

ABSTRACT

Homiletics:

Strengthening Preaching through a Community of Practice Model

by

Paul M. Risler

Effective preaching is at the core of what many congregations expect from pastoral leadership and, for many pastors, a defining part of their calling and identity. Despite the critical nature of preaching to pastoral ministry and pastoral identity, however, many pastors do not feel equipped for the task. Pastors are offered limited training in seminary and are often placed in churches with no systems of support. Continuing-education events may be offered, but often they focus on content with few opportunities for practice and group interaction. In addition, the regular task of preaching is a vulnerable act that leads many to feel isolated, drained, and defensive about criticism.

Using the concepts of Communities of Practice, the purpose of this study was to evaluate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior resulting from a series of one-day seminars offered to a group of pastors in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. Three sessions were offered through Central Avenue UMC in Athens during the months of December 2020 through January 2021. Twelve pastors were selected to participate in the study. The participants attended three weekly seminar days and had access to online interaction between these events. The findings suggest both the

importance of revising vocational calling and the sharing of ideas and processes in a community of peers enlivens and enhances preaching.

HOMILETICS:
STRENGTHENING PREACHING THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE
MODEL

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Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Ministry

by
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CHAPTER 1: NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Using the concepts of Communities of Practice, the goal of this study was to evaluate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of twelve pastors from across the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church as a result of three sessions of a homiletics course offered through Central Avenue UMC in Athens, Ohio. This chapter explores the background of why this study is important as well as an overview of the research methods and delimitations of the study.

Autobiographical Introduction

The congregational survey results were in and they were not good. Feelings long left unstated were now tallied and put onto paper. The following Thursday, a group of local United Methodist pastors gathered for breakfast and our weekly clergy cluster. Although the membership of the group has changed as pastors have come and gone, this group has existed since 1997 and has been a consistent place for pastors to find collegial encouragement, information, and support. As the breakfast cluster meeting officially ended, the server cleared the dishes and the conversation began to take a turn toward how we were doing in our lives and ministries. “Rob” slowly spoke up. The congregational evaluations he received this week were not kind. Although they appreciated his pastoral care and his administrative abilities, they were quite critical of his preaching. He felt defeated and ill-equipped.

Rob had been a pastor for most of his adult life. He felt the call to ministry while in college, went to seminary, and was appointed as a student pastor to a three-point charge in his final year of seminary. Multiple appointments and almost twenty-five years

later, he found himself appointed to a downtown “First” church. Rob had been there for a number of years, and although there was some good ministry happening, there was also increasing tension and conversation around his preaching. He deeply loved his congregation, had a deep faith, and a lived life of prayer. He spent regular time apart with God. Daily, he prayerfully read over scripture passages, memorizing large sections of it in order to “hide the word in his heart.” He would often fast in order to better discern what God wanted to say to his congregation. He was a pastor of deep faith and he had hoped, as he had been told, that what he was doing was enough—that God would honor his heart and use his devotion to change the lives of the congregation through his preaching.

As Rob sat at the table and talked, he confessed that he always sensed that devotion to God alone was not enough to make him an effective preacher. The busyness of ministry—pastoral care, administrative tasks, meetings and bible studies—always seemed to crowd out time for sermon preparation. When Rob did write sermons, even after years of doing so, he still felt inadequately prepared for the task. After several appointments and hundreds of sermons over more than two decades of ministry, Rob confessed he wished he had given more attention to his preaching. He felt stuck. He knew he needed to grow, but he was not sure how to improve beyond buying another book or attending another seminar.

Significantly, this conversation happened in our clergy cluster, as the conversation was a model of the very thing that may be part of the solution to Rob’s struggles. Our cluster is a compelling example of a Community of Practice. Community of Practices (CoPs) are most simply defined as a group of people “who share a concern, a set of

problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, et al. 7). CoPs are spaces created for like-minded people to find support, encouragement, and training. I am coming to believe they can be essential in the identification, recruitment, training, and development of preachers.

Statement of the Problem

Rob’s story is not unique. According to Bill Brownson, treasurer of the West Ohio Conference, each year approximately forty seminary students or new pastors are appointed to serve in churches across the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church (Brownson). Most of them enter the pulpit their first Sunday with little training, and even less ongoing support and community. These pastors will join around 950 other pastors serving other congregations across the West Ohio Conference (Peaks). Each week, these pastors are given the charge to teach the Word of God but then are left on their own to figure out what that looks like on a day-to-day, week-by-week basis. On average, most pastors preach forty-eight to fifty Sunday mornings a year (Rainer); some pastors must prepare more than one sermon per week, making their workload even greater. Sundays happen with amazing regularity: every seven days (Copeland)! Falling into the pattern of writing a sermon each week because they *have to say something* rather than preaching a sermon because they *have something to say* is fairly easy for pastors.

Resources on preaching are widely available. A search of Amazon gives us access to approximately six thousand books written on the subject of preaching. Pastors may also be encouraged to take part in continuing-education events and training seminars (often at a very high cost). In the past ten years, multiple on-line preaching courses have

been made available so users can navigate at their own pace and learn new tips and techniques. However, few events or trainings are designed to offer a commitment to the craft of preaching, the collecting and application of best practices, and collegial support in an ongoing community.

Purpose of the Project

Using the concepts of Communities of Practice, the purpose of this study was to evaluate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of twelve pastors from across the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church as a result of three sessions of a homiletics course offered through Central Avenue UMC in Athens, Ohio.

Research Questions

The following questions sought an understanding of how the effective CoP concepts were in the learning of homiletical principles.

Question #1

What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior before the course?

Question #2

What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior after the course?

Question #3

In what ways did participating in a CoP-based homiletics course impact the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior?

Rationale for the Project

According to a study done by the Pew Research Center, 83 percent of Americans looking for a new place of worship say the quality of preaching played an important role in their choice of congregation (Pew Research Center). Preaching is the top consideration

when families select a congregation to attend (Roehlkepartain 7). According to Christopher The of the Association of Theological Schools' Commission on Accrediting, strictly speaking, homiletics does not appear as a requirement in accreditation documents, and many seminaries require only one preaching class for a Master of Divinity degree (The). The importance of preaching in congregations is not reflected in the amount of training pastors receive in homiletics. Three seminaries, Asbury Theological Seminary, United Theological Seminary, and MTSO, train the majority of pastors in West Ohio (Peaks). Each of these seminaries require only one preaching class for their Master of Divinity program.

However, our congregations continue to demand effective preaching from their pastors. Alyce McKenzie, director of the Perkins Center for Preaching Excellence, is not surprised by the need for good preaching. "My sense is that people are hard-wired to try to make a coherent narrative out of the disparate events in their lives. They yearn to have the stories of their own lives placed in a larger context. They hunger for a story that has a better preface and a much better ending—a story that helps them understand more fully their own journey" (A. McKenzie).

According to Ken Kinghorn, preaching is a manifestation of the spiritual gift of teaching (Kinghorn 36). "Spiritual gifts function as incarnations of God's power in human life. Sometimes they flow through and heighten our natural abilities, and sometimes they work independently of personal aptitudes. In any case, spiritual gifts complement and blend harmoniously with our humanity" (34). Therefore, our preaching is important and is a gift that can and should be developed to its fullest potential. The apostle Paul urged Timothy to "fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through

the laying on of my hands” (New International Version, 1Tim. 1.6). In the scriptures, God has chosen to primarily make Himself known to us through the act of preaching (1 Cor. 1.21).

The apostle Paul wrote, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1.21). When Paul spoke on Mars Hill in Athens, he could have used drama to make his points. After all, drama originated in Greece (Csapo and Miller 1). Paul could have presented the gospel in a three-act play or put it into a musical format. Instead, he chose to preach to them. One of Paul’s most emphatic charges to Timothy was to, “Preach the Word! Be prepared in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4.2). God has many ways to interact with creation but has ultimately chosen preaching to be one of the primary channels to bring the Kingdom of God on this earth.

Despite the importance of the preaching task as both seen in scripture and articulated by congregations today, the reality is that for most pastors, the extent of their preaching development post-seminary is reading the occasional book or attending the occasional conference. Several on-line courses exist, but often they are either cost-prohibitive or passive in terms of a learning style. One-time conferences might sharpen skills, but they are often devoid of relationship. Books and trainings can give information but not relationship, or direction, or feedback. A better way would be a curriculum/community that combined a commitment to the task of preaching, best practices, and active participation in a learning community.

Definition of Key Terms

Homiletics: The study of the composition and delivery of a sermon.

Delimitations

Over six years ago, I developed an eight-session homiletics class as a part of my doctoral dissertation to be used for the United Theological Seminary's Course of Study class (COS 324). I have since adapted it into a series of seminars using some of the concepts of Communities of Practice. The program was designed primarily for a group of senior or solo pastors of congregations within the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, along with laity interested in pursuing ordained ministry. Although the participants self-selected, I desired representation from both male and female clergy across a wide range of experience. At least two of the participants were to be new to ministry (zero to five years) and at least two participants had fifteen-plus years of experience.

The study excluded pastoral staff who do not have regular (defined as a minimum of ten times a year) preaching responsibilities although they were not excluded from taking the class. The small number of participants in the study and their lack of exposure to the regular disciplines of preaching did not allow me to make broad generalizations, therefore, the findings of the study are essentially delimited to those pastors who participated in the study. However, the homogeneous sampling group of pastors did suggest that some generalizability may exist for other preaching pastors or even those exploring a call to ministry. This CoP-based course was designed for broad replicability among a wide variety of clergy and the course content and structure was not exclusively

targeted either denominationally or geographically. Any group of current or aspiring clergy member of any Christian denomination could benefit. Therefore, while the findings of this study were delimited to twelve pastors in one United Methodist conference, the many commonalities between pastors did suggest some generalizability to other preaching pastors or even those exploring a call to ministry.

Review of Relevant Literature

The literature review for this project begins with a biblical overview of preaching throughout the scriptures followed by an exploration of how elements of Communities of Practice are seen in both the Old and New Testament, including Israel, the disciples, and the early church. The theological foundations for preaching, exploring God's self-revealing nature, spiritual gifting, incarnation, and covenant community is then discussed. This first section closes exploring the theological foundation of CoPs, focusing on our identity as shaped by our understanding of God as Trinity, as well as an understanding of the New Testament Church as a CoP.

The next section of the chapter examines the literature around some of the essential characteristics and concepts around Communities of Practice, based largely in the work of Lave and Wenger. Much of the work around CoPs was birthed out of conversations around social-learning theory (particularly Bandura and Handly) and the development of knowledge management (Alavi and Wenger), so both of those concepts were also explored. The use of technology in CoPs including Knowledge Management as well as online education was also explored.

The final third of the chapter is an examination of some of the literature around homiletics used as the basis for the day-long sessions. This section begins with a

discussion around the spiritual life of the preacher and the formation of a Rule of Life. The latter part of the chapter examines elements of preaching often taught in homiletics classes. These include exegesis, sermonic structure, big ideas, introductions, and conclusions. The chapter closes with a section on developing a long-term preaching calendar.

Research Methodology

The intervention for this project was three one-day sessions of a Communities of Practice-based homiletics course. The three sessions included the topics of Ministry Context and Theology, Exegesis, developing a preaching rule of life, writing introductions and conclusions, and a day where participants walked through a process to plan a one-year preaching calendar (See Appendix H).

Type of Research

This study used an intervention model with mixed research methods. The efficacy of the CoP-based course (the intervention) at altering participants' attitudes, skills, and knowledge of sermon development will be assessed through a mixed-methods research design, i.e., one that employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative pre- and post-surveys were employed to measure the extent of change due to the intervention, while qualitative individual diary entries and focus groups explored participants' perspectives on what aspects of the intervention produced the change and why. The combination of these two approaches yielded a more complete understanding of the impact of the course on participants' lives and ministries than either approach could do alone (Creswell p. 4).

Quantitative data was collected through pre- and post-surveys administered to all participants before and after the CoP-based course. The survey instruments were designed to collect data in ways that can be analyzed quantitatively, including continuous (Likert) scales as well as categorical measures such as yes/no and multiple-choice questions. A comparison of data from these two surveys enabled an assessment of the change in participants' attitudes, skills, and knowledge of sermon development attributable to the course.

The qualitative data in this dissertation was collected through three different methods: individual journal entries, post-intervention focus groups with participants, and process observations or field notes made throughout the duration of course delivery by the instructor/facilitator.

First, participants recorded one diary entry after each of the three sessions. These entries were intended to capture the participants' feelings, thoughts, emotions, questions, and concerns in real time. The entries also provided individual reflective data not available in the focus-group setting.

Second, post-intervention focus groups with participants were included. The focus groups were conducted by a trained third party to reduce researcher bias and the results were analyzed to explore the subjective experiences of participants in a more nuanced way than could be achieved solely with written surveys. The focus group was conducted after the surveys have been administered and the quantitative data analyzed so the interviewer could further explore the quantitative findings, giving the study aspects of an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell, p. 15). In addition, however, the timing of the participant interviews, approximately two weeks after the end of the

intervention, enabled exploration of the interviewees' deeper reflections on their participation in the CoP-based course as well as their experience in applying the principles learned from the course within the context of their own ministry settings.

Observations (field notes) made during the course by the researcher/instructor provided valuable additional qualitative data on what aspects appeared to work well and how the content and/or delivery method of the course could be improved in future. These observations also provided context for the analysis of data collected from the participants and enabled a comparison between the instructor's and the participants' perceptions of the intervention experience.

Analyses of the quantitative and qualitative information collected in study was integrated to determine how participating in this CoP-based course impacted the participants' attitudes, skills, and knowledge of effective sermon development. These findings suggested the most catalytic and replicable aspects of the course, as well as ways in which the course content and/or delivery mechanisms could be tailored to meet the needs of distinct subgroups of pastors.

Participants

The participants in the CoP-based course were twelve full-time clergy from across the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. Individuals self-selected to participate in the study and seminars, but recruitment efforts via Facebook were conducted in an effort to ensure as diverse a group as possible in race/ethnicity, age, sex, years in ministry, and size and geographic setting of congregations so that potential differences in the effectiveness of the intervention could be explored (see Appendix). The

West Ohio Conference is a geographically large and diverse conference; therefore, a diverse representation was sought.

Data Collection

The CoP-based course consisted of three online seminars held in the months of December 2020 and January of 2021 through Central Avenue UMC in Athens, Ohio. Participants were recruited beginning in November and continued until the date of the first seminar or until the enrollment reached twelve. Seminar dates were Monday, December 7, Monday, December 14, 2020 and Monday, January 4, 2021 with each beginning at 10:00 a.m. and ending at 4:00 p.m. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, all events happened online using the Zoom platform.

Participants were administered a pre-intervention survey before the first seminar and a post-survey after the final seminar. Both survey forms were administered online because of COVID-19 restrictions. The surveys were identical. The pre-intervention survey is included in this paper as Appendix A. The researcher/instructor also made field notes throughout the course, both during and outside the seminar meeting times.

Approximately two weeks after the conclusion of the course, all the participants were invited to participate in a focus group interview about their experiences. The focus group consent form is included as Appendix B and the focus group script is included as Appendix C. Some interview questions explored findings from the pre- and post-survey in order to assess participants' interpretations of why the course did or did not bring about substantive changes in their attitudes, skills, and knowledge of sermon development, while other questions probed the practical effects of the course upon their approach to sermon development in the context of their ministry settings.

Data Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data collected through the pre- and post-surveys, focus groups, and observations were analyzed to answer the research questions of this study. The pre- and post-survey responses of participants were compared to determine the extent of change brought about by participation in the CoP-based course. The interviews were analyzed by looking for common themes across responses as well as individual responses that may have provided insight into aspects of the intervention that were potentially uniquely applicable to subgroups of pastors (e.g., women, persons of color, or those serving rural churches). The researcher/instructor observations were used to provide context to the overall analysis as well as to suggest opportunities to improve future course offerings; these observations were, however, to be subordinate to participants' own reported perceptions of the intervention.

Generalizability

This CoP-based course was designed for broad replicability among a wide variety of clergy. The course content itself was designed by the instructor/researcher as a part of a Doctor of Ministry program through Asbury Theological Seminary. The course is a subset of a ten-session homiletics class which has been delivered twice as part of the United Theological Seminary's Course of Study Program with very positive student reviews. The original syllabus is included in this paper as Appendix D. The version administered for this study adapted the course content into three online seminars using Communities of Practice concepts and is included as Appendix E. The booklet the researcher created titled, "Creating an Annual Preaching Calendar" is included as Appendix H.

Participants in this study were drawn from a group of senior or solo pastors of congregations in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, along with laity interested in ordained ministry. However, the course content and structure were not exclusively targeted either denominationally or geographically. Any group of current or aspiring clergy member of any Christian denomination could benefit, while the very organic nature of Communities of Practice makes them highly accommodating to the cultural and theological context of each community. Therefore, while the findings of this study were delimited to twelve pastors in one Methodist conference, the many commonalities between pastors did suggest some generalizability to other preaching pastors or even those exploring a call to ministry.

Project Overview

The first third of Chapter 2 is an overview of the biblical and theological foundations of both CoPs and the subject of homiletics. The next third of the chapter covers essential characteristics and concepts for CoPs, technology, and online learning. The third section of Chapter 2 focuses on principles included in many homiletics classes. Because the study utilized the method of semi-structured interviews, the literature on the research design method of interviewing is also reviewed in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 presents an examination and explanation of the project design, methods of research, and data analysis. Then, in Chapter 4, a detailed analysis of the data from the interviews leads into a report of the major results of the study. Chapter 5 concludes the study by providing interpretation of the findings as well as some observations and suggestions for future sessions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Chapter

Reviewing current literature, this chapter begins by offering a biblical and theological overview of the project. This includes an overview of the importance of the role of preaching in the scriptures, as well as an examination of some elements of the Communities of Practice (CoP) model that are seen in both the Old and New Testaments. The chapter then explores Christian identity as shaped by our understanding of God as Trinity and our understanding of the New Testament Church. The latter part of the chapter examines the literature around some of the essential characteristics of a Community of Practice. This section includes a brief history of CoPs, the elements of effective CoPs, and an exploration of Social Learning Theory, Knowledge Management, and the use of technology.

The final third of the chapter gives a brief overview of principles taught in many homiletics classes including the spiritual life of the preacher, the exegetical process, sermonic structure, big ideas, introductions, and developing a preaching calendar. The chapter closes reviewing the literature used in developing the research methodology.

Biblical Foundations

Biblical Foundations of Preaching

Throughout the Scriptures, God uses preaching to proclaim God's character and Kingdom and to challenge hearers to respond appropriately. Christianity is a religion of the Word of God (J. Stott 15). God has used the spoken word of God to topple empires, heal and comfort the sick, shake the proud, and resurrect the dead (Olford). Preaching, however, first began with God. God speaking through the human act of preaching is an

act of the Trinitarian God. In Frame's linguistic model of the Trinity, the Father exerts lordship over creation through speech. The Son is the Word spoken (Gen. 1.3). The Holy Spirit (1.2) is the powerful breath that drives the word along to accomplish its purpose (Frame 66). Preaching and proclamation are rooted in the very character of God—the identity of a God who speaks. The proclamation does not stop with God; rather, throughout the Scriptures God chooses to speak through his human creation to accomplish his will.

In Exodus, God tells Moses he has seen the misery of his people in Egypt, has heard their cry, and will respond to their suffering (Exod. 3.7). The way God chooses to respond to the need is by calling Moses to proclaim to Pharaoh a message of God's redemption of his people (3.10). When God was preparing Israel to enter into the Promised Land, God instructed them to assemble so that they might hear God's character proclaimed (Deut. 4.9ff). Whenever Israel neglected or forgot God's commandments, God sent prophets to his people. Each of these prophets preached God's message to the people of Israel, calling them to repentance and justice (Joel 1.14; Jon. 3.2; Zech. 9.9, Isa. 61.1; Mal. 2.17). In fact, much of Old Testament biblical revelation was given through preaching of some kind. The book of Deuteronomy is essentially a collection of Moses' final sermons. Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and most of the Old Testament prophets first delivered their content as sermons. Throughout the Hebrew scriptures preaching has been one of the primary ways that God has chosen to speak to both God's people and creation (Phillips 19).

In Exodus 3, God speaks to Moses and instructs him to go the elders of Israel and tell them that God—the God of their fathers, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—had appeared

to him. Moses was to proclaim to them that God had watched over them as a people and had seen what had been done to them as slaves in Egypt. Finally, Moses was also to proclaim to the people that God would bring them out of their captivity in Egypt and into a land “flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:17-18). After the elders listened to Moses, the elders together were to go to the King and proclaim that they had met with God and that they spoke on behalf of God (18-20). As the scriptures unfold, God often chose to speak through people he called rather than speaking directly himself. In fact, God gave these called people authority to speak on God’s behalf (Exod. 4.12).

In the Old Testament books of history (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah), prophets such as Deborah, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Huldah, and others came forward to speak God’s word to a people in rebellion. For example, in Ezra chapter five, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews in the name of the God of Israel in order to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Once again, the text suggests that God had given these two prophets authority to speak on God’s behalf. The prophets of God were with this effort and supported the effort through the ongoing prophecy (Ezek. 5.2). Thus, King Cyrus issued the decree to rebuild the temple and, in response to God’s command through his prophets (7.6), they finished the temple. “[T]he elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah” (5.14). The preaching of Haggai and Zechariah was the act from which flowed the success and prosperity of the people of God.

Yamauchi and Larson argue that preachers and expositors today stand in a succession spanning from before Ezra through today (Yamauchi 176; Larsen 15). God

used Ezra and had his “gracious hand on him for Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (Ezek. 7.9-10). Rabbinic tradition suggests that Ezra introduced many of the practices of the synagogue (order of worship, polity, and preaching structures) that were adopted by the early church centuries later (Coggins 229). Although the specific style of preaching of these prophets cannot be known, God used the preaching of ordinary men and women to proclaim God’s character and truth. Preachers today stand in that succession and are offered the same gifts from the same God to have the same effect on the world around them (1 Cor. 12.11).

In the books of Poetry, God is speaking through chosen people who, although the exact style of their preaching will never be known, understood themselves as proclaiming God’s word. The Psalmist David writes about proclaiming God’s “saving acts in the great assembly” (Ps. 40.9). Solomon identifies himself as “the preacher” or “the teacher” (Eccles. 1.1; 1.2; 7.27; 12.9-10). The word translated “preacher” or “teacher” carries the connotation of a “leader of an assembly” (F. Brown et al.). Ecclesiastes states that “the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth” (English Standard Version, Eccles. 12.8-10). Although the wisdom writers are often thought of as poets, the poetry has a purpose: a purpose that aligns with the aims of preaching today (Bell, *Gathering*).

Although the records of the earliest prophets/preachers/teachers were woven through the Torah, the books of history, and the books of poetry, the words and actions of certain prophets were preserved in separate pieces of literature often called the major and

minor prophets. These books comprise the final seventeen books of the Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Old Testaments. Throughout these books, God used prophets to convey messages and warnings to his people, Israel, as well as to those outside the covenant community (McMickle). Sailhamer writes that these prophets now preach to us both as the authors of their books and as narrative characters within the framework of those books. “The prophets’ books are their sermons, delivered in book form. Our task is to preach their books” (Sailhamer). Heschel argues there are always at least two sermons in a prophetic text: the sermon the prophet preaches in his own context and the sermon the author of a prophetic book preaches by means of his book (Heschel). Therefore, when contemporary pastors preach from the prophets, they are preaching both the prophets’ lives and the prophets’ sermons. In this way, the prophet stands between contemporary society and God as both a messenger of God and one who “stands in the presence of God” (ibid). The sermon consists of the “sermon of the prophet,” and the “sermon about the prophet” (Sailhamer).

Similar to preaching today, a prophet was called to faithfully proclaim what God had revealed and not their own desires or thoughts. In the book of Jeremiah, God condemns false prophets for speaking their own thoughts rather than the words of God. “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds” (Jer. 14.14). Through the prophet Ezekiel, God condemned false prophets who were speaking out of their own imagination: “foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!” (Ezek. 13.3-4). A prophet’s job—like a preacher’s today—was to faithfully proclaim what God had revealed, not

what they desired their message to be, because preaching the prophetic word of God was of critical importance to both the people and God.

The New Testament continues to emphasize the importance of the practice and role of preaching in God's redemptive plan. The gospels open with angels proclaiming the coming of the Messiah (Matt. 1.21; Luke 1.13; 1.28; 2.10) and the recipients of that proclamation then proclaiming that good news to others (Luke. 1.42; 1.46ff; 2.20). John the Baptist is introduced as "a voice crying" in the wilderness to prepare the way for the coming Messiah (Mark 1:3; Matt. 3.1-3). When John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees he preached, calling them to repentance (John 3.7). God proclaimed the identity of Jesus at his baptism when heaven was torn open and a voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1.11). Jesus himself then went into towns and villages throughout Galilee preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1.14, Luke 8.1), and he commanded his disciples to do the same (Matt. 10.7).

Like the Old Testament, much of the New Testament can be understood as a collection of sermons or parts of sermons. Jesus's Sermon on the Mount occupies three entire chapters of the gospel of Matthew (chapters 5-7), and chapter six of the gospel of Luke contains similar material. Jesus taught in parables and relied heavily on them. Brief, even terse at times, these more than fifty-five narrative parables are a vital part of Jesus's teaching ministry (Snodgrass 17). The writer Mark tells us that Jesus "did not say anything to them without using a parable" (4.34). Perkins writes that Jesus preached with a prophetic voice to all people but in a way that did not require special education. "Ordinary people heard Jesus's words as the word of God addressed to them" (Perkins 38). Jesus's preaching changed lives. As pastors should be today, Jesus was not interested

in simply presenting information but aimed for the transformation of his hearers' lives and actions. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is three solid chapters of teaching, but the Sermon on the Mount also demonstrates how Jesus viewed his preaching in terms of influencing change. His words were intended to have effect, not just educate. He concluded his sermon with the promise that "everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matt. 7.24). Jesus's preaching was done to create action in the life of his listeners—life change and, ultimately, transformation of the soul. Jesus himself said his ultimate purpose was not to judge (or simply inspire, or education, or motivate) but to save the world through him (John 12.47).

After the resurrection, the women were the first to encounter Jesus, and the change (and response) was the preaching of that good news. Matthew and Luke both record similar encounters with an angel in which the women are told to go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead (Matt. 28.5-7; Luke 24.5-9). John adds subsequent details such as that Mary encountered Jesus and went straight to the disciples with a simple proclamation, "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18). Wallis points out that on that first Easter morning, the women went to the tomb at great risk to themselves; they were caring for the body of a convicted political criminal who had just been crucified, and the guards posted at the tomb could easily have reported the identities of any "followers or supporters of this one whom they had killed and whose movement they now hoped to crush. The risk of the women is made even more dramatic by the realization that the rest of the disciples were all laying low. The men were hiding, paralyzed by grief and fear" (Wallis). Yet the women went to the tomb and boldly

proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. These women became the first preachers of the core tenet of Christianity (Grenz and Muir Kjesbo 76).

In one of his post-resurrection appearances, Jesus commissioned his disciples to continue his earthly ministry (including preaching) when he said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20.21-22). Luke identifies the last earthly words of Jesus to his disciples just before he ascended into heaven as, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1.8). Acts shows those first disciples obeying Jesus’s command through their on-going preaching ministry. Peter preached to the crowds at Pentecost (Acts 2.14-30), at the temple (3.12-26), and to the Sanhedrin (4.5-12). Stephen (ch. 7) and Phillip (ch. 8) continued that preaching ministry. Paul spent much of his public ministry preaching the good news of Jesus and the Kingdom of God (see Acts 13.16-41; 15.13-21; 17.22-35; 24.10-21 as just a few examples). The birth of the church was built on the work of the Spirit through the disciples’ preaching.

The command to “go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them...” (Matt. 28.20-21) was not meant solely for Jesus’s small band of followers gathered on a hillside two thousand years ago but for every succeeding generation until Jesus returns in final victory (Clines 43). Paul’s words to Timothy have resonated in the hearts and minds of every preacher for over two thousand years: “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim. 4.2). Christians cannot escape this calling. As John Stott says, our faith is built on the Word and the word preached. “Preaching is indispensable to

Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its authenticity has been lost. For Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God” (15).

Having addressed some of the biblical foundations of preaching, the biblical foundations of Communities of Practice (CoPs) will be discussed. The purpose of this project is to evaluate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior resulting from a series of one-day homiletics seminars designed to include elements of a CoP. Preaching is the topic, and the CoP is a part of the methodology.

Biblical Foundations of Communities of Practice

Although the term “Community of Practice” is not used in scripture, elements of CoPs are apparent throughout the scriptural texts, and the concept of a CoP provides a helpful framework for understanding both the nature of community and the task of learning as a community. Wenger breaks down CoPs into several complementary elements which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter (Learning, Meaning and Identity). Courduff helpfully selects certain elements of CoPs that share similarities with apprenticeship (Courduff 3) and other formation-of-community models found in Scripture (Otero and Conttrel; O’Grady). These similar elements include areas such as individual and collective identity, apprenticeship through situated learning, legitimate peripheral participation, and modes of belonging (Courduff 3).

Individual and Collective Identity. The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is primarily the story of YHWH’s interaction with one particular people: the nation of Israel. From the beginning, God chose a people to be a kind of model community through which God would bless the world and point people to God (Kee, ch.4; Soulen 3; Lohfink 3; Quinn). The Jews were defined as a religious community with a common goal. “They

were not only a chosen people awaiting a national redemption to be established by God, but also a choosing people working towards universal redemption” (Gurkan 6). This chosenness was beyond status. This chosenness was also a responsibility, a universal/spiritual role which would establish redemption on earth through participation in the community (ibid.). What unfolds in the pages of the Old Testament is God’s working in and through a defined community to bring a knowledge of God to the larger world.

After God brought the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, God led them to Mount Sinai to establish a covenant with them: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (Exod. 19.5). God chose Israel as a covenant community to be in an exclusive relationship with God. God then revealed why he had chosen Israel: “Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5-6). God is the creator of all there is, and God chose a people to be set apart to represent God to people and people to God. “Already in the Book of Exodus you get the idea that Israel does not just contain a number of priests, like the other nations round about, but that as a whole nation she is priest of the God of the universe” (McCabe 524).

The role of a priest was to mediate or restore relationship between two parties. Part of Israel’s priestly role, therefore, was to reconcile all the nations to YHWH. Israel was to faithfully represent God by how they lived in community. Together as a community, the Israelites were set apart to learn from God and one another, and then to model for the world what how to live out love, justice, and authentic worship of YHWH alone (ibid.). To aid them in fulfilling this purpose, Israel was given the Law and the

Prophets (Matt. 22.40). “Israel is not chosen in terms of salvation but for a purpose” (Quinn). The Israelites are called to display who YHWH is to all the nations, so that all nations would come to know and praise the one true God (Ps. 45.17).

Wenger et al. write that a CoP “creates common ground and a sense of common identity” (Wenger, McDermott, et al. 27). Belonging to the CoP forms both an individual identity (in that belonging shapes self-understanding) as well as a corporate sense of belonging. Israel was defined by their relationship to God and to one another and a common mission, that the whole world might be blessed through their community line (Gen. 22.18). This understanding of God and his relationship to their lives and history gave them both an individual meaning and a corporate identity to sustain them amidst an often-hostile environment (Wilson 12).

Apprenticeship through Situated Learning. In the apprenticeship model, a student is placed with a rabbi or teacher over a period of time within a particular school or community. The student learns by watching their mentor and then performing the role under the mentor’s supervision. As they live life and perform tasks together in a given situation, the apprentice becomes increasingly competent.

Within community, there remains a constant tension between competence and experience. Competence (I know what I’m doing), is sharpened by repeated experience (The more I do it the better I get) and challenged by new experience (I thought I’d seen it all, but wow, I really haven’t). The power of the situated learning community is found in its constant renewal and deeper understanding of the common work. (Courduff 336)

One of the places in scripture where this type of situated learning can be observed is through the teacher/student relationship of Eli and Samuel (1 Sam. 3.1-12). In 1 Samuel, Hannah dedicated her son Samuel to the service of the Lord as a sign of her devotion to God, who allowed her to conceive (1.22). After the dedication, Samuel was then sent to Eli, the high priest of the tabernacle, to live with him and serve under him. Samuel, who is labeled as a “boy,” ministered under Eli (3.1). This ministry most likely involved direct instruction from Eli as well as observation of Eli in his role as a temple high priest.

Enough trust developed over time that Eli allowed Samuel to sleep within hearing distance of him (3.5) and Samuel was entrusted to open the doors of the house of the Lord (Nicoll 18). God calls Samuel, who initially assumes the voice is the voice of Eli (up until this point, Eli was unable to instruct Samuel on hearing the Lord because the word of the Lord was rare in that day) (3.1). Once Eli and Samuel figured out that God was calling Samuel, Eli instructed Samuel simply to lie down and, if the voice called again, to say, “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening” (3.9). Eli let Samuel encounter God on his own although Eli pushing his way into the encounter would have been understandable (the word of the Lord was, after all, a rare occurrence). Eli demonstrated masterful mentoring by not intruding. This occurrence is an exceptional example of situated learning and mentoring.

In 2 Kings chapter 2, the mentoring relationship between Elijah and Elisha is presented. Elijah served as Israel’s prophet (1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 1.2-17; 2 Chron. 21.12-15) and inspired and taught Elisha, who later assumed Elijah’s ministry (2 Kings 19.16). Elijah was sent by God to prophesy to King Ahab, a king who “did more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who

were before him” (1 Kings 16.33b). After prophesying, Elijah found his life was in danger, so he fled to a cave and lived in isolation. The toll of this work was overwhelming for Elijah, but at this time God told Elijah to find Elisha (1 Kings 19.16) who would be a new prophet and would receive the ministry passed on by Elijah. When Elijah found Elisha, he was at work plowing a field. Elijah “threw his cloak around him” (19.19), signifying that Elijah was choosing Elisha as an apprentice. Elisha said goodbye to his family (19.20), returned to his oxen and slaughtered them (19.21), cooked them, gave away the meat, “and went with Elijah as his servant” (NLT 1 Kings 19.21). Elisha was willing to let go of his family, his occupation, and the life he had built to follow after Elijah, who was offering his mentorship. For the next six years, Elisha learned from Elijah by following him and watching how he lived and worked. Elisha once stated to Elijah that “as surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you” (2 Kings 26.7). Other examples of apprenticeship through situated learning include Jesus and his disciples (John 1.35-42); Gamaliel and Saul (Acts 9.1-22); and Paul and Timothy (Acts 15.40; 16.1-5).

In the case of Paul and Timothy, Shoemaker points out that their relationship in many ways mirrors that of Elijah and Elisha (Shoemaker 16). An almost parent/child relationship exists with Paul and Timothy, Timothy being Paul’s “true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1.2); similarly, Elisha calls Elijah “father” (2 Kings 2.12). Apprenticeship relationships often develop this kind of intimacy and connection. Paul also models life for Timothy, allowing Timothy to see “behind the scenes” of Paul’s life. “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love,

my steadfastness, my persecutions and suffering that happened to me at Antioch...”
(ESV, 1 Tim. 3.10-11).

A mutual sharing of the ministry and mission exists with Paul and Timothy. Although this sharing will be addressed more fully in other places, in the language of CoP it is called a “common commitment to the domain.” A CoP is organized around a domain: an area of shared concern, a set of problems to be addressed, or a passion about a topic (Wenger, McDermott, et al. 4–5). In theological language, the CoP is a commitment to bringing the Kingdom of God into this world as the kingdom is in the heavens (Matt. 6.10). Timothy is Paul’s apprentice in the task of bringing the kingdom. Paul calls Timothy his “fellow worker” (Rom. 16.21). Paul and Timothy share a common ministry and purpose. This common commitment is at the heart of the CoP model.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Situated learning the central defining characteristic of a process that Lave and Wenger call legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave and Wenger 31). “For Lave and Wenger, LPP is the defining characteristic of apprenticeship as a form of learning. Newcomers learn the practice of the community by being situated in the practice and by having access to established members” (Hildreth 37). Mastery of skill and knowledge requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community (ibid). In simpler terms, newcomers move from observers to old-timers through participation in the group and the activities of the group. LPP is the process where one’s participation and identity in a community of practice are changed by doing the things the community does and living into the identity of the community (Wenger, *Learning* 11).

Throughout the scriptures, biblical foundations of this concept exist in both the Old and the New Testaments, where people are defined by and derive identity from their participation in the community. The degree of participation in the community, as well as a common understanding of what that means for members' lives and the community, are inseparable from the practice (Lave and Wenger 37). Perhaps nowhere is this dynamic seen more than in the discipleship model of Jesus. A brief examination each element of LPP will be discussed before looking at LPP through the lens of Jesus and discipleship.

When Wegner talks about "participation," he is referring to the process of taking part in and being in relationship with others who are a part of the community. "It suggests both action and connection" (Wenger, *Learning* 55). Participation is both the active engagement in activities and the social character of our experience of life (55). Participants then are both shaped by and shapers of their social community; "the transformative potential goes both ways" (56-57). Participation is critical, but for participation to occur there must be legitimacy granted to new members by those already in the community (101). New members must be given access. Finally, where the legitimacy of participation is vital for true learning to occur, the participation must progress in stages. Growth is involved—a widening of responsibilities, trust, and access. "An apprentice to any practice does not start out participating with the same degree of responsibility, intensity, understanding, or skill that we would expect of an 'old timer' in the same community" (Mercer 200). In saying participation is peripheral, implications should not be made that the newcomer's participation is irrelevant and tangential, only that ways exists to gain even greater access through growing understanding and involvement (Lave and Wenger 37).

In the context of the New Testament and the time of Jesus, discipleship (apprenticeship) was built into the fabric of society and formal and informal ways. “Evidence from the Hebrew Bible is largely circumstantial, and some texts say more about literacy in general than about how that ability to read and write was acquired” (Crenshaw 206), but in Judaism most education was either home-based (a son was an apprentice to his father in carpentry) or, more rarely, under formal education systems by professional teachers and rabbis (ibid). The vast majority of the population was illiterate, and professional education was not readily available to the masses so to be selected by a rabbi to be one of his Talmudine was a high honor (Wilson 281). Rabbis would choose their students at an early age (299). If a boy was not selected by a rabbi by puberty, he would most likely remain in his family business. If chosen, he would be invited into relationship with the rabbi with the goal of becoming like the rabbi (299). Wenthe states that the role of the rabbi was not solely to impart factual knowledge into the minds of his disciples. Rather, the Rabbi was to induct them into a new way of life. “The disciple did not simply learn things; he was converted from one way of living to another” (Wenthe 194). “As one followed one's rabbi, learning to do what he did, one would gradually move from peripheral knowledge of the rabbi's ways of life to a more full understanding of what it meant to think and act as his disciple” (Csinos 52). Students (newcomers) would increase in skill and understanding and be granted access to practices that moved them from the periphery of the community to full participation (52).

The Disciples as a Community of Practice. If a CoP is a group of people who both share a passion about a topic and deepen their knowledge by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, R. McDermott, et al. 4), then the argument stands that the twelve

disciples were Jesus's initial CoP. "As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen" (Matt. 4.18). Wilson notes that this detail most likely means the brothers had not been deemed disciple material (Wilson 299), or by their age they would have been studying not fishing. Yet rabbi Jesus calls them into his CoP. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." (Matt. 4.19). With that invitation, Jesus invited people into his CoP known as the Kingdom of God.

Jesus's discipleship of his core group of students exhibited many of characteristics that define and give structure to the CoP model of Domain, Community, and Practice (Wenger, R. McDermott, et al. 27).

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus called his disciples and gathered them around what could be considered a domain: life with Jesus and the invitation to be a part of the Kingdom of God. "He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:10). This group had a common mission, along with Jesus, to "fish for people" (Matt. 4.19). Jesus ultimately called them to proclaim the Kingdom of God (10.7) and demonstrate God's reign (10.8). The disciples of Jesus were not a random group of people with no purpose, but a voluntary group of people who were highly committed to the "domain" of following Jesus and doing so at great cost (Matt. 19.27). Peter, Andrew, James, and John left their work as fishermen and began to follow Jesus (Matt. 4.18-22, Mark 10.28, Luke 18.28). In Luke 14:25-33, Jesus cautioned his followers about the high cost of discipleship and challenged them to consider the cost before deciding to follow him. In the language of CoPs, Wenger et al. write that the

commitment to the domain “creates common ground and a sense of common identity” (Wenger, R. McDermott, et al. 27). Jesus continually defined the character of his disciples by identifying them as students, co-laborers, friends, and family with a common mission: to go into the world and make more disciples. Christian discipleship might represent the ultimate example of the CoP concept of a commitment to the domain.

An essential component of Jesus’s discipleship model was the creation of a community of followers. For the disciples, *being with* Jesus was the primary calling, even before they were to engage in the practice of ministry (Mark. 3.14). Presence with Jesus and each other was an essential component in the development of their identity, maturity, and purpose. The disciples traveled with Jesus, ate with him, lived with him, and learned from him. The disciples’ presence and participation with Jesus was so transformative that, although they were identified as “unschooled ordinary men,” people were able to tell that they had “been with Jesus” (Acts 4.13).

Jesus invited his disciples not just to be with him but to learn from him. “A disciple of Jesus is a learner, a student, an apprentice—a practitioner, even if only a beginner” (Willard 135). Jesus’s invitation to “take my yoke upon you” (Matt. 11.29) was an invitation to the kind of life the disciples would share and discover as a group with Jesus as their teacher (Bivin 23). “Disciples of Jesus are people who do not just profess certain views as their own, but apply their growing understanding of life in the Kingdom of the Heavens to every aspect of their life on earth” (Willard 135). Jesus demonstrated a mentoring relationship with his disciples as he gathered them for a task and then reflected with them afterward about the significance of that task and their role. The disciples learned his teaching and followed his example as apprentices. “Instead of writing a book,

he established his teachings in the Jewish oral method of preserving tradition” (Young, ch.2). Courduff refers to this as “apprenticeship through situated learning” (Courduff 335). In an apprenticeship-type model, learning is situated within the context of community and is done over time with a leader, teacher or rabbi; “When apprenticeship happens as a legitimate part of normal day-to-day life, it may not be recognized as teaching. It becomes part of the social matrix of a community” (Haddad 3). Learning is, therefore, not done in isolation (Floding and Swier; Lave and Wenger 15).

Community in the Bible. CoPs are a natural fit with a biblical approach to learning (Deulen 4). In the CoP model, learning takes place in the context of community (Lave and Wenger 29). Christians too are encouraged to operate within the framework of community. The Psalmist writes, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity” (Ps. 133.1). Although community does not mean uniformity, the call to togetherness, to unity, and to “one-anothering” is difficult to avoid in the scriptures. The English word translated “one another” in the New Testament is actually a single word in Greek (allélón). Allélón is used one hundred times in ninety-seven verses of the New Testament, forty-seven of those to give instructions to followers of Jesus. The instruction is given to be at peace with one another (Mark 9.20), to be of the same mind (Rom. 12:6; 15.5), to be forgiving of one another (Eph. 4.2), and to bear with one another (Col. 3:13). The word calls everyone to love one another (for example John 13.35; 15:12; Rom. 13.8; 1 Pet. 1.22) and to be humble before one another (Rom. 12.10; Eph. 5.21; Phil. 2.3). “[C]onsider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another” (RSV, Heb. 10.24-25). Christians function as a body, interdependent on each other for learning and function

(Rom. 12.4-4). The concept of community is arguably emphasized in scripture simply by the repetition of the term “one another.” Many of these instances refer to the community of believers as a family, stating we are all children of God and fellow heirs (Rom. 8.14-17). As such, Christians are part of a family and ought to relate to each other as such.

The scriptures’ writers also use the word *Koinonia* to describe this kind of communal connection. First used in Acts 2.42-47, the word is most commonly translated “fellowship.” Although most CoPs will certainly not reach the level of biblical *Koinonia*, the word carries the connotation of a shared life and joint participation in work together (Thayer 352). Within this kind of community, believers are transformed by each other. For example, the writer of Colossians reminds believers to “teach and admonish one another in all wisdom” (Col. 3.16). While this practice is certainly a social approach to instruction with community, Christian followers are also exhorted to instruct in a cross-generational fashion: “What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Believers are to live, learn, and teach in a socio-cultural and cross-generational context.

The scriptures offer a solid biblical and theological basis for CoPs. Although the term is not used in scripture, the elements of CoPs are apparent throughout the scriptural texts and provides a helpful framework for understanding both the nature of community and the task of learning as a community.

The Early Church as a Community of Practice. Haddad proposes Acts 2.42-47 as one of the first models of Christian ministry as a CoP (Haddad 8).

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many

wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (The English Standard Version Bible, Acts 2.43-47)

Haddad suggests that the first-century church may be observed in this passage to have the characteristics of a CoP:

- Shared Purpose or domain: The disciples devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the fellowship and the breaking of bread (2.42);
- Shared Practices: The disciples were committed to regularly meeting together, eating in their homes and praising God (2.46-47);
- Shared Participation: The disciples had everything in common, sold possessions, and shared the proceeds among those in need (2.43-45); and
- Shared Presentation: The disciples were filled with awe, enjoyed the favor of people and experienced miracles, and the Lord added to their number (2.43,45-47) (Haddad 8–9).

Theological Foundations

Theological Foundations of Preaching.

Thomas Long writes that for much of history, the discipline of homiletics was viewed in the category of applied theology. Homiletics was practical. “Real” theology was taught in Bible courses or systematic theology classes. “The discipline of homiletics

was about learning the pragmatic techniques needed to apply the theology learned elsewhere in the form of a sermon” (Long 62). Preaching is intensely theological in and of itself, and the process of preaching should be transformative not only for the listeners but also for the one who is preaching. The act of preaching is a way of confronting much of human nature in the preacher. “It is a discipline to destroy illusions” of ourselves, God, and the world around us (Peterson 21). The congregation becomes the pastor’s place for developing vocational holiness. “It is also the place in which we develop virtue, learn to love, advance in hope—become what we preach. At the same time we proclaim a holy gospel, we develop a holy life. We dare not separate what we do from who we are” (ibid.).

Preaching should therefore be, by nature, personally theological and transformative. The study of hermeneutics must include not only an understanding how God works through our preaching but also an understanding that God is working both in and through the preacher her- or himself. Luchini asserts that if preaching “is going to have the greatest possible spiritual impact on the lives of preachers and those to whom they preach, the homiletic process must be seen more as a spiritual discipline that incarnates Christ, than a rhetorical technique that highlights the preacher” (Luchetti 35). Theologically, as pastors form the sermon, God, through the sermon, forms pastors. Behind the concept and act of preaching, there lies a doctrine of God and a conviction about his being, his action, and his purpose in both the preacher and the listener. Therefore, the act of preaching is deeply rooted in theology.

A Theology of Self-Revealing God. Preaching begins with, and emerges out of, a God who chooses to reveal his character and will to people. “God is not the object of the

human religious journey, but the source and instigator of his own journey toward us” (Rutledge). Although theologians vary in an understanding of how God distinguishes himself and the exact nature of God’s self-revelation (47 Hepp), Christianity is rooted in the self-revelatory nature of God (Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 66; Packer and Oden 56; Pannenberg 189). God is a good God who chooses to reveal himself to his creation. Therefore, although life is often described as a “search for meaning” (Frankl) or “peoples’ search for God,” on the contrary, the scripture writers speak of a God who is in search of his creation (Ezek. 34.11; Luke 16.9; Matt. 18.12). “Every year, it is that story that we tell from the lectern and from the pulpit. We hear the story of how God has revealed himself to people who otherwise would never have known who he was or anything about him” (Rutledge). Preaching is rooted in this knowledge that God wants to be known. The God of the scriptures is a God who wants his creation to know his name (Exod. 3.13-14; Matt. 1.23) and although God will use his written word (2 Tim. 3.15), his Spirit (1 Cor. 2.10), and even creation itself (Ps. 19.1; Rom. 1:.20), God has chosen to reveal himself through others and through the act of preaching (Rom. 10.14; Heb. 1.1).

The letter to Romans ties the act of preaching into the picture of salvation in a very clear way as well, in speaking of the consequence of a lack of preaching. Paul writes, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Rom. 10.14-16). Reversing the passage, Paul implies that God calls and sends some to preach; that preaching causes a hearing of the gospel; that hearing causes belief, which in turn causes

a person to call on the one in whom they have believed through that preaching. All of this assumes not only a God who wants to be known but also that God chooses preaching as a primary way to make his presence and character known. Obedience to this act of preaching is said to be pleasing to God (1 Cor. 1.21).

Biblical preaching can, therefore, be understood as a re-presenting of the message of a biblical text for the contemporary context. The goal is to faithfully bring the modern listener as close as possible to the point or points made originally by the biblical authors and thinkers in their context (Sanders 5). Whether that is Barth's oft-quoted understanding of "not needing to say something, but merely repeat something" (Barth, *Homiletics* 49), Packer's call to free the text to speak its own message again today to sinful men and women (Packer 141), or Buttrick's meditation on the theology of the text and articulation of Christian faith-consciousness (Buttrick 320–21), the task of the preacher is to "decide how God's nature is appropriate for this time and context, through a prophetic or a constitutive Word" (Trotter 238). God is the one who has chosen to reveal himself. Our task is to be faithful to that revelation.

Although a preacher must strive to be faithful and do the work of exegesis, the preacher cannot, of course, control God. Preachers can control only what is actually said in the sermon, and they are responsible for the quality of that control and content. Moreover, "what a preacher decides to say and how the preacher decides to say it enormously influence the impact of the sermon. It is surely good theology not to equate God's activity and the preacher's actions, but it is bad theology to disconnect them so completely that they do not even touch and the preacher loses any sense of responsibility

for the sermon” (Long, ch. 1). God reveals. God leads. What the preacher does with that leading is his or her responsibility.

A Theology of a Supernatural Gifting. God calls people to preach and then gifts them to function that in role. These gifts are often referred to as Spiritual Gifts or charisma (Potts 5). Tied into a theology of a self-revelatory nature of God, a theology of spiritual gifting is best understood in the context of full surrender to and relationship with the trinitarian God. Preaching apart from this context is flawed (Seamands 19). Although the bible never gives a formal definition of a spiritual gift, Kinghorn writes that scripture gives us a great deal of insight into the nature and function of spiritual gifting. Kinghorn defines a “spiritual gift as a supernatural enabling of the Holy Spirit which equips a Christian for the work and service of ministry” (Kinghorn 20). God could have chosen to supernaturally, apart from human contact, reveal himself to the world and to build his kingdom, but instead he has called us to be co-workers in that task. (1 Cor. 3.9; 2 Cor. 6.1). Preaching is not primarily an act of our will or effort but a result of an anointing and gifting from God.

Notably, Jesus first engaged in public ministry after his baptism. The writer of Luke tells us that “when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’” (Luke 3.21-22). Immediately after that baptism and affirmation, Jesus began his ministry (3.23). Perhaps as significantly, in subsequent verses Jesus’s anointing from God included the call of “preaching good news to the poor” (4.18). In his homiletics textbook, Donald Demaray reminds us that “we have no ministry, much less

power to cope with its peculiar temptations, without the preparation that comes from God's Spirit." (Demaray 28). The call to preach is connected to this anointing and gifting from the Spirit of God.

Despite spiritual gifts being from and of God, the writers of scripture suggest that gifts need cultivation. The apostle Peter says, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:10). To be faithful in using a gift means that the one using the gift takes opportunities to sharpen the gift and to use the gift in the proper way and context. The writer of Ephesians says that the role of a church leader is to "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..." (Eph. 4.12). According to Merriam-Webster, "preparation" is "the action or process of making something ready for use or service or of getting ready for some occasion, text, or duty." Preparation assumes a level of process. Paul tells Timothy that, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1.6). Gifts are given, but they must be developed to fully and faithfully serve others. The spark what was given by God needs to be developed.

A Theology of an Incarnational Life. Preaching is not just something preachers *do*; preaching is something preachers *are* and *live*. To preach is not "simply a call to believe something, to learn something, or to do something; it is to have one's life formed by the Spirit to be a wise and truthful witness to Christ, knowing and loving the Word which shapes our lives and gives shape to all the words we speak" (Pasquarello, "Speaking of God: Preaching as a Spiritual Practice" 69). Referencing Augustine, Pasquarello writes that the pastor is to be transformed by grace into "an 'eloquent

sermon,' a holy performance that invites the church into truthful, enlivening conversation of self-giving love in communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” (qtd. In *ibid*). Pastors’ lives and the message become intertwined. Scazzero writes that pastors can give inspiring messages about the importance of spiritual transformation and enjoying the transforming journey with Christ, and yet if their lives do not reflect that transformation, the life lacks power. “We may preach rich truths out of Scripture...but if we have not lived the truths we teach and been transformed by them personally, the spiritual transformation of those we serve will be stunted. I am not saying there will be none. Just not much” (Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* 38). A theology of preaching must include a theology of incarnation—not just of Jesus but of the message and the messenger. This living of the message does not mean perfection. Lewis writes that moral perfection in clergy is not a demand but rather an “attempted consistency between words and actions” (Lewis and Lewis 24). A congruency between the message and the messenger must exist—a sense that the messenger embodies the message in the midst of the congregation (Long).

This incarnational framework for preaching produces a message that not only is consistent with the life of the messenger but also shows the living of that life in ways the receiver of the message will hear and understand. In Philippians chapter 2, the apostle Paul writes how Jesus, in the act of incarnation, submitted himself to others even to the point of death. Although some recent scholarship offers a conflicting view (Edsall and Strawbridge 292), Philippians 2.5-11 is almost universally accepted either as one of the earliest hymns or a confessional statement of the church and, therefore, most likely pre-existent to Paul’s writings (Collins 361; Streiker 51; Edsall and Strawbridge). In his

letter to the Corinthian church, the apostle Paul (using similar language about Jesus as in Philippians 2) states that, particularly in regard to his preaching of the gospel, he is willing to become to become a slave to all people. This emptying of authority is done so that Paul can “win as many as possible.” To a Jew, he will be like the Jew; to the Gentile, a Gentile; to those under the law he will become like one under the law (though he himself was not under the law) in order to win those under the law; to the weak, he will become weak (1 Cor. 9.19-22).

In fact, Paul goes so far as to say that he has become “all things to all people so that... [he] might save some” (1 Cor 9.22). As one who is called to preach, “Paul is up front about his willingness to become X or Y so that the gospel might go forth and the people of Corinth might come to know the God of the gospel” (Alcantara 230). This kind of incarnational framework is foundational to our understanding of preaching and proclamation. Those who preach are called to empty themselves, to incarnate the message of Christ to the listeners. “Through Jesus Christ, God speaks a specific language and embraces a specific culture. God condescends through risking specificity. By tabernacling with a specific people in a specific time and place, God demonstrates a divine willingness to take on humanness, to embrace creatureliness, with its requisite restrictions of language and culture” (Alcantara 233). In Christ, God shapes grace to humanity in ways that are custom-fit and incarnational to the specific human situation. “Put simply, God in Christ becomes like us to reach us” (ibid). An adequate theology of incarnation will encourage preachers to do likewise with their congregations and contexts.

A Theology of a Covenant Community. Although scriptural examples of preachers who come from outside the community as evangelists, prophets, et al. exist, pastors must also develop a theology of their identity as voices to, of, and within their community. The word “homiletics” comes from the Greek word “homilos,” the Greek word for “crowd” or “assembly,” meaning at once “to assemble” and “to converse together” (“Homily”). Homiletics is the theological discipline of formally studying preaching, though implied that the preaching is to the assembly—the community, the gathered.

Although preachers are often pictured as prophetic voices *to* a community, Long and others argue that, theologically, preachers should be thought of as voices coming from within the community of faith and not from the outside (Long, ch.1; Moltmann 303; Rose). Preachers are members of the larger body but also participants in the worshiping assembly. Preachers are commissioned to preach by the very people to whom they are about to preach. Preachers “have been immersed in the lives of these people to whom we will speak, which is another way of saying that, symbolically at least, we rise to the pulpit from the pew” (Long ch 1). Tisdale reminds us that a credible theology of preaching will include this idea that one of the most unnerving things about prophetic witness is that it often requires the prophet to put his or her body on the line on behalf of the Word proclaimed, and that this is done in front of the community to which this Word is proclaimed (Tisdale, ch 5). “Prophetic witness can be costly. Yet this very costliness also makes it part and parcel of the gospel Jesus came preaching and living” (ibid). The gospel that is preached to and among our community reminds one that it is only as one loses

their life that they find their life. Believers are called to lay down their lives for one another, which certainly includes our community (1 John 3.16).

Therefore, although a theology of preaching most certainly involves the idea of a solo voice proclaiming God's truth to and among the community, this proclamation of truth need not always have come out of the mind and mouth of simply the preacher. A growing movement of scholars and preachers view preaching as more conversational, collaborative, and irenic. Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote in 1928 that the conventional model of preaching "has long since lost its influence over intelligent people, and the future does not belong to it." "The future," he writes, "belongs to a type of sermon which can best be described as an adventure in co-operative thinking between the preacher and his congregation" (Fosdick 9). Many contend that teaching and preaching is best when the preaching and teaching is conversational and spurs further dialogue (Rose; Thomson 118; McClure; Jones 109; Pagitt 52). Rose argues that the aim of the sermon is not to tell but to share. Rather than preach *at* or *for* their listeners, preachers collaborate *with* their listeners. Preachers create nonthreatening, open spaces in which open dialogue and learning can emerge (ibid 93-94). Pagitt writes that with his congregation, "sermons are not primarily about my extracting truth from the Bible to apply to people's lives. In many ways the sermon is less a lecture or motivational speech than it is an act of poetry—of putting words around people's experiences to allow them to find deeper connection to their lives" (ibid 166). Preaching has often been considered as water for a thirsty soul, yet these authors suggest it may also be thought of as salt which helps create a thirst for God that is addressed in the context of a community.

Theological foundations of Community of Practice.

Having addressed some of the theological foundations of preaching, the theological foundations of CoPs will now be discussed.

Trinity as Collective and Individual Identity. The Christian community's identity is understood to be radically rooted in the nature of God as Trinity. The importance of various aspects of a CoP among believers can, in some ways, be rooted in the very identity of God.

Christians are created to exist and thrive in community with each other. Twentieth-century philosopher Richard Swinburne wrote that one great question any worldview must answer is “why does something exist rather than nothing?” (Swinburne 2). The writer of Genesis tells us that, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (NIV, Gen. 1.1-3). Samuel Powell notes that from these opening words of the scriptures emerges a picture of a God who exists in community—in Trinity (Powell 17).

Vestiges of that Trinity are found throughout creation (Schaff 171). In Genesis 1.1, the work of the *Father* in creation is seen—the first member of the Trinity, who created all things. James 1.17 calls this creator “the Father of every good and perfect gift.” In the second verse of Genesis, the *Spirit* of God hovers over the waters (Gen. 1.2). Rabbis have noted that the writer of Genesis uses language and imagery similar to that sometimes used of birds (Visotzky 100). The same language and imagery are used in the New Testament to describe the Spirit of God descending like a dove and hovering over

Jesus at the time of his baptism (Matt. 3.15, Luke 3.22, John 1.32). Verse three of Genesis says that God created by *speaking*—by his *Word* (Gen. 1.3). The opening words of the gospel of John echo this image: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1.1). John says “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1.13)—i.e., Jesus, the Son of God. The opening verses of the Old Testament, therefore, present the earliest scriptural hint of the existence of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son. God is in nature one, while living in a community of the Godhead.

References like these appear throughout the New Testament (Matt. 3:16; 28.19; Luke 3.22; John 15;26; Acts 1.4; 2 Cor. 13.14); by the time the Scriptures are complete, the existence of an eternal God who exists in Trinity—three persons in one— has become apparent. These three persons exist in an unceasing state of love and joy and delight; the Father delights in the Son, the Son points to the Father, and the Spirit points to the Son. “The Father, Son, and Spirit live in a harmony and love that is a model for human life: the Father makes room in himself for the Son, the Son for the Spirit, the Spirit for the Father and Son, and so the Trinity is the perfect and eternal communion reflected in dim and distant ways in families, churches, and peoples” (Leithart 136). God is the initial model of community and demonstrates the richness of living in community.

Unlike the stories of pagan mythology in that day, the Bible asserts that God does not create because he is lonely or bored or needs help getting his work done (Sanders 96). Rather, out of the richness of his magnificent being, out of the fullness of the community of Trinity, God says, “This idea of community, this joy of fellowship, is so surely good, let’s broaden the circle. Let’s create human beings, not as God, but in our own image.

And let's invite human beings to bask in the fellowship of the Trinity" (Rohr et al.). God creates not because God needs us; God's identity was not empty and in need of worshippers. God was perfectly content enjoying the fellowship of the Trinity. God creates because God's nature to give. God creates because God loves community. "In the beginning was the relationship" (ibid.). God models this relationship in the Trinity, and God demonstrates this relationship in his creation (Sanders, ch.2).

The gospel of John records a prayer Jesus prayed to the Father. In this prayer, God the Son (the Word) prayed to God the Father about our relationship with each other: "May they be one as we are one" (John 17.21). God, who exists in the richness of Trinitarian love from before the beginning of time, says that this idea of community is so good, so rich, and so beautiful that the community should be expanded. From the beginning of creation, richness of community already exists and is in fact the motivation for God's creative work.

Identity Formation in a New Testament Model of CoPs. In the generic concept of CoP, the community rather than the individual defines a given domain of work and what accomplishing that work successfully (Suchman and Trigg 73). The individual recognizes that learning is a process which takes place in a participation framework, not just in an individual mind (Lave and Wenger 15). In scripture, Jesus was the leader and set the agenda of the Kingdom of God before his disciples (Matt. 6.33; Matt 22.37-38), and other New Testament writers point to following Christ as the central work of our faith (1 Cor. 11.1, Phil. 3.13). Jesus and the writers of scripture assumed that Christians would work out what this specifically means together as a body. Peter is told that whatever he "binds on earth will be bound in heaven" (Matt. 16.16-19). Paul tells the

Philippian church that we are to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2.12). Christians are told that they participate together in the divine nature with God (2 Pet. 1.4). God created us for community and desires us to work out our faith in that context.

As Christians are “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5.27; 1 Pet. 5.24; Col. 3.3), their life “in Christ” is primarily corporate, not individualistic. Christians are a people who have been made alive, a body of Christ comprised of Gentile and Jewish Christ-followers (Campbell 153). Therefore, members of the church as a CoP seek to better understand and practice faith corporately, through sharing in the work of ministry, reflecting on stories past, and writing stories together in the present. This sharing in love further builds up and strengthens the body (Eph. 4.16).

In Christian community, the collective identity is understood as membership in the body of Christ (Rom. 12.5, 1 Cor. 10.17, 1 Cor. 12.27, Eph. 4.12, Col. 1.24). We are called to live communally with each other, under the direction of Christ. “Christian community means community through and in Jesus Christ. On this presupposition rests everything that the Scriptures provide in the way of directions and precepts for the communal life of Christians” (Bonhoeffer and Coles 13). Life does not exist apart from the body just as fruit does not exist apart from the vine (John 15.4). In the case of the church, faith represents the shared passion not only for the domain (Christ), but also for those participating in the community of practice (the Church). Paul urged the early church to consider participation in the body of Christ as both collective and individual. “Just as each of us has one body with many members, these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs

to all the others” (Rom. 12.4-5). Paul’s letters reminded both Jewish and Gentile Christians of their collective identity found in Christ and the importance of finding common ground and identity through participation in community (Epp 87; W. Campbell). Similarly, in speaking of CoPs more generally, Wenger writes that through participation in the community one learns the intricacies of a job, explores the meaning of work, constructs an image of the company, and develops a sense of oneself as a worker (Lave and Wenger 27). For followers of Christ, one learns about the meaning of mission, constructs an image of God, and understands oneself in relationship with God through the work of ministry in a particular context and community (Hunsberger 13; Bonhoeffer and Coles 25).

With the biblical and theological foundations of both homiletics and CoPs addressed, a discussion of what CoPs are and how they function will follow.

What is a Community of Practice?

Communities of Practice are everywhere. “We all belong to a number of them—at work, at school, at home, in our hobbies. Some have a name, some don’t. We are core members of some and we belong to others more peripherally” (Wenger, R. McDermott, et al. 5). In fact, most people belong to several diverse CoPs at the same time, and their involvement in and commitment to them changes over the various stages of their lives (Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* 6).

Whereas CoPs are pervasive in one’s lives, the task of defining them is not an easy one; the operationalization and establishment of them in organizational settings has proved challenging (Addicott et al.; Swan and Robertson; Waring and Currie). Although the term itself was coined in recent years (being first used in the 1991 book *Situated*

Learning), the phenomenon is an age-old practice dating back to the early days of civilization (Lave and Wenger 42). Wenger suggests CoPs were humankind's first knowledge-based social structures, stemming back from when humans lived in caves and gathered around fires to discuss strategies for cornering prey, the optimal shape of arrowheads, or which roots were edible (Wenger, R. A. McDermott, et al. 5). For example, an early tribe learning to survive in any situation is a CoP (Wenger, "Doughnuts" 9; Ranmuthugala et al.) Other knowledge-based social structures such as the corporations in ancient Rome, physicians and nurses, priests and nuns all hold characteristics of CoPs (Agrifoglio 38). They can be found in schools, universities, research institutes and business organizations (Nistor et al. 109).

CoPs are most simply defined as a group of people "who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, R. McDermott, et al. 7). This group is "informally bound to one another through exposure to a common class of problems, common pursuit of solutions, and thereby themselves embodying a store of knowledge" (Manville and Foote 7). Different from a team in which legitimation, structure, and membership are externally imposed from the formal hierarchy (Hildreth and Kimble 29), CoPs are not bound to a hierarchy and need to invite the interaction of others to make them alive and vital (Wenger, R. McDermott, et al. 7). In fact, a defining characteristic of a CoP is that of the voluntary participation of the member (Orr 33). As members interact with each other, they learn from each other. "This learning results in certain practices peculiar to those in the same community due to their close relationship and interactions" (Haddad).

CoP are usually groups of people who have worked together over a period of time and have evolved (Huberman and Hogg 9). CoPs are not simply a team nor are they a task force. CoPs do not have to be an authorized or identified group but are peers in the execution of “real work.” “What holds them together is a common sense of purpose and a real need to know what each other knows” (Seely and Solomon). In a CoP, “every practice is dependent on social processes through which it is sustained and perpetuated, and that learning takes place through the engagement in that practice” (Gherardi et al. 11).

Apprenticeship

Another way to think of CoPs is through the lens of apprenticeships and formal mentoring relationships. Although Lave and Wenger initially cite CoP examples based on an apprenticeship model (Lave and Wenger 62), e.g., Yucatec midwives (67), Vit and Gola tailors (69), naval quartermasters (73), meat cutters (76), and nondrinking alcoholics (79), CoPs can challenge the traditional understanding of apprenticeship as a relationship in which one sole master holds the knowledge and apprentices are to learn it. In terms of teaching homiletics, understandably, most learn preaching through traditional classroom models or through master and apprentice models. Although elements of CoPs may resemble some of the characteristics of traditional apprenticeship (Ash et al.) in that skilled participants transfer tacit knowledge to others through practice (Fuller et al. 90), generally the research asserts that knowledge resides collectively in the CoP through the expertise, practices, and participation of all of its members (92). “In apprenticeship opportunities for learning are, more often than not, given structure by work practices instead of by strongly asymmetrical master-apprentice relations” (93). This scenario does

not mean that the role of the teacher or mentor is irrelevant or antithetical to the CoP but rather that leaders often emerge as the ones who take advantage of the full range of participation (thereby leading the practice of the core group) rather than more peripheral or occasional participation (Handley et al. 650).

While cognitive models of learning stress teaching in a classroom-type model, where learning is mechanistic and the focus is the cerebral process of transmission and absorption of theory and ideas (Cox 529), CoPs generally focus more on learning than teaching (DuFour 6). CoPs are about understanding how to behave as opposed to learning simply what to do (Cox 529). This change in behavior is understood as the product of a change of identity that comes through participation in a defined social system (Wenger, “Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System” 1). This way of learning and process of change is known as Situated Learning.

Situated Learning Theory

Situated Learning is an instructional approach developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in the early 1990s that draws from the work of Dewey, Durkheim, Marx, Vygotsky, and others as well as cognitive anthropologists such as Lave (Clancey 14). Based in the broader concept of social learning theory, Situated Learning asserts that students are more inclined to learn if they are actively participating in the learning experience, embedded within activity, context, and culture (Lave and Wenger 29).

Situated Learning theory dates back to the 1970's, when a shift in learning theory moved the focus of scholarship from behavioral approaches alone to include more cognitive approaches to learning (Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* 12). Cognitive psychologists promoted a conceptualization of learning that was based on individual

achievement and concerned only with cognition (J. S. Brown et al.). Lave and Wenger's model emerged in the context of "a growing awareness of the fundamentally social nature of learning and cognition in the fields of educational and cultural psychology" (Haneda 807) as well as critical anthropology (Lave and Wenger 50). Situated Learning theory posits that knowledge is not something that is incrementally stored in an individual's mind, but rather knowledge is to be understood relationally as a part of social process (15). Learning happens in what is called situated community; in other words, learning is located in the evolving relationships between people and the settings in which they conduct activities (Haneda 808). "Accordingly, learning is an intrinsic and inseparable aspect of any social practice, not the goal to be achieved, and it occurs when people engage in joint activity in a CoP, with or without teaching" (809).

According to Bandura, all learning phenomena result from direct experience or vicariously from observing and learning from other's behavior, and they are influenced by norms or expectations (Bandura, "Vicarious" 3). Learning is connected to modeling—not just by the leader but also by the other learners. "Much social learning occurs on the basis of casual or directed observation of behavior....in everyday situations" (Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* 39). The role of social modeling, beyond simply mimicry, is to lead people to learn and generate new behaviors vicariously through the actions and consequences observed in other learners. Individuals generate new learning by going beyond what they observe (Lave and Wenger 31). In this way knowledge builds and accumulates based on the participation of the learners.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Situated learning's central defining characteristic is a process that Lave and Wenger call legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave and Wenger 31). "For Lave and Wenger, LPP is the defining characteristic of apprenticeship as a form of learning. Newcomers learn the practice of the community by being situated in the practice and by having access to established members" (Hildreth 37). Mastery of skill and knowledge requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. LPP provides a way to conceptualize "the relationship between newcomers and old-timers about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice" (Lave and Wenger 29). Although Lave and Wenger's initial intention in writing was to redeem the idea of apprenticeship, the concept of LPP is broader than the traditional concept of apprenticeship. LPP is the process where one changes participation and identity in a community of practice (Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* 11). LPP is not merely learning situated in practice but learning as a "generative social practice in the lived-in world." (Lave and Wenger 35).

Legitimation is about the authenticity of the person's relationship to the community and is the aspect that is concerned with power and authority relations in the community. Power and authority do not necessarily derive from formal structures. For example, a butcher or tailor may receive some degree of formal legitimacy from hierarchy, while midwives' and alcoholics' legitimacy is more informal. What makes one legitimate in the community is contribution. (Hildreth 37)

Peripherality, Kimble states, is not a physical concept measuring proximity to a center point, nor is it a simple measure of the amount of knowledge or skill that one has acquired. "The terms peripheral and full participation are used to denote the degree of

engagement with and participation in the community” (Kimble et al. 6). Therefore, the degree of participation in the community as well as a common understanding of what that means for members’ lives and the community are inseparable from the practice. (Lave and Wenger 37).

Essential Components of a CoP

Communities of Practice have three essential structural components: a shared domain of interest, a community pursuing that shared interest, and a practice or shared repertoire of resources (Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* 2). Without all three of these components, a group may be a community but the group is not a CoP. “Interactions within these three CoP dimensions propitiate fertile ground for group collaboration and innovation” (Saldana 1).

The domain. One of the characteristics that differentiates a CoP from a club of friends or social network is the organization of the group around a *domain*: an area of shared concern, a set of problems to be addressed, or a passion about a topic (Wenger, McDermott, et al. 4–5). A shared domain “creates common identity..., legitimizes the community by affirming its purpose and value to other members and stakeholders,” (27) and assumes consonance in the way people think and act (Townley et al.). The shared domain inspires members to participate, guides members’ learning, and gives meaning to their actions. The shared domain draws the CoP together (Wenger, R. A. McDermott, et al. 23). “Attention to something that members really care about is an essential aspect of a community of practice. For a community to form, the topic must be of more than just a passing interest” (Wenger, White, et al. 4). Rather, this shared domain guides what questions are asked and even the way the CoP organizes knowledge. The shared domain

allows the participants to focus on what really matters (Wenger, R. A. McDermott, et al. 30). A shared domain is especially important during the inception and formation stages of a CoP as well as in sustaining the community over time in a shared collection of ideas, because the shared domain gives the collective participants increased capacity to solve problems as the sense of common purpose develops (Flesher Fominaya 401).

The community. The community is the social structure for learning, fostering interactions, and relationships based on mutual trust and respect (CenterPoint Institute 6). In pursuing their interest in the domain, members of a CoP engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information (Wenger, *Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction* 2). This community must be inextricably tied to the practice of a shared domain for a CoP to exist. A residential neighborhood, for example, is a community, but the residential community is not a CoP. Likewise, playing scales repeatedly on a trumpet is certainly practice, but this practice is not a CoP. The marriage of domain *and* community makes something a CoP (Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* 72). These relationships of mutual engagement with a particular domain bind the members of the community together into a social entity (Wenger, “Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System”). Therefore, CoP communities are not simply people who do the same job, work for the same company, live near each other, or hold the same title. Rather, CoP communities are committed to learning from and interacting with each other in the form of a community (Wenger, “Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction”).

Barab and Duffy conclude that the community of a CoP is also more than the kind found in “practice fields” (public settings in which learners apply new knowledge), e.g.,

student-teaching placements or field-based placement sites for learning and development. Rather, a CoP understanding of community emphasizes the learners' connections and patterns of participation in the community and offers regular opportunities for reflection and dialogue with people of varying levels of expertise within that community (Barab and Duffy 33–34). This human aspect of connection and social relationship of learning differentiates a CoP from a team or a group (Hildreth et al. 35).

Finally, the concept of a connected community often connotes a commonality. The shared understanding of their domain and common approach to the practice produce mutual trust and respect and, over time, foster a common identity (Van Maanen and Barley 35). Assuming that the hallmark of an ideal community of practice is homogeneity would be wrong. “Although long-term interaction does create a common history and communal identity, it also encourages differentiation among members” (ibid). People grow in different areas and take on different roles over time which, in turn, allows for additional mutual engagement. “A good dose of diversity makes for richer learning, more interesting relationship, and increased creativity” (36). Commonality is not homogeneity.

The practice. A CoP is not merely a community of people who share a common interest—people who like certain kinds of books or movies, for instance. The members of a CoP are practitioners. “They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice” (Wenger, *Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction* 3). This practice can be thought of as a shared pool of knowledge about the domain, a baseline that can be assumed as a common foundation of the group that allows members to work together (Wenger,

McDermott, et al. 38). This practice can include local communities that steward a practice inside particular organizations, or a practice that is not confined to the boundary of a singular organization but rather extends beyond the organization, creating interorganizational partnerships (221-22). For example, Hutchins and Klausen reference a community of airline pilots (Hutchins and Klausen 11). Their practice would include the body of knowledge of the wider community of pilots as well as that of the more compact community of which they are simultaneously a part (for example, the specific practices of a specific team of pilots who work for a particular airline, who are located at a particular airport) (Hildreth et al. 38).

A practice denotes a set of “socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, problem-solving performance, communion, and accountability (Wenger, R. A. McDermott, et al. 38). Communities will often create a set of shared resources which could include things like models, tools, principles, practices, and best practices. These tools can range from what are called artifacts (e.g., a specialized tool or a manual) to far less tangible and measurable products—for example, a general way of doing things (39) or a vocabulary or a general shared identity (Wenger, “Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System” 1).

Technology and CoPs

Knowledge Management. The following discussion of the use of technology in CoPs begins with a brief exploration of the use of technology in the field of Knowledge Management (KM) in general, as historically, technology was simply used as a way to share information/knowledge across space (Hildreth 11).

Davenport defines knowledge management as “the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge” (Davenport 8). This understanding of how knowledge/information is managed implicitly conceptualizes knowledge as an object, which has influenced attempts to quantify, capture, measure, and control it (Glazer); knowledge is perceived as something to be built, owned, and controlled, and the value is to be maximized (Allee 32). “More recent developments in KM have demonstrated that this approach to the management of knowledge is too restricted and that some aspects of knowledge cannot be captured” (Hildreth 8). Therefore, the theory of KM has been broadened to include elements such as sharing learning, the generation of new knowledge, and the application of knowledge (8), even knowledge that has not yet been codified (12), in which technology is playing a key role.

CoP theory acknowledges the communal nature of knowledge and that, even with technology, some knowledge can only be gained in specific circumstances, lived out, and applied in those circumstances. Therefore, knowledge is not detached from context and in fact is often formed and shaped by context (Lave and Wenger 31; Hildreth and Kimble 29). The context becomes an “intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge” (Lave and Wenger 91). This means that one of the main challenges in managing an organization's knowledge is transferring that knowledge from creator or source to where the knowledge is needed (Alavi and Leidner 110; Liu et al. 892; Ruggles 87).

Organizations have addressed this transfer of knowledge using two basic approaches: the *codification* approach and the *network* approach (Hansen; Zack; Liu et al. 892). The codification approach involves pulling together explicit knowledge (knowledge that is readily articulated, stored, and accessed) and turning this knowledge into a usable

form (Hélie and Sun 997). Examples of the codification approach might be the creation of a process map, minutes from meetings, a decision tree, a teaching video, or a “how to” or policy manual (Lent 102; Alavi and Leidner 110). Technology is extremely useful in making this explicit knowledge accessible beyond the individual or even the organization. Information stored in explicit ways is only a small part of the picture because knowing is primarily something which comes about by participation in communities (Wenger, *Learning*).

A network approach focuses more on sharing interpersonal knowledge through networks of people and is usually more directed at tacit knowledge (Ruggles). Alavi and Leidner assert that tacit knowledge is rooted in action, experience, and involvement in a specific context (Alavi and Leidner 110). “Tacit knowledge is bound with an individual. It is unstructured, personal, very often context and life experience dependent, difficult to explain and mostly not documented knowledge” (Lent 110). An example of tacit knowledge might be how to best approach a particular customer (ibid.) or how to deal with a difficult congregation member when he or she gives feedback on a sermon. Both approaches are critical because knowledge is a valuable asset to any organization. Organizations must capture the knowledge and experience of their employees and transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge so that this knowledge can be used even when an employee has left the organization or is no longer available. Although both types of knowledge are critical, tacit knowledge is the harder of the two types to capture and use but may be the more valuable one (Jones and Leonard 62).

Even in the field of Artificial Intelligence and technology, where arguably the capture-codify approach is most deeply entrenched, some of the most robust forms of

knowledge sharing and communication began to be recognized as socially based, with their content being extremely hard to formalize (Shum 917). Sharing knowledge is not simply about capturing, codifying, storing, and sharing information by people for later use but rather having access to each other and the opportunity to communicate (Hildreth 11). Through social and collaborative processes as well as individuals' cognitive processes, knowledge is created, amplified, shared, and justified (Nonaka). Knowledge creation is, therefore, a social and collaborative process involving a continual conversion “between tacit and explicit knowledge and a growing spiral flow as knowledge moves through individual, group and organizational levels” (Alavi and Leidner 11).

Networks of Practice. Increasingly, technology is seen as a means to enable that social learning and collaborative process to take place (Kim ix). Specifically, with the growing recognition of the importance of more subtle, softer types of tacit knowledge that are best shared via network approaches, CoPs have been identified as a means by which this type of knowledge can be nurtured, shared, and sustained (Hildreth and Kimble). “Internet-based networking technologies, which can provide a single platform for groups or networks of groups to form within larger organisations, have led to the development of various forms of virtual groups and communities” (Kimble and Hildreth 3982). Brown and Duguid coined the phrase “Networks of Practice” (NoPs) to describe one type of virtual group. NoPs are composed of people who are geographically separate, most likely do not know each other, may never even get to meet each other face to face, but who share similar work or interests (Brown and Duguid). This concept became more relevant to this project when the COVID-19 pandemic moved the course from an in-person interaction to an online platform. Although in general NoPs have weaker ties

between members, are usually quite larger, and are different enough from the type of CoP this project hoped to create (ibid.) elements of NoPs exist that may be helpful to the purpose of this project. Particularly of interest was the question of how does one get participants to share when the NoP is voluntary? Wasko and Samer suggest that participants will share knowledge when they perceive that their knowledge enhances their professional reputations (Wasko and Samer 41), when they have the experience to share (43), and when they are structurally embedded in the network (54). Surprisingly, participants contribute without regard to expectations of reciprocity and do not seem to be more committed to the NoP than noncontributors (ibid).

CoPs and online education. Online education and communities are not new (Allen and Seaman; Palvia et al.; Bustamante). Educational adoption of computer networking began in the mid-1970s, learning circles in the early 1980s, and the first entirely online courses began in 1981 with noncredit “mini-courses” and executive training programs (Harasim). In 1989, the Open University launched what came to be known as the first application of computer conferencing in a large-scale distance education course (Kirkwood and Price; Harasim). By 2005, 65 percent of schools offering graduate face-to-face courses also offered graduate courses online (Allen and Seaman). In 2018, 64.7 percent of students were enrolled in a distance education course at a degree-granting postsecondary institution (“National Center for Education Statistics”). Currently, 98 percent of public universities and colleges offer some form of online classes as the COVID-19 pandemic has forced students and educators across all levels of education to rapidly adapt to online learning. In 2016, 39 percent of faculty members said they have taught online course for credit, compared to 46 percent in 2019. As of April 2020, 98

percent of institutions have moved the majority of in-person classes online (Bustamante; “National Center for Education Statistics”). Only three years ago, online education was predicted to be on track to become main-stream by 2025 (Palvia et al.), but the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the developments taken to adapt could permanently change how education is delivered (Lockee).

Eric Sheninger writes that “consistent innovation, effective integration of technology, meaningful professional development, connecting beyond the walls of a brick-and-mortar building, and an open mind are all mandatory duties of a leader in the digital age” (Sheninger xi). Although for many years, church leaders have held to tradition and generally avoided ushering their churches into the digital age (GJeten), the COVID-19 pandemic has generated an unprecedented shift in all areas of social interaction and learning:

Various types of human social interactions (e.g., shopping, banking, learning, meeting, and entertaining) are shifted from dominantly offline to dominantly online. In other words, the enforced social isolations in the physical world significantly increase humans' social interactions in the cyber world. This becomes a “new normal” in our daily life. (Yan)

Volumes of books and dissertations will be written about how the COVID-19 pandemic has moved the world to a more online community. The question of how long will this shift remain or if this shift is permanent is yet to be known, but there is little doubt a shift has occurred (Harasim; Smith et al.; Lockee). “The offices and schools of America have all moved into our basements and living rooms. Nothing is having a more profound impact on online activity than this change” (Koeze and Popper).

Many churches as well have adapted and adopted digital ethnology during the COVID-19 restrictions. One-third of U.S. adults have watched religious services online or on television in the past month, and a little over half of adults—or 18 percent of all adults—say they began doing this for the first time during the coronavirus pandemic (Cooperman). “Among those who typically attend religious services at least monthly, one-third say they have done so in person during the last month, and nearly three-quarters (72%) say they have watched religious services online or on TV” (Pew Research Center). Although most U.S. adults say when the pandemic is over they expect to go back to attending religious services in person as often as they did before the coronavirus outbreak, nine out of ten Americans who have watched services online or on TV in the past month say they are either “very” satisfied (54 percent) or “somewhat” satisfied (37 percent) with the experience; just 8 percent say they are “not too” or “not at all” satisfied (Cooperman).

“The church is still called to be a social institution, where people engage, support, and care for one another. The concept of *The Distanced Church* suggests church leaders need to find alternatives to physical gatherings and spaces, and are engaging technological options to do this” (H. A. Campbell 4). With the continued urging of physical distancing, people are seeking out new ways to connect, with most of that connection happening through video chat (Koeze and Popper). This need to while not being physically present has led to a normalizing of virtual training and an increased reliance on online training and virtual solutions (“How COVID Is Changing Corporate Training for Good”).

Without much instructional guidance, pastors and educators “turned to what they felt was natural, real-time communication and tried to replicate the classroom in videoconferencing virtual meetings” (Correia et al.). Pastors hurriedly set their phones in the back of their sanctuaries and continued to record the exact type of worship service as before; many times having more online than the few gathered in the room (H. A. Campbell). This type of online hybrid worship “does not just mean putting a camera in the room and doing worship the way you always have done it. We must re-imagine worship for multiple audiences. It's a whole new way of thinking” (Moore, *Both/And*).

Worship is not the only aspect of church that is being reimagined. Preachers and those wanting to grow in their preaching are asking how online communities can further the goals of continuing education and meaningful community in ways unavailable before. Unlike NoPs, these online communities might not replace existing face-to-face communities or trainings but rather become an extension allowing for the communal engagement to continue beyond the in-person time and space. Online communities also allow for extended participation beyond a geographic area (Li ch 2). In an interview with Jason Moore, co-founder and owner of Midnight Oil productions, Moore said that “in the same way that paradigms have shifted from in-person to online worship, so has the world of live training” (Moore, *Personal Interview with Jason Moore*). Prior to March of 2020, Moore averaged thirty to forty in-person, day-long seminars, workshops, keynotes, and other trainings. As the COVID infection numbers quickly rose, his in-person events started to cancel. Within the span of three days, he had six events cancel as in-person gatherings were no longer safe to engage in. Moore was contacted by denominational

leaders and asked to develop some online training to help churches navigate these changing times.

Before the pandemic, I had offered one or two trainings online that I was invited to participate in as a presenter. I had zero experience in leading online training on my own. After a lot of experimentation, exploration of platforms, software and equipment options, I decided to move forward with online training... Within a few days of putting the word out that I'd be offering this new training on, I found myself booked with over 30 events for over 19 United Methodist Annual Conferences.

From March of 2020 to March of 2021, I will conduct approximately 80 trainings.

This is double what I did on my most successful year. (ibid)

Moore added that while nothing “quite replaces the feeling of being in the room with people, hearing laughs, and seeing ah-has in real time,” the advantages of online eventually become apparent. “The lack of travel, the ability to see thoughts of participants in chat, the consistency of the setup and the ability to reach more people are all things that I’ve come to appreciate” (ibid).

While teleconferencing and traditional social media sites have been growing, “it seems that we want to do more than just connect through messaging and text—we want to see one another” (Koeze and Popper). Synchronous online conferencing systems have allowed experts from anywhere in the world to visually join online classrooms and have allowed presentations to be recorded for individual learners to watch at a time most convenient for them (Lockee). Correia et al. analyzed four widely used videoconferencing systems used for online learning: Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp. Using experiential e-learning as the framework for analysis, they examined

the systems' general characteristics, learning-related features, and usability. Experiential learning theory defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb 38). The focus in experiential learning is on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes. Knowledge is continuously created and recreated, “not an independent identity to be acquired or transmitted” (p. 39); which is similar to a CoP where knowledge resides *collectively* in the CoP through the expertise, practices, and participation of all of its members (Fuller et al. 92).

Correia et al. developed and used the following criteria to guide the selection process (Correia et al.). To qualify, videoconferencing had to offer a free version or free trial for users, be available in both web and application versions, be updated regularly, be prevalent and widely used, and have been used in educational contexts. As a cloud-based videoconferencing system, they found Zoom stood out among the selected systems due to cost and performance ratio. “Compared with the other systems, Zoom free version best supports learners to incorporate their experiences into online learning by offering the most learning-related features that correlate to the four experiential learning modes” (ibid). Also, at 300 million daily meeting participants at the time of the study (Warren), Zoom had over three-times the daily meeting participants than the next largest competitor, Teams at 75 million daily users (Zaveri). This increases likelihood of access and familiarity by the widest range of users. Zoom also supports more operating systems (ibid.).

In terms of online instructional design itself, good course design is key to overcoming many of the challenges of teaching online. Creating a clearly outlined

syllabus is usually a good place to start. Knowing an online course will likely often evolve overtime, think of a syllabus more as a living document representing a map of the course for the students (“Remote Teaching Good Practices: Beyond the Tech”). This document might include rules of online etiquette, expectations for interaction and communication with each other, use of audio and video mute during class, and use of visual cues like Zoom’s “raise your hand” feature (ibid). In reality, prioritizing course design and creation can help mitigate many of the frustrations caused by the ubiquity of the online classroom (Brennan et al.). Instructors should be willing to “course correct frequently. And view those course corrections as evidence of your teaching effectiveness. Changing your approach when something isn’t working for students isn’t a sign of failure — it’s a sign of professionalism and expertise” (Green).

Not only organizing course materials and making sure that some form of a course structure is set up in advance key, creating various policies about class communication norms and the expectations of student and faculty roles as well as student to student participation is helpful. “While we typically focus first on making sure the students can see and hear the instructor, it’s equally crucial that students are seen and heard (and that they feel they are seen and heard), and this takes some additional structure and intentionality online” (“Remote Teaching Good Practices: Beyond the Tech”). Student communication and participation can be increased by breaking into smaller groups for conversation. “Students reported feeling more engaged when they are assigned to a breakout room and given a that [sic], rather than listening to straight lecture through the class time” (Smith et al.). In the larger gathering such as a zoom room, smaller groups of students do most of the talking. “On Zoom, you can literally see the dominant talkers

taking the spotlight onto themselves and away from others. For the shy and reticent, being in a more intimate group can allow them a chance to speak” (Toor). Breakout rooms also reduce anxiety, increased overall attentiveness, focus, and learning (Smith et al.; Lockee; Álvarez; Kohnke and Moorhouse).

Lockee writes that the COVID-19 pandemic pushed educators to rethink online lesson design. Although this rethinking was forced and hurried,

The experience has served as a rare chance to reconsider strategies that best facilitate learning within the affordances and constraints of the online context... Lengthy Zoom sessions are seldom instructionally necessary and are not aligned with the psychological principles of how humans learn. Interaction is important for learning but forced interactions among students for the sake of interaction is neither motivating nor beneficial. (Lockee)

Instructors continue to re-examine the length of lectures as well as reading assignments. “Instead of assigning novels or books, I will use shorter reading assignments that accomplish the same pedagogical goals. That is not giving up on rigor; it’s simply recognizing that no one, including me, has the same attention span as before Covid-19” (Toor). Some studies have shown that average attentiveness was statistically significantly lower for class segments of over thirty minutes than class segments under thirty minutes (Smith et al.; Bunce et al.). With YouTube being the second largest social media platform and the most popular form of content distribution globally (Tankovska, “Most Popular”), the average length of a YouTube video in 2018 was 11.7 minutes in length (Tankovska, “Average YouTube Video Length as of December 2018, by Category”). Citing multiple studies, Bradbury writes that, “the academic literature is replete with articles and books

supporting and propagating the conclusion that lectures should adhere to the 10- to 15-min attention span that is characteristic of modern students” (Bradbury 509), although he argues those studies originate with a 1978 article by Hartley and Davies (Hartley and Davies) and are inadequate as a basis for evaluation of lecture effectiveness (Bradbury 510). “We have all experienced lectures where the lecture has been so awful and jejune that 10 min of lecture has been 10 min too long, yet for other lecturers 1 h seems wholly inadequate” (ibid).

Rather than simply focusing on lecture length, best practices would suggest that educators focus on creating student-centered pedagogies that not only help attention but retention of information (Bunce et al.). This focus can be done by breaking up lectures, by integrating polls and surveys to help learners to engage and process (Kohnke and Moorhouse), using breakout sessions for students to share in smaller groups and process information (Smith et al.), the use of video tutorials (Thomson et al. 70), and providing asynchronous content so students can work at their own speed (Green; Hogan and Sathy; Thomson et al.; Hughes 2). Smith et al. reported that qualitative findings from their focus groups confirmed the importance of asynchronous content. “Participants reported that they often multi-tasked during classes that did not have an asynchronous portion, and therefore required them to log on to Zoom for three hours” (203). Participants also reported a preference for this flipped classroom approach, with a pre-recorded portion, so that they could “do it at your own pace in your own speed and then you come to class and it’s like applied and in-depth” during the synchronous portion on Zoom. As one participant put it, “That way our live synchronous can be more concentrated to the salient points” (ibid). Peer review and feedback are also helpful practices for solidifying learning

and helping students feel invested in their success. Giving stronger students increasing levels of responsibility such as writing recaps and summaries has also been shown to increase the learning and engagement of the both the stronger and weaker students (Toor).

Homiletics: Fanning the Flame

Although coverage of homiletics in depth is beyond the scope of this dissertation, in order to give a sense of the curriculum developed for this project, several themes will now be explored that are common to many homiletics texts and curriculums.

The Spiritual Life of the Preacher

Peterson describes preaching as the place where we become what we preach. “At the same time we proclaim a holy gospel, we develop a holy life. We dare not separate what we do from who we are” (Peterson 21). Although a significant role exists for technique and process in learning homiletics, a problem exists “when the preacher is more concerned about becoming a better orator than becoming a better lover of Christ and others” (Luchetti 6). Excellent homileticians study sermon structure, timing, rhetoric, and the proper use of humor. Technique and process are necessary. What we do must flow out of who we are. “When preaching is more about the rhetorical eloquence and technical abilities of the preacher than it is about the wisdom and power of God, then preaching will fall short of its intended and potential impact” (24).

Psalm 78.72 reads, “And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.” Luchetti points out that both skill and integrity are vitally important for those who lead God’s people, but that “integrity” appears first in this verse (20). Pastors must not become more concerned with technique than spirituality. This

proclivity can lead to what John Wesley calls “practical atheism.” Although most preachers would profess a deep dependence upon God, in the practice of developing and delivering sermons they can potentially become atheistic in their over-reliance on technical methodology and their under-reliance upon revelation, wisdom, and power from God (Luchetti 6). Oden writes bluntly, “No amount of technical instruction or objective data gathering can finally call preaching into being. It cannot be reduced to an art or natural talent” (Oden 129). Therefore, curriculum designed to teach pastors as preachers must emphasize the ongoing formation of the inner life in Christ.

McDonald writes that the majority of people have been taught to manage their public worlds well (MacDonald 10). Our public world is the world that everyone sees, the presenting self (Adler, ch.4). Our public world is the Insta-life, the image we manipulate for public consumption (Carlo). Because these public worlds are so visible, they are often the first things people are tempted to address. Jesus talked about this tendency when he cautioned against cleaning the outside of the cup rather than the inside of the cup (Matt. 23.26). For the preacher, the goal of the Christian life is never image management. Pastors saying the right words or doing the right things is not sufficient. Rather, the goal of the Christian preacher should be to become the kind of person who lives and acts a certain way based out of the overflow of who they have become. Proverbs says and Jesus later affirms, “As a person thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23.7). The temptation is always present to exchange an intangible virtue for a tangible reward (Stanley, *Choosing to Cheat*)—the cultivation of an external goal for the inner world (MacDonald 45).

Life as a disciple and preacher must start with the things that no one sees—a grounding of a life with God. Foster says that “superficiality is the curse of our age... the

desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people” (Foster 1). Preachers must have congruency between their public and private worlds, between the words they speak and the actions they live (Lewis and Lewis 24).

One way this need has been historically addressed is in the formation and use of a Rule of Life. The term “Rule of Life” first became popular among early monastic communities. Members of these religious orders would live together in Christian community and would collectively agree to a certain to a set of practices by which they all would live. Perhaps the most famous of these is the “Rule of Saint Benedict,” or the “Benedictine Rule,” whose essence can be summarized as “Pray and work.” Many monasteries today still live this Rule out by calling their community to a very simple life built around prayer and work.

While most Christians are not called to a Benedictine kind of life, we can think of this style of living in this way: a Rule of Life is our “intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do” (Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* 196). Marjorie J. Thompson likens a Rule of Life to a trellis, “which curbs our tendency to wander and supports our frail efforts to grow spiritually” (Thompson 138). Rule of Life is a set of guidelines that support or enable us to do the things we want and need to do as those who desire to follow Jesus. “It allows us to clarify our deepest values, our most important relationships, our most authentic hopes and dreams, our most meaningful work, our highest priorities. It allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment” (Macchia 14). Dallas Willard describes Rule of Life as a curriculum for Christlikeness, a training in righteousness. Willard notes there are severe limitations to

what a person can do by simply trying harder. To accomplish true transformation, Christians must train themselves to godliness (1 Tim. 4.6-8). Christians cannot become those who “hear and do” (Matt. 7.25) without specific training and preparation (Willard 313–17).

Scazzero suggests the following simple steps to consider when developing a general Rule of Life. First, he suggests writing down everything one does currently (or hopes to do) that nurtures the spirit and fills the person with delight (e.g., people, places, activities).

Think more broadly beyond such activities as prayer, going to church, worship, and Bible reading. A fully developed list may include gardening, walking the dog, being in nature, talking with close friends, cooking, painting, hobbies, or any number of other possibilities. List them all (Pete Scazzero).

Next, the person should write down the activities they need to avoid, limit, or eliminate that pull him or her away from remaining anchored in Christ. This list may include things that impact their spirit negatively such as violent movies, excessive social media involvement, or commitments that take them beyond their limits. The third step is to consider the challenging “have to’s” in the next three to six months of life that may impact those rhythms (e.g., caring for aging parents, a special-needs child, a demanding season at work, moving, or health issues). Finally, given the categories of prayer, rest, relationships, and work, consider what God is inviting you to focus on in this season of your life (ibid).

While many Christians have experimented with a general Rule of Life, those who preach would also benefit from creating a preaching Rule of Life. Similar to a general

rule, these rules are the practices, relationships, and experiences that provide support and enable preachers to keep the work of preaching as a ministry priority and done with intentionality, integrity, and care (Pasquarello and Minger). “In the ancient sense of the term, *regula* or *rule* meant ‘guidepost’ or ‘railing,’ something to hang on to in the dark, that leads in a given direction, points out the road or gives us support as we climb” (Macchia 14). These preaching Rules should be fairly simple, life-giving, and realistic. This Rule is not an ideal toward which you are striving. Instead, one’s initial Rule should be a minimum standard for their life that one does not want to drop below. It’s a *realistic level* of engaging in the spiritual disciplines—as well as preaching practices—for which one can honestly and truly be held accountable (Thompson 35–39).

Although any discipline can be a helpful part of a rule, John Ortberg suggests the importance particularly of solitude, withdrawal, and silence.

Because preaching and teaching involves standing in front of other people, and receiving a response from them, and you have to try to be able to read their response in order to be effective, it means that a constant temptation is just going to be, “what do other people think of me? What kind of an impression Am I making on them?” And so I think solitude is a particularly important practice for people that are involved in preaching and teaching. Because it’s kind of the antidote to spending so much time, while I’m actually trying to read, how are people responding to me, and tailor what I say, in response to that reading. And so that makes it probably more likely are vulnerable for a preacher to get sucked into living for impression management than people who do other kinds of things for living. (Ortberg, *Personal Interview*)

This practice of solitude and silence gives preachers permission and structure to be unavailable to others for a time in order to be fully available to God (Thompson).

Exegetical Process

Perhaps the most daunting part of teaching homiletics is teaching the student to approach the scriptures in a way that is both faithful and manageable. Although scholars devote entire lives to mastering only a small section of scripture through exhaustive exegesis and biblical studies, all preachers regardless of their level of training must find ways to get at the meaning of the text. This practice is the process of exegesis.

In its simplest terms, exegesis is a systematic plan for uncovering the meaning of a biblical text (Hayes and Holladay 23–28). Most pastors begin the exegetical process with a prayerful and careful reading of and “soaking in” the text. Pasquarello contends that we must put a significant amount of energy into “where it should be; on the task of studying and listening intently to what scripture has to say before we speak” (Pasquarello, *Pasquarello Video 1*). Perhaps the key to being a truly good preacher begins with being a truly good listener, since in preaching, “the first word is always the word God speaks to address us” (ibid). Preachers are charged with listening very carefully for what God would say to his people. This soaking in the text is about attentiveness to God and God’s leading, as God works through his Spirit to enlighten the preacher, his messages tailored to each individual and arriving in God’s time (Demaray 34). Effective preaching is about effective listening. Barbara Brown Taylor writes that this deep listening to the text is one of the hardest and most rewarding aspects of the pastor’s job. “We do not make sermons out of air: our creations, poor or brilliant as they may be, are always variations on someone else’s theme. The main melody is always a given, and even when we launch into

our own bold improvisations we are limited to a scale of eight notes” (Brown Taylor, ch. 7). God does not dictate sermons to us. Rather we have to use “our skills and training to interpret and translate what God would say to them, in a way [the hearers] can understand and apply to their lives” (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word* 13).

After reading and praying through the text, the preacher must determine an effective way to approach the text. There are likely as many variations in this procedure as there are authors of books about this procedure. Haddon Robinson argues that “as professional skills go, sermon construction ranks among the most inexact when compared, say, with cooking spaghetti, removing an appendix, or flying an airplane” (Robinson ch.3). But clear, relevant biblical exposition does not take place by intuition or accident. “Good expositors have methods for their study” (ibid).

For the purposes of this project, the researcher adapted an “exegetical notebook” assignment from his doctoral work (included as Appendix F). This “notebook” is a document of questions and prompts to consider when approaching a text. The notebook begins by seeking some information about the preacher’s content and rationale for choosing a text, an exercise that may or may not be helpful in the week-in, week-out work of preaching but is very helpful given the context of a homiletics course. The main part of the notebook starts with question four, a section asking the preacher to list the “first questions” in approaching the text. Crediting Paul Ricoeur, Craddock uses the term “first naivete” to describe the “first exposure to the text in total naivete” (Craddock et al. 37). This “first questions” section asks the preacher to list all of the possible questions that come to mind on the first reading: questions of context, geography, emotion, heart, and feeling (ibid). These may be questions the preacher wants to research

later or simply ideas to keep in mind as one proceeds. At this point, answers to these first questions are not expected; the questions are merely listed.

The next part of the document is what Pasquarello calls “technical studies.” Having selected the passage, read the passage carefully, and asked the first questions, the preacher must then examine the passage in context. This examination may include background research on historical, geographical, and political insights as well as social customs. The research also includes word studies and theological insights from commentaries and other books. “The passage does not exist in isolation. As individual verses rest within a paragraph, the paragraphs are part of a chapter, and the chapters are part of the book” (Robinson, ch. 3). Robinson argues that a passage will not always say what we expected the passage to say. Preachers must avoid using “proof texts” for favorite doctrines by completely ignoring the context in which these texts lie (ibid).

Sermonic Structure

Homileticians often used the term “biblical preaching,” but there is little consensus on what defines this term. In some circles, biblical preaching is equated with expository preaching, whose proponents argue that this style of preaching has the strongest voice of pastoral authority (Blythe 12), appeals to biblical authority (Chapell, ch.1), and “best carries the force of divine authority” (Robinson, ch.1). Reid asserts that a deductive approach conforms to the Baptist partiality for the teaching voice in the pulpit (Reid ch 2). Yet historically, the way sermons are structured has great variety (Keller, *Communicating Faith* 99–103). This research does not endorse one type of preaching over another or one sermon form over another. Authors use terms like expository preaching and topical preaching (Robinson, ch. 3; Stitzinger, ch. 3; Keller,

Communicating Faith 30), narrative and story preaching (Frymire 19–33; Lowry; A. M. McKenzie), and prophetic (McMickle; Tisdale; Brfueggemann; Storey); even a “movement of thought” (Buttrick). For the sake of comparison and completion, these forms will be briefly defined and addressed.

Haddon Robinson defines expository preaching as the “communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers” (Robinson, ch. 1). Proponents of expository preaching argue that with expository preaching, the passage of scripture governs the sermon. “Expository preaching grounds the message in the text so that all the sermon’s points are points in the text, and it majors in the text’s major ideas. It aligns the interpretation of the text with the doctrinal truths of the rest of the Bible.” (Keller, *Communicating Faith* 32).

Although a source of debate for some (Dever; MacArthur; Robinson), topical preaching has for centuries been widely used along with expository preaching (Keller, *Communicating Faith* 30). Fred Craddock moved mainline Protestant preaching away from the expository method to a more topical method, writing that people did not accept the authority of either the Bible or the preacher to tell them how to live (Craddock, ch.1):

Expository or Biblical preaching has been found guilty of archaism, sacrificing the present to the past. One should, according to this view, choose relevant topics for treatment. Scriptures can be read in the service for mood or atmosphere or to satisfy those who feel it should be included, but this should not be allowed to shackle the minister. (ibid)

Instead, Craddock called for preaching consisting of open-ended stories that allow listeners to draw their own conclusions (ch. 7). Although the Word is effective in itself and the preacher is still responsible for careful preparation of the sermon, the preaching experience can be profound even if the preaching is simply like the ordinary experience of conversing and talking (ch.2).

Even authors who lean toward expository preaching acknowledge value in some forms of topical preaching. Robinson writes:

As expositors we may normally work our way through entire biblical books or extended passages in Scripture. Yet at some time or another during the year, we will preach on topics. Sermons preached at Easter and at Christmas require special topical treatment. In addition, we may preach on theological topics such as the Trinity, reconciliation, worship, God's concern for the poor, or the authority of the Scriptures. (Robinson Ch. 3)

Keller cites an example from the book of Acts in which Paul engaged in biblical exposition in the synagogue yet employed topical oratory, "using no Scripture at all, in the public square of Mars Hill. His points were all truths taken from the Bible, but the method of presentation was more like classical oratory in which he set forth theses and made arguments in their favor" (Keller 33). Keller notes that these two types of preaching are not mutually exclusive, and absolutely pure forms of either are rare. "They are actually overlapping categories or two poles on a spectrum. Even the most careful verse-by-verse exposition will usually refer to other places in the Bible that treat the same topic" (Keller, *Communicating Faith* 31).

In the broadest of categories, two types of preaching exist: *inductive* and *deductive*. Deductive preaching is structured so the sermon begins with a “central idea derived from the biblical text and logically unpacks the particular meanings of this for the listeners through a series of subdivisions” (Blythe). Put another way, deductive preaching begins with a thesis and then unpacks, analyzes, or defends the thesis (Keller, *Communicating Faith* 102). Robinson argues that deductive sermons do not require the same kind of application as a conclusion. “A truth correctly comprehended can carry its own application” (Robinson, ch. 6). Rather, the truth understood is the goal.

Inductive preaching, in contrast, essentially starts with a question and arrives at the answer toward the latter part of the sermon. The preacher takes the listener on a journey of mutual discovery. The pastor “wants to sustain anticipation so that, while the trip will not be the same experience for everyone, all will stay to the end. He [or she] desires also that it be an experience for the whole person, all faculties being engaged” (Craddock 121). In this way, the preacher sustains the interest of the listeners as they anticipate arriving at the central theme (D. Sunukjian).

“One of the basics of the inductive approach is to start the sermon where the people are” (Lewis and Lewis 123). Pastors must avoid sermons that are merely academic lectures and involve themselves in the ongoing lives of their congregations and their congregations in their lives as well (23). Pastors sometimes bemoan the tension that exists between pastoring and preaching. Craddock argues that inductive preaching requires the pastor to be more in touch with the ongoing needs of the congregation, blending the work of pastoral care and preaching. “The battle [of being in touch with the

congregation] can be waged with some success simply by staying alive personally”

(Craddock et al. ch 4). This statement means that preachers don't allow themselves

to become only a dealer in those commodities that allow others to live; but [they themselves] live. [They] do not just announce the hymns, [they] sing; [they] do not just lead in prayer, [they] pray. Time spent walking rustic lanes, pushing on crowded subways, strolling among window shoppers, or standing in dreary terminals where life is reduced to arrival and departure is not with notebook in hand getting illustrations for sermons (ibid.).

Rather these are the movements and scenes of his or her own life and psyche that inevitably become part of preaching. If the imagery of a sermon is to be real, the preacher must “see life as life, not as an illustration under point two” (Craddock 70).

Frymire says that in inductive preaching, one considers the reality of the whole story, the whole revelation, the whole text. Whereas with deductive preaching the listener hears the point the pastor is going to make up front, with inductive preaching they hear the question (often rooted in a congregational need) and then arrive at the answer through a progression (22). Robinson offers this illustration: (Robinson, ch.6)

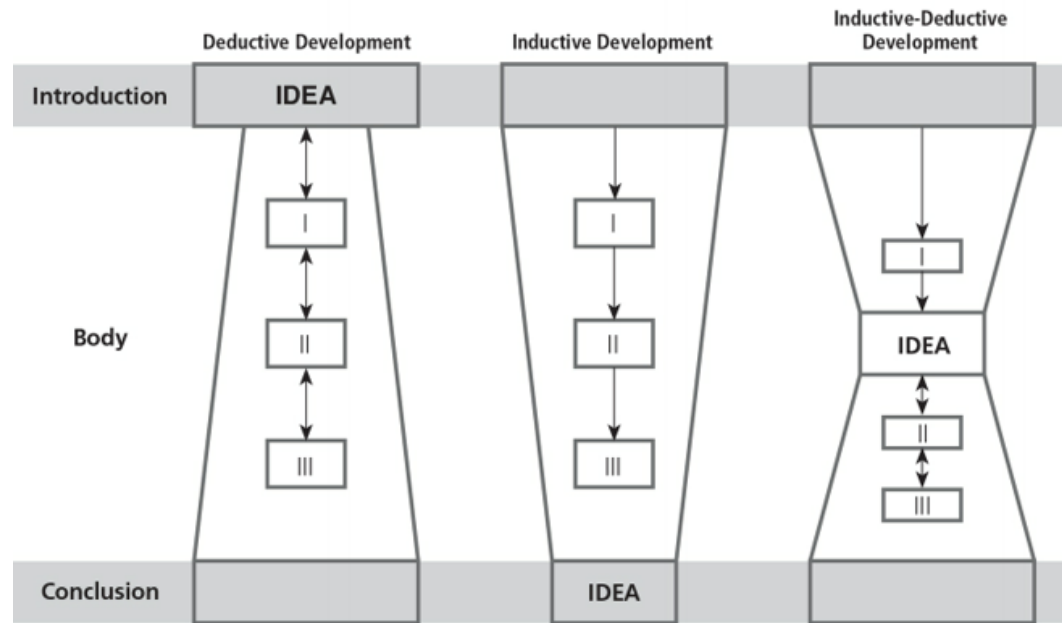


Figure 1: Deductive versus inductive preaching.

Inductive preaching begins with an initial thesis that is developed, clarified, or proven through the body of the sermon. This leads the listener to a conclusion. Inductive sermons begin with the introduction, which meets people in a problem or need or asks a question. The body of the sermon leads to the central idea as a resolution to the question or tension presented at the beginning of the sermon. Sermons can also combine inductive and deductive approaches (Robinson, ch. 6). The key in choosing the type or structure of a sermon may have more to do with what missiologists call “contextualization” (Keller, *Center Church* 89–134). Contextualization means to resonate with parts of the surrounding culture and yet defy culture. “It means to antagonize a society’s idols while it means to resonate with yet defy the culture around you. It means to antagonize a society’s idols while showing respect for its people and many of its hopes and aspirations” (Keller, *Communicating Faith* 99). Effective preaching is not dependent as much on a particular form or structure as much effective preaching is dependent on using

whatever structure allows contextualization of the gospel to be done most effectively (101).

Big Ideas, Focus, and Function Statements

One of the primary communication concepts taught in perhaps the majority of homiletics textbooks and curricula is the importance of locating a unifying theme or idea in the passage the preacher is addressing (Long, ch. 4; Stott 224; Chapell 144; McDill 88; Frymire 106; Ramesh 65; Merida 77). How that theme is addressed and the approaches to get at the theme vary, but the development of this central idea helps both the preacher and the listener focus. Clarity does not come easily to either.

Haddon Robinson wrote perhaps the most influential book on preaching in the past twenty-five years (Duduit). Used as a text in over 120 seminaries and bible colleges (“The Heresy of Application”), this book has dominated the classrooms of evangelical colleges and seminaries (Duduit). In *Biblical Preaching*, Robinson writes that “sermons seldom fail because they have too many ideas; more often they fail because they deal with too many unrelated ideas” (14). Robinson defines the big idea to include a subject and a complement. The subject answers the question, “What am I talking about?” The complement asks, “What am I saying about what I am talking about?” (21-22). At least these two components exist in a sermon, and they serve as divisions. Together Robinson refers to the subject and the complements as the exegetical idea. “In light of the audience’s knowledge and experience, think through your exegetical idea and state it in the most exact, memorable sentence possible” (69). “A sermon should be a bullet and not buckshot. Ideally, each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several

passages of Scripture” (17). Robinson then instructs preachers to build their sermon around this big idea (35).

Although perhaps the most dominant voice, Robinson is by no means the only voice trumpeting some variation of this idea even if the methodologies vary greatly. Craddock asserts that although the single idea is important, much of the creativity of preaching can be squeezed out by a propositional, linear, logical style of preaching like that which Robinson teaches. Craddock worries that once the exegetical idea is presented, the idea is often followed by a slogging through of three or four points that mark the “dull deductive trail” (Craddock 124–25). Rather, Craddock suggests using an inductive approach, wherein the preacher walks the congregation through the scripture text making small discoveries until it leads to a final idea: “the point the author sought to make” (105).

Demaray also suggests preachers keep to one subject or idea—one truth, not the universe. He offers the image of a tree as a picture of a strong sermon, in contrast with an image of a brushpile:

The model of a single theme unity is the tree, not the bush. The tree has a trunk, branches, and leaves. It has order. To be sure, it has variety, but variety in order. The trunk is the main stream of thought, the branches its points, the leaves its illustrations and quotations. The brushpile represents the sermon of the inept, careless, or lazy preacher. (Demaray 111)

He asserts that a torrent of words, even with fairly good illustrations here and there, do not translate a brushpile into a tree. Unity comes from focus, limiting the number of points, and repetition of those main ideas (112-213).

Stanley also suggests that a sermon should build toward a single point. Using the analogy of a trip, he recommends that “before you head out, Pick a Point” (Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* 37). Preachers are encouraged to think of a sermon like a journey, which has a beginning, a trip, and a destination. The preacher can either drive around and hope to end up somewhere interesting or decide before taking the trip where they are going. “Every time I stand to communicate, I want to take one simple truth and lodge it in the heart of the listener. I want them to know that one thing and know what to do with it” (12). For Stanley, multiple points are too much to remember. Remembering a string of numbers can be difficult, but remembering one number is easy. No matter how life-changing the preacher’s words might potentially be, if the hearers cannot remember them, they will not change anything. In simplistic terms, “If you’re thirsty, don’t go to a fire hydrant. You’ll drown yourself before you ever manage a swallow” (39).

Stott also writes that the sermon should convey only one major message and that all of the details of the sermon should be marshaled to help the congregation grasp that singular message and feel its power (Stott, ch. 4). Stott is perhaps best known for his concept of “bridge building” (J. Stott 135) wherein a single “dominant thought” begins the building of a bridge between the divine context and the context in which the thought is both written and preached (224). Ultimately that dominant thought should point the listener to Jesus Christ, the “fulfillment of every truly human aspiration. To find him is to find ourselves” (J. R. Stott 51).

Although Long also believes in having a defining thought, he too has a slightly different perspective. He explains that, more recently, homileticians and biblical scholars have become suspicious and critical of this “main idea” approach to biblical

preaching, even suggesting that this way of thinking is a distortion to think of the Bible as merely a box of ideas.

No one who reads a rousing novel or sees a powerful play or views a provocative movie would be tempted to squeeze those rich experiences into only one main idea. Engaging a biblical text is at least as multifaceted as any of those encounters, and while ideas are surely uncovered in biblical interpretation, there are also moods, movements, conflicts, epiphanies, and other experiences that cannot be pressed into a strictly ideational mold. (Long, ch.4)

Long prefers the idea of “focus” and “function” statements. He defines a focus statement as “a concise description of the central, controlling, and unifying theme of the sermon.” In short, what is the sermon about? The function statement is a “description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers” (ibid).

Although called by different names and used in different ways, this concept of a single unifying thought is a fairly consistent theme in many of the major preaching texts. Akin, Curtis, and Rummage use the phrase “the main idea” of the text or message , McDill talks about the “text idea” or “sermon idea” (88). Others write about the “proposition” (Chapell 144), the main point of the text (Merida 77), the central proposition of the text (Ramesh 65–76), the “sticky idea” (Heath and Heath 14), the “sticky statement” (Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* 111), the take-home truth (D. R. Sunukjian 65) and the “central idea of the text” (Vines and Shaddix 91–125). “Nobody remembers a paragraph. People are impacted by statements that stick. You need a sticky statement... It doesn’t need to be cute. It doesn’t have to rhyme. But it should be short and memorable” (Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* 111). This statement is best

written at the beginning of a message preparation, but it also can be one of the last things written (Richard 70–71). An overwhelming number of homiletics scholars agree that that no sermon is ready for preaching, nor ready for writing out, until the sermon can be expressed in “a short, pregnant sentence as clear as a crystal” (Jowett 133). This task may be the most difficult, the most exacting, but perhaps the most fruitful labor in the sermon writing process (ibid). This focused point provides an answer to a particular question or problem and is the one thing listeners should remember and take with them when they leave (Hamilton, *Speaking Well*, ch. 7).

Introductions

In the opening few minutes of the sermon, a good preacher sets the stage by creating urgency and interest, breaking down barriers, and setting the mood for the listeners (Demaray 89–90; Ortberg, *Personal Interview*).

Robinson argues that introductions have significance out of proportion to their length, creating a critical moment wherein the listeners gains impressions of the speaker and determines whether they will accept what the speaker says or not (Robinson, ch. 8). Long counters, however, by noting that the degree of attention paid to the introduction is somewhat curious since much of what needs to be said about introductions applies equally to every other part of a sermon.

A sermon introduction has a job to do, but so does every other part. An introduction requires certain kinds of materials to get its job accomplished, but, then again, the same is true of every other sermon step. From one perspective, a sermon introduction is not at all a special case. (Long, ch. 7)

However, Long concedes that homileticians are of the general opinion that the opening move in a sermon's development is an extremely important one and crucial to the outcome of the sermon. The introduction must be done well or the whole sermon will be impoverished (ibid).

One function of an introduction is to establish rapport between the preacher and the congregation. When a preacher begins a message, a physical and emotional distance exists between the speaker and the congregation. As a part of the introduction, the speaker must shrink the gap between the speaker and the listeners (Ortberg, *Willow*). "Establishing rapport is related to, but is distinct from, creating interest. The task here is to win goodwill and to arrange the meeting of minds between preacher and people" (Demaray 90). As a general rule, connect first, convey content second. How this connection happens in the introduction obviously varies based on the tenure of the preacher before the congregation, but great preaching is rooted in personal relationship and connection. When the relationship is positive, laity are more prone to assert that the Word of God has been spoken (Lewis and Lewis 29).

Not only does the introduction introduce a pastor to the congregation, but an effective introduction should introduce the congregation to the subject (Lewis and Lewis 29). Ortberg suggests that a good introduction will primarily answer one question: "Why does the listener need to hear what the speaker is about to say?" (Ortberg, *Willow*). Hamilton relays the idea that unpassionate preaching is like going into a restaurant and asking the server what she likes best on the menu, and the server responding that she has never eaten here herself, but she has heard that others liked the steak (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word* 42). The congregation must sense why this message is important

not only to the preacher but also to the listener. Bell suggests that often listeners come to a sermon subconsciously asking several questions: Why are you saying this? Why do we need to hear this? Why should we care? Why do *you* care? The preacher must articulate what spark, impulse, insight, twist, revelation, truth, picture, or reality has compelled these words to be said to this group of people at this time. Is the pastor preaching merely because he or she has to say something, or are they preaching because they have something to say? In other words, are they passionate? (Bell, *Gathering*).

While the passion of the speaker for a particular topic is important, the speaker's passion alone does not automatically make a subject interesting. The introduction should demonstrate not only that the speaker has thought about the subject matter, wrestled with this subject matters, and personally feels this subject matter is important, but that the subject itself should also matter to the listeners (Ortberg, *Willow*). Stanley proposes the Me-We-God-You-We approach to sermons (Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* 46). In this approach to structuring messages, the messages start with the "Me," a personal story ("This is how I have experienced this issue."), then expands to the congregation (We) by something like, "Perhaps you have struggled with something similar." This approach bridges the preacher's personal passion to the congregation's passion, establishing common ground between the two.

The final thing an introduction should do is capture attention and draw the listener into the body of the sermon. "The opening words of a sermon therefore need not be dramatic; they need not even be plain; but they must go after the minds of the hearers to force them to listen. If you do not capture attention in the first thirty seconds, you may never gain it at all" (Robinson, ch. 8). Introductions focus the attention of the listeners

and establish a shared purpose between the speaker and the audience that will move them together into the body of the message. An introduction's purpose is to draw the listeners toward the sermon topic (Buttrick, ch. 6). Perhaps one of the most effective ways of drawing listeners in is to create tension (Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* 143). In life and conversation, people are taught to avoid tension, to diffuse the situation rather than be uncomfortable, or create an argument. Yet in communication, tension can be an incredibly effective tool. Tension causes people to lean in, to actually want to hear the rest of what you will say. When tension exists, people pay attention because they want to know the resolution. "I believe the best communicators are masters at creating and using tension. And I'll put my cards on the table say that I don't think most preachers and teachers use tension enough in sermons. And they don't hold it long enough" (Ortberg, *Willow*). The introduction creates tension. The conclusion resolves that tension (Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* 143).

Conclusions

Sangster declared that "every sermon should have not only a subject but an object. It must aim to do something: something quite precise; something that can be written out in a few plain words" (Sangster 128). The aim is never simply information. Rather, the aim of preaching is transformation of the listeners increasingly into the image and likeness of Christ (Ortberg, *Willow*). Although the point of the entire sermon is to transform, the role of the conclusion is to focus that transformation in specific areas and actions (Rummage 35).

As an experienced pilot knows that landing an airplane demands special concentration, so an able preacher understands that conclusions require thoughtful

preparation. Like a skilled pilot, the writer should know where the sermon will land. In fact, the conclusion possesses such importance that many preachers sketch the conclusion after they have determined the sermon idea and the purpose for preaching the sermon. Whether or not that is the technique, preachers must work on the conclusion with special care; otherwise the sermon may come to nothing (Robinson, ch. 8):

The purpose of your conclusion is to conclude—not merely to stop. Your conclusion should be more than a swipe at getting out of an awkward situation: “May God help us live in the light of these great truths.” It should be more than asking the congregation to bow in prayer so you can sneak off the platform when they’re not looking. You should conclude, and the conclusion should produce a feeling of finality. Like an able lawyer, a minister asks for a verdict. Your congregation should see your idea entire and complete, and it should know you are done. (ibid)

Hearers intuitively know when a sermon is finished. “In the same way that people know when a story is done, a joke is complete, or a conversation is over, they also have the ‘sense of an ending’ about sermons...Sermon conclusions that come after the hearers have finished listening can only serve as pallbearers” (Long, ch.8).

Directly or indirectly, the conclusion answers the question, “So what? What difference does this make?” (Robinson, ch. 8). What does the sermon aim to do? How does the preacher drive home the thrust of the message (Demaray 125)? Long asserts that the conclusion is a natural outgrowth of the “function” of the sermon. If what the sermon aims to say is the focus, what the sermon aims to *do* can be called its “function” (Long, ch. 4):

A function statement is a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers. Sermons make demands upon the hearers, which is another way of saying that they provoke change in the hearers (even if the change is a deepening of something already present). The function statement names the hoped-for change. (ibid)

This hoped-for change can be a change in an individual action but also can be a change in thinking or corporate action. The difference does not always need to be a direct action taken by an individual but can be a new way of thinking or acting for the corporate body as well (Pasquarello and Minger).

Several factors will go into a strong conclusion. Although not every conclusion will have each of these elements, each is worthy of consideration in forming a strong conclusion.

At the most basic level, a good conclusion can be a summary of the message or main point. “Put your sermon in a nutshell...a summary has the power to turn people on to the truth at hand and inspire them to act” (Demaray 126). In a more inductive approach, the conclusion can be when you finally reach resolution and make your point (Lewis and Lewis 84–92; Craddock et al. 157). A conclusion often contains a clear reminder of the central theme of the message, perhaps through words or a summarized singular, concrete statement (Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*; Heath and Heath 121; Craddock et al. 160). Hamilton suggests going beyond a verbal summary with words and putting something tangible in the hearers’ hands as a reminder of the message: this item could be a object, a prayer, a scripture verse, or something else that summarizes the message or prompts an action related to your summary (Hamilton, *Speaking Well*, ch. 9).

One thing a good conclusion will *not* do is leave the listener questioning what the sermon was about.

A strong conclusion can also be a call to action. This type of conclusion will often tell the listener how to live out the “what” of the sermon (Demaray 126). The conclusion may be an invitation to some decision or expression of faith (Craddock et al. 161), an exhortation toward specific direction or actions (Robinson, ch. 8), or a call to a communal response. Minger notes that when preachers think of a conclusion as a call to action, the action is too often limited to a singular response. Consider God’s call to the church: What is the application to the corporate body? (Pasquarello and Minger).

Other ways to conclude a sermon include ending with a period of silence for people to pause and reflect (Craddock et al. 162; Ortberg, *Willow*), ending with questions (Buttrick, ch. 7; Robinson ch. 8), and even returning to the introduction and initial thought in order to provide closure (Craddock et al. 159; Buttrick, ch. 7).

Developing a Long-Term Preaching Calendar

Coined in the law-enforcement and gun-control world, the phrase “Saturday Night Special” originally described small, compact, cheaply made handguns that flood the gun market. Among pastors, the term “Saturday Night Special” has become so common that the term may not need a definition or citation. In case the term does, however, a Saturday Night Special is a message delivered on a Sunday morning with only a few hours of sleepy late-night preparation (Neff). “In the pastoral preaching world there are thousands of cases of Saturday night specials: sermons hastily cobbled together on Saturday night. They are cheaply made and small in effectiveness” (Fry). Preparation is critical to effective preaching. Lewis and Lewis cite a survey that revealed that those pastors who

spend twenty hours or more on their messages preach to hundreds more people every week than those who spend less than five hours. “You could argue which is cause and which is effect but the correlation between study time and congregation size ought to say something to us” (Lewis and Lewis 122). Preparation is critical to preaching, and preparation requires time. One way to create time is to have a consistent method to one’s sermon preparation.

Consistent, high-quality preaching requires good planning. Yet planning one’s preaching is difficult. Planning requires a commitment of time and energy to pause from the weekly pressures of pastoring to devise a thorough preaching calendar (Rummage 17). “It’s impossible to develop a preaching plan, even for several months out, without having adequate time away from the day-to-day pastoral activities of the church. You must have time to pray, to reflect, to read, and to outline—all without distractions” (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word* 23). Many pastors are committed to preaching and study hard to preach, but they do not have a clear strategy for where their preaching is headed or a disciplined method to get there (Rummage 34). Many pastors find the use of a long-term preaching calendar helpful in order to save time and provide focus to the sermon-preparation process (Robinson ch. 3).

Long-term preaching calendars offer several benefits. First, a preaching plan allows room for the Holy Spirit to guide the preparation of messages (Rummage, ch.1). Lloyd-Jones writes that the Holy Spirit does not anoint or lead arbitrarily but does so in response to preparation and consecration. “The right way to look upon the unction of the Spirit is to think of it as that which comes upon the preparation” (Lloyd-Jones 304). McEachern says that planning one’s sermons gives the Holy Spirit “a greater opportunity

to lead your thinking and thus enrich your peaching...The same Spirit who inspires the sermon at delivery can lead you along in advance as you make thoughtful preparation” (McEachern 12). Developing a plan does not limit the Spirit, and Hamilton notes that the development of the plan does not mean the plan cannot be changed along the way due to circumstances or leading:

While sermons are planned out two years in advance, there is generally at least one sermon series, or part of a series, that we end up changing each year.

Sometimes the series no longer seems appropriate. Sometimes it is dismissed as I try to develop more detail and find it simply doesn't fit the needs of the congregation. (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word* 21).

If the Holy Spirit leads the preacher to preach something other than what was planned, then preach what was not planned. “The plan is not the master but a servant” (Rummage, ch. 1).

Another benefit of a long-term preaching calendar is that it can create more diversity in the preacher's homiletics, encouraging a more systematic approach to preaching. (Rummage, ch.1; Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word*, 16). Every preacher has favorite theological “hobbyhorses” he or she likes to ride (Rummage, ch. 1). Most of the time pastors preach these same subjects because the subjects are important or have already been worked out in their minds and theology, but these issues can become too limited in perspective for the needs of a congregation (Chapell 55). Planning helps encourage more diversity by systematizing the way the preacher chooses subjects and scripture passages. This systematizing can be done through the lectionary and church calendar (Robinson, ch. 3; Long, ch. 3) or another system that takes into account local

and cultural holidays as well as regular themes to be addressed (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word*, 16; Demaray 74–77; Long, ch. 3).

A final benefit of planning ahead is the potential of removing burden from staff and volunteers who plan the services (Ortberg, *Personal Interview*; Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word* 20; Greenway).

If you're working at a church with other staff members or volunteers who are trying to craft services that are integrated, mutually reinforcing, and mutually supportive, and then you're trying to leverage that for small group ministries, and mission activity and children, students, families; to have series that are laid out is a really good thing to do. (Ortberg, *Personal Interview*)

Planning also communicates value to the staff and allows people to integrate and leverage weekend services for other ministries. Staff and volunteers can be involved in the sermon planning process and feel additional ownership of the process (ibid).

Hamilton suggests that developing a preaching plan requires three things: Time away; an awareness of the needs of the congregation, community, and world; and prayer (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word* 22). Perhaps the most difficult to accept is time away from the demands of ministry. This time away is not vacation time and is best not done at home. “It is part of your legitimate workload if you are going to be an effective parish preacher” (23). In an email interview with Dr. Jeff Greenway, pastor of Reynoldsburg UMC and former president of Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. Greenway said that he takes a study leave every January to read, pray, write, and refocus. During that time, he reads fifteen to twenty books. “I take a mix of theology, bible, ministry skill, personal growth, history and fiction with me. I also write 1- to 2-page teaching series summaries

and 1- to 2-page summaries for each sermon in a series for up to 12 months of future preaching” (Greenway).

The next piece in the development of a preaching plan is gaining a sense of the needs of the congregation, the community, and the world. This task can be as simple as taking a church and denominational calendar along on a retreat as well as a community calendar and a couple of news magazines, along with a laptop or notebook containing the previous years’ sermons(Rummage, ch. 3). Some questions that the preacher might use in such needs assessment are:

- Where are the people in my church hurting?
- What are they afraid of or concerned about?
- Where do we need to grow as a congregation?
- Is there something we need to celebrate?
- What are some of the themes I preached last year?
- What are the scriptures or themes I have neglected?
- What characteristics might God want to form in us this year?
- Did I give significant attention to preaching through biblical books last year?
- Was my preaching balanced between Old and New Testaments?
- What aspects of last year’s plan fell short of the whole counsel of the Word of God?
- What am I reading? (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word*, 24; Rummage, ch. 3; Bell, *Gathering*).

As a part of this need assessment, the preacher may survey the congregation to find out what topics or books of the Bible they might consider interesting or needed for

their spiritual growth (Hamilton, *Speaking Well*, ch.6). These questions not only become ways to survey the congregation for needs, but also become prompts for prayer (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word*, 22). Greenway enlists staff and volunteers to contribute to the creative process before he departs for his annual study leave by working together to determine major themes they may want to address.

Greenway says that this annual study leave is one of the great gifts his church gives its pastoral staff. As the lead pastor, he receives up to four weeks (in addition to vacation) every year “for the purpose of reading and writing projects related to the mission and ministry of our congregation” (Greenway). During his study leave, he reads every day but usually only writes five days a week. Mornings are spent writing from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Late mornings until dinner are spent reading. After dinner in a local restaurant with his wife, he will spend the evening writing often until eleven at night (ibid).

Similarly, Hamilton takes two weeks of leave in July. At least a part of this time is spent completely on his own at a retreat center, seminary library, or home study, although he will often spend evenings with his wife and children. “During this two weeks I will spend roughly ninety hours reading, praying, writing, and outlining sermons” (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word*, 23). Ortberg usually plans between six months and a year ahead, working with a team of people. The team would gather, talk about, and do brainstorming around what are potential series.

We would think about, what’s the kind of balance: Old Testament New Testament vertical, where it’s very oriented towards my relationship with God, horizontal, where it might be more relational, or community based, textual, topical, didactic,

things that are really trying to reach the mind, heartfelt things that speak to people emotionally, you know, so that there could be a good balance in all those areas.

(Ortberg, *Personal Interview*)

All of this would all be a part of the planning process where they lay out series, break out the series into individual messages. and go from there.

The practitioners of this sermon-planning method suggest letting your congregation know what you are doing when you take your planning retreat, and emphasizing that this is not vacation but a critical part of the pulpit ministry of the preacher (Rummage, ch. 3; Greenway; Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word*). Greenway, for example, shares a study leave plan with his church board before leaving and provides a report of his plan performance when he returns. This time away improves the quality of preaching and the aligns a congregation's worship, and ultimately "pays off many times over" (ibid).

A final complement to the creation of a preaching calendar is the development and use of a system to facilitate the regular filing and review of relevant topical material collected over time. Once topics are chosen on the retreat, the preacher must find a way to organize the topics in such a way that, as he or she finds illustrations and exegetical insights, they can be either plugged into the right sermon immediately or captured so they can easily be found later if needed. The "homiletical garden" is a concept originated by Blackwood (Demaray 78; Blackwood) in which the preacher plants sermonic "seeds" and allows them to grow without interference but with proper nourishment. Such resources were originally created using notecards and envelopes or daybook (Demaray 79); today many pastors use computer files, spreadsheets, computer applications like Evernote, or

other online data bases (Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word*, 31; Bell, *Gathering*; Bell, *Poets*; Graham). As one example, Bell's system involves creating a folder on his computer for each sermon he will preach in the coming year. He names the folder something that will allow recall of the general topic or scripture passage. As he is reading or studying, or just going through life, if an idea or illustration seems interesting but doesn't have an immediate use, he will put it in a file (he uses the term "bucket") to "marinate" (Bell, *Poets*). He will read over those random ideas once a week just to keep them in his mind. If he finds a particular illustration or insight that might fit a particular planned sermon, he will stop what he is doing, capture that idea, and then put it in the corresponding sermon folder on his computer or phone. He reports that usually, when the time comes to write the sermon, he has an abundance of material (Bell, *Gathering*). However one shapes one's homiletical garden, the genius of the idea is that when time comes to put together sermon, the speaker has on hand the materials required to adequately construct the sermon (Demaray 79), although what you get out of your file for a given sermon depends entirely on the quality of what have put into the file (Robinson, ch. 7).

Although many argue the importance of a sermon file, others argue that a long-term filing system is not necessary or helpful to them. Ortberg says that he never had a filing system.

Early in my ministry, I remember reading an article by Gordon McDonald. And Gordon wrote about how it was very helpful for him to start a filing system. So, as he read, if there was a story or an interesting article about parenting, he would find a way to file it. And then when he was going to preach on that, go to that file

and have a bunch of material already there. I tried it for a couple months and hated it is just did not fit my personality at all. So I never did that sort of thing.

(Ortberg, *Personal Interview*)

Ortberg admits he tends to remember probably a higher percentage of the material he has read than might be average. When he is working on a sermon, he will remember something he had read and will go back to that book or article. For him, that informal process works better than trying to have a formal filing system. Therefore, although planning is good for many, a formal system is not a necessity. “A great message planned a week ahead of time is better than a mediocre message planned a year ahead of time” (ibid.).

Finally, as the sermons are being assembled and planned, a few guiding principles should be considered. First, as the elements of the sermon are considered, are there particular ideas that will require additional “dwelling time” (Ortberg, *Willow*)? If an idea is particularly important, the idea often bears repeating. If an idea is complex, the idea requires additional dwelling time for explanation. Dwelling might involve repetition, restatement, or illustration. Dwelling might require an image or a metaphor. Ortberg will often highlight or mark ideas that require additional illustration or insights to be found which takes an additional level of discipline but often pays off in the writing process (ibid.). The same discipline and restraint must be used when finding illustrations and stories and filing them. Preachers often succumb to the tendency to use a clever and catchy illustration simply because the illustration is clever and catchy. Just as the number-one rule in real estate is “Location, Location, Location,” so too in preaching, the value of an illustration is in the fit (Bell, *Gathering*). “You will hurt the sermon if you

stick a story somewhere it does not fit. Position illustrations where they will best clarify the text, highlight the point, or enforce the application” (Charles Jr.). Preachers should resist the temptation to use illustrations simply because they are good illustrations; the illustrations must fit the context. The writer of Proverbs says, “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25.11). Notably, an apple of gold in a setting of silver is an apple of gold only if the apple is *apt*. The great temptation is to think the power comes from the illustration or story itself, when in reality the power comes from the context (Ortberg, *Willow*).

Research Design Literature

This research project was an intervention intended to measure the change in knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs resulting from three one-day sessions of a CoP-based homiletics course. The three sessions covered topics including ministry context and theology, exegesis, developing a preaching Rule of Life, and writing introductions and conclusions. On the final day of the course, participants worked through the process of creating a one-year preaching calendar.

To assess the impact of the course, the researcher used a mixed-methods approach involving the collection of both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed-ended) data to explore the research questions (Creswell 217). This choice allowed the researcher to integrate the data so that the quantitative data could be used to support, enhance, and add context to the qualitative data (230).

Data were collected through pre/post participant surveys; “Play participant” researcher field notes (Tracy 109); and participant journals (81). In addition, a semi-structured focus group with participants was held via Zoom to clarify the most catalytic

elements of the project (Krueger and Casey). Due to the COVID pandemic, the Zoom platform was chosen because many participants find Zoom to be “useful in forming and maintaining rapport with the researcher, especially when compared to ‘nonvisual’ communication media such as telephone or e-mail” (Archibald et al. 4).

Summary of Literature

This literature review has explored the biblical and theological foundations of preaching as well as examples of Communities of Practice in both the Old and the New Testaments in order to demonstrate that, although not explicitly named as such in the Bible, CoP concepts are embedded into the ways in which the people of God have learned and related throughout salvation history.

This review then explored the theological framework of preaching including understanding God as a self-revealing God, preaching as spiritual gift, incarnation, and community. CoPs were explored as a reflection of the perfect communion characterizing the Triune God. Community flows out of the community of the Trinity. This research discussed God, each other, giftings, and callings through participation in community. This community is not forced or mandated, but rather flows out of believers’ understanding of a God who delights in the community of God’s personhood. When one learns, and particularly when one learns in community, one is reflecting the image of God.

Much learning is done in the context of community. This mean that, as much as the transmission of knowledge is important (e.g., typical preaching books and resources), most learning happens when interacting with those ideas as a group. Much of the learning in groups happens by simply being informally bound to one another out of a commitment

to the domain. In other words, people grow by “staying at the table.” An effective CoP is not just about conveying great content but also about fostering an effective learning and supportive community.

Wenger is the primary source for much of the information on the structure of CoPs as well as the components that are essential to a successful CoP: commitment to a domain (in this case, the craft of preaching), a community (in this case, a group of pastors and teachers who are committed to be with and learn from each other), and a practice (a shared set of resources, be they tools, systems, experiences, stories, or best practices). Lave and Wenger’s work around Legitimate Peripheral Participation is also helpful in conceptualizing the way newer members of a CoP are brought into full participation in the group.

Perhaps most significantly, an effective CoP requires a new understanding of the role of the teacher. The leader of a successful CoP cannot simply share his or her experience around learning the craft of preaching or focus only on communicating content. For a CoP to be effective, the leader must shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning. As the research has shown, this shift does not mean that the role of the teacher is irrelevant to the CoP or that content is unimportant, but rather that the group leader must allow and encourage other leaders to emerge, take advantage of the full range of participation of the group (including offering themselves), and encourage others to become leaders of the practice rather than settling for peripheral or occasional passive participation.

In a conference as large as the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, ways must be found to connect beyond physical presence in the same room.

Although strengths exist in physical presence, the tools of technology and knowledge management allow users to share, learn, connect, and generate new knowledge. The creation of content by the group is a part of the learning process. The evidence strongly indicates that CoPs are a helpful model for understanding identity and an effective tool for learning.

The final section of this chapter explored the biblical and theological foundations of homiletics as well as some of the basic ideas to be included in a homiletics class.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this project. The chapter begins with a review of the nature and purpose of the project as well as the three research questions and how they were addressed. The ministry context is described, followed by a description of the participants included and how they were selected, as well as any ethical considerations.

Next, procedures for collecting evidence from participants, the instruments used, and the project design to determine reliability and validity are addressed. The project is then broken down into steps showing how the data was collected and concludes with a brief explanation of how the data was analyzed.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of three modules of a CoP-based homiletics course on the participants' attitudes, skills, and knowledge of effective sermon development. Preaching is a valued and important aspect of pastoral ministry in the church today, but, surprisingly, most pastors receive very little seminary training, continuing education, or ongoing constructive input around sermon construction and delivery. Pressures of ministry and demands on a pastor's schedule tend to push preaching out of a place of importance on the calendar. While training is available in terms of books, courses, and seminars, very little training in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church is offered in the context of a peer community. Communities of Practice are groups of people—in this case, pastors in the West Ohio Conference—who share a concern or a passion for something they do: in this case, preaching. CoP

members learn how to do what they do better as they interact regularly with each other. The sessions used in this model were developed for a homiletics course through United Theological Seminary's Course of Study and were adapted to include aspects of CoP theory.

Research Questions

Research Question #1: What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior before the course?

Fulfilling the purpose of this project necessitated determining the impact of the intervention as the intervention related to participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors before the course. The pre-intervention survey was administered using Google Forms and used a six-point Likert scale to quantitatively measure participants' attitudes, skills, and knowledge about preaching before taking the homiletics course provided in this study. (See Appendix A). Each question was tied to both a research question and a learning goal/class session as shown in the table below:

	Question	K/A/B	Session # AM/PM
1	Being a good preacher is important to me.	A	2A
2	I see value in investing significant time in the development of the craft of preaching.	A	1A
3	Being a good preacher is important to my ministry context.	A	1A
4	I am conscientious about my sermon preparation.	B	3 A/P
5	I have a regular method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic.	K	1P
6	I get regular, positive feedback on my preaching.	B	1A
7	I am appropriately creative in my preaching.	B	1P
8	I get regular encouragement on my preaching from my cluster or colleagues..	B	1,2,3
9	When I speak, I feel I have my congregation's attention and am connected with them.	A	2P
10	I'm often told my illustrations connect with my congregation.	B	1A
11	I feel equipped to preach on a regular basis.	A	3
12	I have a plan to be a better communicator.	K	2A
13	I have a sense of expectancy when I preach. I feel that I have something important to say.	A	1A
14	I have a system in place to collect sermon illustrations that I regularly use.	B	1B
15	I feel encouraged in my preaching.	A	2A
16	I can summarize my last sermon in a single sentence.	B	1B
17	People say my preaching makes a difference in their lives.	A	1A
18	I feel confident in my ability to plan and organize sermons .	A	3A/P
19	People would say the last sermon I preached had a clear call to action.	B	1B
20	How many hours on average do you spend preparing a typical sermon?	B	1A
21	How long are your typical sermons?	B	1B
22	In terms of what you personally value, please rank order these roles of pastoral ministry.	A	1A
23	In terms of what your congregation values, please rank order these roles of pastoral ministry.	K	1A
24	What do you believe is the goal of preaching?	K	1A
25	What makes for a compelling sermon introduction?	K	2P
26	What are the elements of a good conclusion?	K	2P

Figure 2: Pre-intervention survey questions and corresponding K/A/B.

Three qualitative questions at the end of the survey provided additional data that could not be easily collected through quantitative means.

After providing basic demographic information, participants were asked to complete a short “Preaching Autobiography” as the first in a series of journal entries (see

Appendix G). Although the rest of the journal entries were only shared with the researcher, this first entry was shared with the class via a private Facebook group. In this way, participants could begin the process of knowing more about each other and their context, influences, exegetical process, preaching styles, and hopes for the CoP, while also adding to the researcher's baseline understanding of their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior before the course.

Research Question #2: What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior after the course?

After the classes, a post-intervention survey was administered via Google Forms. The post-intervention survey asked the same questions as the pre-intervention survey. After the conclusion of the CoP group, using information from both the pre- and post-intervention surveys, students were invited to participate in a focus group conversation (See Appendix C). Each focus-group question was designed to elicit qualitative information specific to one of the research questions.

Research Question #3: In what ways did participating in the CoP-based course impact the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior?

The responses to the survey and focus group were analyzed to determine the most catalytic aspects of the course and in what ways participating in a CoP-based course impacted the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. As a part of the ongoing reflection process built into the course, participants were asked each session to reflect on various questions through journal prompts. Field observations were also made during the course by the researcher/instructor. These observations provided valuable additional

qualitative data on which aspects of the course appeared to work well and how the content and/or delivery method of the course could be improved in the future.

Ministry Context for Observing the Phenomenon

The context of this study is the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. The West Ohio Conference is made of eight districts that contain 550 pastors who oversee a total of 1,100 congregations. The conference includes three of the five largest cities in Ohio (Columbus, Cincinnati, and Toledo) as well as other smaller cities, towns and rural areas. Pastoral leadership covers a broad demographic of age, years in ministry, theological stances, and seminary backgrounds (and, therefore, different histories of preparatory ministry instruction provided to the participants).

Members of the CoP group are appointed to congregations that differ in their expectations of preaching styles and sermon delivery. A final factor of importance in this ministry setting is the current cultural climate in both the United Methodist Church and the nation as a whole. Because of the division over human sexuality that is at the core of the upcoming General Conference, an increasing amount of distrust exists among pastors. Add to that the increasing national tensions of politics, race, and the stresses around the COVID pandemic, trust is low.

Participants

The participants in the CoP-based course included twelve full-time clergy and lay people interested in preaching from across the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. Individuals self-selected to participate in the study, but recruitment efforts via Facebook were also conducted in an effort to ensure as diverse a group as possible in race/ethnicity, sex, district, credentialing, years in ministry, and geographic

setting of congregations. In this way, some potential differences in the effectiveness of the intervention for different individuals could be explored. The West Ohio Conference is a geographically large and diverse conference. Due to the fact that this CoP setting is West Ohio, the researcher wanted to be as representative as possible of the conference as a whole.

Criteria for Selection

The context of the West Ohio Conference was selected because, at the time this project was being conceptualized, geographic constraints were important because the group was originally intended to meet face to face at Central Avenue Church in Athens, Ohio and group members, therefore, needed to be located within a reasonable driving distance of Athens. National and statewide COVID precautions instituted in spring 2020 necessitated moving the entire project online, but because of the researcher's investment in and relationships with the people in the West Ohio Conference, the original geographic parameters were kept.

The decision to limit this project to the United Methodist Church was originally made because of the researcher's desire to invest in the spiritual and professional development of colleagues, but also the desire to have a baseline of common denominators within the group. For example, because this is a value for both the researcher and the denomination, the group had to hold the theological value that women have equal giftings and callings as men, can be ordained and serve as pastors, and, therefore, could be a part of the CoP group.

The participants self-selected in the months of October through November 2020. A general invitation was broadcast via Facebook soliciting pastors interested in

participation in the group. Participants were then selected from that group on a generally first-come, first-served basis; however, an effort was made to ensure as diverse a group as possible in race/ethnicity, age, sex, years in ministry, and size and geographic setting of congregations so that potential differences in the effectiveness of the intervention could be explored and so that the group represented as much of the diversity of the conference as possible.

Description of Participants

Fourteen participants were selected largely on a first-come, first-served basis with additional consideration given to demographic diversity. Two individuals self-selected out of the study after the pre-test, citing an inability to make the necessary time commitment to the study; those participants' responses were removed from the data analysis. Of the twelve-remaining people, all completed the course. Two participants missed small sections of one of the classes due to family or medical issues. Two participants were unable to attend the focus group. Participants included eight men and four women. Of the twelve total participants, eight were credentialed as elders, three as local pastors, and one as a lay person. Participants represented four of the eight districts of the West Ohio Conference: four from Miami Valley, four from Capitol Area South, three from Foothills, and one from Ohio River Valley. Six classified their congregations as being located in a small town, four as rural, three as suburban, and two as urban. This total represents more than the number of participants as two of the pastors served multi-point charges.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the initial meeting, pretest survey, or any assignment of reflections, participants received a link to an online informed consent form (see Appendix B) as a part of the introduction to the group. After reading the purpose of the study, instructions, risks and benefits, recording consent, compensation, and maintenance of confidentiality and records, the participant was then asked to click a box if they agreed to participate in the study. Participation in the study was not required to be a part of the homiletics course. Both the instructor/researcher and the research assistant were notified of individual members' consent.

This study maintained participants' privacy by sending surveys online via Google Forms. Each participant was contacted via Facebook Messenger with a link to both the pre- and post-surveys. Responses were kept anonymous through the online service provider's privacy policy. This policy can be located at <https://policies.google.com/privacy?hl=en-US>.

The sixty-minute focus group was conducted on the Zoom videoconferencing platform and recorded to ensure data accuracy. The Zoom platform was chosen because of COVID precautions as well as the convenience, simplicity of use, and ease of building rapport (Archibald et al. 3). The Zoom focus group was recorded and transcribed by the *Go Transcripts* transcription services (<https://gotranscript.com>). In addition to the recording, physical notes were taken by a member of the research team. The group members were informed that this recording (or parts thereof) were not shared on any social-media platform or with anyone outside of the researcher, the focus-group facilitator, and the transcription service. After the recording was transcribed, participants'

names were replaced by code words based on the participant's elementary school and date of birth to protect confidentiality in the reporting of information. The results of the survey, as well as any additional artifacts, were saved in a folder on the research team members' password-protected personal computers to further ensure privacy. Only the researcher and team members know the passwords, and auto-fill password storage applications were not used. Data will be maintained for twelve months after the study, and then the data will be removed online and deleted from the researchers' personal desktop computers.

All members of the research team completed a web-based training course on "Protecting Human Research Participants" prior to the study to ensure that they understood their role and responsibilities with human subjects in the research. In addition, confidentiality agreements were signed by all parties working with data to ensure the data remained private and confidential (see Appendix H). The researcher obtained prior approval to conduct this project from the Institutional Review Board at Asbury Theological Seminary. All of these measures ensured that the welfare, rights, and privacy of human subjects involved in this research were safeguarded and that the research methodology was sound.

Procedure for Collecting Evidence from Participants

The project design was a mixed-method intervention, using a combination of researcher-designed, qualitative/quantitative pre- and post-surveys, qualitative participant journal entries, and a qualitative focus group. The researcher also made field notes throughout the duration of the sessions.

The availability of this class was informally announced on October 16, 2020; October 19, 2020; and November 10, 2020. After IRB approval, group subjects were identified and invited to participate. Subjects were limited to pastors and interested lay persons in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. The group was chosen to represent a broad range of credentialing, geographic location within the conference, race, and gender with special attention given to years in ministry. Upon acceptance, subjects were sent a link to a consent form before any other communication or assignments.

Participants were evaluated with a researcher-designed pre/post survey before the first session of the homiletics course and after the final session (See Appendix A). This project relied on both quantitative and qualitative research methods to measure the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior before and after the course.

Quantitative data was collected through pre-surveys administered to all participants before the CoP-based course began. The instruments were designed to collect data in ways that can be analyzed quantitatively, using a continuous (Likert) scale as well as categorical measures and two multiple-choice ranking questions.

General demographic information gathered as a part of this opening protocol instrument included name, email, age, credentialing, gender, current appointment, current district, and number of years in ministry. This survey was administered through Google Forms. After the initial survey, participants were asked to complete a short online journal entry, a "Preaching Autobiography" (See Appendix G). Participants were asked to post this entry to a private, online Facebook group created for the class. In this way,

participants could begin the process of learning more about each other as they shared their own influences, context, preaching styles, and hopes for the CoP.

The individual modules of the group were scheduled for December 7 and December 12 of 2020, and January 4, 2021. The group met from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. each time. Due to COVID-related physical distancing restrictions, the sessions were held online using the Zoom videoconferencing platform.

As a part of the ongoing reflection though the course, participants were asked to respond to various online journal prompts and to respond to one another. Also, journal prompts were given at the end of each session and participants were asked to respond privately through a Google form that went to the researcher/instructor and research assistants. The discussion and journal prompts provided to the participants are included in Appendix G.

The first week of the group (Monday, December 7, 2020), the instructor/researcher sent out a message asking participants to hold open the date of January 18, 2021 as an opportunity to participate in a focus group. This group was facilitated by a trained researcher, and this advance notice of the date increased the likelihood that all participants would be available to participate.

On the evening of the final session (January 4, 2021), a post-survey identical to the pre-survey was sent out to all participants through Google Forms (see Appendix A). An email reminder was sent on January 7 to those who had not responded by that time. Participants were asked to complete the post-survey by January 11, 2021.

The results of the post-surveys and journal prompts, along with observations made during the course by the researcher/instructor, provided a basis for shaping the

focus-group questions. A comparison of data from the pre- and post-surveys enabled an assessment of the change in participants' attitudes, skills, and knowledge of sermon development attributable to the course.

The focus group was conducted on January 18, 2021 by a trained third party to lessen researcher bias. In addition to recording the session for later transcription, a member of the research team took notes. Due to COVID-related physical distancing restrictions, the focus group was held on a Zoom call. All twelve participants were invited and ten were in attendance. The results were analyzed to explore the subjective experiences of participants in a more nuanced way than could be achieved solely with written surveys.

After all the data were collected, the researcher/instructor, the focus-group facilitator, and a research adviser analyzed both the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the participant journals, the observations from the researcher/instructor, the comparison of the pre- and post-surveys, and the focus groups. Analyses of the data collected in study were integrated to determine how participating in this CoP-based homiletics course impacted the participants' attitudes, skills, and knowledge of effective sermon development. These findings indicate the most catalytic and replicable aspects of the CoP course as well as ways in which the course content and/or CoP delivery mechanism could be tailored to meet the needs of distinct subgroups of pastors.

Procedure for Analyzing the Evidence Collected

The data for this project were collected in a mixed-method format from the pre- and post-surveys. The data collection and analysis techniques were appropriate for and driven by the research questions (Sensing).

The online service Google Forms provided the quantitative data from the surveys. The data were collected and analyzed through Google Forms, Google Sheets, and in Microsoft Excel. The researcher analyzed descriptive statistics, most notably the mean and mode of each question. Each question was individually analyzed to determine the statistical significance of the responses, mean, and mode.

The unstructured field notes (qualitative observations) as well as the individual journal prompts were collected and coded (Creswell 190). The focus group was recorded and professionally transcribed by Go Transcripts. Transcripts were coded to protect subject's anonymity and to reduce bias. The researcher, working with an independently trained research assistant, read through the notes of the interviews, the field notes, and the journal entries several times, creating codes to identify themes that emerged from the data. A shared Google Doc was created with each coded theme and the responses for each theme.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

This project administered an intervention to measure the effect (knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors) of a CoP-based homiletics class on a group of twelve pastors and lay people from the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. A mixed-method approach was employed using pre/post quantitative/qualitative surveys, a post-intervention focus group, researcher field notes, and participant journals. This approach allowed for a "thicker," more well-rounded interpretation by the researcher as different instruments were compared (Sensing 72).

Development of the pre- and post-survey instruments followed best practices in order to ensure reliability. The researcher chose to use a forced-choice Likert scale of six

values in order to eliminate indifference/neutrality (Joshi et al. 398). Although a forced-choice Likert scale is often four values, the six-value scale was chosen to allow a more detailed analysis of potential change between individuals' responses on the pre- and post-surveys. The six-value scale also allowed the participant to pick the more exact option as well as to lessen ipsative tendencies (ibid.). The researcher chose to use all positively worded questions rather than a mix of both. Although mixing negatively worded and positively worded questions may keep a participant from checking boxes on "autopilot," Colosi suggests that negatively-worded questions can cause confusion (Colosi and Bureau 2896). "The survey is a device often used to measure people's opinions and attitudes. Yet, a large body of research shows that the question polarity, a seemingly unimportant linguistic question characteristic, influences how respondents express their attitudes" (Holleman et al. 90). A growing body of research suggests that survey respondents are more inclined to disagree with negative questions than to agree with equivalent positive ones (Bishop et al.; Holleman).

The surveys, focus-group questions, and journal prompts were positively evaluated by four expert reviewers: Dr. Barry Oches, Senior Research Associate at Ohio University (retired); Dr. Brittany Peterson, Associate Professor in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University; Dr. Laura Risler, Ph.D.; and Dr. Ellen Marmon, who served as the researcher's dissertation coach.

In addition, each instrument was delivered consistently and with clear instructions. The instruments were validated by carefully aligning the questions being asked of the participants with the research questions of the project as well as the learning goals and curriculum of the class. The focus group followed best practices for semi-

structured interviews, including a consistent order and reading of questions, and was developed in collaboration with a trained focus-group expert.

Once the results were gathered from the three instruments, a triangulation and a “reflective confirmation” approach were used by the researcher to validate the findings (Sensing 220–21).

CHAPTER 4: EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Preaching is a top priority in terms of pastoral responsibility as well as congregational vitality, yet the significant role of preaching is not reflected in the quantity of training and support pastors receive in homiletics. At some point, an individual perceives a calling into ministry and is funneled through a system yet receives little initial training and often is placed in churches with no ongoing training, support, or connection. Most pastors are placed in ministry settings with the urgency of week-to-week message preparation and never make the effort to grow in this significant area of their ministry; others may simply lack access to the time or tools for such growth. Also, many of the current continuing education events available to pastors within the West Ohio Conference are lacking in community and connection with colleagues.

Using the concepts of Communities of Practice, the purpose of this study was to evaluate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of twelve pastors and lay people from across the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church as a result of three sessions of a homiletics course offered through Central Avenue UMC in Athens, Ohio.

Chapter Four presents the data generated from the participants of that class. This chapter first describes the participants and shares demographic information about them as a whole. Using narrative, charts, graphs, and direct quotes from the participants, Chapter Four then presents relevant data for each of the three research questions. These data are organized according to the research questions and the instruments used to collect the data.

The chapter concludes by summarizing the five major findings to come out of the research study.

Participants

Twenty-three pastors expressed interest in the course as a result of an initial invitation on Facebook. Of those twenty-three, fourteen participants were selected largely on a first-come, first-served basis with additional consideration given to demographic diversity. Two individuals self-selected out of the study after the pre-test, citing an inability to make the necessary time commitment to the study; those participants' responses were removed from the data analysis. Of the twelve remaining participants, all completed the course. Two participants missed small sections of one of the classes due to family or medical issues. Two participants were unable to attend the focus group.

Participants included multiple levels of credentialing (see Figure 3) and tenure in

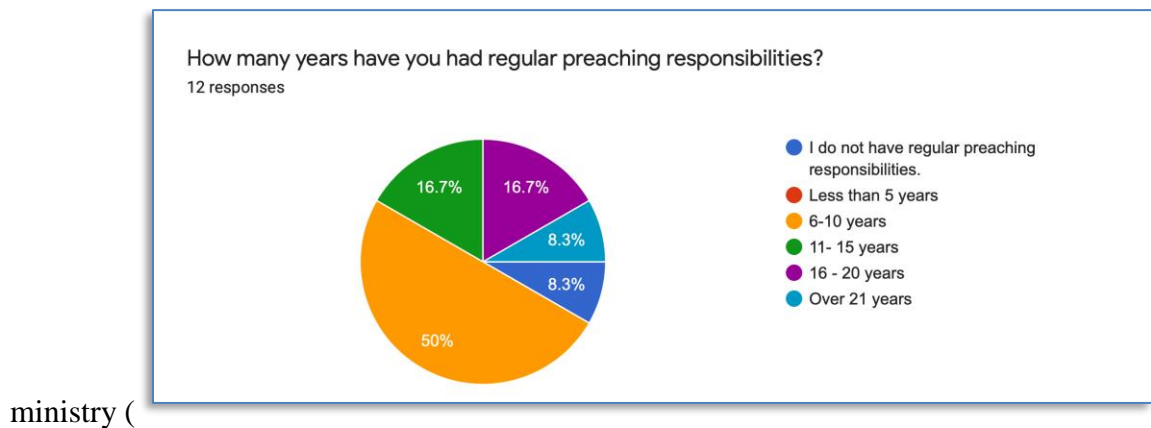


Figure 4). They represented four of the eight districts in West Ohio (Figure 5) and served in churches in a variety of congregational settings (Figure 6). Four of the twelve were women (Figure 7) which is a slightly larger percentage than for the West Ohio conference overall.

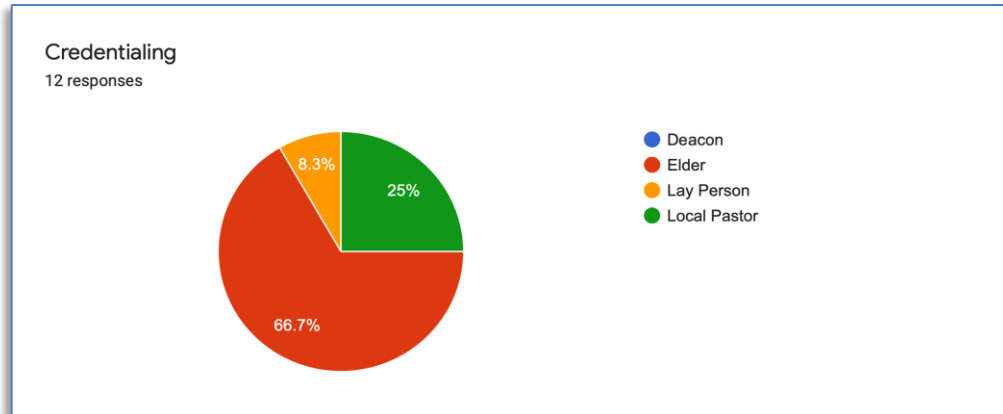


Figure 3: Credentialing breakdown of participants.

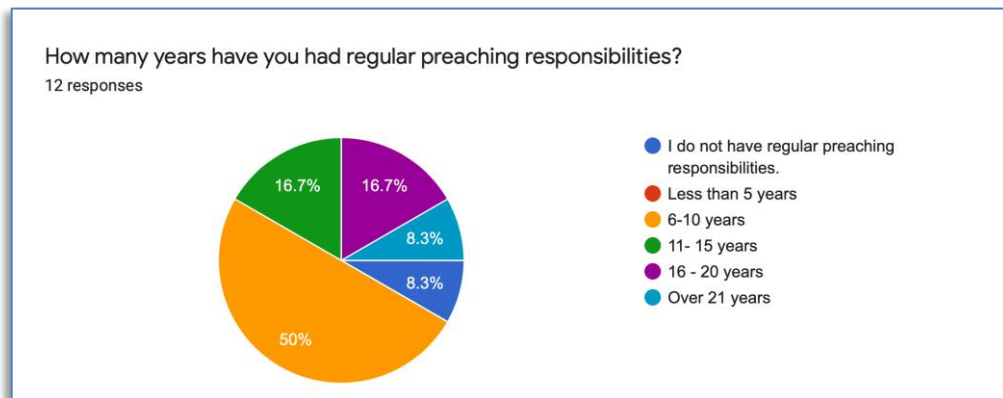


Figure 4: Tenure breakdown of participants.

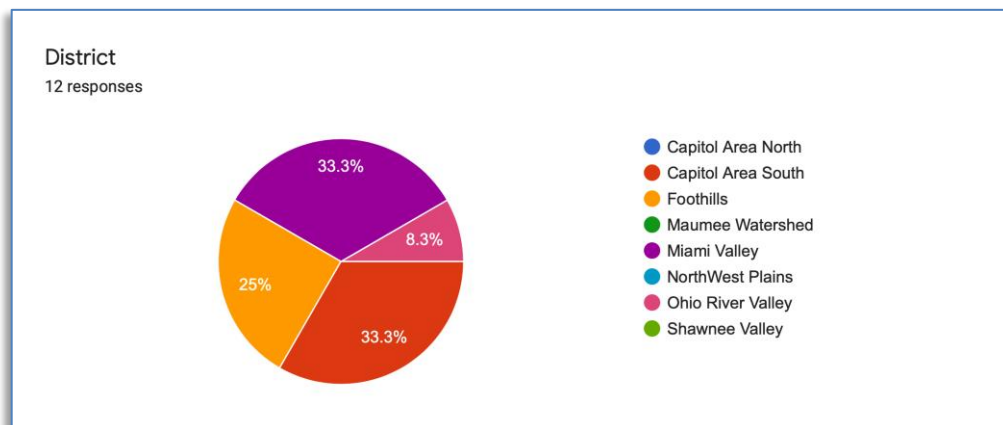


Figure 5: District breakdown of participants.

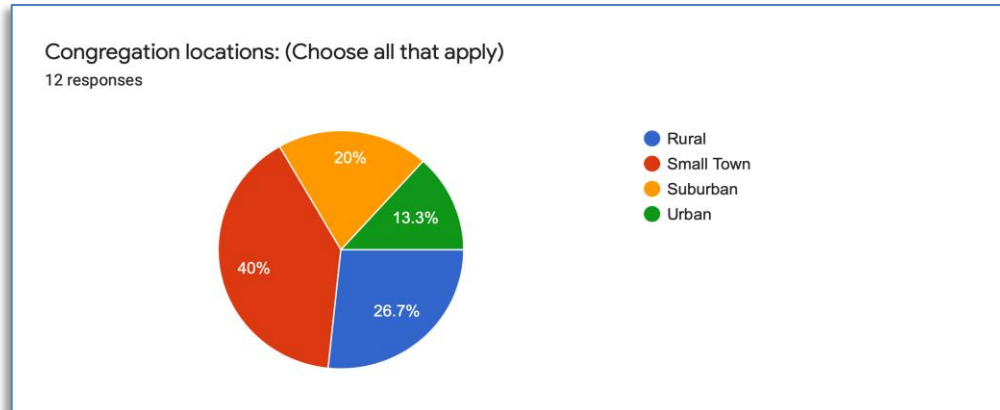


Figure 6: Location breakdown of participants.

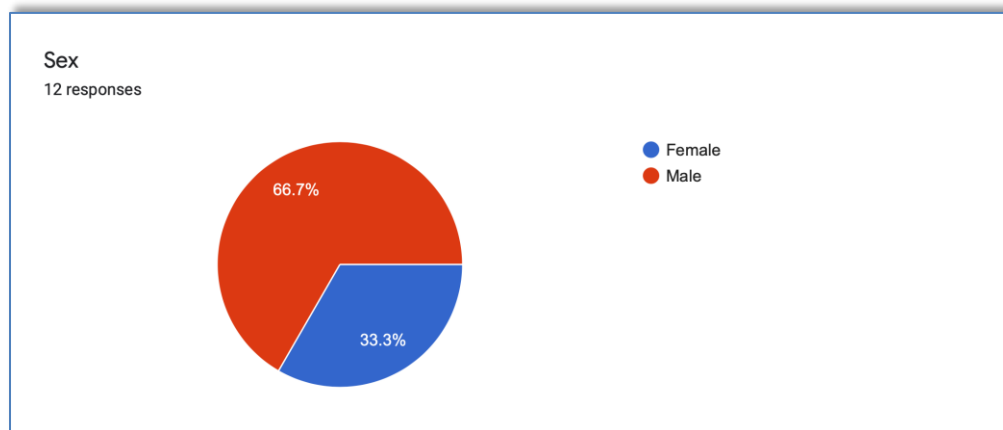


Figure 7: Sex breakdown of participants.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

RQ1: What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior before the course?

Pre-Intervention Survey: The pre-intervention survey contained twenty-three Likert-scale statements designed to assess the participant's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior before the course. Four of the questions assessed knowledge, ten assessed attitudes, and ten assessed behaviors. An additional three qualitative questions were

placed at the end of the survey to gather additional data on knowledge that could not be easily collected through quantitative means.

Knowledge

Questions 5, 12, 23, and 24 and the three short-answer questions were included to assess participants’ knowledge.

Question 5 asked if participants have a regular method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic. Nine of the participants agreed with the statement at some level, but only one strongly agreed. The mean score was 4.25.

I have a regular method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic.
12 responses

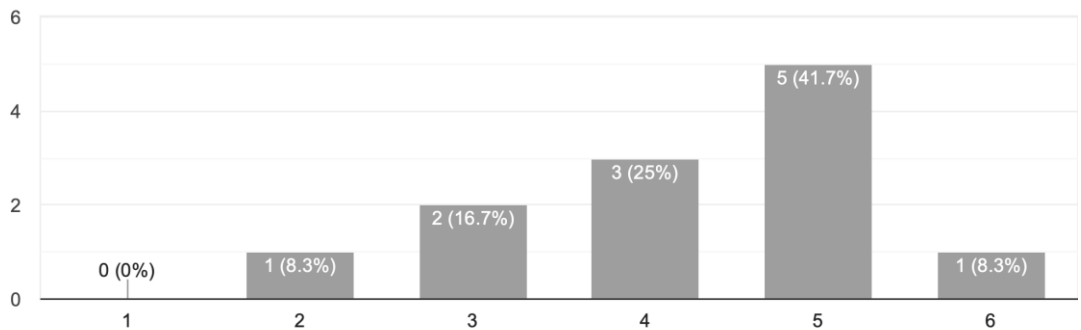


Figure 8: Method of approaching a scripture.

In their first journal prompt, participants were asked to describe their method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic. Five respondents were able to describe a specific method; seven indicated that their method varied from sermon to sermon. Four of the five who were able to describe their approach also described some method of planning ahead beyond the next weekend. Of those who attempted to describe their process, some, such as Fulbright14 below, stated their methods were more mystical:

The work of preaching for me begins in solitude, silence, and stillness. Behind the door of my prayer room, where the excess can be shed, the tears cried, and the truth faced. In the quiet hours of morning meditation, where the gentle words of the poet or evangelist finds its way into a deeper place in my soul. In the hours spent in my garden or on my porch, remembering again the marvel of this creation and the love that permeates all of it... Silence is the birthplace. Over time, I will find that a word or an idea continues to make itself known. It emerges out of the silence and finds its way into conversations, journal entries, poems, and insights. (Fulbright14)

Other participants described their methods in more mechanical language, detailing timelines, processes, and others who are involved in the creation of worship in their settings. Trinity06 typically planned “2–3 months in advance. [Prepare] a month out, polish week of.” LivingVine15 planned “by thinking of themes several months ahead of time to plan our series [which are] usually 4–6 weeks long. Then as each series and sermon approaches, I’m looking and listening for resources along the way.” Burt06 planned weeks ahead of ever preaching a sermon:

I am usually 2–3 seasons ahead, so that worship teams...have time to get together anything that they need...Then after I have a portion of the year mapped out, I go back and begin to flesh out the entirety of the worship service, including as much as possible. Once that is done and sent off to people, all that remains is the message, which I usually have complete, Monday or Tuesday of the week I will be preaching it. (Burt06)

Burt06 wrote that the process was learned from this class when a one-day in-person version was offered at Central UMC in 2019. Lincoln12 wrote that “my preparation would be a fairly detailed outline that I could make note of when preaching if need to, but for the most part I preached without notes, would physically move around the stage to help with transitions, and would preach for an average of 20–25 minutes” (Lincoln12). At this point, Lincoln12 confessed to not having a clear process of planning ahead.

Many of the participants described a hope to cultivate a regular method or process. Some expressed a desire to move toward “greater consistency in preparation” (Washington31), develop a plan of preparation (LivingVine15), or “learn more about crafting a unified preaching schedule while leaving open room for adjusting for present needs” (Fulbright14).

Question 12 asked participants to respond to the statement, “I have a plan to be a better communicator.” Respondents to the pre-test were split evenly between some degree of agreeing and disagreeing, with a mean score of 3.45. The minimum score was 2, the maximum score was 5, and the mode was 4.

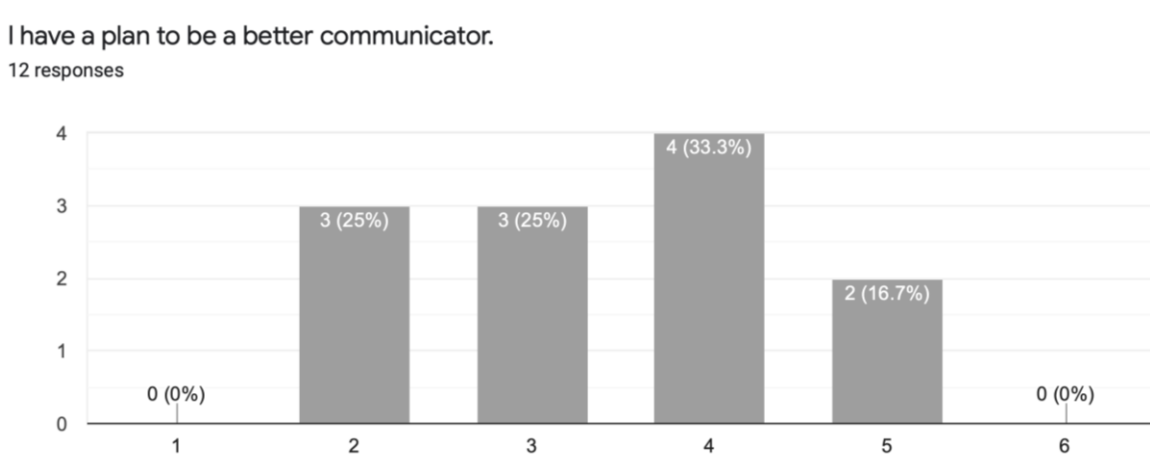


Figure 9: Plan to be a better communicator.

In Journal prompt #1, the participants were asked to describe their hopes for the class and how they wanted to grow. Many said they sought to become better preachers, hoping to “gain some new skills and practices around preaching and preparing sermons, (Asbury03), learn a “better system for finding and using stories, data, history” (Trinity06), helping them “hone my preaching from preparation to delivery” (LivingVine15).

Question 23 asked the participants to rank-order the ministry roles that their congregation values. Only nine of the twelve participants answered the question with five of them saying they felt their congregations thought preaching was the top priority. Three participants thought their congregations would say that preaching is their second priority and one listed it as the third priority. Using a weighted system, preaching received the most points.

In terms of what your congregation values, please rank order these roles of pastoral ministry.

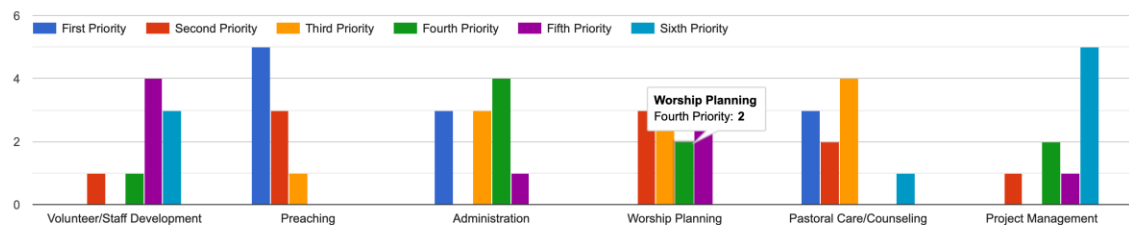


Figure 10: Congregational role values.

Questions 24–26 were short-answer questions designed to assess participants’ general knowledge of the goal of preaching and certain elements of the preaching act.

Question 24 asked participants to share what they saw as the goal of preaching. After coding on key words, no clear consensus was found among the twelve respondents, although a few themes emerged. Four respondents reported that the goal of preaching was, in part, to *encourage*. In a similar vein, others reported that preaching was to *nurture*

(2) and *inspire*, (2) and *invite* (2). These words tend to be more emotional and motivational. Other responses indicated more of a task focus; using words like *equip* (2), *deepen* (2), *challenge* (2), *teach* (1), *communicate* (1), and *correct* (1). All narrative responses are provided below:

What do you believe is the goal of preaching? (12 responses)

1. Discipleship
2. To challenge, encourage and equip the body to love God and neighbor.
3. Invite the hearer into greater love for God and a greater desire to be faithful.
4. Encourage believers for ministry.
5. To encourage the congregation and move the church outside the walls into the world.
6. To communicate the gospel weekly.
7. To share the good news
8. To nurture and deepen the spiritual lives of the listeners.
9. To invite people to form a closer relationship with God thru Jesus Christ through the scripture. To challenge them in faith and spiritual growth,
10. To inspire people to deepen their faith and equip them with theologically sound approaches to life.
11. The goal of preaching is tending to, leading, and nurturing people. As a preacher, through my weekly message I am offering Christ to people. His correction, love, compassion, hope and encouragement.
12. To bring inspiration from information for transformation.

Question 25 asked participants what they believed made for a compelling sermon introduction. After coding on key words, no clear consensus was articulated among the twelve respondents although a few themes emerged. Eight of the twelve respondents talked about telling a *story* (4), *illustration* (3), *hook* (2), or *allegory* (1). Respondents used words describing the character of those stories or the relationship with the preacher: *personal* (3), *relatable* (2), *practical* (1), and *meaningful* (1). Three said a compelling introduction creates a need to be filled by what followed in the sermon. All narrative responses are provided below:

What makes for a compelling sermon introduction? (12 responses)

1. Meaningful illustration
2. Personal story.
3. Demonstrating that what will follow matters.
4. A good story
5. A short story that captures the imagination.
6. A hook of some sort, a relatable story or a point of interest for the church.
7. A hook
8. It immediately hooks the interest of the listener and makes them want to hear more.
9. Being able to take scripture and make it relatable to the congregation.
10. A personal anecdote or an allegory.
11. The ability to help a congregant move from a theoretical idea to the practical. I use many types of illustrations, from serious to silly, from historical to personal. But each illustration is used to help move people from words on the text to receiving Christ in their lives.
12. Something that connects universally...felt need.

Question 26 asked participants to share what they felt were the elements of a good conclusion. After coding on key words, one clear consensus emerged: eight of the twelve respondents believed a conclusion requires some kind of response, some kind of a call to action. That call was articulated in several ways, but a clear pattern existed in what these preachers looked for in a conclusion. The other major theme reported was some kind of summary of the information in the sermon; seven respondents included this as an element. Only one explicitly said that the conclusion should be a decision to commit or recommit to Christ. All narrative responses are provided below:

What are the elements of a good conclusion? (12 responses)

1. Summary
2. An easy landing with all the subject matter in tow.
3. Proclamation and potentiation
4. A call to action.
5. Prayer. Ok, seriously--I think a good conclusion will always have a clear call to action of some sort.
6. A condensed reminder in summary, of what you have already said in the body of the sermon.

7. Call to action or summary action
8. Helps the listener make a direct connection to their own personal life and actions.
9. Taking the points highlighted into a usable direction for faith that can be applied daily.
10. A call to action and a summarizing sentence.
11. Most sermons end with an appeal for parishioners to make the decision to commit to Christ for the first time or to recommit. But this doesn't fit every message. A couple of weeks ago the appeal was to offer forgiveness to someone who had wronged them. A couple of months ago the appeal was to bring someone to worship, and this Sunday the appeal will be to thank God for His blessings every day.
12. Recap of the primary point and a call to action

Attitudes

Questions 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, and 22 were designed to assess the attitudes of the participants toward preaching.

Overall, the pre-test data suggest that the participants value the domain of preaching. Participants feel preaching is important both to them (Q1 and Q22) and their congregations (Q3 and Q23), and they see value in investing time into the work of preaching (Q3). While the participants feel preaching is important, the data also seem to suggest that respondents do not always feel equipped (Q11 and Q18) or encouraged (Q15) by either their congregations (Q6 and Q17) or their colleagues (Q8).

Question 1 asked participants to rate how much they valued being a good preacher. Twelve participants answered the question, and all said that they either agreed (7) or strongly agreed (5) that they valued being a good preacher. This finding was echoed by the first journal question responses, as participants almost unanimously shared areas they wanted to grow as a preacher. This value was also demonstrated by the

participants' agreement to regularly attend and commit to the three day-long sessions provided for this study; each student committed approximately twenty-one hours plus additional time for reflection and writing. To even agree to be a part of the group shows a desire to improve in the task of preaching. As stated in Chapter 2, one of the key components to the CoP model is a commitment to the domain; the stronger the commitment, often the stronger the group. The data indicate that this group of people values preaching.

Being a good preacher is important to me.

12 responses

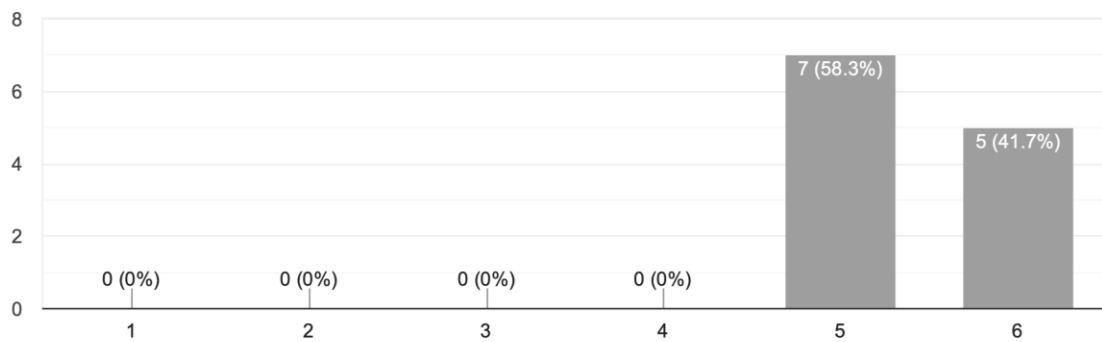


Figure 11: Importance of preaching.

Question 2 asked participants to rate their attitudes toward investing a significant amount of time in the development of the craft of preaching. Of the twelve who answered, the mode (8) agreed that they valued investing a significant amount of time in developing their craft. Two “more agreed than disagreed” and one “strongly agreed.” The mean value of the responses was 4.75. Only one person “more disagreed than agreed” that he valued investing significant time in preaching. This person, although an elder, disclosed that he was appointed quarter-time as a pastor to a thirteen-member church and

that the majority of his job involved flipping houses; in this specific situation, a large investment of time in preaching might not be seen as a priority.

I see value in Investing significant time in the development of the craft of preaching.

12 responses

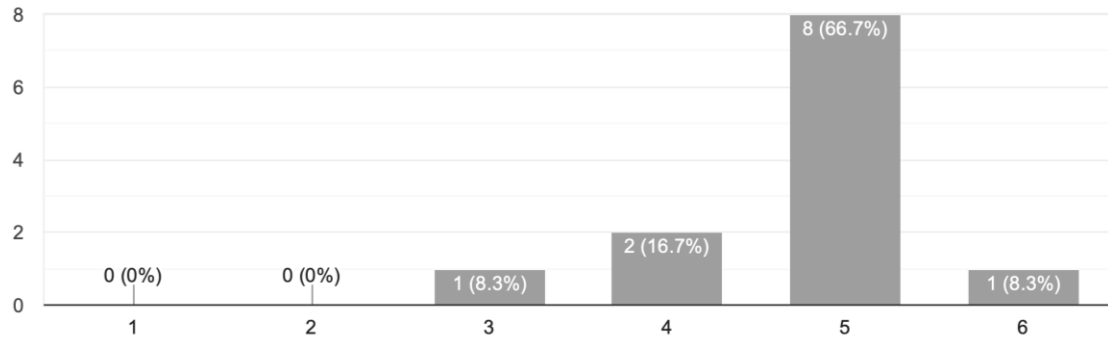


Figure 12: Importance of investing time in preaching.

Question 3 asked participants if they felt being a good preacher was important to their congregations or ministry context. All participants agreed that preaching was important to their ministry context, with nine either agreeing (5) or strongly agreeing (3) while one person only “more agreed than disagreed.” Interestingly, the quarter-time pastor to a thirteen-member church who didn’t value investing substantial time into sermon preparation nevertheless “strongly agreed” that being a good preacher was important to his congregation and ministry context.

Being a good preacher is important to my ministry context.

12 responses

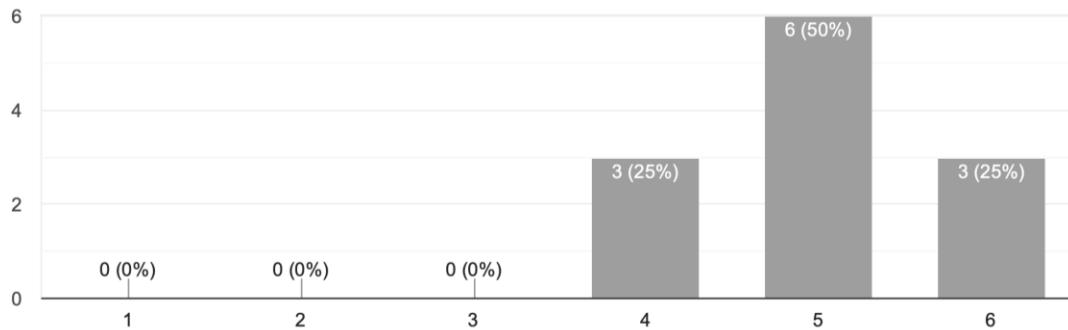


Figure 13: Importance of preaching to ministry context.

Question 9 sought to measure participants’ attitudes towards the congregation’s attention to and connection with them as preachers. Everyone held the attitude that their congregations were paying attention. Five only “more agreed than disagreed,” six “agreed,” and one “strongly agreed.”

When I speak, I feel I have my congregation’s attention and am connected with them.

12 responses

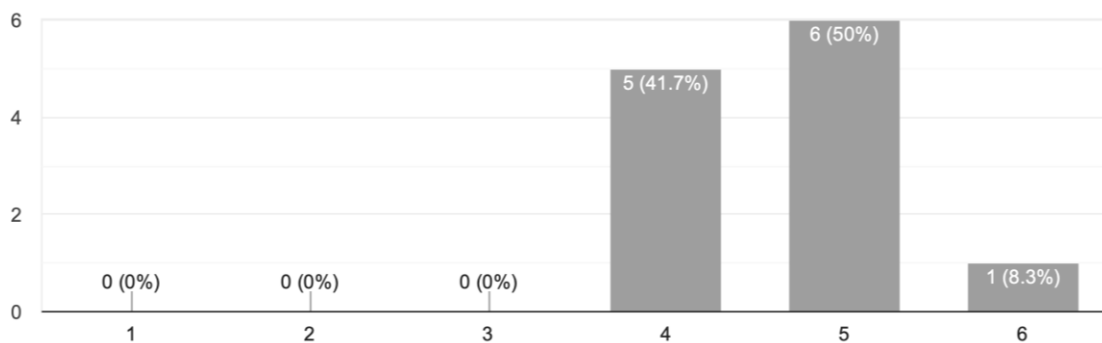


Figure 14: Congregational connection when preaching.

Question 11 sought to measure participants’ attitudes toward feeling equipped to preach on a regular basis. Only two people “more disagreed than agreed” that they felt

equipped to regularly preach while the rest agreed on some level. The mode was 5 (agree). Three “strongly agreed” they felt equipped, and two “more agreed than disagreed.” The mean score was 4.75. One of the two who disagreed they felt equipped to preach was a lay person who had only preached once and had no formal training.

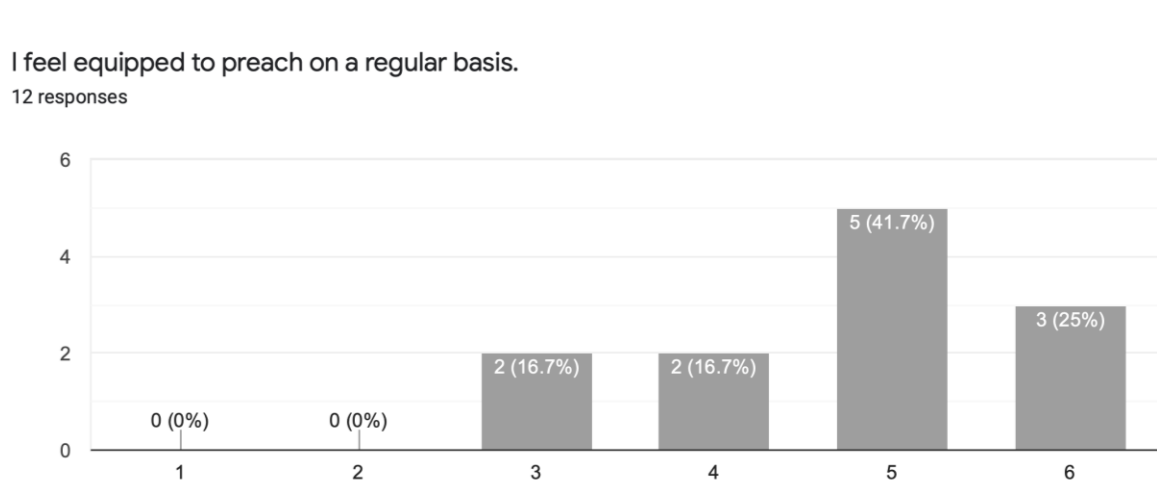


Figure 15: Feeling of being equipped to preach.

Question 13 sought to measure participant’s own sense of expectancy when they preach and the importance of their proclamation in that moment. Before the class, only one person “more disagreed than agreed” with the statement that they felt expectancy and a sense of importance about their preaching. The mode score was 5 (agree) with five responses. Three “strongly agreed.”

I have a sense of expectancy when I preach. I feel that I have something important to say.

12 responses

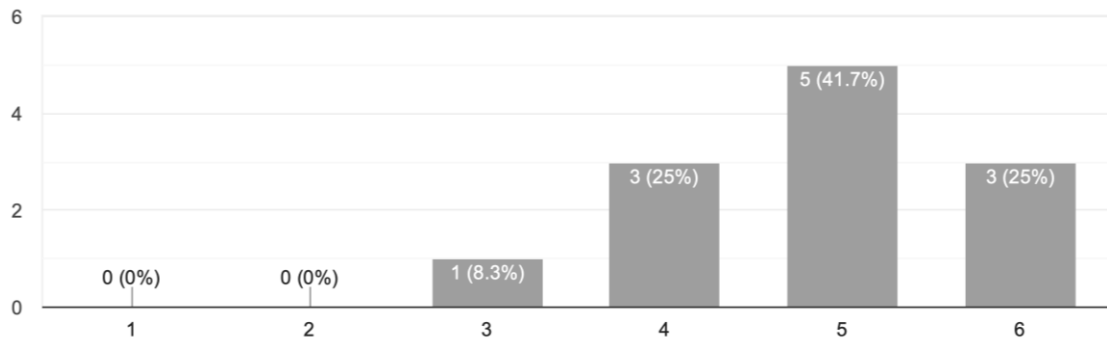


Figure 16: Sense of expectancy when preaching.

Question 15 sought to measure if the participant felt encouraged in his or her preaching. Two disagreed with the statement, and an additional three “more disagreed than agreed” that they felt encouraged in their preaching. The mean score was 4, with a minimum score of 2 and a maximum of 6 (given by only one participant). The data seems to suggest that at least this particular group of pastors does not feel strongly encouraged in their preaching.

I feel encouraged in my preaching.

12 responses

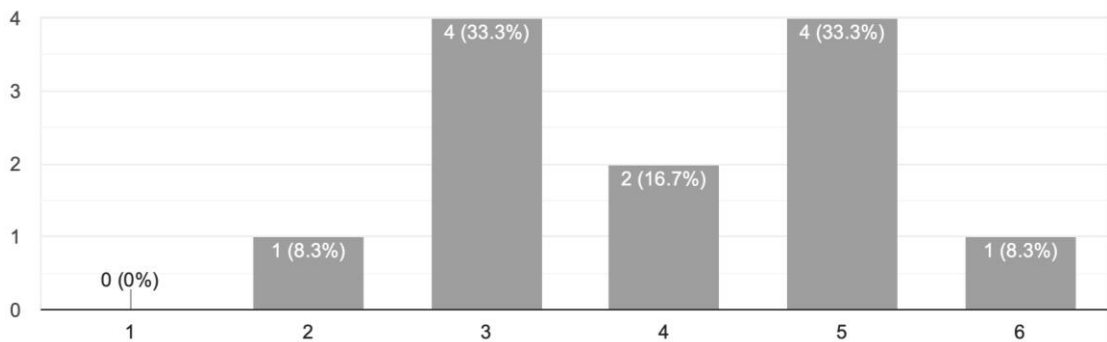


Figure 17: Sense of encouragement in preaching.

Question 17 sought to measure the respondent’s attitudes toward their preaching as a means of transformation in the lives of their congregations—that their preaching makes a difference in people’s lives. Rather than simply relying on the preacher’s perception of people feeling changed, the question asks whether the respondents have received feedback confirming their perceptions. All but two respondents agreed that their preaching makes a difference, with the largest number of responses (6) saying that they only “more agreed than disagreed.” Interestingly, though the number of respondents is too small to support conclusions; their pre-test data showed an *inverse* relationship between the time a person spent working on their sermon and their confidence that their preaching made a difference in people’s lives; those who spent the most time in sermon preparation (ten to fifteen hours a week) felt the least confident that their preaching made a difference, while those who spent less time felt *more* confident.

People say my preaching makes a difference in their lives.

12 responses

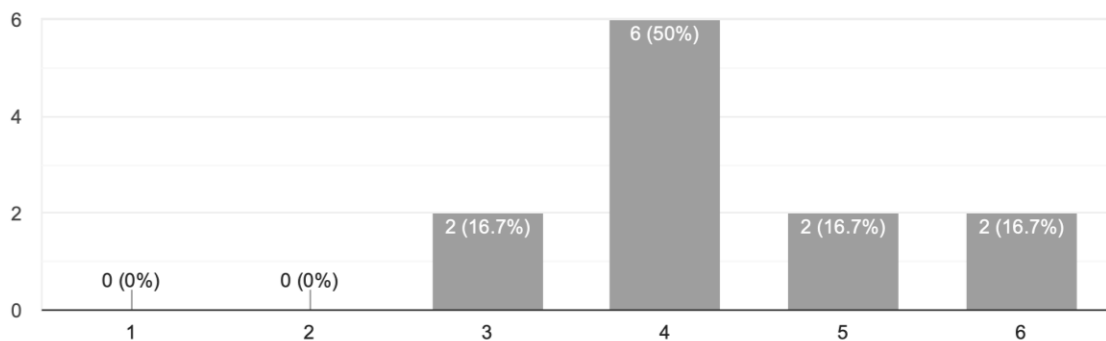


Figure 18: Sense of effectiveness of preaching.

Question 18 sought to measure the participants’ attitude toward their own ability to plan and organize sermons. All agreed they felt some level of confidence in their ability to plan and organize with the mode (6) expressing that they only “more agreed

than disagreed.” Only one “strongly agreed” that they felt confident in their ability to plan and organize sermons. Again, although the sample size is small, an inverse relationship appears between the amount of time they spent in sermon preparation and the confidence they have in their ability to plan and organize sermons. The mean score for this question was 4.53.

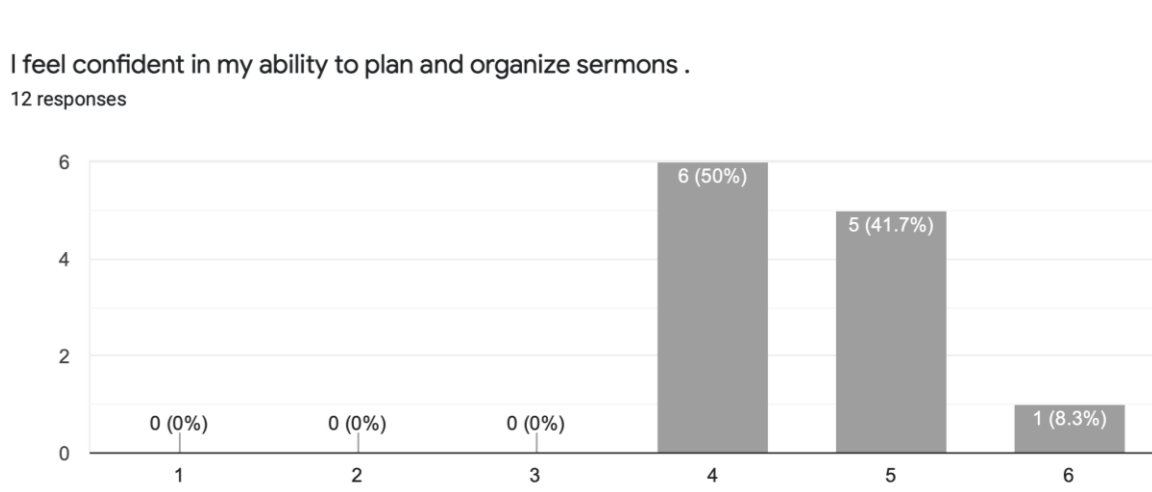


Figure 19: Sense of confidence in preaching.

Question 22 sought to determine how the participants valued preaching in comparison with five other roles of ministry: volunteer/staff development, administration, worship planning, pastoral counseling, and project management. Only eleven participants answered this question. Preaching was the only role ranked among the top three roles by all of the respondents, with the mode (7) placing preaching as their second-highest priority. When respondents were asked what they believed their congregation most valued, preaching moved from second priority to first.

In terms of what you personally value, please rank order these roles of pastoral ministry.

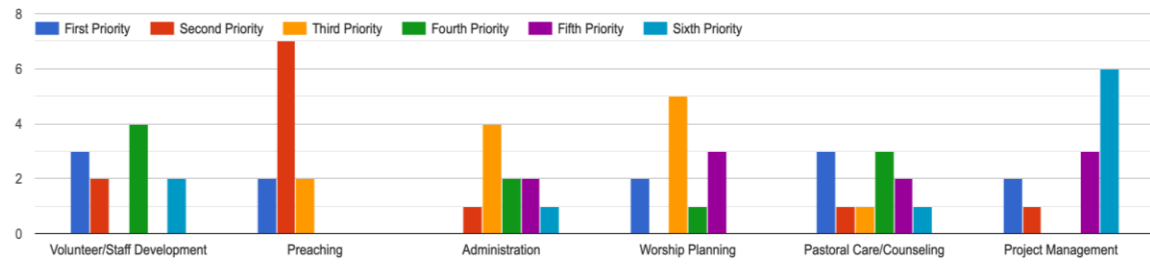


Figure 7: Participant role values.

In terms of what you personally value, please rank order these roles of pastoral ministry. [Preaching]



Figure 21: Personal rank order.

In terms of what your congregation values, please rank order these roles of pastoral ministry. [Preaching]

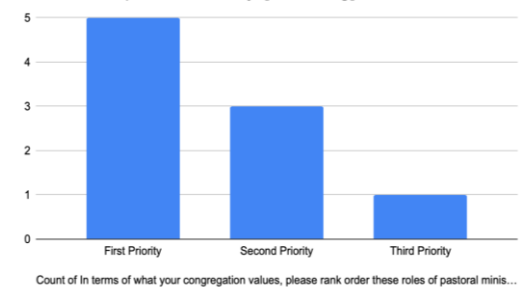


Figure 22: Congregational rank order.

Behaviors

Questions 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 14, 16, 20, and 21 were designed to evaluate certain behaviors of the participants around preaching.

Overall, the participants reported a lack of strong systems in place for writing sermons (Q4, Q14) and receiving feedback (Q6, Q8, Q10) about their sermons. When asked if they practiced a behavior (such as Q16, the ability to summarize their sermon in a single sentence), they were more confident than if they were asked what their congregation has reported back to them (Q10 and Q19).

Question 4 sought to measure the participants' thoughtfulness around sermon preparation. Although certain specific behaviors were addressed in subsequent questions, this question explored the degree of intentionality to what they did as a part of preparation. Most (seven) of the eleven participants who answered the question only "slightly agreed" with the statement, while three agreed. One "more disagreed than agreed," and one did not answer the question.

I am conscientious about my sermon preparation.

11 responses

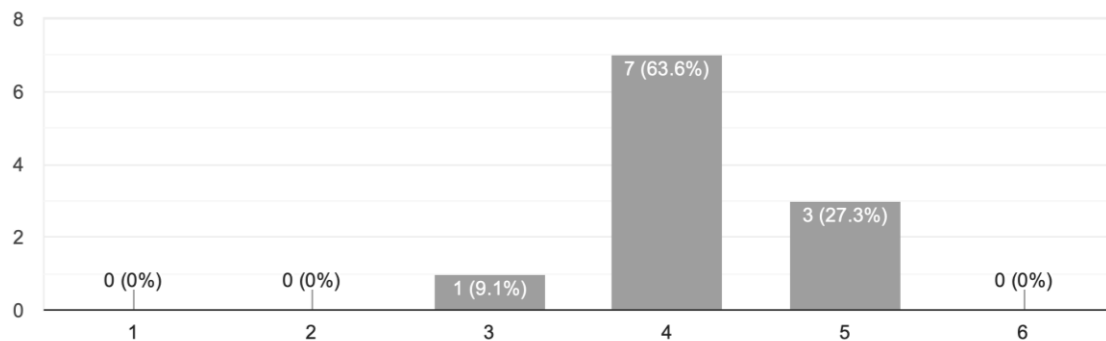


Figure 23: Conscientiousness of preparation.

Question 6 was designed to measure whether the participants solicited feedback about their preaching. Although the question could be interpreted as a behavior of the preacher in setting up feedback mechanisms, the question was originally designed to assess the behavior of the congregation as much as that of the preacher. In hindsight, the question was not a strong question for this reason. Nevertheless, the question uncovered that only two of the participants "strongly agreed," while half "more agreed than disagreed." Four participants disagreed at some level.

I get regular, positive feedback on my preaching.

12 responses

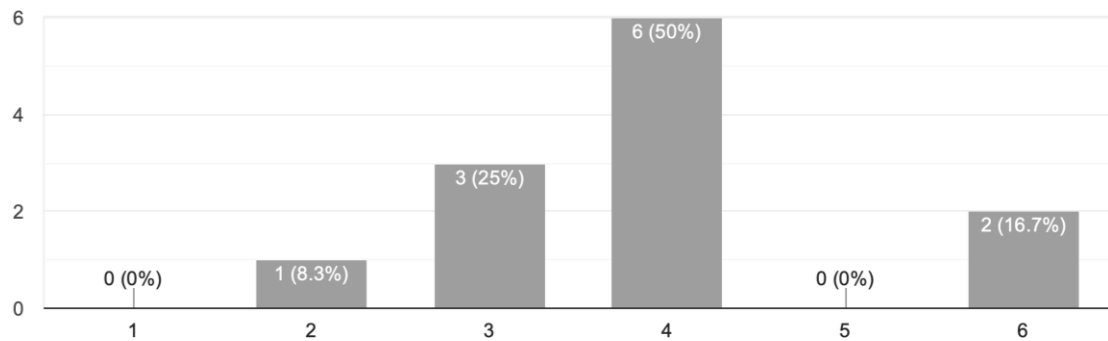


Figure 24: Regularity of positive feedback.

Question 7 asked about the use of creativity in preaching. Most of the respondents felt they agreed to some degree that they were appropriately creative, but the mode (six responses) was 4, only “slightly agree.” Two reported they “slightly disagreed” that they use appropriate creativity in their preaching. The mean response was 4.25.

I am appropriately creative in my preaching.

12 responses

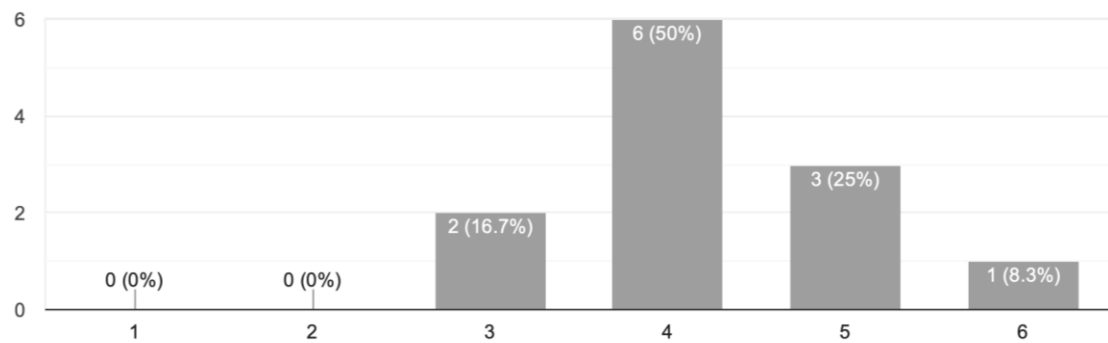


Figure 25: Creativity in preaching.

Similar to Question 6, Question 8 was designed to measure whether the participants received feedback about their preaching, although this time from colleagues.

This question sought to assess whether the participants set up feedback loops or created ways to get support from other preachers. The question also could have been interpreted to assess the behavior of the colleagues as much as the preacher. For that reason, the question should have been recrafted. However, fewer respondents received this kind of feedback from colleagues than received the same feedback from their congregations. The majority disagreed, with two participants “strongly disagreeing.” The mean score was 3.16 with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 5.

During the course, participants were asked to respond to several journal prompts as a tool of reflection. The second journal prompt asked participants what came to mind when they thought of the idea of community. This question was followed by the question, “As a pastor, do you believe you have a community based on your definition above?” Responses to this question showed a notable lack of community among pastors; only two of the eleven respondents to the journal prompt identified a strong, life-giving community outside of their families. A notable exception was EurekaSprings14, who shared that she was able to form “a small community with a few fellow clergywomen. We have invested deeply in one another's lives and seek to be that place of support, honesty, and encouragement.”

The vast majority of participants confessed to a lack of community or cynicism about the concept of community altogether. Trinity36 wrote, “Honestly, I am pretty cynical about the way we tend to use the word community. It’s a buzz word that sounds right, but rarely is executed in a distinctly Christian way as far as I can tell.” He went on to say that “if a community is a group of people who have self-selected to care about the same stuff, then we are probably pretty close to a community at the church.”

The most obvious lack of community was that with other pastors. Although Question 8 was designed to measure whether the participants received feedback about their preaching from colleagues, the data suggest that this or any kind of feedback was not common among these pastors for preaching or anything else.

Honestly, it has taken me a few days to write this because I've been wrestling with the question. I don't really like the answer. I don't have much community in terms of preaching or in terms of personal community. I have my immediate family and, with my spouse also being a pastor, we do bounce sermon ideas off one another.

Outside my family, I don't have much. (Washington31)

Other data indicate a lack of preaching support as well as fellowship in general between pastors. Licklocal26 shared,

A number of years ago I fully trusted a clergy member with devastating consequences to my family. I felt betrayed and became guarded. After this incident my inner circle is very limited. In fact, I find many times not fully participating emotionally in such things as; cluster, holiday get-togethers with clergy and family; and trainings. (Licklocal26)

Lincoln12 wrote that, as a pastor, he thinks he has a community—"though very unfortunately we don't see each other much. So perhaps that's more an issue of a community in exile."

Several respondents noted the difficulty of them being in community with people in their congregation—or to be in the kind of vulnerable relationship that comes when one is seeking feedback (Lincoln12, Asbury03, Washington31). This lack of community makes any kind of feedback threatening (Lincoln25, Asbury 03). Asbury03 points out

that vulnerable community is only made more difficult by the process of itinerancy. “Why start investing in people again and let them into my life if I’m just going to be moved again. Being a pastor is lonely.” He acknowledges after having written those words just how lonely he is. “Maybe I don't have a community. Or maybe, as I already said--that community is in exile” (Lincoln12).

I get regular encouragement on my preaching from my cluster or colleagues.
12 responses

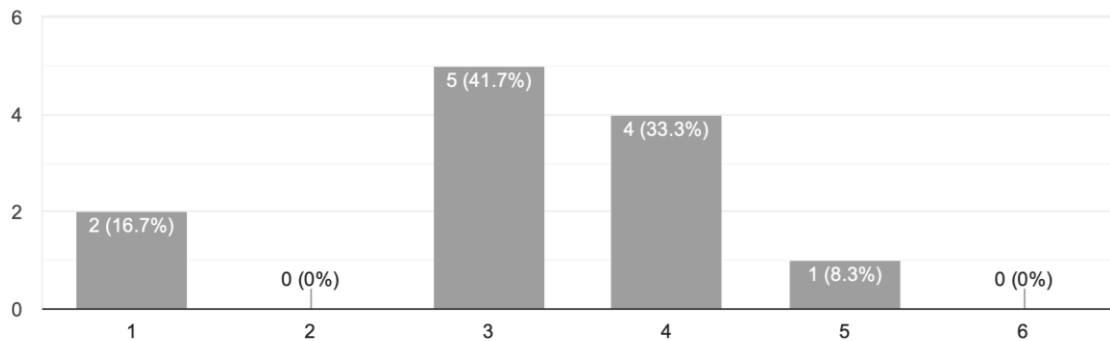


Figure 26: Regularity of encouragement from colleagues.

Question 10 sought to measure feedback from the congregation about illustrations and their ability to connect with them. The majority of the respondents agreed that their illustration connected with their congregations. Of that majority, four only “slightly agreed” with the statement. Three said that they “more disagreed than agreed,” and one disagreed. The mean was 4.08.

I'm often told my illustrations connect with my congregation.

12 responses

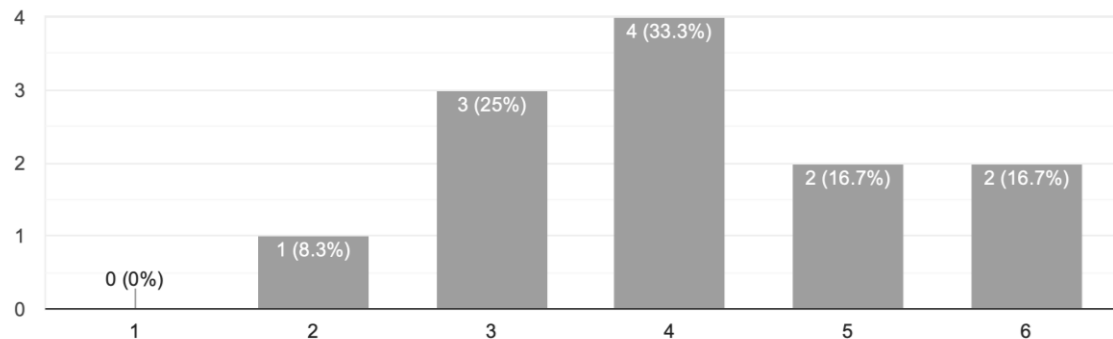


Figure 27: Congregational feedback of illustrations.

Question 14 asked if the participants had a system in place to collect illustrations; the question also asked about regular use of that system. Responses to this question clearly showed a lack of illustration systems among participants. Nine participants disagreed, three of them strongly, and only three “more agreed than disagreed.” The mean score was 2.41 with a minimum score of one and a maximum score of 4. This was the lowest overall score for any survey question.

I have a system in place to collect sermon illustrations that I regularly use.

12 responses

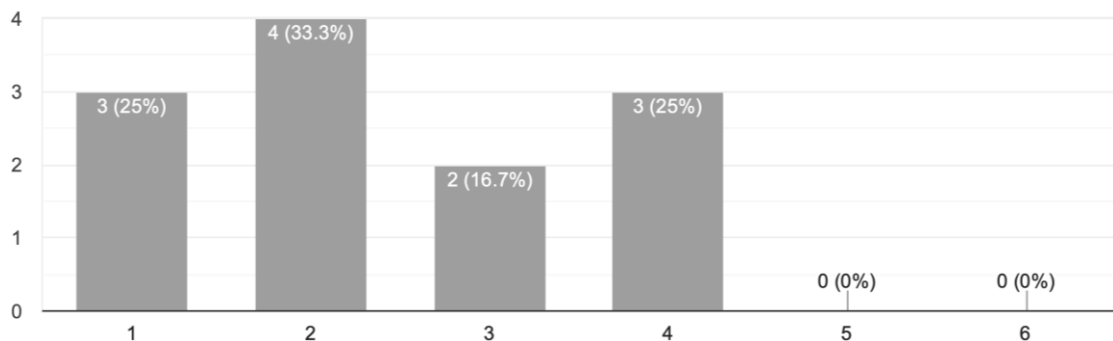


Figure 28: System of collecting illustrations.

Question 16 sought to measure the use of a “Big Idea” or “Focus Statement.”

Eleven of the twelve participants agreed they could summarize their sermon in a single statement. Unlike other similar questions asking if “people say” something (for example, Q19, “People say the sermon had a clear call to action”), this question focused on whether the participants, not the congregation, could do so.

I can summarize my last sermon in a single sentence.

12 responses

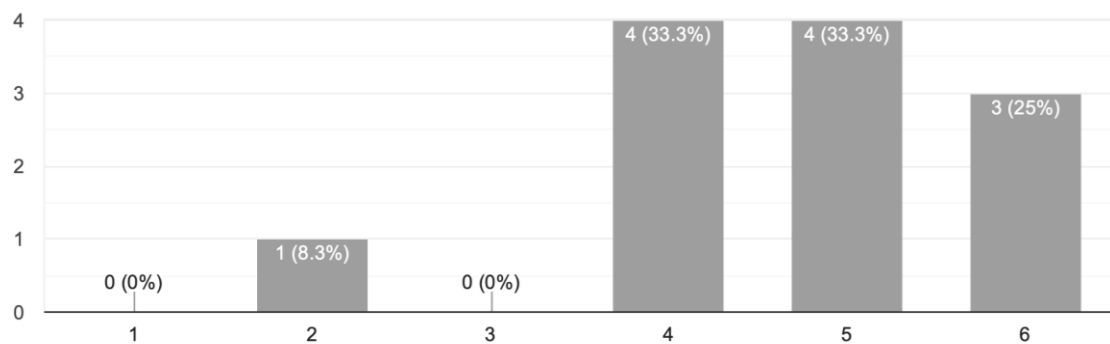


Figure 29: Sentence summary of sermon.

Question 19 asked about the role of application or a “Function Statement” in preaching. Unlike the previous statement, this statement focused on the congregation’s perception, not the participant’s perception, so the statement requires a level of feedback, not simply self-assessment. Eleven of the twelve participants agreed that people would say their last sermon has a clear call to action. The mode (7) was 4, “more agree than disagree.” The mean score was 4.33.

People would say the last sermon I preached had a clear call to action.

12 responses

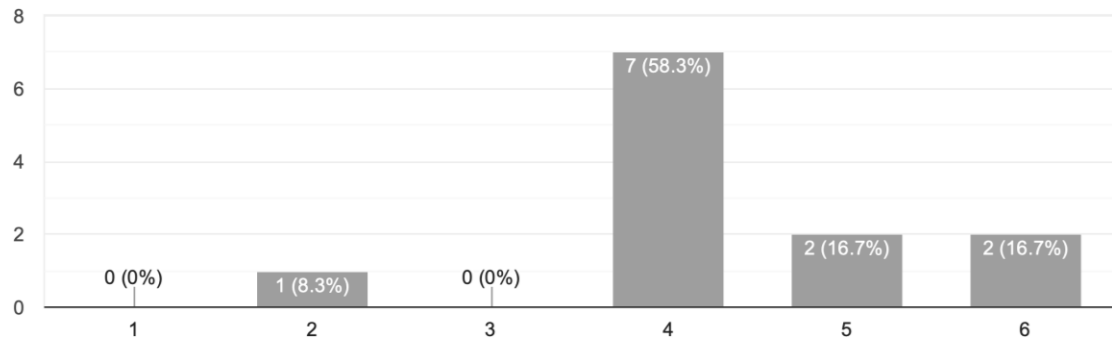


Figure 30: Sermon call to action.

Participants were asked how many hours they spend preparing a typical sermon. The mode was anywhere from five to nine hours per week. Three people spent less than five hours a week in sermon preparation, and one spent ten to fifteen hours in preparation. No respondent reported spending more than fifteen hours a week in sermon preparation.

How many hours on average do you spend preparing a typical sermon?

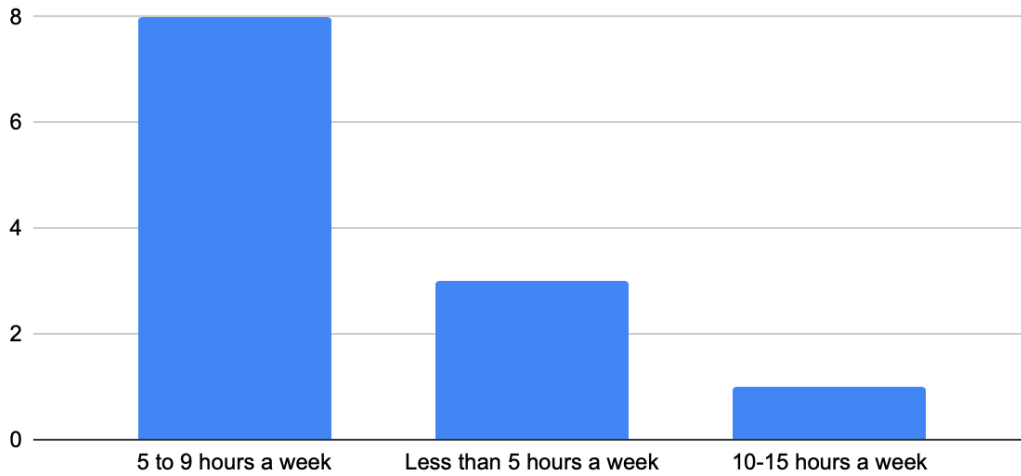


Figure 8: Hours spent preparing.

Respondents were also asked the length of their typical sermons. Fifty percent reported their sermons were anywhere from twenty-one to twenty-seven minutes. Three reported they were twenty-eight to thirty-five minutes, and three reported they were sixteen to twenty minutes. The mode was twenty-one to twenty-seven minutes.

How long are your typical sermons?

12 responses

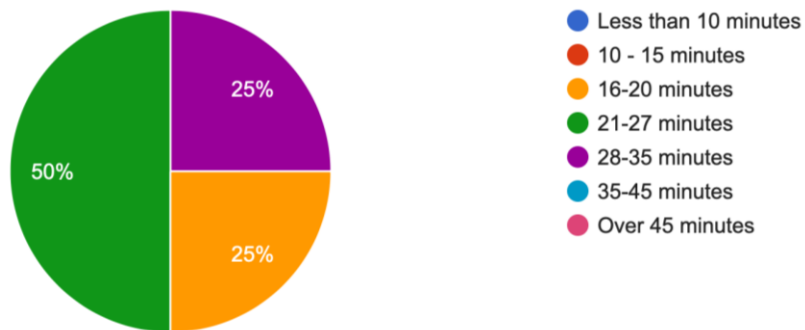


Figure 32: Sermon length.

When aligning the respondents' code names, hours spent on a typical sermon, and sermon length, no correlation was found between hours spent writing a sermon and sermon length.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

RQ2: What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior after the course?

Post-Intervention Survey: The post-intervention survey was identical to the pre-intervention survey except for the addition of demographic questions. It contained twenty-three Likert-scale statements designed to assess the participant's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior after taking the course; four of the questions assessed knowledge, ten assessed attitudes, and ten assessed behaviors. An additional three qualitative questions (designed to address knowledge) were included to gather additional data that could not be easily collected through quantitative means.

Knowledge

Questions 5, 12, 23 and 24 and the three short-answer questions assessed participants' knowledge after taking the course.

Question 5 asked if participants had a regular method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic after taking the course. The mean score for the *pre*-intervention survey was 4.25, but in the *post*-intervention survey the mean notably rose from 4.25 to 4.83. Eleven participants now reported agreeing they had a regular method of approaching a topic, and only one "more disagreed than agreed" with the statement. Although the mode remained the same, the value increased. All but two participants now either agreed or strongly agreed they had a regular method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic.

Pre-intervention: I have a regular method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic.

12 responses

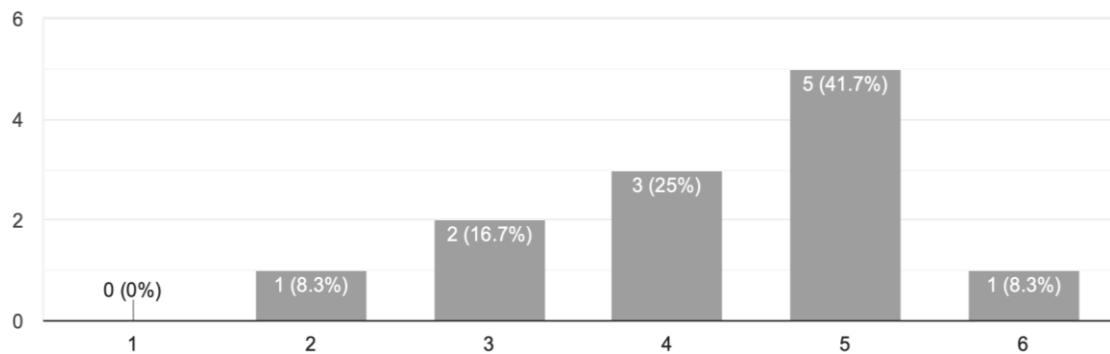


Figure 33: Pre-intervention method of approaching a scripture.

Post-intervention: I have a regular method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic.

12 responses

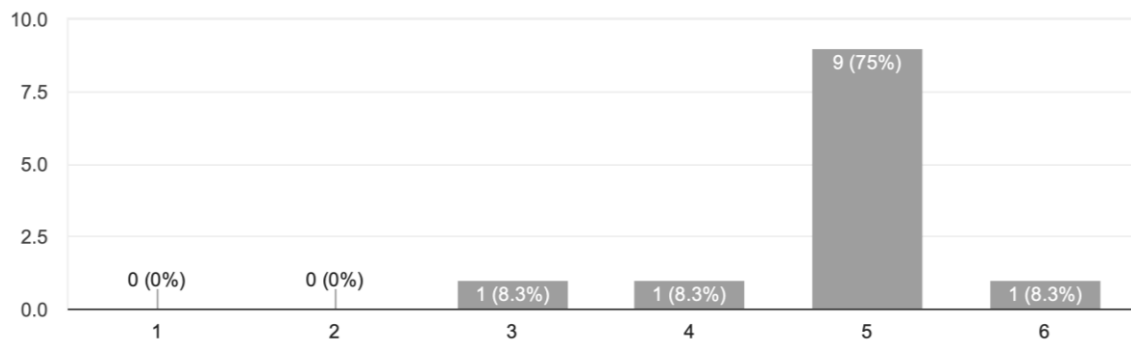


Figure 34: Post-intervention method of approaching a scripture.

In the focus group held after the class, Lakecity26 admitted that, before the class, they had not done a lot of advance sermon preparation but that they were currently “even working on planning February while I’m trying to do January also, um, to try to get, um, in advance some things out there and looking at things more critically.” Burt06 agreed:

“I’ve um, gotten myself to that point [of working ahead]. I’ll hope that it stays that way as well and feeling less stress on my life. It’s, um, it’s been a powerful gift, so I’m hoping I can continue that, especially when we roll into Lent and things get crazy again.”

Lanternlane03 said “I also think, uh, I don’t get to preach that often. So knowing [how to plan ahead] gives me opportunity to plan more.”

Question 12 asked the participants to respond to the statement, “I have a plan to be a better communicator.” Before the class, respondents were split evenly between some degree of agreeing and disagreeing, with a mean score of 3.45. In the post-survey all twelve respondents now agreed with the statement that they had a plan to be a better communicator, with nine of the twelve either agreeing or strongly agreeing; the mean score increased from 3.45 to 5.17, with a minimum score of 4 and a maximum of 6. The mode went from a pre-class value of 4 to a post-class value of 6.

Pre-intervention: I have a plan to be a better communicator.

12 responses

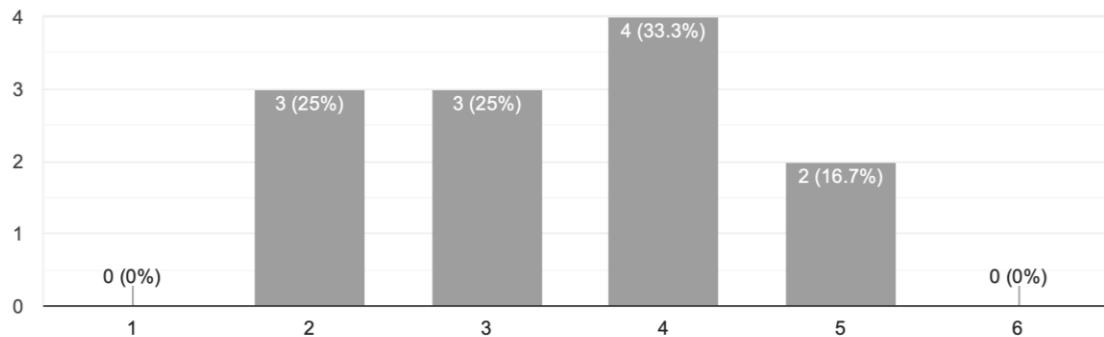


Figure 35: Pre-intervention plan to be a better communicator.

Post-intervention: I have a plan to be a better communicator.

12 responses

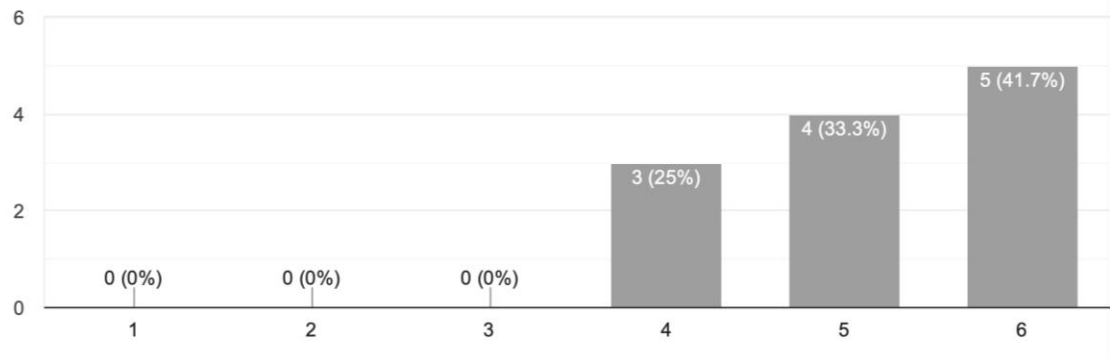


Figure 36: Post-intervention plan to be a better communicator.

In the focus group, many reported they had a plan for becoming a better communicator. Lincoln24 said, “For me, one of the things that surprisingly was impactful and I haven’t—I haven’t made a change yet, but I have plans to, uh, to revisit—[was] the preaching rule of life example [given to us]. I haven’t thought about that for probably 10 years...it becomes sort of a guard rails for me as I’m thinking about it.” Lincoln24 said that before the class he had a process, but the process was “not very, um, it’s not very streamlined or, um, I couldn’t explain my process to someone else well. I couldn’t say, ‘This is what I do or whatever.’” In a journal entry, Lincoln24 said after the class, “now I think I will be able to explain what I do and why I do it.”

Question 23 asked the participants to rank-order the roles their congregation valued in pastoral ministry. Only nine of the twelve participants answered the question, with five saying they felt their congregations valued preaching as a top priority, three saying preaching was their second priority, and one recording preaching as the third priority. No significant shift occurred between the pre- and post-tests.

Questions 24–26 were short-answer questions designed to assess general knowledge.

Question 24 asked participants to share what they saw as the goal of preaching. After coding on key words, no clear consensus was articulated among the twelve respondents, although a few themes emerged that were listed in section under research question one. After the class, no clear consensus was articulated among the twelve respondents, but four described the goal of preaching using the word “transform” (or “change”), which was a concept introduced by the researcher as a goal of preaching. This word had only been used once in the pre-test.

Pre-intervention: What do you believe is the goal of preaching? 12 responses

Discipleship

To challenge, encourage and equip the body to love God and neighbor.

Invite the hearer into greater love for God and a greater desire to be faithful.

Encourage believers for ministry

To encourage the congregation and move the church outside the walls into the world.

To communicate the gospel weekly.

To share the good news

To nurture and deepen the spiritual lives of the listeners.

To invite people to form a closer relationship with God thru Jesus Christ through the scripture. To challenge them in faith and spiritual growth,

To inspire people to deepen their faith and equip them with theologically sound approaches to life.

The goal of preaching is tending to, leading, and nurturing people. As a preacher, through my weekly message I am offering Christ to people. His correction, love, compassion, hope and encouragement.

To bring inspiration from information for transformation.

Figure 37: Pre-intervention responses to goal of preaching

Post-intervention: What do you believe is the goal of preaching? 12 responses

To create growing and deepening the congregations as well as myself a relationship with God via: scripture, interpretation and application.

To offer people a greater knowledge of God and the Bible so that they will experience transformation in their own lives and through their commitment to Christ, seek to offer the Good News to the world.

To bring people closer to God either in mission or identity.

To act as a tool for God to reveal his truth to the congregation.

The goal of preaching is inform to transform.

Inviting the people of God to step into God's preferred future.

To bring about life-giving transformation within the church, awakening individuals and the congregation as a whole to the Spirit that is alive already in them!

To proclaim the gospel in our modern context

To reveal Jesus and bring those who hear to an opportunity to be more like Him.

Creating an ethos for the gathered community.

To proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ every week

Life change

Figure 38: Post-intervention responses to goal of preaching

Question 24 asked participants to share what they believe makes for a compelling sermon introduction. After coding on key words, no clear consensus was articulated among the twelve respondents, although a few themes emerged as listed above.

Question 25 asked participants to share what they thought were the elements of a good conclusion. After coding key words, one clear consensus emerged: that a good conclusion requires some kind of response, some kind of a call to action (eight participants responded in this way). That call to action was articulated in several ways, but the response was a clear pattern in what the participants looked for in a strong conclusion. The other major theme reported was some kind of summary of the information in the sermon (seven responded). Only one explicitly said that the conclusion should be a decision to commit or recommit to Christ. The post-test did not show a significant change between responses.

Attitudes

Statements 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, and 22 were designed to assess the attitudes of the participants toward preaching.

Question 1 asked participants to rate how much they valued being a good preacher. In the pre-test, twelve participants had answered the question saying they either agreed (seven responses) or strongly agreed (five responses) they valued being a good preacher. In the post-test two participants moved from the “agree” category to the “strongly agree” category, creating a bimodal result as shown in Figure 40.

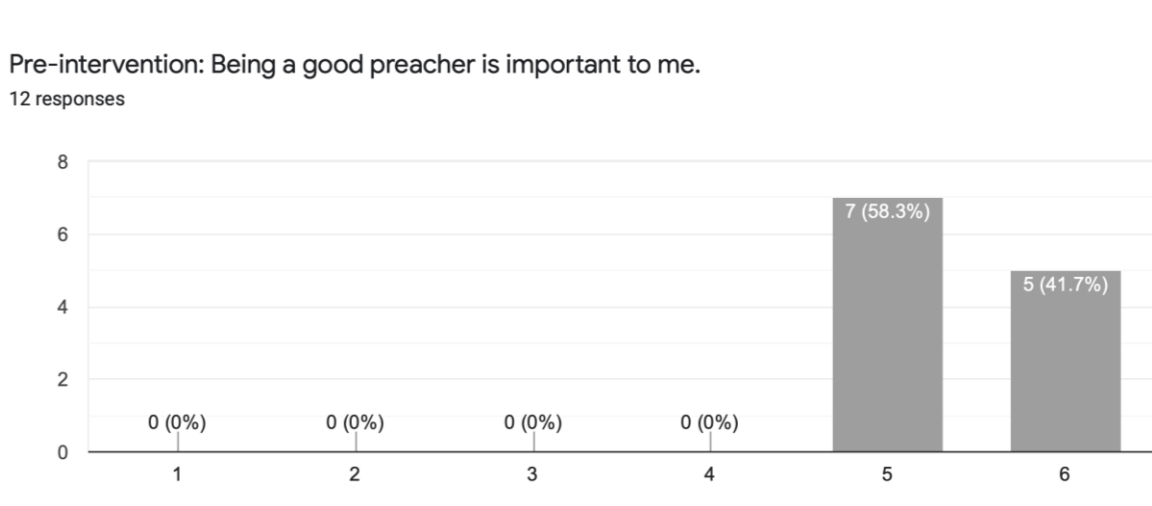


Figure39: Pre-intervention importance of preaching.

Post-intervention: Being a good preacher is important to me.

12 responses

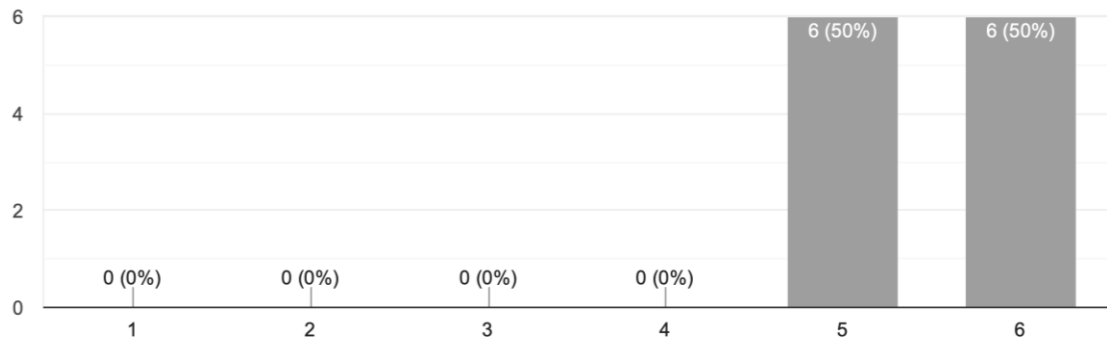


Figure 40: Post-intervention importance of preaching.

Question 2 asked participants to rate their attitudes toward a significant investment of time in the development of the craft of preaching. In the post-test, seven participants now strongly agreed they saw value in investing significant time into the craft of preaching, making “strongly agree” the highest category and the new mode. An additional four said they agreed, and one responded they “more agreed than disagreed.” No one disagreed with the statement. The average score rose from 4.75 in the pre-test to 5.5 in the post-test.

Pre-intervention: I see value in Investing significant time in the development of the craft of preaching.

12 responses

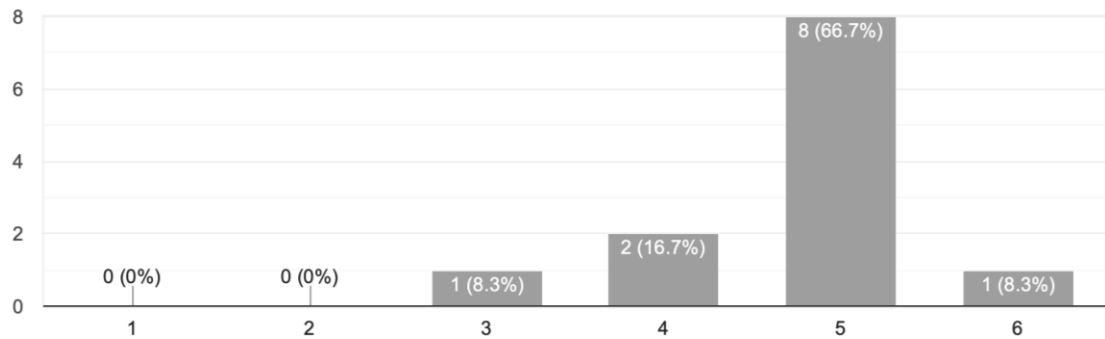


Figure 41: Pre-intervention importance of investment of time.

Post-intervention: I see value in investing significant time in the development of the craft of preaching.

12 responses

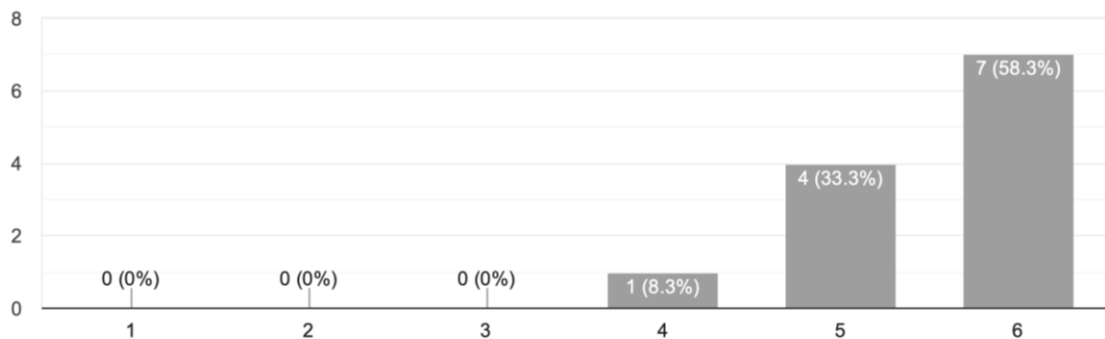


Figure 42: Post-intervention importance of investment of time.

Participants were asked in Question 3 if they felt being a good preacher was important to their ministry context. The responses were identical to those in pre-test. All participants agreed that preaching was important to their ministry context, with nine participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing and three respondents “more agreeing than disagreeing.” The mode was five.

Pre-intervention: Being a good preacher is important to my ministry context.

12 responses

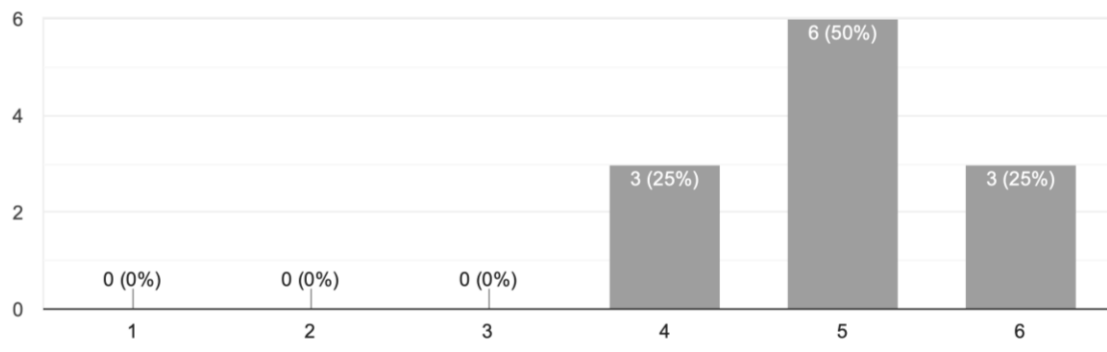


Figure 43: Pre-intervention importance of preaching to ministry context.

Post-intervention: Being a good preacher is important to my ministry context.

12 responses

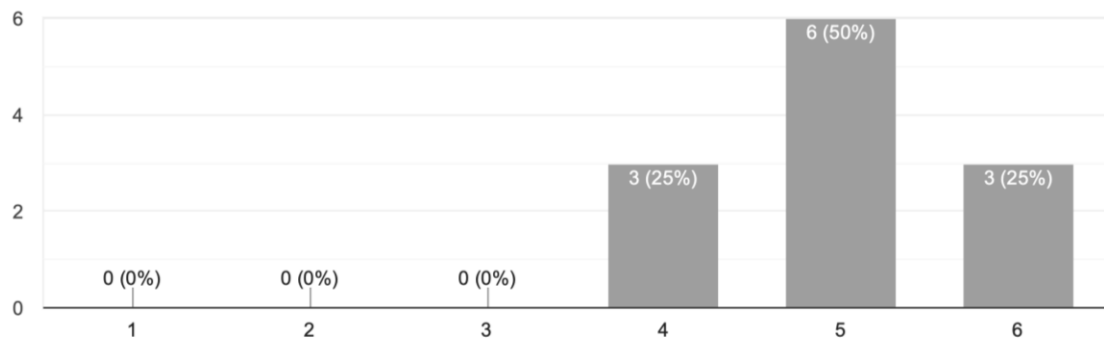


Figure 44: Post-intervention importance of preaching to ministry context.

Question 9 sought to measure participants' attitudes towards the congregation's attention to and connection with them as preachers. The post-test produced results similar to the pre-test, with none in the strongly agree category, eight in the agree category, and four more agreeing than disagreeing.

Pre-intervention: When I speak, I feel I have my congregation's attention and am connected with them.

12 responses

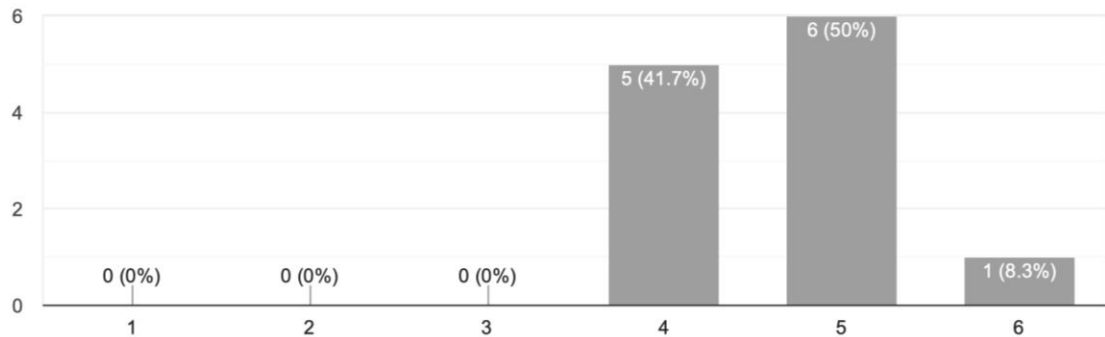


Figure 45: Pre-intervention congregational connection when preaching.

Post-intervention: When I speak, I feel I have my congregation's attention and am connected with them.

12 responses

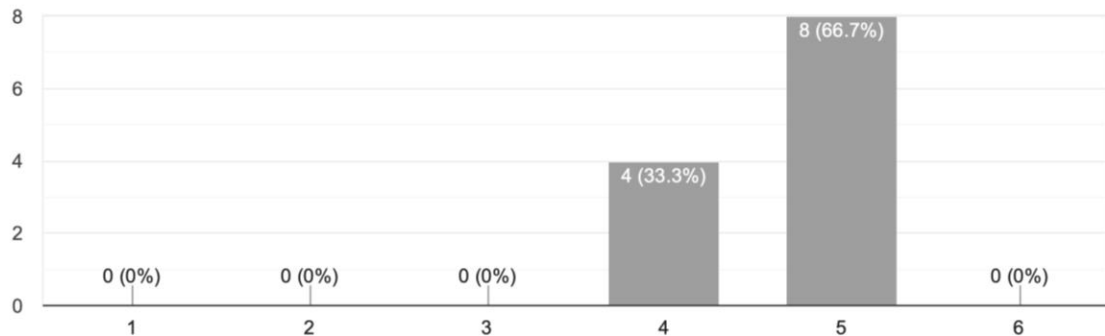


Figure 46: Post-intervention congregational connection when preaching.

Question 11 sought to measure participants' attitudes toward feeling equipped to preach on a regular basis. In the post-test, all twelve participants moved to some level of agreeing with the statement. The mode moved from 5 (agreed) to 6 (strongly agreed) and the post-test mean increased from 4.75 to 5.16.

Pre-intervention: I feel equipped to preach on a regular basis.

12 responses

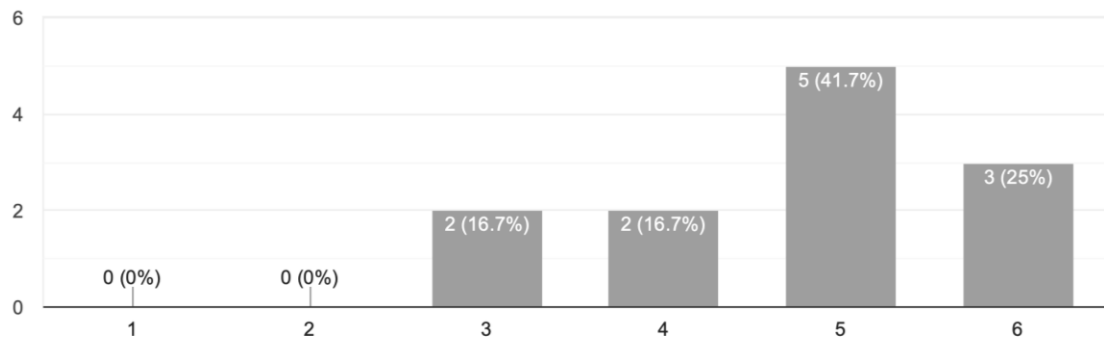


Figure 47: Pre-intervention feeling of being equipped to preach.

Post-intervention: I feel equipped to preach on a regular basis.

12 responses

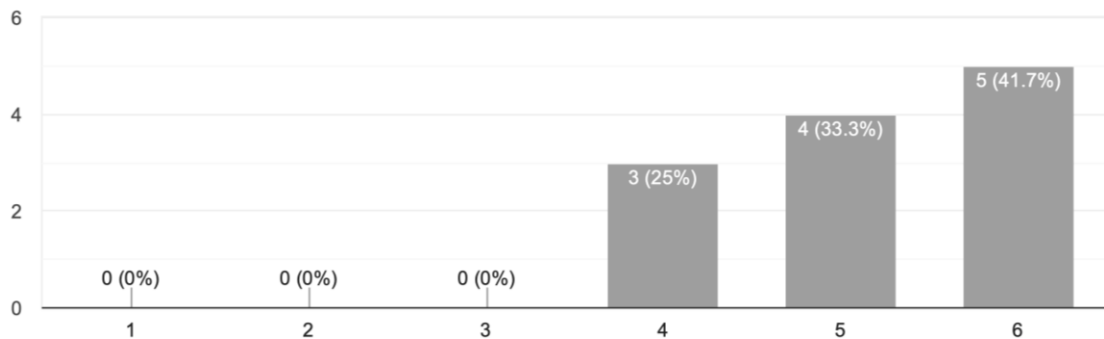


Figure 48: Post-intervention feeling of being equipped to preach.

Question 13 sought to measure the participants' attitudes toward their own sense of expectancy when they preach and the importance of their sermon in that moment. In the post-survey all agreed, with the mode shifting to strongly agree. The mean score increased from 4.83 to 5.08.

Pre-intervention: I have a sense of expectancy when I preach. I feel that I have something important to say.

12 responses

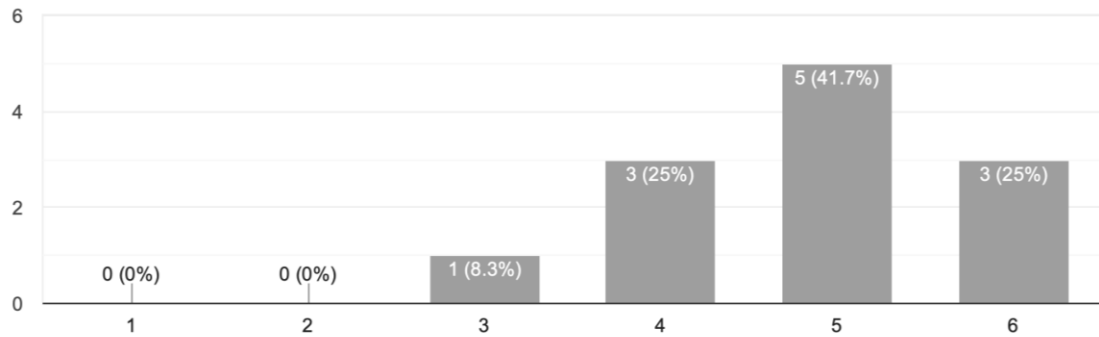


Figure 49: Pre-intervention sense of expectancy.

Post-intervention: I have a sense of expectancy when I preach. I feel that I have something important to say.

12 responses

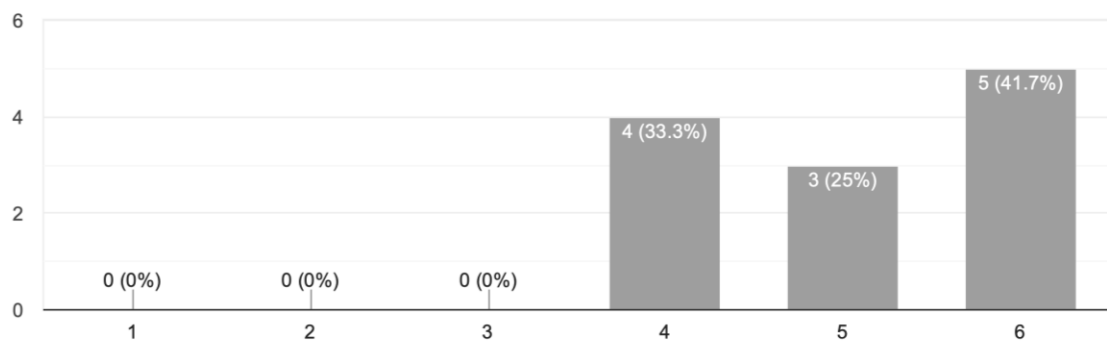


Figure50: Post-intervention sense of expectancy.

Question 15 sought to measure if the preacher felt encouraged about their preaching. After the class, the post-survey showed that all participants now agreed with the statement that they felt encouraged in their preaching, with four responses in each of

the “agree” categories. The average score went from 4 (more agree than disagree) to 5, with a multi-modal distribution of responses.

Pre-intervention: I feel encouraged in my preaching.

12 responses

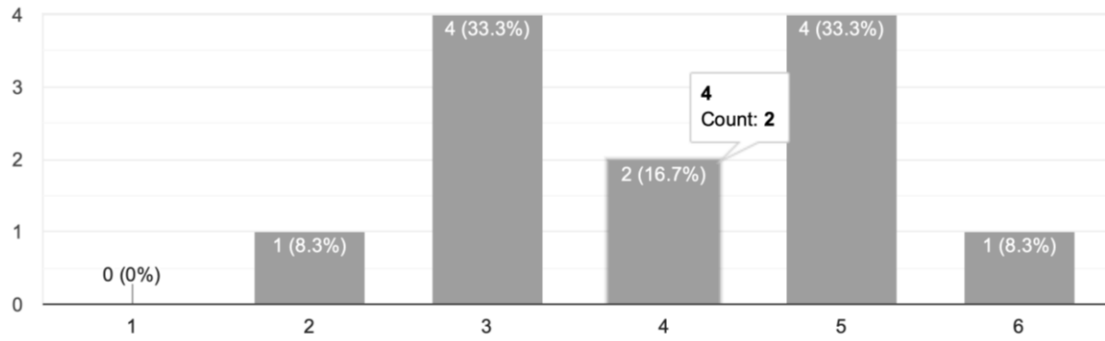


Figure 51: Pre-intervention sense of encouragement.

Post-intervention: I feel encouraged in my preaching.

12 responses

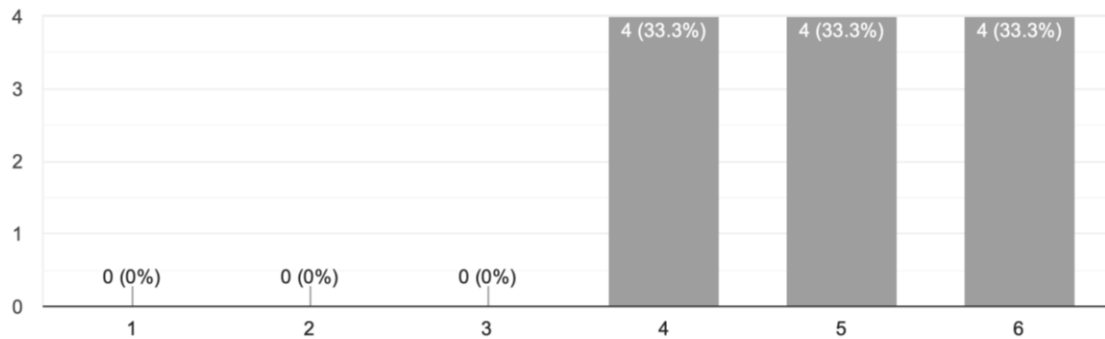


Figure 52: Post-intervention sense of encouragement.

Question 17 sought to measure attitudes (and levels of feedback) toward a sermon’s transformative power—i.e., whether their preaching makes a difference in people’s lives. In the post-survey, all respondents agreed at some level. The mean score rose slightly from a 4.33 to 4.83.

Pre-intervention: People say my preaching makes a difference in their lives.

12 responses

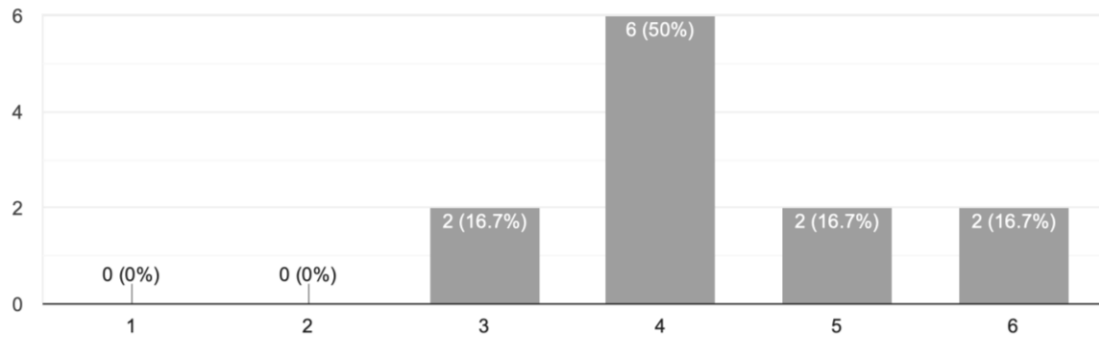


Figure 53: Pre-intervention sense of effectiveness.

Post-intervention: People say my preaching makes a difference in their lives.

12 responses

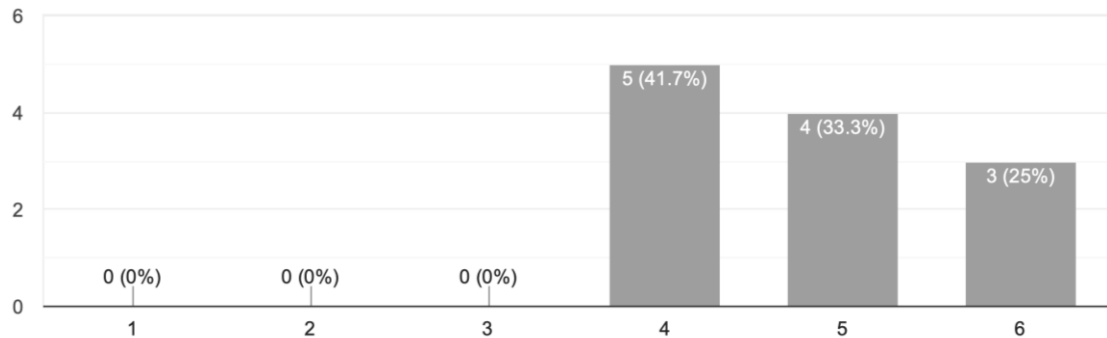


Figure 54: Post-intervention sense of effectiveness.

Question 18 sought to measure the participants' attitude toward their own ability to plan and organize sermons. In the post-survey, the mode moved from 4 (agreed more than disagreed) to 5 (agreed). The mean score rose from 4.58 to 5.25.

Pre-intervention: I feel confident in my ability to plan and organize sermons .
12 responses

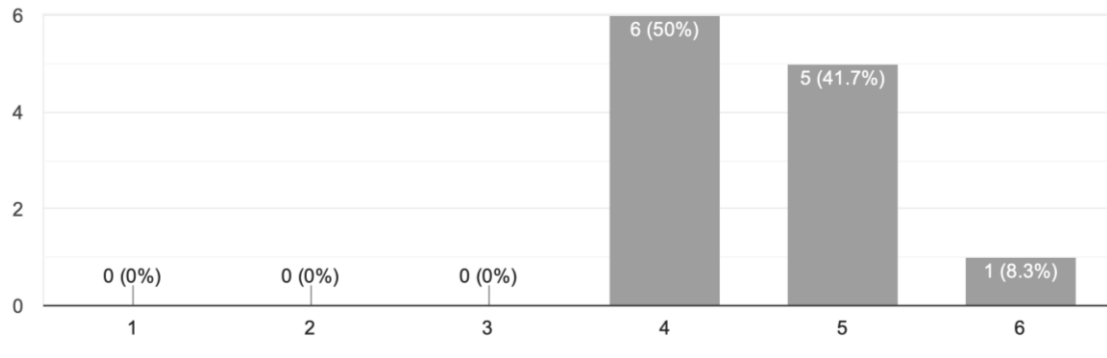


Figure 55: Pre-intervention confidence in preparation.

Post-intervention: I feel confident in my ability to plan and organize sermons .
12 responses

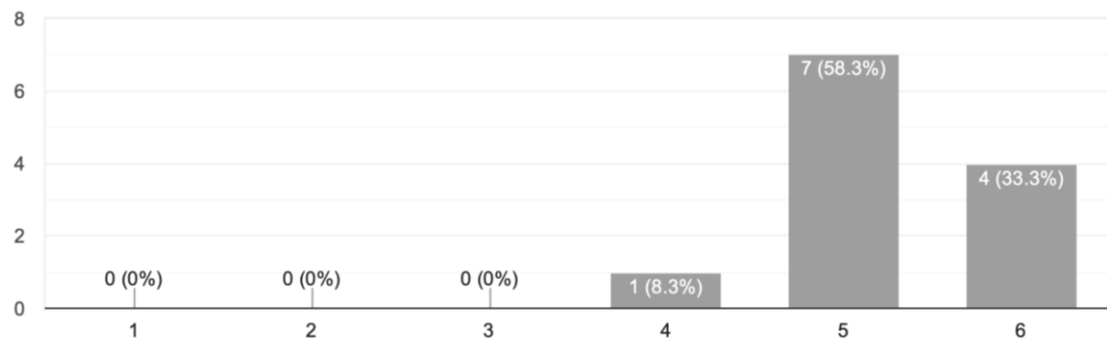


Figure 56: Post-intervention confidence in preparation.

Question 22 sought to determine the participants’ value of preaching compared to five other various roles of ministry: volunteer/staff development, administration, worship planning, pastoral counseling, and project management. Only eleven participants answered this question. No change occurred in the post-test responses; preaching was the only role that fell into one of the top three priorities for all of the participants, with the majority (seven respondents) placing preaching at second.

Behaviors

Questions 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 14, 16, 20, and 21 were designed to evaluate certain behaviors of the participants toward preaching.

Question 4 sought to measure the participants’ overall thoughtfulness around sermon preparation. Although certain specific behaviors are addressed in subsequent questions, this question inquired about the general sense around the participant’s conscientiousness in preparation. In the post-test, twelve responses were given. The median rose from 4.18 to 4.83, and the mode rose from 4 (more agree than disagree) to 5 (agree). One participant now strongly agreed they were conscientious about sermon preparation.

Pre-intervention: I am conscientious about my sermon preparation.
11 responses

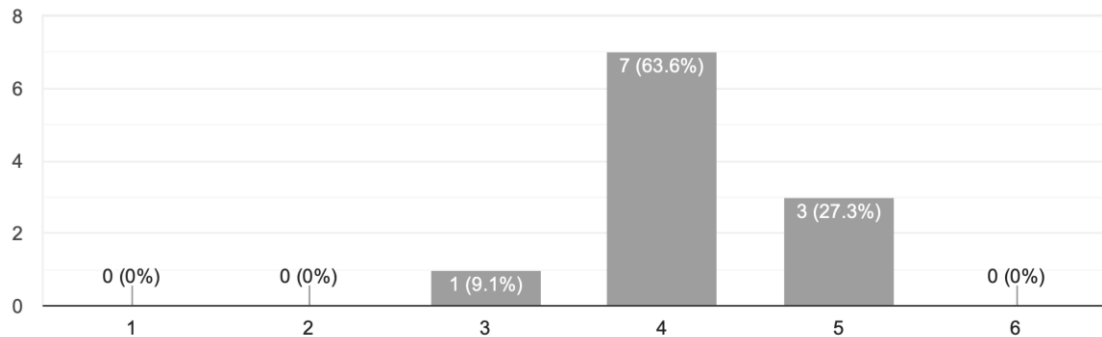


Figure 57: Pre-intervention conscientiousness of preparation.

Post-intervention: I am conscientious about my sermon preparation.

12 responses

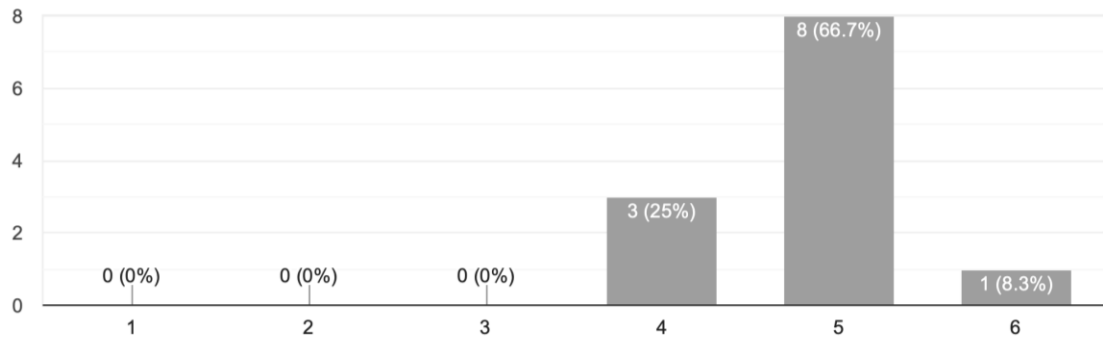


Figure 58: Post-intervention conscientiousness of preparation.

Question 6 was designed to measure whether the participants solicited feedback about their preaching. Although the question could be interpreted as setting up feedback loops, the question was originally designed to assess the behavior of the congregation as much as the preacher. In hindsight, the question was not a strong question. Nevertheless, in the post-test, the mode moved from a value of 4 (slightly more agree than disagree) to a value of five (agree). The mean rose from 3.91 to 4.41. In the post-test only two disagreed with the statement on any level, down from five in the pre-test. In the pre-test, two people “strongly agreed” with the statement, while in the post-test no one strongly agreed with the statement.

Pre-intervention: I get regular, positive feedback on my preaching.

12 responses

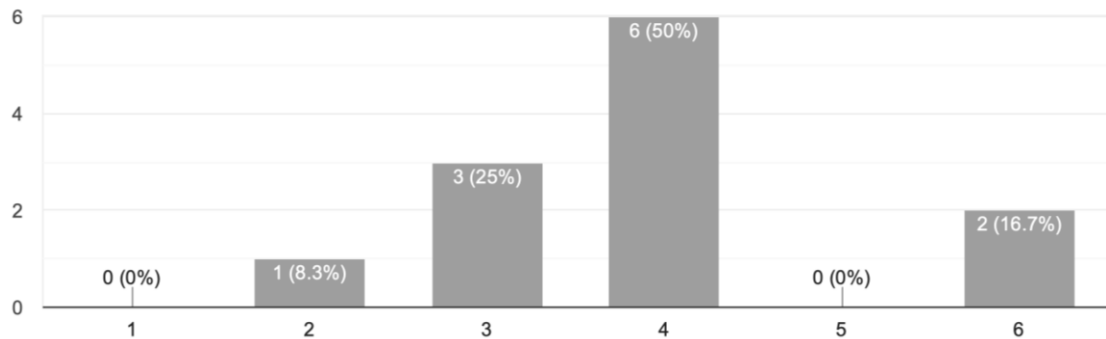


Figure 59: Pre-intervention regularity of positive feedback.

Post-intervention: I get regular, positive feedback on my preaching.

12 responses

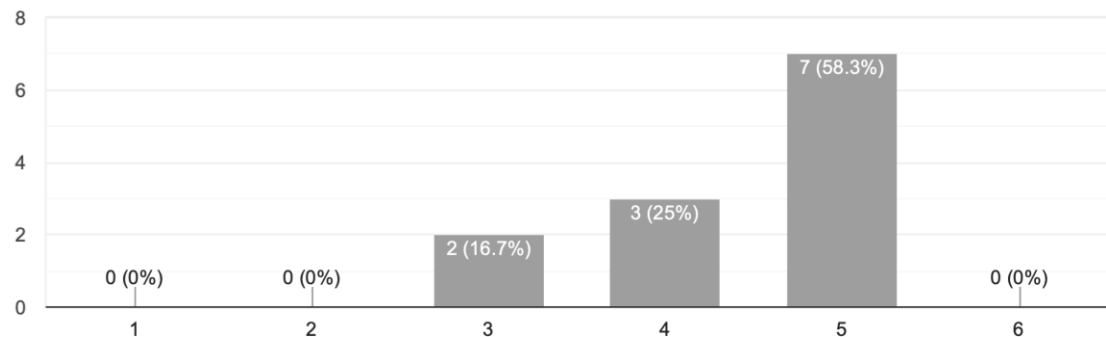


Figure 60: Post-intervention regularity of positive feedback.

Question 7 asked about the use of creativity in preaching. The bulk of the respondents agreed that they were appropriately creative, but in the majority of that group only slightly agreed. The pre-test mean score was 4.25 and the post-test mean score declined to 4.08.

Pre-intervention: I am appropriately creative in my preaching.

12 responses

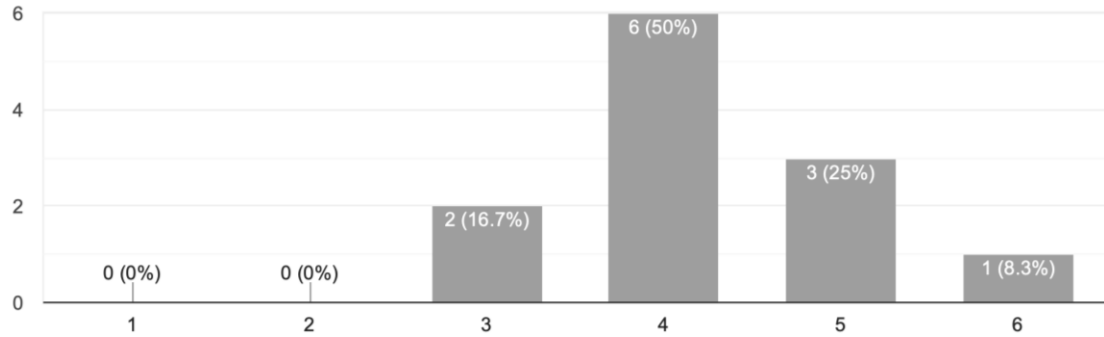


Figure 61: Pre-intervention creativity in preaching.

Post-intervention: I am appropriately creative in my preaching.

12 responses

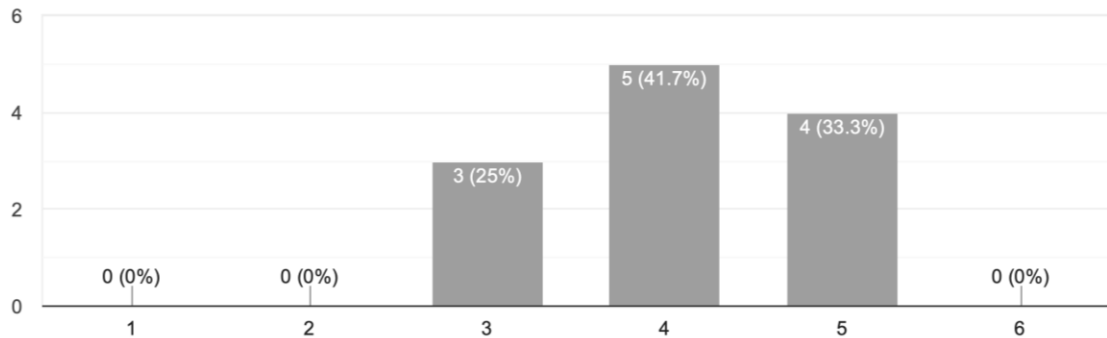


Figure 62: Post-intervention creativity in preaching.

Similar to Question 6, Question 8 was designed to measure whether the participants received feedback about their preaching from colleagues. This question sought to assess if the participants set up feedback loops or had created ways to receive support from other preachers. The question also could have been interpreted to assess the behavior of the colleagues as much as the behavior of the preacher. For that reason, the

question should have been recrafted. However, fewer received this kind of feedback from colleagues. The post-test revealed a shift in both the mean and mode; although the mean score only increased from 3.16 to 3.67, the mode shifted from a three (more disagree than agree) to a five (agree). No one in either the pre or post-test strongly agreed.

Pre-intervention: I get regular encouragement on my preaching from my cluster or colleagues.
12 responses

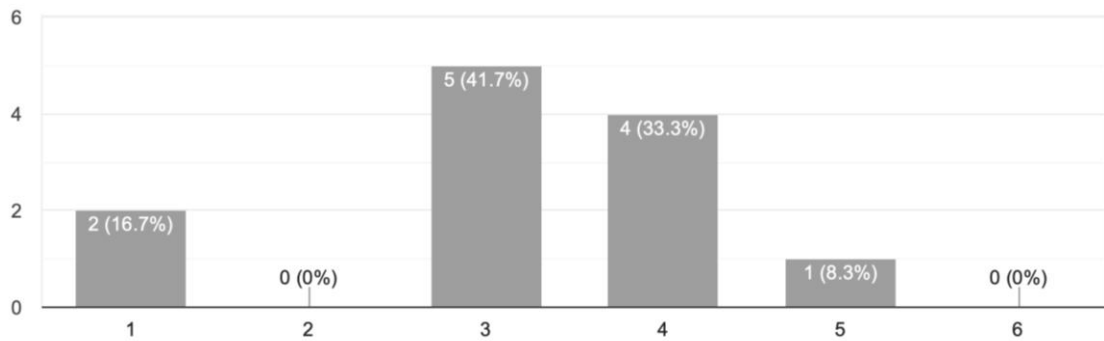


Figure 63: Pre-intervention regularity of encouragement from colleagues.

Post-intervention: I get regular encouragement on my preaching from my cluster or colleagues.
12 responses

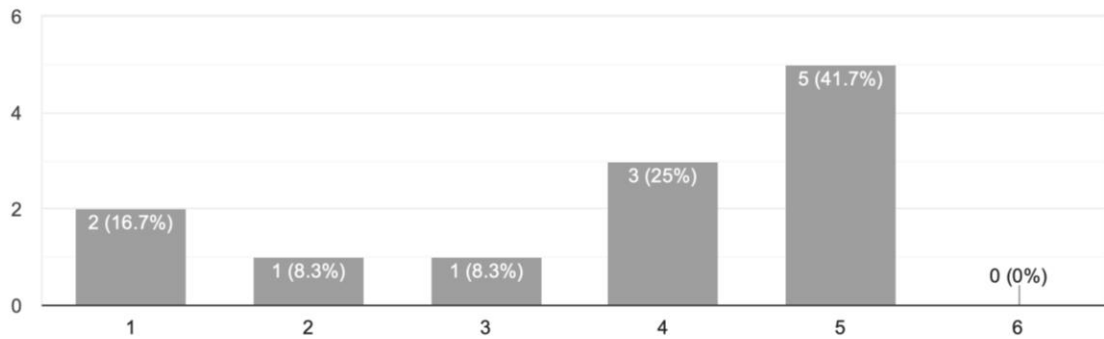


Figure 64: Post-intervention regularity of encouragement from colleagues.

Question 10 sought to measure feedback from the congregation on illustrations and the congregation’s ability to connect with them. In the post survey, the mean

increased from 4.08 to 4.58 although the mode stayed the same at 4. In the pre-test four people disagreed with the statement, but in the post-test no one disagreed with the statement.

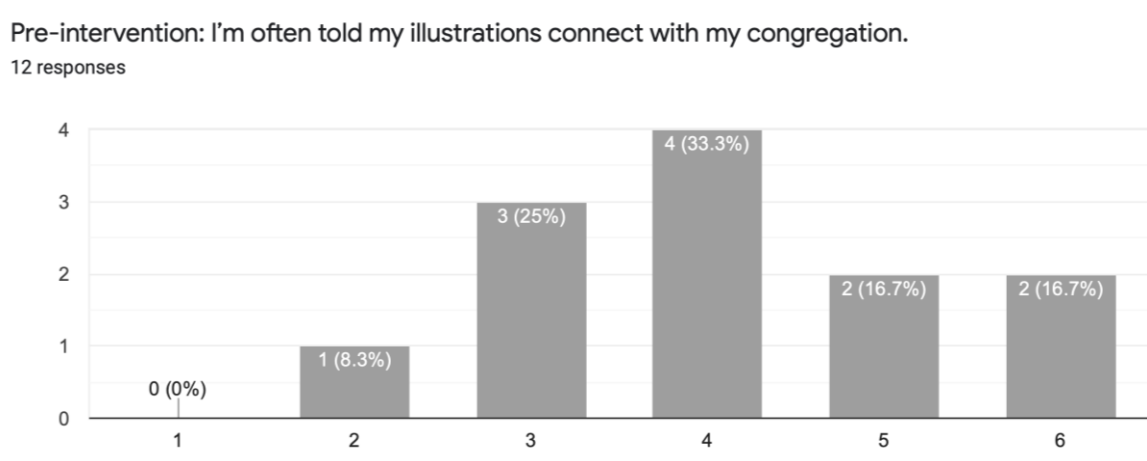


Figure 65: Pre-intervention congregational feedback of illustrations.

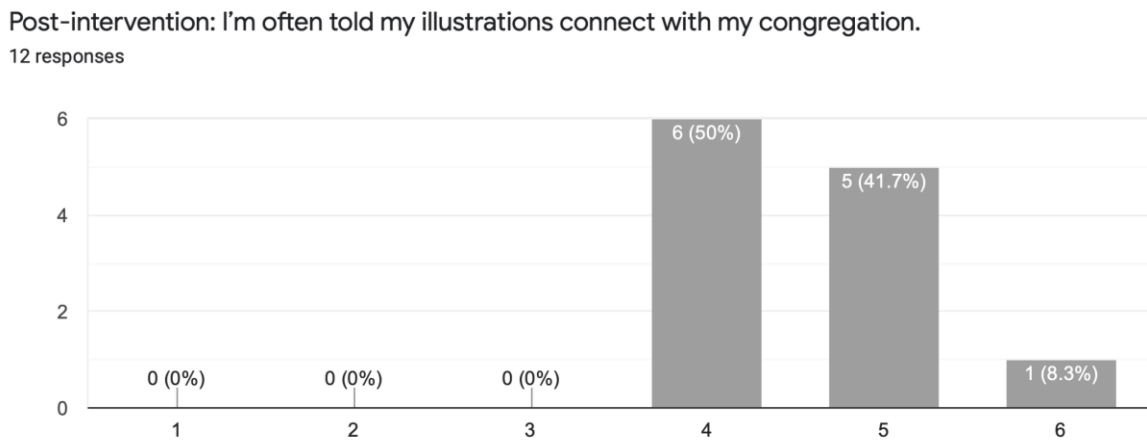


Figure 66: Post-intervention congregational feedback of illustrations.

Question 14 asked if the participants had a system in place to collect illustrations. This question also sought to inquire about the regularity or use of the system. After the

intervention, the post-test mean increased from 2.41 to 3.83 with the minimum score of two and maximum score of five. The mode went from two (disagree) to four (agree).

Pre-intervention: I have a system in place to collect sermon illustrations that I regularly use.

12 responses

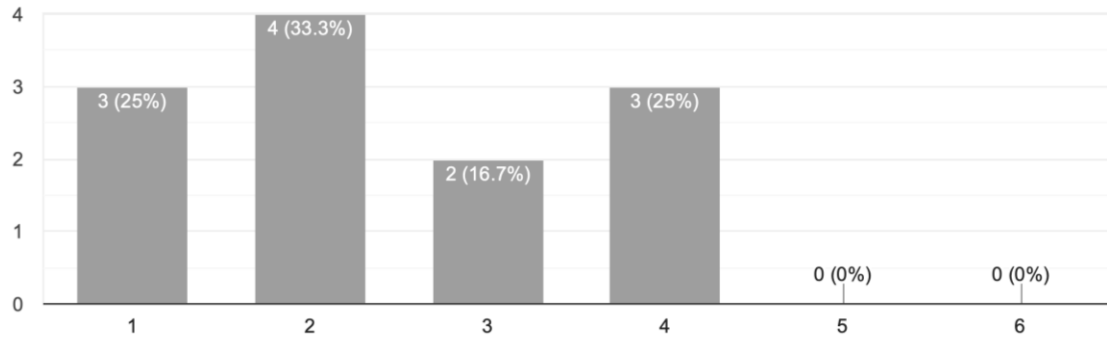


Figure 67: Pre-intervention system of collecting illustrations.

Post-intervention: I have a system in place to collect sermon illustrations that I regularly use.

12 responses

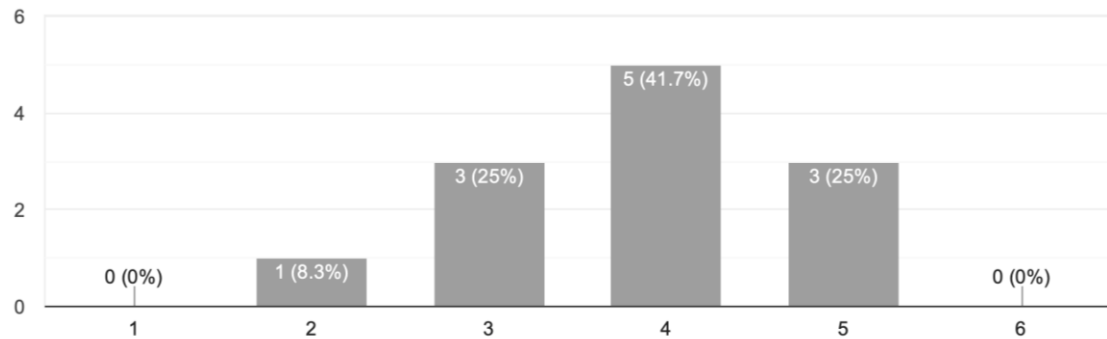


Figure 68: Post-intervention system of collecting illustrations.

Question 16 sought to measure the use of a “Big Idea” or “Focus Statement.” The post-intervention survey showed a mean increase from 4.66 to 5.08 and a mode increase to 6 (strongly agree).

Pre-intervention: I can summarize my last sermon in a single sentence.
12 responses

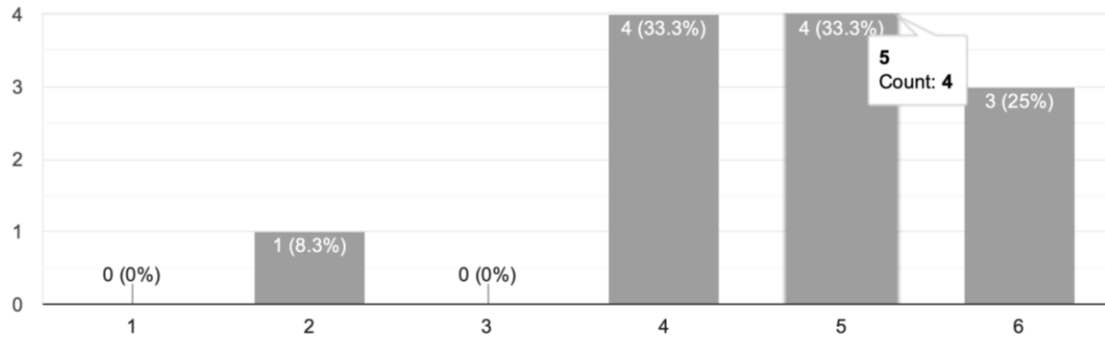


Figure 69: Pre-intervention sentence summary of sermon.

Post-intervention: I can summarize my last sermon in a single sentence.
12 responses

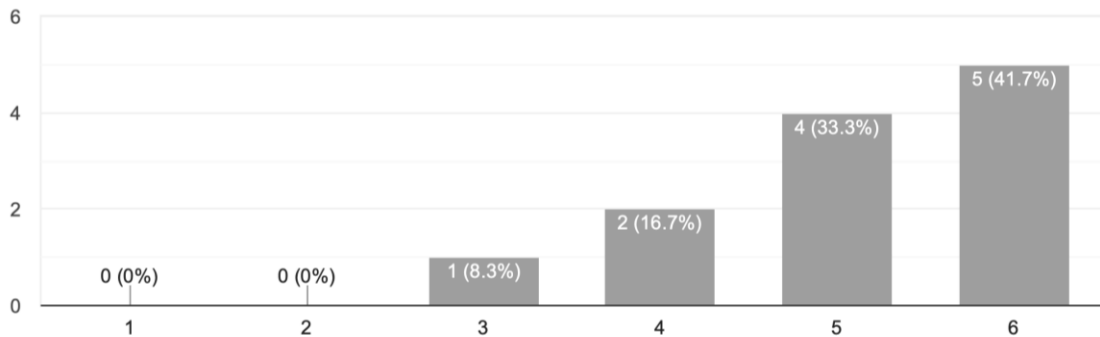


Figure 70: Post-intervention sentence summary of sermon.

Question 19 asked about the role of application in preaching or a “Function Statement.” In the post-intervention survey, the mode shifted from 4 (with seven respondents) to 5 (also with seven respondents.)

Pre-intervention: People would say the last sermon I preached had a clear call to action.
12 responses

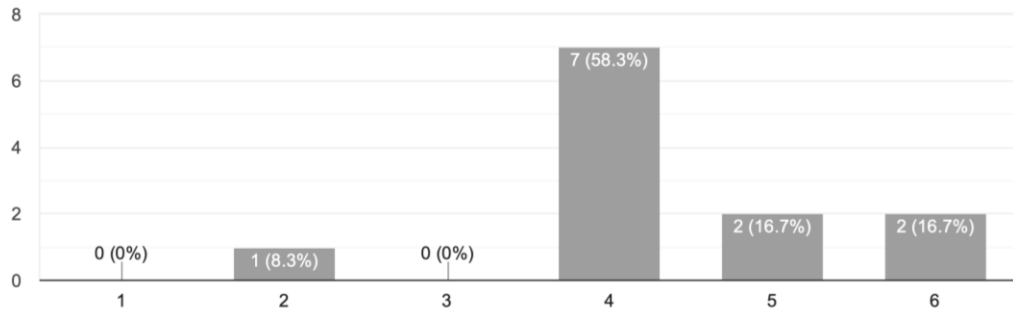


Figure 71: Pre-intervention call to action.

Post-intervention: People would say the last sermon I preached had a clear call to action.
12 responses

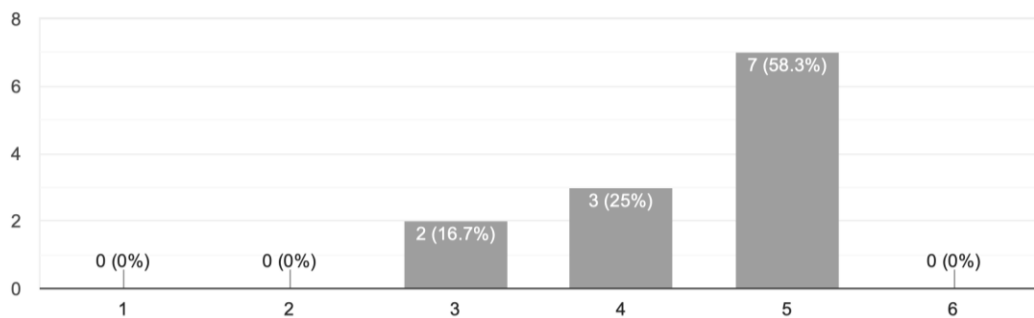


Figure 72: Post-intervention call to action.

Participants were asked how many hours they spend preparing a typical sermon. In the post-test, two participants moved from the lowest category of less than five hours a week to a higher category.

Pre-intervention: How many hours on average do you spend preparing a typical sermon?
 12 responses

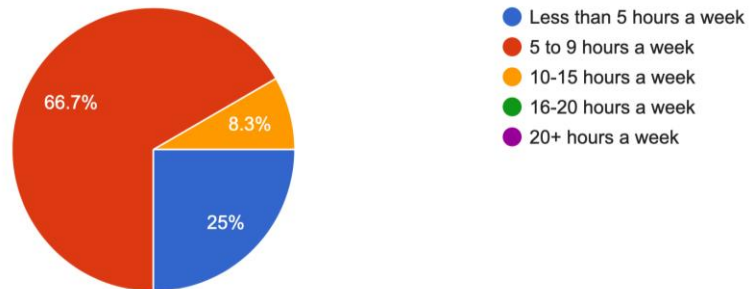


Figure 73: Pre-intervention hours spent preparing.

Post-intervention: How many hours on average do you spend preparing a typical sermon?
 12 responses

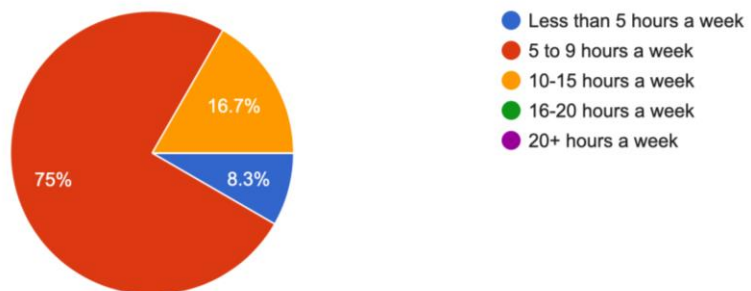


Figure 74: Post-intervention hours spent preparing.

Participants were then asked the length of their typical sermons. In the post-test, the mode was sixteen to twenty minutes with six participants in that category.

Pre-test: How long are your typical sermons?

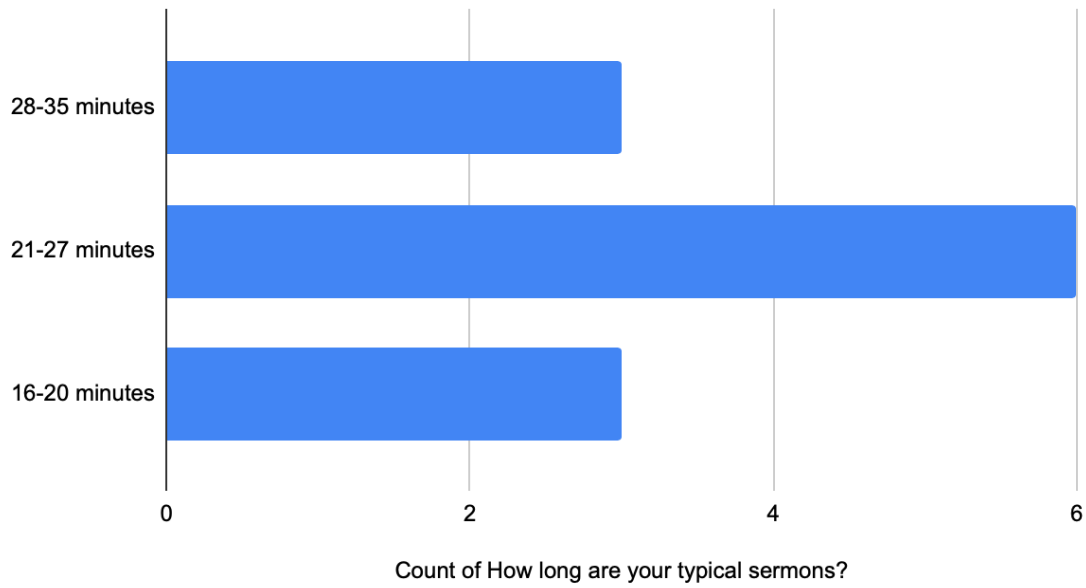


Figure 75: Pre-intervention sermon length.

Post-test: How long are your typical sermons?

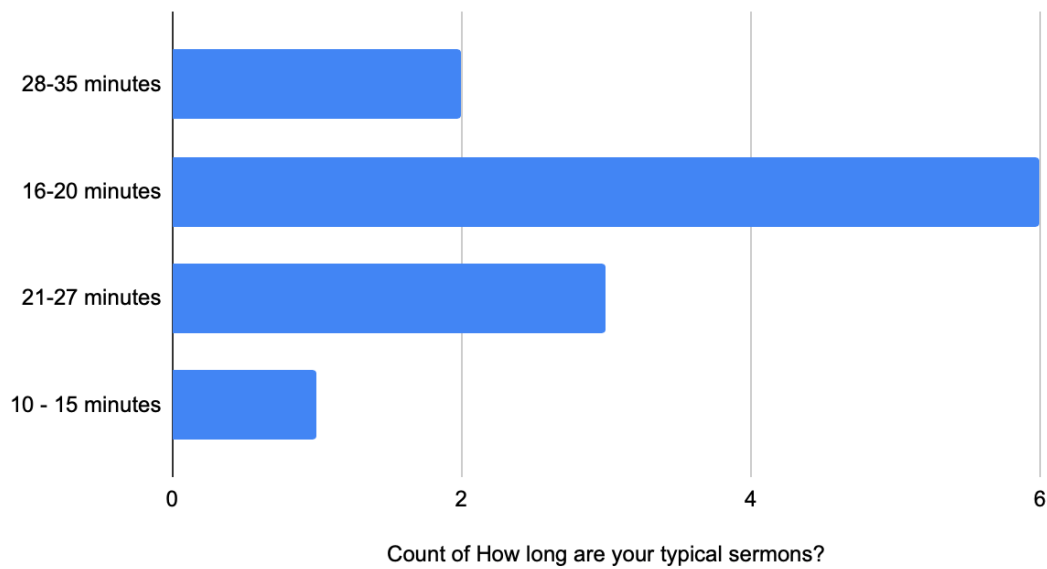


Figure 76: Post-intervention sermon length.

When aligning the respondents’ code names, hours spent per week on a typical sermon, and sermon length, no correlation was found between hours spent writing and sermon length.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

RQ3: In what ways did participating in a CoP-based homiletics course impact the participants’ knowledge, attitudes, and behavior?

Knowledge

The data shows evidence of a knowledge shift in two particular areas: the knowledge of various methodologies in how participants can approach the crafting of a sermon and how they as preachers intend to continue in their growth into the future. This plan for growth would include the creation of congregational and collegial networks for support, input, and feedback.

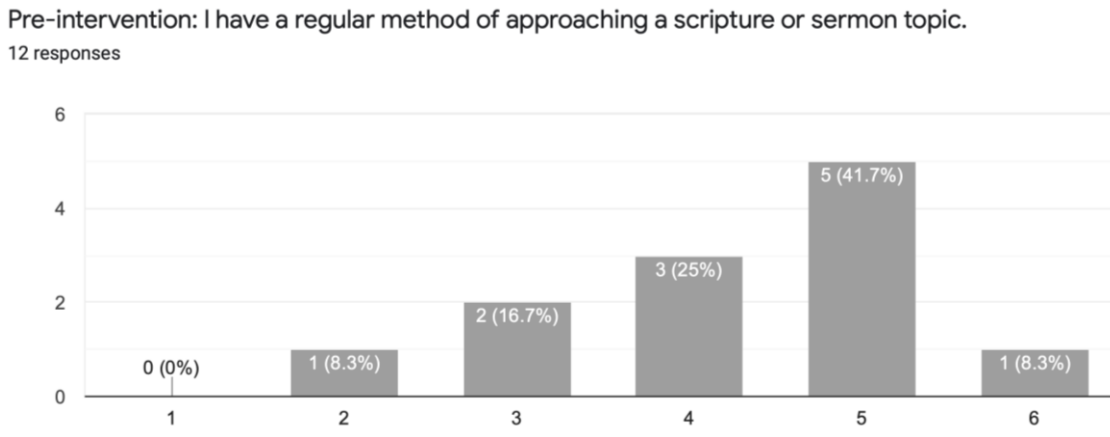


Figure 77: Pre-intervention method of approaching scripture.

Post-intervention: I have a regular method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic.

12 responses

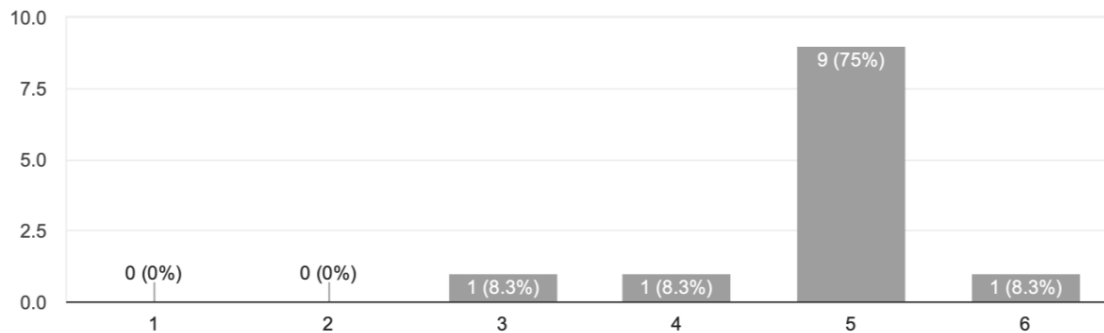


Figure 78: Post-intervention method of approaching scripture.

Methodology of Crafting a Sermon. As demonstrated above, participants now have increased knowledge of several methods of approaching a scripture or sermon topic. This increase includes knowing a structure for thinking through the content and various elements of a message as well as exegetical methods and outlines, how to create and reference sermon illustrations, practical tips and tricks, and a method for planning ahead and working on messages up to one year in advance.

Stdavids18 said in the focus group that as someone who is not yet a pastor but is beginning that process, what he “appreciated was the opportunity to kind of sit in a group of—of, uh, this—this sort of learning community and hear all of this advice and tips and tricks and, uh, you know, lessons on how to preach well and then kind of file them away for the future. Um, so I appreciated the opportunity to gather up that information early.” The researcher’s field notes indicated that several times people used the phrase “it was good to be reminded of that.” Although evidence exists from the focus group, journal entries, and post-test that participants learned new information, a good amount of the knowledge was “knowledge refreshed” (Lanternlan03). EurekaSprings14 wrote in a

journal reflection about how she had learned some of what the group talked about in seminary, but at the time the knowledge was not as relevant and, therefore, she did not always retain or act on it.

For many, the course gave them an “excuse to refine [their] process of preaching” (JE-Washington21.) Lincoln24 (FG) said, “I think for me, all of these areas that the rest of you have brought up about sermon preparation and, uh, what, what I put into it and, um, you know, I have a process, but it's not very, um, it's not very streamlined or, um, I couldn't explain my process to someone else well.” And Lincoln12 noted when “Paul shared his, uh, exegetical framework for preparing sermons, um, that I thought was very useful and handy and so, um, we'll—we'll use that to engage more.”

For several participants, the opportunity to intentionally think through the various elements of a sermon seemed helpful. During the focus group, Asbury03 referenced the session-one morning lecture, “Preaching as Stew: Ingredients of a Sermon” (discussing the components of a sermon and how they all work together): “I'd say like the one again that resonated with me was the stew analogy.” Lanternlane03 agreed, “I saw the value, uh, that Paul presented and really letting things stew his, um, uh, his idea, his metaphor that he shared.”

Others focused more on specific ingredients in the stew, such as the exegetical considerations like historical context, geography, and background. Lakecity26 said, “when Paul was talking about sermon prep and talking about the- the context, building the context of what you're preaching on into the sermon, um, historical context, uh, for one, but also geographical context. Um, and that was something I hadn't really thought about before.” Several said the concept of using geographical context cues as potential

sermon content was enlightening. “I think not neglecting historical things, even just as simple as a map. I mean, that was really a big takeaway for me. Um, when he unpacked using a map to show a geographical significance, uh, to something that happened in scripture. Um, and I used it like the following week and I was like, ‘Whoa’” (Asbury03). “I mean, I think about historical context all the time, um, but geographical context, not so much. And so the example he used was, uh, John, the Baptist baptizing upstream from the Dead Sea. And so baptizing people’s sins into the dead sea basically” (FG-Lincoln24). Asbury03 went on to explain,

You're looking at somebody who's not been formally trained at all, uh, in the ministry and I just happened to stick around long enough to keep doing it. So for me to learn that, that was huge. Um, for me, and I guess I, it was learning something new. Um, and I guess not doubting that there's more to unpack and not just reading things at the top of the surface and to dig deeper. (Asbury03)

Stdavids18 said that using historical-geographical context pieces is not something done very often but when done, people really appreciate it. “Um, I think I—I—since I know a lot of that stuff intuitively from just gathering that information over the years that I sort of assume everybody does, um, but they really don’t” (Stdavids18). Livingvine15 not only reported he wanted to use more historic context, geography, and background but he thinks he would “start tracking the—the use of those geographical historical tools. Um, I would have to write down what I've done ‘cause I won't remember. Uh, and—and I—and I could tend to like overuse it too, you know, like they don't need a, an exhaustive history every Sunday.” Lanternlane03 agreed that the use of geographical and historic context was helpful but could be overused. He valued the ideas around “prepping and planning,

uh, researching more and then not sharing everything you dig up. I thought that was a really good nugget. Um, it's not, you don't have to share everything that you learned prepping for your sermon.”

In the third session of the course, the creation and use of a filing system for illustrations was talked about. As shown above, the pre-test showed clear evidence that participants did not have a regular system for collecting sermon illustrations. The post-survey and focus group showed clear positive movement in participants' knowledge of how to construct and use such a system. Livingvine15 said, "...just like in the buckets that—that Paul has, uh, taught us to use.... and like Dan shared a chart that he uses to, to lay out his sermons and the scriptures and everything,” he wants to create something similar, adding, “maybe I'd add a—add a column of whether I'm using some of those, uh, those tools, um, so I can remember what—what I've used and what I haven't used. (FG - Livingvine15). Trinity06 said that he hadn't used a system before. He just assumed, “Oh, I'll remember that forever, and I don't because I'm a knucklehead.” He noted that the idea of the sermon bucket, or as he named the idea in the focus group, “the barrel full of illustrations I think, is going to be really helpful. But, um, yeah, I think being more intentional about writing down, um, the, the good stories and illustrations so that they can be, uh, brought back when you need them” (Trinity06).

The last grouping of knowledge that emerged was around practical tips and tricks learned from not only the presenter but also other participants, which is a critical element in a CoP. This knowledge includes everything from Lincoln12 appreciating the “practical feedback of camera angles” to Licklocal26 learning about social media analytics. “Using Facebook, which I do for my messages, I'm able to watch how many people were sharing

it, and—and like you said, how long they’re staying with it.” Licklocal26 also learned multimedia tips from the group during one session. She shared how she was able to get feedback when visiting the food pantry and how people saw her sermon because others had shared her sermon on social media. They would “come up to me and talk to me about it.... using the multimedia, I guess you could say, has been very beneficial to help me to understand, um, about how we are connecting to people, even outside the church doors” (ibid).

Lakecity26 recalled the need for balance and realistically assessing how many good sermons one can realistically preach each year. “When we were talking about that [preaching Rule of Life].... I think that whole balance, and he did get into some of that.....what's most important [is] that we are very balanced, and to know how many sermons we have in us a year.” Lanternlane03 later made a similar observation. “I preach about every week. So, you know, not every one of those is a gold-star winner and so I think that's probably Paul's, uh, good advice, uh, that I'll probably take away, is I probably don't have 52 good sermons in me. And so how many? Thirty-eight, 39?”

Lakecity26 received a suggestion from the group that in order to get ahead, he could use the material developed for their Wednesday night group. He realized he could “go in and tweak them. So that winds up giving me some things that are already produced for a Wednesday night thing, which is just for our online church... and do some of that same type of work for the Sunday sermon.”

Plans for continued Growth as a Communicator. The second theme that emerged from the data around knowledge was the participants’ lack of a plan to become a

better communicator, including the creation of congregational and collegial networks for support, input, and feedback.

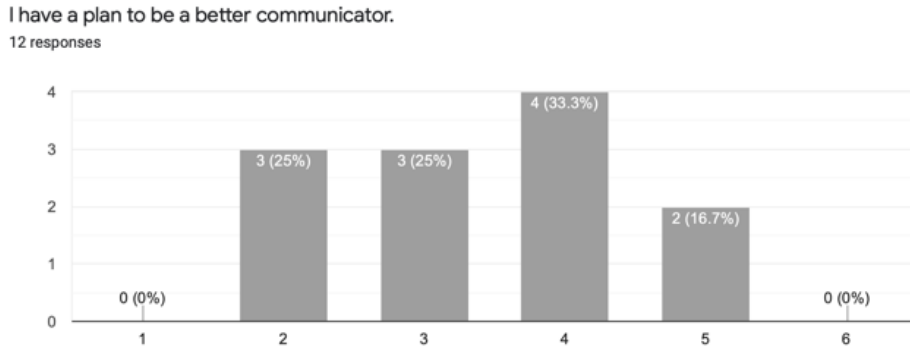


Figure 79: Pre-intervention plan for growth.

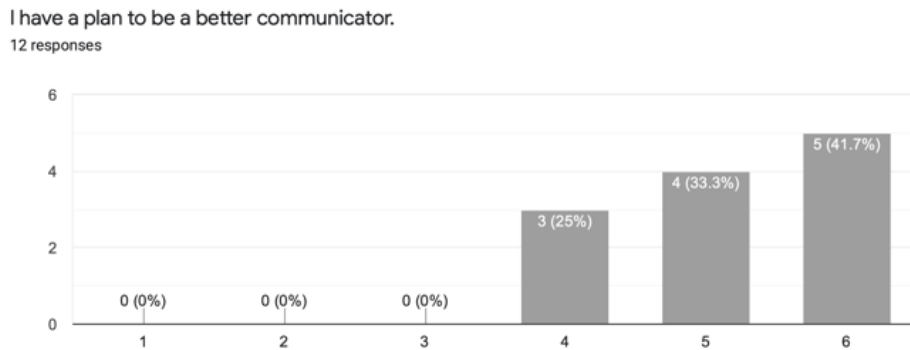


Figure 80: Post-intervention plan for growth.

As demonstrated in Figure 78 and Figure 79, after the course, participants’ knowledge of ways to create a plan for being a better communicator increased. Although this increase certainly included methodological aspects that have already been covered, what largely emerged was a need for congregational feedback and support as well as collegial feedback and support. Asbury03 revealed in the focus group that one of the things he learned from the group was the value of community in sermon preparation.

Um, it was, I think week one or two of this class and [my senior pastor] was off the next two weeks of preaching. And we had already, uh, divvied out to our, our children's director and our worship director and both of them preached the next two weeks. And so I was able to share all these things that I was learning here with them, uh, to cultivate this, uh, community, even in our church and in our staff to, uh, you know, as iron sharpens iron kind of deal. And we were like, "Oh, well, that's cool. And did you think about this?" (Asbury03)

Livingvine15 said, "I appreciated the, um, uh, constructive criticism of sermons and, uh, my intention then is to invite more of that, um, from, uh, people, other than hearing like 'great sermon pastor.'" Lanternlane03 agreed. "Yeah. I echo that as well from Livingvine15. The feedback was vital." Asbury 03 gave an example: "I started last night, um, with just watching my own sermon uh, with my wife, because we had bad technical difficulties on Sunday morning. So we watched it together last night and I just was like, wow, 'I did not take a breath during that whole time!' [laughter]."

Later in the focus group, when directly asked by the facilitator what was learned, the concept of feedback reemerged. "I'll just reiterate what you mentioned earlier, Livingvine15 and I, about, um, having people give us feedback...just asking for that and looking at it more carefully and not just saying, 'Oh, I'm done,' on Sunday. [chuckles] On to what's next. But saying, 'Oh, what can I do better for next time? What can I learn and [how can I] grow from here?'" (Stdavids18). Licklocal26 added that "realizing that a worship committee team can help you to make your sermon, is something that was honed in [sic] better. That together we can work on developing a message that we can give to the congregation and get feedback, um, from within the congregation itself."

Another consistent theme emerged around the desire for increased collegial support and encouragement, even if that feedback challenged them. Recalling one of the class discussions about time and intentionality in sermon preparation, Lanternlan03 joked, “Well, it made me feel like crap for being lazy. [Laughter] It's like if you don't do any prep, you're just a lazy preacher.”

The data seemed to show that even the knowledge of this kind of support existing seemed new information to some. “I think having colleagues (knowing they exist), um, who are trusted, um, who I can share stuff with, um, in the future is a goal and—and hopefully even in our Facebook page here, knowing it exists” (Asbury 03). Licklocal26 shared that one of the things she appreciated about the group was that “it gave us a connection to others, uh, and, and it allowed us to have avenues of, um, seeing what works, what doesn't work for others and being able—able to apply it to what we're doing, individually.” Livingvine15 noted that he appreciated the constructive criticism of sermons from the group and his intention is to invite more of that. He continued, “I want to hear like, ‘Hey, you know, if you would slow down, we could get a lot more out of that.’ I mean, that hit me like a ton of bricks, so, but I've taken it to heart already and—a—but inviting others to be more critical of it so I can get better rather than just being in my own, uh, wind tunnel of like ‘Yeah, I'm doing fine,’ you know? Um, so that's what I intend to do.”

Attitudes

The data show evidence of a shift in participants' attitudes in several areas, including increasingly valuing the investment of time and energy into their preaching. As shown in chapter two, the literature is clear that a group's commitment to the domain is

invaluable to a CoP's effectiveness and cohesion. To assess this commitment among participants, the survey asked them to react to the statement, "Being a good preacher is important to me." In the pre-test, all participants agreed or strongly agreed. As shown already, in both the pre-test and the post-test, this score was high.

Lakecity26 said that because of his participation in this group, he had a change in attitude about sermon preparation and was now more likely to work ahead in terms of planning and writing. "For me, [the attitude change] was the scheduling of sermons and working in advance...right now I use the Lectionary, but I don't do a lot of work in advance." He notes that since the CoP, his attitude toward advance preparation has changed: "So I'm trying to, um, to try to get, um, in advance some things out there and looking at things more critically." Burt06 agrees, saying that working ahead has reduced her stress levels. "I've um, gotten myself to [the point of working ahead]. I'll hope that it stays that way as well and feeling less stress on my life. It's, um, it's been a powerful gift, so I'm hoping I can continue that, especially when we roll into Lent and things get crazy again." Lincoln12 said, "What I'm going to take away is I'm going to look ahead in the Lectionary and be able to put some structure together a little further out than I'm currently doing." Lanternlane03 said that he "used to just kinda drag my feet around things and I—I saw the value, uh, that Paul presented and really letting things stew."

Desiring Feedback and Constructive Criticism. The second large attitudinal shift was a change in appreciating the need for, and advantages of, systems of community support and feedback, both through the participants' congregations as well as through other colleagues. This theme was a consistent theme through the pre/post tests, the focus group, the researcher's field notes, the journal entries, and the post-class interactions the

participants had with each other. In the second journal prompt, participants were asked, “What comes to mind when you think about the word ‘community’?” Many talked about like-mindedness and unity (Bert06, Asbury03, StDavids18, Livingvine15, Licklocal26, Washington 31, Lincoln12), people who desire to grow (Bert06, StDavids18, Washington 31), accountability and transparency (Bert06, Asbury03, Livingvine15, Licklocal26, Fulbright14, Washington 31, Lincoln12), serving one another (Bert06, Asbury03, StDavids18), valuing one another (Fulbright14), and that community is messy and imperfect (Fulbright14, Lincoln12).

As stated previously, only two of the group asserted that they have that kind of community in their lives. Asbury03 wrote, “I do have this community...I lean on and into it everyday. If it were not for my community, I would be sunk. I am my best, when my community is vibrant and intertwined with as much as my life as possible” (Asbury03).

Livingvine15 said that previously, after a sermon a “lot of people would just say, ‘Oh, it was fine.’ You know, they're not really being critical. Um, but I think if I ask the questions more often [seeking feedback], they might be prepared to answer them.” This was a shift in attitude from his first journal entry before the class, in which he confessed to wrestling with fearing feedback, particularly feedback that he deemed critical and that he tended to isolate himself from it. (Livingvine15, JE1) After the course, he expressed an intention to invite “others to be more critical of [his sermon in controlled ways] so [he] can get better, rather than just being in [his] own, uh, wind tunnel of like ‘Yeah, I'm doing fine,’ you know?” (Livingvine15, FG). Licklocal26 added that “realizing that a worship committee team can help you to make your sermon, is something that was honed

[sic] in better” and was an attitude shift for her. “That together we can work on developing a message that we can give to the congregation and get feedback, um, from within the congregation itself” helped her to see feedback from her congregation differently. Asbury03 asked his team to assist in sermon planning for the first time and was able to share some of what he learned through the group. “And so we were putting it into practice, even right there in our, in our setting. And I thought, you know, we really should do more writing and dreaming and praying and planning of our sermons like this.”

Another shift between pre- and post-tests appeared in valuing feedback from colleagues. Lincoln24 confessed that he is “terrified to receive feedback from peers. Um, Paul talked about people who are overconfident of their abilities or think that they're better than they are. I am not one of those, uh, I—I'm more self-deprecating and doubting of myself.” He continued, saying that even after being with the CoP group for over twenty hours and building friendships and relationships, “the invitation to share a sermon with this group...terrified me and I managed to avoid doing it until basically the last half of the last session, um, for that very reason” (ibid). Interestingly, the researcher's field notes from the final session recorded that he was the only one who did not submit a sermon, and the group initially interpreted that as a lack of commitment from Lincoln24. In the focus group, he reported he was cognitively aware that preaching to the group was a good opportunity and practice. “Um, however, uh, emotionally I'm thinking, ‘No.’ So I—that hopefully will be something that I—I challenge myself to do” (ibid). Asbury03 and Burt06 both echoed that “the feedback was vital.” Stdavids18 said “having people give us feedback...just asking for that and looking at it more carefully and not just saying, ‘Oh, I'm done,’ on Sunday [chuckles], ‘on to what's next,’ but saying, ‘Oh, what

can I do better for next time? What can I learn and grow from here?” was a shift in attitude for him. Lincoln12 appreciated even some of the simple yet practical feedback around camera angles. Licklocal26 said that the group “gave us a connection to others.”

To foster a communication and feedback loop among the participants, a Facebook group was set up so they could share questions, answers, and reflections with each other. Months later, that group is still operational and used weekly. During the focus group Asbury03 shared that he “almost posted [his] sermon from yesterday in our kind of closed group, um, and just to hear what you all thought.” In the weeks following the end of the class, several members posted sermons asking for feedback. Lincoln12 wrote, “Hi friends--I really did find the feedback helpful....would y'all be interested in uploading one sermon a month for feedback? Here's mine from yesterday--all told after listening to it I would do things differently but would love your input on it. If you're willing--thanks. I'd love to hear/watch yours and then offer text feedback or have a [Z]oom call.”

Person/Gifting/Rule/Self Understanding. The final area of attitude shift involved participants’ understanding of their personhood and gifting. The CoP course included a session about developing a Rule of Life. This session, along with several conversations along the way, encouraged looking at preaching holistically as a part of a bigger picture. Participants reflected on their callings and the spiritual gift of preaching, as well as the capacity required to preach every week and still remain fresh. Feedback from participants suggests these conversations had an effect on the attitudes of the participants, as well as their understanding of stewarding the spiritual gift of preaching that has been entrusted to them.

Lincoln24 shared that one of the things that was impactful for him “and I haven't—I haven't made a change yet, but I have plans to, uh, is to revisit—I actually still have up and active on my desktop, [was] the preaching rule of life example [we received]. I haven't thought about that for probably ten years.” He reported that thinking about preaching holistically, as something affecting all areas personal and professional, and then setting personal goals around those areas, “was really helpful...for me where I am right now, because I never used to be a kind of checklist, make—you know, make a list of things that needed to be done and I've become more of that and I thought, ‘Why don't I extend this? And it—it becomes sort of a guard rails for me as I'm thinking about it” (ibid).

Lincoln24 also reflected on developing a Rule of Life in his Journal Entry #3:

The section on the Rule of Life was important for me to hear again. While in seminary, we learned about a Rule of Life and I'm positive had to put something on paper that was our own personal Rule of Life. But I've done nothing with it since then. I intend on doing a personal 2–3 day retreat in the next 3–4 months to organize my thoughts around an updated Rule of Life. The thing I found myself most hesitant to engage with is getting feedback on my sermon from peers. Unlike the folks you talked about who tend to grade themselves higher on performance and ability than is actually the case, I tend to do the opposite. I have an inferiority complex when it comes to my own preaching. This is why I had interest in taking this course and hopefully learning how to regularly ask for feedback outside of my congregation. (JP3 Lincoln24)

Evidence shows that reflecting on this rule was noted in several places as being important to participants.

The group was also challenged to reflect on their self-understanding, personhood, and gifting. When the focus-group moderator asked the group how their attitudes had changed as a result of the class, Lanternlane03 said,

Well, it made me feel like crap for being lazy, [laughter].... I can fake a sermon really, really well. Um, and most of my people don't know the difference between me spending a lot of time and me, airmailing it. Um, so, uh, yeah, so I've taken my craft a little more seriously...but it kind of hit home that, yeah, don't be lazy about it. You know, if you're going to do it, do it spend a little more than two hours on a Sunday morning, or something (Lanternlane03).

Lincoln12 agreed. "When you feel like your, one of your gifts is preaching and so you can phone it in or airmail it, as [Lanternlane03] says, um, and get by and then getting margin for all the other things that are demanded of you in a pastor's life. And to then hear, 'You're neglecting your gift, uh, by airmailing it.' Uh, and it, I mean, it's just conviction."

Participants also showed integration of the group's conversation into their ministry idealities and self-understanding in their roles as pastors. Asbury03, an associate pastor who largely works with youth, reported to the focus group, "I think as I am preaching more and more often in our context, and [my senior pastor] and I are sharing a pulpit a lot more. Um, you know, for a long time, I was *just* a youth guy at our church." He reflected that having additional preaching responsibilities and considering how he

could use those opportunities might allow him to be more of a change agent in his congregation.

You know, it's this really crazy thing, but, um, there's good people who Jesus loves on both sides of [the contemporary verses traditional worship] argument, and I think I have a role, uh, kind of in the middle that I can help bridge that. So long story short, if I—if I'm more effective in my preaching and—and receiving feedback, uh, to grow, to minister to both end of those crowds, um, I would think we would see a more united body that helps. (ibid)

The data revealed several of the participants equated working ahead with working in series as opposed to using the lectionary. Lanternlan03 said, “I have always been an anti-series person. I'm a huge Lectionary fan. It was created for a reason. I'm kind of more Orthodox in that way, I guess. Um, but I will say that after taking this class, I'm much more open to doing a series.” He then joked, “I won't do one any time soon. I just want to clarify that it didn't, it wasn't, it wasn't that miracle-working, um, but I'm much more open to it!”

Behavior

Insufficient time has elapsed to effectively observe a great deal of behavioral change within the group, although some change is apparent with participants sharing plans to address other specific behavioral changes in the future. Participants in the CoP-based homiletics course indicated that the course impacted their behavior in several areas, particularly around methods of sermon preparation and seeking feedback from their congregation and colleagues.

Based on their journal entries and focus-group feedback, participants are changing the ways they write and organize their sermons. Several participants reported they have already started to work ahead in their sermon preparation. Lanterlane03 shared that before taking this class, his practice was to get up Sunday morning, read the lectionary text, and then “wing it.” In the focus-group debriefing he shared that now, “instead of faking it, I actually spent some time on a Friday or Saturday, which is better.” When asked what he will take away from the class, Lakecity26 said, “For me, it was the scheduling of sermons and working in advance. Because right now I use the Lectionary, but I don't do a lot of work in advance.” Since the class, he reported that he has begun working a month ahead with a plan of writing even further in advance in the following weeks (Lakecity26FG). Burt06 also reported shifting her behavior. “I've um, gotten myself to [the point of working ahead]. I hope that it stays that way as well and feeling less stress on my life. It's, um, it's been a powerful gift, so I'm hoping I can continue that, especially when we roll into Lent and things get crazy again.” Lincoln12 similarly reported looking ahead in the Lectionary and beginning to structure messages further in advance. Asbury03 also changed the way he approaches sermons, adding other people on his staff to the process: “Um, it was, I think week one or two of this class and...I was able to share all these things that I was learning here with them, uh, to cultivate this, uh, community, even in our church and in our staff to uh, you know, as iron sharpens iron kind of deal....and so we were putting it into practice, even right there in our on our setting.”

Data also indicated a shift in behavior around the development of an idea/illustration file to facilitate accessing and reviewing seed ideas for future messages.

After the course, EurekaSprings14 wrote in the Facebook group, “I was deeply inspired by your massively well-organized libraries and have already started utilizing some of the tools on Dropbox to get myself going.” Livingvine15 shared in the focus group that he had already thought of ways to use and even adapt one of the methods of illustration filing.

Just like in the buckets that—that Paul has, uh, taught us to use [I would like] to somehow...keep a record of like Dan shared a chart that he uses to—to lay out his sermons and the scriptures and everything. And I have something similar, maybe I'd add a column of whether I'm using some of those, uh, those tools, um, so I can remember what—what I've used and what I haven't used. (Livingvine15)

The second major area of change was the introduction of systems of feedback, particularly around sermon creation and evaluation and community support. Not enough time has passed to demonstrate lasting behavioral change, but data do indicate that the participants are moving toward changes in behavior. Nine participants have already asked if the group could continue after this doctoral work is finished. Eight of the twelve participants regularly post, interact with, or read the Facebook group created for the course, and four have posted sermons for critique. Asbury03 wrote, “Thanks....for the feedback. I have been chewing on it all night and am looking for ways to incorporate it into my life and ministry.” EurekaSprings14 wrote, “Thank you to many of you for the thoughtful critique and ability to see with new eyes some things about how to do our work on video that just hadn't dawned on me.”

In addition, group members continue to exchange artifacts and ideas after the end of the class. EurekaSprings14 asked Lincoln12 if he would “be willing to share a

template of your brilliant color-coded preaching Excel file.” Lincoln12, Licklocal26, Stdavids18, and Trinity06 have sought out and shared sermon series ideas through the Facebook group and text messages. Lincoln12 writes, “I just want to say how grateful I am for this group and this opportunity. Thanks for being a community, yall! I think I've texted more after this group with a couple of you than I have than the entire time we've not lived in the same town combined! Thanks.”

Summary of Major Findings

Consolidation of the data from each of the three research questions led to three major findings.

1. Despite valuing the role and purpose of preaching, pastors often do not have a system in place that allows for intentional preparation over time.
2. Sharing ideas and processes in a community of peers around preaching (content, illustrations, resources, etc.) enlivens and enhances the preachers' experience of sermon preparation and preaching alike.
3. Revisiting vocational calling as a preacher, gifting, and Rule of Life commitments rekindles passion and clarifies vision for ministry.

CHAPTER 5: LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

For many pastors effective preaching is a defining part of their calling and identity. Preaching is also core to what many congregations expect from good pastoral leadership. Despite the critical nature of preaching to both pastoral ministry and pastoral identity, limited training and support leave preachers feeling ill-equipped and unsupported for the ongoing work of proclamation. Continuing education often focus primarily on content with few opportunities for practice, group interaction, and curation of ideas. In addition, the regular task of preaching is a vulnerable act that leads many to feel isolated, drained, and defensive about criticism. Using the concepts of Communities of Practice, this study evaluated changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior resulting from a series of one-day seminars, incorporating principles of CoPs, that were offered to a group of pastors in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church.

This chapter identifies three findings from this research project and explains how they correspond to personal observations, the literature review, and the biblical and theological framework. Limitations of the study, unexpected observations and takeaways, and recommendations for further study are then explored.

Major Findings

Major Finding #1—Need for intentional systems allowing for preparation over time

I began this doctoral program for the purpose of creating this research project. Prior to the study, I had countless conversations with colleagues who felt called to pastoral ministry and believed they had the spiritual gift of preaching but were either discouraged by or weary from the regular task of preaching. Sundays came with amazing

regularity, and the stress of writing a sermon each week was wearing. I hypothesized that the use of a system allowing for content creation over time would add value to their preaching ministry. Before this CoP group was formally offered as a part of my research, I tested parts of the CoP by offering a couple of stand-alone, one-day seminars on preaching. Both seminars filled up within the first hour of announcing them and had waiting lists of at least ten people beyond the full class. This evidence of interest only confirmed my sense that pastors are hungry for ongoing training and support but most of my data was anecdotal.

My research confirmed that, although pastors felt their preaching was important to both them and their congregations, they had not taken the steps to determine how they would grow as preachers. During the study, I observed that many of the participants lacked an intentional way to approach crafting a sermon and had no systems in place to allow for preparation over time. They also did not see the importance of investing time into such systems, settling for week-to-week preparation. After the study, participants felt better equipped to preach on the regular basis demanded by the role of pastor. They reported increased confidence in their abilities to plan and organize sermons, and many had already taken steps to establish their own systems.

Many pastors write sermons from week to week and would benefit from using a system that facilitates thinking and writing into the future. Participants in the study reported that planning sermons in advance lessened stress and most likely increased the overall quality of the message. Question 14 of the presurvey asked participants if they had a system in place to collect illustrations. This question also inquired how regularly such a system, if they had one, was used. After the intervention, the post-test mean on the

responses to this question increased from 2.41 to 3.83, with a minimum score of two and a maximum score of five. The mode went from two (they disagreed they had a system in place) to four (they agreed they had a system in place). This change was one of the more notable shifts in the research and an indicator of meaningful behavior change as a result of the intervention even in a very short time.

The concept of a sermon bucket (Bell, *Poets*) or “homiletical garden” (Demaray 78; Blackwood) seemed revolutionary to many of the participants. Planning sermons out in advance and creating a system to collect illustrations and ideas that could be used in those sermons allowed participants to spread their sermon work over a period of time and enabled a “marinating” of ideas (Bell, *Poets*). In my course content, I use the analogy of “preaching as stew”—that every sermon has several ingredients the preacher needs to incorporate when preparing the sermon. There is meat, which is the exegetical work. Vegetables (things like history, context, and geography) are often an acquired taste that might not be initially palatable to congregations but over time become appreciated as they promote health. Starch and seasoning are illustrations and examples that accentuate and bring brightness to the stew. As the pastor is building his or her sermon, the material-collection system serves as a kind of “refrigerator” where the different ingredients are stored. The preacher’s job is to “shop for” or “harvest” the different ingredients over time and then to form the stew/sermon with the best ingredients available at the time of writing. The use of an intentional system also allowed for “simmer time,” which can transform an ordinary stew into a great stew and an ordinary sermon into a great sermon. Using a system allows the necessary time for the different ingredients to simmer together and bring additional flavor.

The study showed that this knowledge helped produce a shift in participants' attitudes in several areas, including increasingly valuing the investment of time and energy into their preaching, specifically in a few key areas: adopting and using a regular system to work ahead on sermon development and developing systems of community support and feedback over time. Evidence also exists that, in simply participating in a truncated version of this CoP course, participants felt more equipped to preach, had a greater sense of expectancy around their preaching, reflected on their calling and gifting more, and overall felt more encouraged.

This system of working ahead or "letting things stew" was cited by several participants as being transformational. Allowing additional time to reflect, build, and consider the sermon content changed participants' attitudes toward not only the sermon text but also the preparation process. As the literature review in Chapter 2 reveals, effective preaching is birthed not simply out of preaching the truths of scripture but also by being transformed by them personally. The message must be embodied, a process that takes time in order to be genuine (Scazzero 38, Lewis and Lewis 24, Long). The process also requires effort; the literature around creating a Rule of Life suggests the importance of structure to growth and health of the preacher (Scazzero, Macchia, Thompson, Bruggeman) and Pasquarello and Minger suggest a preaching structure or rule that supports the work of preaching so it can be done with intentionality, integrity, and care.

Although much of the homiletics literature suggests the need for preaching systems, much of the biblical and theological literature remains relatively silent on the subject of preparation. Certainly, pastors are told to value preparation (2 Tim. 4.2), to fan the fame of our gift (2 Tim. 1.6), and to work at everything as if working for the Lord

(Col. 3:23), but the biblical literature suggests that preaching is primarily a spiritual gift given by God for the use of ministry (Kinghorn 36). Pastors are given very little insight into or counsel on any particulars of sermon construction, yet certainly preparation is counseled and encouraged.

Major Finding #2—Sharing of ideas in a CoP enlivens and enhances preaching

Although a communications major in college, I had only tangentially heard of the CoP model before working on this dissertation project. In fact, much of the scholarly work on CoPs was written after I graduated with my B.A. in Communications from Miami University in 1990. As I continued to read and research, I found the CoP model was articulating a phenomenon I had already experienced. As Wenger and McDermott et al. suggest, CoPs are everywhere, whether named or unnamed (5). As a part of my initial research to help me better understand CoPs, I contacted and interviewed eight people who facilitated various CoP groups, mostly through the United Church of Christ. Although these interviews were not cited in the literature review of this dissertation, they helped me gain a general understanding of how the CoP model is at work in some areas of the church today. Through those interviews and my research, I reflected that I had been a part of two very vital and essential CoPs for most of my ministry. These two groups provided a formational context to my research and added to my enthusiasm for the CoP model.

First, until COVID-19 restrictions, I had been involved in a cluster of local United Methodist Pastors for over twenty-three years. This cluster met for almost two hours every Thursday morning for breakfast and mutual support. Although all other members of this group have changed over the years as different pastors were appointed to different

area congregations, I remained the constant in the cluster the entire time. This tenure allowed me a long-term view of the positive effects the cluster has had on these pastors' lives and ministries. Almost without exception, pastors who have served in this district and been a part of this cluster have, upon moving to their next appointment, recognized the value of this cluster of colleagues through the loss they feel at not being in it anymore. Many former members of this cluster have written me to tell me the cluster "kept them in the game" when ministry became difficult and they needed encouragement.

I also have done much of my preaching/worship planning using a creative-team model of ministry. Our creative team was a group of pastors, worship-team members, and media artists in my church who help create and structure the weekly worship service at Central, giving input to the message and service content. We would meet almost every week, often around a meal, and together dream, craft, and implement Central's weekend worship experiences. As a part of the process, the team offered critique and feedback on my sermons as well as on other elements of the service. This group also served as a kind of personal small group for me. Some of my closest friendships have been formed through working together in this group. It became a place of creativity and feedback, but also safety, honesty, and affirmation around my preaching. Having had this team for much of my ministry, I went into this project with the assumption that my experience was at least somewhat common. I discovered in my research, however, that this kind of sharing of ideas is not the norm for many other pastors.

My research data suggests that the time a pastor invests in creating communities like the ones I described pays off in an increasingly positive attitude toward preaching and the effectiveness of one's preaching. Although they may be cautious of hurtful

criticism, many pastors crave honest and constructive feedback as well as affirmation. My research suggests that many pastors feel isolated in ministry, particularly in the area of preaching. The vulnerability of preaching adds to that isolation. The group in my study found more than just the idea of receiving congregational feedback beneficial; a consistent theme also emerged around the desire for increased collegial support and encouragement—even when that feedback challenged them. Written or spoken, the unsolicited desire of almost every participant was that this group continue beyond the study period. The gathering together around the domain of preaching in particular was life-giving. Participants reported their preaching, and perhaps more importantly their attitudes towards preaching, improved in just the few times we gathered.

I believe that part of what made this group work was the fact that the group was a community of peers. Everyone in the group voluntarily chose to be a part of the group and to invest in its work. As explained in chapter 2, the literature is clear that a group's commitment to the domain is invaluable to a CoP's effectiveness and cohesion. To assess this commitment among this courses' participants, the pre- and post-surveys asked them to react to the statement, "Being a good preacher is important to me" (Q1). In both the pre- and post-surveys, all participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This strong consensus is a significant indication of both the individual's and the group's commitment to the domain of preaching. This commonality of commitment added greatly to the energy and overall group dynamic. Interestingly, in terms of individual group members' investment of "significant time into preaching" (Q2), the change in responses between pre- and post-tests suggests that the CoP course changed the participants' perceived value of the time they invested into preaching. This shift is important because,

if a participant is unwilling to invest time and energy into preaching, they are not likely to have other changes in attitude and behavior.

During and after the study, the vast majority of the participants exhibited an increased hunger for community, feedback, and constructive criticism as a result of having experienced them within this group. Most participants suggested they did not yet have the systems in place to facilitate this kind of community in their own churches. Participants evinced an increased desire for not only feedback from their congregations but also feedback and support from colleagues. One way this study helped foster an ongoing communication and feedback loop among the participants was by creating a Facebook group in which participants could share questions, insights, and reflections with each other as the group progressed. Participants together collected artifacts or shared resources (Wenger, McDermott, et al. 38) around preaching such as planning calendars and illustration-file formats. As additional evidence of a change in attitude around the need for support and feedback, four months later the Facebook group is still active; for two months after the group concluded, the Facebook group was even used weekly with no prompting from me as the facilitator.

To validate the idea of enlivening and enhancing preaching, Question 10 of the pre- and post-surveys sought to measure what kind of feedback participants receive from their congregations about their ability to connect with the sermon illustrations. While the majority of the respondents agreed their sermon illustrations connected with their congregations, of that majority four only “slightly agreed” with the statement, while three said that they “more disagreed than agreed” and one disagreed. The mean was 4.08. Although this data may suggest that the participants felt their illustrations only somewhat

connected with their congregations, this data may also suggest that there were no or few channels of feedback for the participant to gauge the level of connection. In either case, a community of peers (either congregational or collegial) would add value to participants' preaching.

The biblical foundation on which this research is based points to the importance of not only community but also peer learning and support. From the beginning mankind is told they are made in the image of the Trinitarian God (Gen. 1.27). Being created in God's image, mankind is also invited into the fellowship of the Trinity and to join in God's creative work. This community is not forced or mandated; rather, this community flows from our understanding of a God who delights in the community of God's personhood. When people learn, and particularly when people learn in community, they are reflecting the image of God. Passages like Ecclesiastes 4.12 tell us that while one person may be overpowered, two can defend themselves, and a cord of three strands is not quickly broken; strength exists in numbers. Jesus primarily related to his disciples as a group. He called them to be with him (Mark 3.14) as well as each other (Luke 6.13). They did ministry together and debriefed on that ministry together (Matt. 16.8-10, Luke 10.17). With minor exceptions, in a biblical vision of life and ministry, community is non-negotiable. Again, when people learn—and particularly when people learn in community—we are reflecting the image of God.

Major Finding #3—Re-visiting vocational calling rekindles passion and clarifies vision

My calling to ministry emerged out of my gifting to preach. I decided to enroll in seminary in part because I had no undergraduate debt and wanted to use the freedom that

gave me to learn more about Jesus in a systemic and academic way. I considered even attending for a year and then returning to my original plan of law school. Although I was beginning to see myself being called to ministry, the role of the pastor was puzzling to me as I had few models of pastors I could relate to in any concrete way. When I ran out of tuition money for seminary, I wanted to stay relatively debt-free so I secured a job as a youth pastor in a small church in southern Ohio. What I discovered fairly quickly through that position was that as I taught, people were changed. My passion for ministry emerged out of my calling to teach and preach the scriptures and the wonder of seeing people's lives changed. Early encounters with the writings of Gordon McDonald, Dallas Willard, and John Ortberg inspired me to revisit my calling on a regular basis. The creation and maintenance early on of a Rule of Life also became important to my identity as both a Christian and a pastor.

During the research project, I discovered that although many pastors start with a clarity of call, and particularly the call to preach, the day-to-day pressures of ministry often crowd out time for reflection and revisiting that call. My researcher's field notes indicated this need for reflection several times when participants used the phrase "it was good to be reminded of that." Although evidence exists from the focus group, journal entries, and post-test that participants learned new information, a good amount of the work was "knowledge refreshed" (Lanternlan03). In working through our discussion around developing a preaching Rule of Life, EurekaSprings14 wrote in a journal reflection about how she had learned some of what the group talked about in seminary, but at the time the teachings were not as relevant and, therefore, she did not always retain or act on these teachings. Revisiting her calling and particularly her calling to preach was

helpful and invigorating. The data revealed a need for preachers to refresh and rethink methods on a consistent basis.

One of the course sessions created as a result of my research explores what happens if, upon reflection and revisiting vocational calling and gifting, a pastor discovers he or she might not have the spiritual gift of preaching. I created the following quadrant diagram based on the both the amount of effort the preacher puts into a sermon and the ranking of teaching in the person's gift mix. The Y axis is the preacher's estimation of how high preaching is in their spiritual gift mix, and the X axis is the amount of time and effort put into sermon preparation.

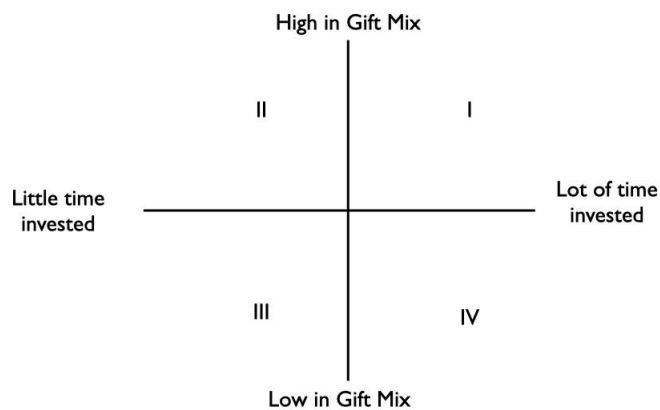


Figure 81: Gift versus time invested by preachers.

A person in Quadrant I is someone highly gifted in preaching who also invests a lot of time into sermon preparation. Quadrant II is someone who is highly gifted in preaching but does not invest a lot of time into preparation. Quadrant III is someone for whom preaching is lower in their gift mix and who also does not invest a lot of time into sermon preparation. Quadrant IV is someone for whom preaching is lower in their gifting but who invests a lot of time preparation. The group was asked to consider their gifting and effort and mentally place themselves into one of the 4 quadrants.

The reflection/discussion question was what two quadrants would be most effective in preaching. Most of the group reflexively chose quadrants I and IV simply based on effort. Based on my reading and experience, however, I argued for quadrants I and II. As much as effort is important, gifting and God always trump time and effort.

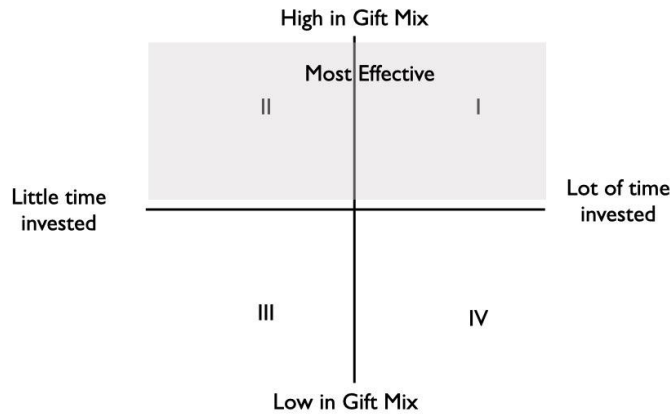


Figure 82: Most effective preacher.

I then make an argument that people in Quadrant II are wasting their gift, and people in Quadrant IV are wasting their time.

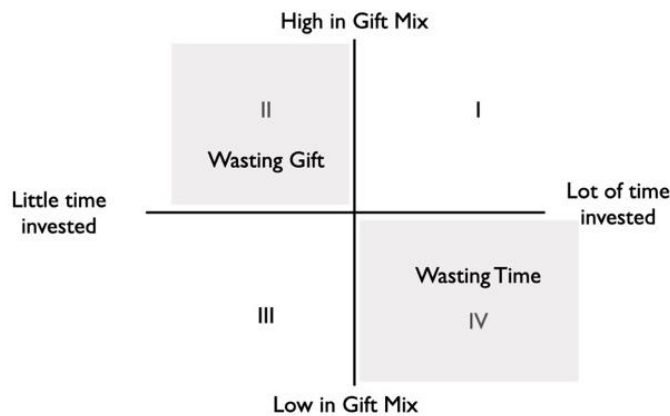


Figure 83: Least effective preacher.

Quadrant II people have this supernatural gift from God for use in ministry but are not “fanning it into flame” (1Tim. 1.6). If they did not neglect the gift God had given

them (1Tim. 4.14) and instead honed their craft, they could do many of the other ministry tasks they have (e.g., counseling, vision casting, pastoral care) through their preaching and teaching ministry. People in Quadrant IV, meanwhile, are wasting their time by putting inordinate amounts of time and effort into something they are simply not gifted to do. They may grow marginally better by the attempt, but the results may not be worth the effort.

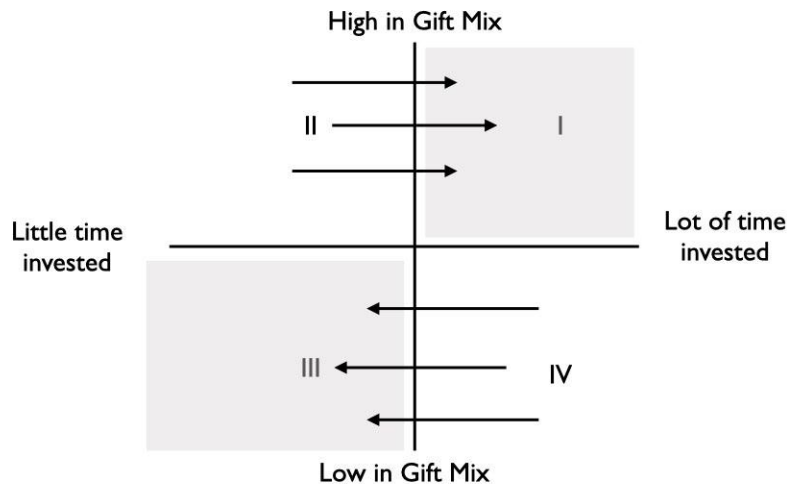


Figure 84: Suggested time investment in preaching.

Rather, people who do not have the spiritual gift of preaching may benefit from investing their time in areas of ministry in which they are gifted. Part of that time investment may involve training and encouraging people in the congregation who do have the spiritual gift of preaching so they might exercise their gifts more. This kind of ongoing re-examination of vocation and gifting rekindles passion and clarifies vision around how the pastor should be investing her or his time into the Kingdom of God.

In response to that reflection, many in the group voiced conviction that they had a spiritual gift of preaching and were neglecting it, and they subsequently recommitted

themselves to sermon preparation and practicing a preaching rule of life. Livingvine¹⁵ used the discussion to consider another alternative: “I was going to go the other way with it. Because I was like, ‘Well, I might be in that quadrant where I’m not gifted at it. So, I might as well just quit putting so much time in it anyway, focus on these other things.’” Although in the end, he was affirmed in his preaching gift by the group members and through prayer, participants took the conversation seriously enough to actually question whether they, as pastors, had the spiritual gift of preaching.

In the literature, how preaching should be personally theological and transformative was discussed and how a Rule of Life “allows us to clarify our deepest values, our most important relationships, our most authentic hopes and dreams, our most meaningful work, our highest priorities. It allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment” (Macchia 14). The theological framework of CoPs reminded Christians that they learn about God, each other, their gifts, and their calling through participation in community. Jesus calls his disciples, causes them to reflect on their calling, and rekindles their passion for ministry and for himself (John 6.60-71; John 15.4; John 21.17).

Ministry Implications of the Findings

This project’s findings point to several implications for people who are called to the preaching ministry, particularly in the local church where the expectation is for weekly message preparation and delivery. First, because preaching is critical to both the health of congregations and the well-being of preachers, pastors, congregations, and denominations consider the initial training of the pastor (though limited in most seminaries) only a prelude to the ongoing sharpening, support, and encouragement of

preachers once they are in local churches. In my twenty-seven years of ministry, I have never had a district superintendent or conference staff ask me what I'm doing to keep my preaching fresh; such questions need to be asked regularly of pastors. Specialized "preaching CoPs" could be encouraged as a part of the regular cluster system but should not be mandated as a voluntary commitment to the domain of preaching is key to the group's success. Even so, such groups could be encouraged and resourced. As often happens in the small-group ministry of a local church, CoP facilitators could be trained by first being participants in an initial group, which would subsequently multiply into two groups, then four. This study suggests the need for this kind of training and support is real and could have a revitalizing effect on both pastors and local churches.

Second, local churches and conferences should make encouraging pastors in annual study leaves and sermon-writing retreats a priority. Annual sermon-planning retreats could be a normal part of pastoral ministry if properly resourced and encouraged. Ideally, the members of CoP could do some of the retreat together as way to begin or end their season of life together. Such retreats could be done at a retreat center or a local church. In addition to the CoP course done for my research, I have already offered two day-long retreats through Central Avenue Church in Athens, Ohio. Twelve pastors gathered for a day of planning, prayer, conversation, and worship. Our local church also saw this retreat as a ministry to the wider church. Members of our congregation took turns praying for each participating pastor and their churches by name, from six in the morning until eight at night throughout each retreat. In addition, rather than asking the pastors to pay for the course, our congregation chose to sponsor their lunches at a very nice, local restaurant, provided each participant with an Amazon gift card to buy a needed

resource or commentary, and gathered with the group at the end of the retreat day for prayer and worship.

Assuming a return to gathering without COVID-19 protocols, our church's current plan is to offer one day-apart planning retreat in January of 2022, and I will be facilitating two CoP preaching groups for the year of 2021-2022. I plan to continue using the research components developed for this dissertation into the future, because I believe this work is important and more data could prove beneficial.

Limitations of the Study

This CoP course was originally designed to meet in person, once a month, over an eight-month timeframe. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the timeline of my dissertation, the course was moved online and shortened to three one-day meetings spread over a five-week timeframe. Evidence exists that, even in simply participating in a truncated version of this CoP course, participants felt more equipped to preach, had a greater sense of expectancy around their preaching, reflected on their calling and gifting more, and overall felt more encouraged. I suspect that offering the course as originally designed might have led to even more movement in the pre- and post-survey data, particularly in terms of behavioral change. Changing behavior is difficult in such a short time period and with little follow-up or opportunity to put into practice the ideas and methods learned. Although I was disappointed the course could not be conducted as designed, the online version may have produced a different set of learnings which I will briefly examine in the recommendations section below. Although the course has elements of CoP learning theory, I believe the original design would have been a better model in

terms of incorporating group participation and learning, particularly in the final session where we discussed, rather than created, a one-year preaching plan.

The small sample size of the group must also be acknowledged as a limitation to statistical significance. Although I plan to continue this research into the future and create different groups, no way exists to replicate exactly the same experience over time between groups. Nevertheless, I would have preferred to have three different groups over the research period as additional data subjects might have proven beneficial.

A potential area for future research is considering the effect of a participant's financial investment on their participation in the group. As a part of some initial research not included in chapter 2, I contacted and interviewed eight people who facilitated various CoP groups, mostly through the United Church of Christ. These groups charge participants a fee of \$150 to \$400 per program year. When Central Church did our initial one-day groups, the groups were viewed as an investment in church leaders and part of our overall mission as a congregation to equip and encourage the body of believers, so the experience was offered as a gift to the pastors involved. Not only did we have no charge, but about \$70 per person was spent for food, gifts, and materials, in addition to the in-kind commitment of my time as facilitator of the group. Commitment to each CoP group has always been high, I suspect, because of the participants' commitment to the domain of preaching and preaching's importance in their lives. Requiring a financial investment of participants might change the group dynamics, whether positively or negatively, and would be worth investigating.

Unexpected Observations

Many of the results of this research were anticipated, but I was surprised at both the number of people who desired to be in this group and the real need the group seemed to address. In a relatively short time, fairly marked changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior occurred. A trust was formed as participants sought honest feedback from each other; many of the group members did not know each other before the group but now continue to talk and seek advice from each other even after the group has disbanded. Multiple group members have also contacted me asking to be a part of the post-doctoral-dissertation group I plan to create. Despite the deluge of ministry-related books and materials available on the market, this group met a need beyond information—rather, information in the context of community.

This CoP homiletics course was originally designed to be delivered in person. Intended to be spread out over eight one-day gatherings, the course was radically condensed to fit the timeline of my research. Also, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the course was adapted for online delivery. The evidence suggests that the course was effective, though perhaps not as effective as if the course was delivered in person as originally designed. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the course was offered online through the Zoom platform. As the group leader and researcher, I recorded attendance at each session in my field notes, and the Zoom platform did not hinder people from attending. Session attendance was very regular. In fact, given the geographic dispersion of the participants, offering the course online made participation possible for some who might not otherwise have been able to do so.

Two participants had standing family commitments at the end of each day. “Going home” required them simply to close their laptops or shut down their computers as opposed to driving home from Athens—a two-hour drive for one and a three-hour drive for the other. Therefore, several reported that the online format made participation possible, or at least easier, for them.

Recommendations

Participants provided some helpful qualitative feedback on how the course could be improved. This data come mostly from the focus group but also from my field notes as the researcher and group leader.

Lecture videos: Each session featured several lectures that were used to prompt discussion. In the in-person version of the course offered prior to this study, these lectures were shared with the group in a more classroom setting which was informal and interactive. In the online version of the course, however, these lectures became pre-recorded lectures from seven to fifteen minutes in length. For this iteration of the course, the videos were played through Zoom’s screen-sharing feature. The group saw both strengths and weaknesses in the video format, particularly in playing a video in a Zoom format as opposed to just lecturing live on Zoom.

In the focus group, Lincoln12 referenced a time when he was taking notes and missed something in a list that was on the video, so he asked if that section could be replayed or frozen so he could catch it again. Trinity06 said he believed the most effective use of recorded video was playing a sermon clip as an example of what we were talking about at the time. In this way, the video was used as “a jump-off point rather than as the primary content driver. I think content expressed through Zoom

that was supported by video, just pedagogically, uh, at least for me, was, uh, preferable to, um, content through video.” Stdavids18 said he thought the videos provided an opportunity for the group to just listen.

Certainly, I'm sure if Paul were to do a lecture, and he wanted to...share a bunch of information with us for a time, I'm sure he could like mute us all... [and say] “Hey, these next ten minutes I’m going to share. And then we'll discuss.” Maybe that'd be a way to use Zoom more powerfully that way.

Lanterlane03 said he believed showing a video through a video platform was not as effective. “I think we saw that, um, with the lag and latency of-of technology. Um, so I'm sure it could be better and more engaging, uh, at different times, and maybe in a different avenue.” Trinity06 was a participant in a previous in-person training I offered in the spring of 2019. Although the module he attended was one of the modules cut from this version of the course, the format was similar to how this course would have been presented absent COVID-19 restrictions.

[A]s someone who, uh, was at the in-face session, um, it was—it was easy to check out during the video portions ... Whereas, like, you know, Paul live was a little more engaging ... I think the content was, uh, was good. Um, but in this medium, where we're staring at a 15-inch screen for seven hours, and our butts are starting to cramp, um, the video felt like a chance to check out rather than to hype up my engagement (Trinity06 FG).

Burt06 suggested that she would rather have had the videos ahead of time “to be able to watch so that I could internalize some of that and then spend the rest of our time together, unpacking all of that instead of having to stop every few minutes to watch a video.”

Lincoln 12 agreed. “I don't know that [the lectures] being in video form and shared in this context in video form added to any—added to it at all. Um, and I think, in this idea of a community of practice, it may have actually detracted from it.” Many therefore suggested that if the course were offered again, the lecture information would be more effective if shared lecture-style over Zoom, with videos added as examples.

If the study were repeated, rethinking the use of video in this online platform would be helpful. The use of video in a Zoom meeting seems redundant, but doing so also tightens the lecture and allows for the insertion of other graphics easily into the lecture. A comparison of the costs and benefits of each approach might be an additional area of study.

There were also a couple of questions on the pre- and post-tests I would change if I were repeating the research. Question six was designed to measure whether the participants solicited feedback about their preaching. Although the question could be interpreted as a behavior of the preacher in setting up feedback mechanisms, the question was originally designed to assess the behavior of the congregation as much as that of the preacher. In hindsight, the question was not a strong question for this reason. Similar to question six, question eight was designed to measure whether the participants received feedback about their preaching, although this time from colleagues. This question sought to assess whether the participants set up feedback loops or created ways to get support from other preachers. The question also could have been interpreted to assess the behavior of the colleagues as much as the preacher. For that reason, the question should have been recrafted.

Question ten sought to measure feedback from the congregation about illustrations and their ability to connect with them. The majority of the respondents agreed that their illustrations connected with their congregations. Of that majority, four only “slightly agreed” with the statement. Three said that they “more disagreed than agreed,” and one disagreed. The mean was 4.08. This finding suggested that either participants’ illustrations only somewhat connected with their congregations or channels of feedback did not exist to gauge the level of connection. Although both insights are important, given the wording of the question, knowing which conclusion should be drawn is unclear.

Finally, with more time an added session on around how to preach on video would have been incredibly helpful. Bart06 said that “the pandemic will be with us for some time therefore I need to get comfortable with preaching to an empty room and a video camera. For even after things are safe to meet freely for worship again, the work that is done for God and the Kingdom online, needs to continue.” A lot of wisdom and experience existed in that group around this need, and addressing this need would have been helpful and timely.

Postscript

I began this doctoral program having the desire to one day teach a homiletics course through a seminary or college. I wanted the time to create a class with academic honesty and rigor. I have never had the desire to be on the full-time faculty at a seminary; a part-time adjunct instructor position would be ideal. I am a local United Methodist pastor who has had the privilege of preaching at the same church for twenty-four years. I love my calling. I love my community. I love what I do. I am very much a practitioner. I

have always had a passion for preaching and I wanted to find a way to invest in a community of colleagues, both to offer what I have learned about preaching over the years and also to learn from each other and grow and improve together.

When I began the doctoral program, I had a fairly clear purpose: create a homiletics class. As I began reading, I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information that has been written on the subject of preaching already.

When my dissertation coach, Dr. Ellen Marmon, suggested I instead look into the concept of Communities of Practice, something clicked. The proverbial light went on. The more I wrote, the more I felt what I was writing was important. As I progressed through the program, I began to discover that my presence in this program was not primarily about what I was creating; my presence was about allowing what I was creating to re-create me. My time here was about being open to God and God's spirit to grow me in new ways. To open new doors of understanding. To form new relationships.

This process has been an incredible journey—one for which I'm incredibly grateful, and one that, I sense, is not over.

APPENDICES

A. CoP-Based Pre-Survey

CoP-based Preaching Course (Pre-Survey)

4/12/21, 3:44 PM

CoP-based Preaching Course (Pre-Survey)

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent.

This informed consent form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to click the box below. This will allow your participation in this study.

Background and Purpose

Paul Risler is conducting a research project called, "Homiletics: Strengthening Preaching through Communities of Practice (CoP)" (hereafter known as "the class") as a partial requirement for his Doctor of Ministries program at Asbury Theological Seminary. The class is based on the Community of Practice theory and he has taught it twice before at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. This particular class has been shortened and will be conducted virtually due to the limitations brought about by COVID-19. The results of this research will be used as the basis for Paul's dissertation.

The purpose of this survey is help measure the efficacy of the class as related to altering the participants' attitudes, skills and knowledge of sermon development. The data resulting from this survey will be compared with the data from the post survey and focus group you will be asked to complete at the end of the class. The combination of these two approaches will yield a more complete understanding of the impact of the course on participants' lives and ministries than either approach could do on its own.

Risks and Discomforts

There is minimum risk to your involvement in taking this survey. However, sharing information, by nature, may cause discomfort. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may elect to not take part in the survey. In addition, you may refuse to answer any question and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty or consequence.

Benefits

Although not guaranteed, the benefit of your participation is increased confidence that you can impact a group of people seeking to learn how to become better preachers.

Recording

After the class is over, you will be invited to participate in a focus group. The 60-minute focus group will be recorded so that we do not miss anything that is said. We want to be sure we hear all of the comments and the recording helps us to do that. Your name will not be used in any writings. This recording (or parts thereof) will not be shared on any social media or with anyone outside of Paul and the persons conducting the focus group. The recording will be stored on an external drive to which only the Paul and research assistants will have access. At the completion of Paul's dissertation the recording will be completely deleted.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by the researchers of this study. Both the researcher and research assistants have signed confidentiality agreements. As a part of your reflection, you will be asked to submit journal responses through Google forms. This class will also be posting to a private Facebook group. Although this information is private, you should know that Facebook is not a secure platform. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- * Representatives of Asbury Seminary, including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at Asbury.

Contact Information

If you have questions regarding the surveys, focus group, or Communities of Practice, please contact Paul Risler (email and phone). If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact Barry Oches who can be reached at (email). You can refuse to respond to any or all the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board at Asbury Seminary at irb@asburyseminary.edu.

By clicking below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction
- you understand Asbury Seminary has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

* Required

1. Please enter the name of your elementary school in first grade, followed by the two-digit day you were born (e.g. Roosevelt23). This is to increase anonymity and serve to link the pre- and post- survey results. *

2. Please choose one: *

Mark only one oval.

- I agree to be a part of this study. *Skip to question 4* I would
- prefer not to be involved.

Thanks for you consideration.

3. We understand that you have chosen to not participate in this research. If you have made this decision in error, please click "Go back" and you will be taken back to the consent form. If you do not want to participate, please click "No thanks." *

Mark only one oval.

- Go back to consent form
- No thanks. *Skip to section 3 (We are sorry you have chosen not to participate.)*

4. Sex

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male

5. Credentialing

Mark only one oval.

- Deacon
- Elder
- Lay Person
- Local Pastor

6. District

Mark only one oval.

- Capitol Area North
- Capitol Area South
- Foothills
- Maumee Watershed
- Miami Valley
- NorthWest Plains
- Ohio River Valley
- Shawnee Valley

7. How many congregations (or locations) are in your charge?

Mark only one oval.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

8. Congregation locations: (Choose all that apply)

Mark only one oval.

- Rural
- Small Town
- Suburban
- Urban

How strongly do you disagree or agree with the following statements

- 1. Strongly Disagree
- 2. Disagree
- 3. More Disagree than Agree
- 4. More Agree than Disagree
- 5. Agree
- 6. Strongly Agree

Pre-Course Survey

9. Pre-intervention: Being a good preacher is important to me.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

10. Pre-intervention: I see value in investing significant time in the development of the craft of preaching.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

11. Pre-intervention: Being a good preacher is important to my ministry context.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

12. Pre-intervention: I am conscientious about my sermon preparation.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

13. Pre-intervention: I have a regular method of approaching a scripture or sermon topic.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

14. Pre-intervention: I get regular, positive feedback on my preaching.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

15. Pre-intervention: I am appropriately creative in my preaching.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

16. Pre-intervention: I get regular encouragement on my preaching from my cluster or colleague

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

17. Pre-intervention: When I speak, I feel I have my congregation's attention and am connected with them.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

18. Pre-intervention: I'm often told my illustrations connect with my congregation.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	--

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

19. Pre-intervention: I feel equipped to preach on a regular basis.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

20. Pre-intervention: I have a plan to be a better communicator.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

21. Pre-intervention: I have a sense of expectancy when I preach. I feel that I have something important to say.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

22. Pre-intervention: I have a system in place to collect sermon illustrations that I regularly use.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

23. Pre-intervention: I feel encouraged in my preaching.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

24. Pre-intervention: I can summarize my last sermon in a single sentence.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

25. Pre-intervention: People say my preaching makes a difference in their lives.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

26. Pre-intervention: I feel confident in my ability to plan and organize sermons .

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

27. Pre-intervention: People would say the last sermon I preached had a clear call to action.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

28. Pre-intervention: How many hours on average do you spend preparing a typical sermon?

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 5 hours a week
- 5 to 9 hours a week 10-15
- hours a week
- 16-20 hours a week
- 20+ hours a week

29. Pre-intervention: How long are your typical sermons?

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 10 minutes
- 10 - 15 minutes
- 16-20 minutes 21-27
- minutes 28-35
- minutes
- 35-45 minutes
- Over 45 minutes

Rank Order

30. Pre-intervention: In terms of what you personally value, please rank order these roles of pastoral ministry.

Mark only one oval per row.

	First Priority	Second Priority	Third Priority	Fourth Priority	Fifth Priority	Sixth Priority
Volunteer/Staff Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worship Planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pastoral Care/Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Project Management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

31. Pre-intervention: In terms of what your congregation values, please rank order these roles of pastoral ministry.

Mark only one oval per row.

	First Priority	Second Priority	Third Priority	Fourth Priority	Fifth Priority	Sixth Priority
Volunteer/Staff Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worship Planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pastoral Care/Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Project Management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Short-Answer Questions

32. Pre-intervention: What do you believe is the goal of preaching?

33. Pre-intervention: What makes for a compelling sermon introduction?

34. Pre-intervention: What are the elements of a good conclusion?

Thank you for taking this survey.

Please take a moment to watch this video



<http://youtube.com/watch?v=mxszoYvgzbg>

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Forms

B. Informed-Consent Form

Community of Practice based Preaching Course Participant Focus Group Consent Form

Title of Research: Community of Practice based Preaching Course

Researchers: Paul Risler and Barry Oches

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study.

Background and Purpose

Paul Risler is conducting a research project called, “Homiletics: Strengthening Preaching through Communities of Practice” (hereafter known as “the class”) as a partial requirement for his Doctor of Ministries program at Asbury Theological Seminary. The class is based on the Community of Practice Theory and he has taught it twice before at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. This particular class has been shortened and will be conducted virtually due to the limitations brought about by COVID-19. The results of this research will be used as the basis for Paul’s dissertation.

The purpose of this interview or focus group is to discuss the efficacy of the class as related to altering the participants’ attitudes, skills and knowledge of sermon development. The qualitative data resulting from interviews and/or focus groups will be combined with the quantitative data from the pre-post surveys you will be asked to complete at the beginning and end of the class. The combination of these two approaches will yield a more complete understanding of the impact of the course on participants’ lives and ministries than either approach could do on its own (Creswell 4).

Risks and Discomforts

There is minimum risk to your involvement in this interview or focus group. However, speaking to an interviewer or focus group facilitator, by nature, may cause discomfort. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may elect to not take part in the interview or focus group. In addition, you may refuse to answer any question and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty or consequence.

Benefits

Although not guaranteed, the benefit of your participation is increased confidence that you can impact a group of people seeking to learn how to become better preachers.

Recording

The 60-minute interview or focus group will be recorded so that we do not miss anything that is said. We want to be sure we hear all of the comments and the recording helps us to do that. Your name will not be used in any writings. This recording (or parts thereof) will not be shared on any social media or with anyone outside of Paul and the persons conducting the interviews or focus

groups. The recording will be stored on an external drive to which only Paul will have access. At the completion of Paul's dissertation the recording will be completely deleted.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by the researchers of this study. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- * Representatives of Asbury Seminary, including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at Asbury

Contact Information

If you have questions regarding the interview, focus group or Communities of Practice, please contact Paul Risler (_____ or 740-_____). If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact Barry Oches who can be reached at _____. You can refuse to respond to any or all the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board at Asbury Seminary at irb@asburyseminary.edu

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Asbury Seminary has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature _____ (clicked box) _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Normally, this form would be signed at the interview or focus group and given to the researcher. However, due to the nature of virtual data collection, we ask you to simply check the box to agree to be a part of the study.

C. Focus-Group Script

Community of Practice based Preaching Course Participant Interview/Focus Group*

Today we are going to discuss the Community of Practice based Preaching Course that you have been a part of December 7th, December 14th and January 11th. It was led by Paul Risler and was a special presentation of material which he will use as part of his dissertation. As you know this discussion is being recorded and the particulars about the recording was explained in the consent form you signed. The qualitative data gathered will be analyzed and combined with the results of the pre-post survey you also took.

Here are some simple ground rules:

- a. Please let everybody answer the questions. I may have to interrupt occasionally in order to honor the time we have set aside for this discussion. I also may call on people who have not answered in order to get everyone's input.
- b. After the first question, each person does not have to answer each question.
- c. Everybody is entitled to their own opinion; we are as interested in negative comments as positive comments.
- d. You are welcome to respond to a comment made by someone else, building on their answer.
- e. Be respectful of others' opinions even if you do not agree with them.
- f. I will be calling on people by name, but no names will be used in our report

Questions

1. Opening question: We will go around and have everyone answer this first question. I will call on you for your answer. (get from Paul one thing all of these people have in common to get a "safe" question every person can answer and is somewhat related to the topic. Intent is to get everybody into the groove of answering questions posed to the group. The content from this question is not analyzed.)

Tell me about your church and the surrounding community and how that effects your preaching.

2. Introductory Question: Get everybody focused on the reason for the group – to talk about the class they have just completed. (Use one of the following, not both). For the rest of the questions, please answer as you feel led.
 - a. Tell me about a part of the class that particularly resonated with you and that you plan to use in the future. (1 because it's future)
 - b. Think back to before you took this class. Describe a way you planned a sermon or series of sermons that you will change, as a result of this class. (3)
3. Transition Questions:
 - a. Think about the [video lectures] for this class. On a scale of one to ten how would

- you rate their value to you? One is worthless, ten is best stuff you ever seen. Explain. (1
- b. Think about the assigned writings you submitted. On a scale of one to ten how would you rate their value to you? One is going through the motions, ten is something you will definitely save for later use. (assignments are reflective except for 3) Explain. (1
4. Key Questions: The purpose of this class was to change participants' attitudes, skills and knowledge of sermon development.
- a. Describe a change in attitude toward sermon preparation you feel you made as a result of this class. What factors went into this change? New information? Style of presentation? Being among this particular group of individuals? Other? (2
- b. Share with us a skill (behavior) concerning preparing a sermon or a series that was either introduced to you as a result of the class or was significantly improved as a result of the class. How will you use this new or improved skill as you prepare future sermons? (3
- i. What are the evaluative criteria you will use to know you are using this skill well? Unsolicited compliments? Increased attendance? More people paying attention? Other? (2
- c. Through this course you had recorded lectures, writings, group discussions and a planning day. This involves the transfer and use of a great deal of information. What comes to mind as something you "learned" and you consider is a piece of knowledge you will retain long term as a result. (1
5. Ending Questions: run through quickly
- a. Of all the things talked about during this time, what is most important to you? (2
- b. What would you suggest to Paul that he change in this course?
- c. Is there anything else you would like to say that has not been covered in this discussion?

*(Developed in collaboration with Dr. Barry Oches)

D. Syllabus of Preaching Course

COS 324 – Preaching

United Theological Seminary
Summer 2017

Instructor: Paul Risler
Cell: 740-707-0711
Email: paul97@centralavenue.net

This course begins online May 5, 2017 and will end on campus with class and preaching lab on June 16-17. An additional final assignment will be due before June 23.

I. Course Description:

The focus of COS 324 is on the preparation and proclamation of the gospel through preaching. This course will focus on the preparation, proclamation and evaluation of sermons.

II. Course Objectives

Listed below are the 4 major objectives for this course; these will form the core of what will be taught during our weeks together.

Students will be able to:

1. Articulate a theology of preaching in their specific local context. (Obj.#1)
2. Exegete a variety of biblical passages for preaching. (Obj.#2)
3. Evaluate sermons for biblical integrity, theological soundness, internal logic, delivery, and appropriate insights gained from the evaluation of their own sermons. (Obj.#3)
4. Develop plans for ordering, writing, and delivering sermons in their own congregational and communal context. (Obj.#4)

III. Textbooks

Required Reading:

Craddock, Fred B., *Sparks*, and Hayes, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching*
Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*
Adam Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word*
Sections from Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (provided)

Supplementary:

Cleophus LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*
Joseph Webb, *Preaching Without Notes*

Paul's Suggestions:

Andy Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*
Buttrick, David, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*
Robert Stephen Reid and Lucy Lind Hogan, *The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching*

Reference:

Paul Scott Wilson, Editor, *The New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching*

IV. Written Assignments**A note on the written assignments:**

Please put your name, the course number, and the date on the first page and use page numbers on all pages. Follow the guidelines for each item of written work. Assignments may be given an approximate page or word count. All written work should be double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman font, with 1" margins. Please save all work in .doc format for ease of evaluation and grading.

Citations: If you quote from a printed text, you must use quotation marks and note the source (including pages) in parentheses at the end of each usage. Direct quotations should never be more than a sentence or two long. There may be times when you are reflecting on a more extensive section of something you have read; in that case, if you are citing an idea but not directly quoting it, simply cite the source at the end of the section.

Please understand, this is not a class on academic writing and citation, but clarity and consistency are important and helpful. For assigned texts, I suggest you use MLA format. There is a link in the online classroom, but in summary: After the quote, simply list the author's last name and the page number of the book in parentheses (Long, 131). If the same author has written multiple books, give some indication of the title. For example, use an abbreviation (Long, TWP, 131). Please provide a "works cited" page as your final page, including assigned books as well as any books or resources used that are not listed on the syllabus. An example has been provided in the online classroom.

Preaching Lob

Each student will preach to the class for evaluation once during the face-to-face portion of the course (June 16-17). The sermon should be 12–15 minutes in length. Please prepare a full manuscript of the sermon to be handed in the day you preach. While these manuscripts do not need to be used during the sermon, they will assist the student in preparation and the instructor in grading. You will be writing parts of this sermon through the entire class time and will be given the final week to pull it together, but feel free to work on it earlier if you would find that helpful.

V. Online Forum Discussions

Each week, students are expected to participate in the Online Forum Discussion (often the class will be broken into smaller groups for easier participation). Each week an assignment or question will be posted for your interaction. Students are expected to understand, analyze, and question the subject matter presented by the instructor and classmates; and then to communicate their thoughts, experiences and ideas with the online community. Below are guidelines for an effective post and comment. A simple reply such as "I agree" or "Yes/No" without

further elaboration does not constitute substantive participation. Students are encouraged to challenge their own, as well as their classmates', perspectives in a constructive manner. Please base any comments on the concepts, perspectives, and practices you are learning in the reading or class, as well as your own observations and insights. The rubric for grading is posted in your online classroom.

WEEK ONE: Ministry Context and Theology
Friday, May 5th – Thursday, May 11th

Weekly Objectives: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe the factors shape both your context of ministry and your practice of preaching.
- Describe your current process of sermon preparation and writing.
- Evaluate and defend your preparation methodology.

Video Overview: Introduction to the class

- My context
- My hope for the class
- Overview of the class

Video Lecture: Preaching as Stew: The Ingredients of a Sermon

Assignments:

Read: Hamilton, chapters 3–4

Assignment 1.1: Preaching Autobiography. Due Thurs, May 11 at 11:59 PM. (Obj. #1)

This is not a research paper; rather, write this paper out of your own experiences with preaching. You do not need to interact with the assigned reading. This paper is designed to give me a sense of who you are, what you are passionate about, and how you approach preaching. In your online classroom, I provide a structure for you to follow. Please follow the outline of the main headings (in bold and underline). You will not have room to answer every sub-question. These sub-questions are simply to prompt your reflection; other insights under each heading may come to mind. Please craft your response in an essay format, not a Q and A format. Please copy and paste the final "context" section of your paper into the Online Forum for class discussion. (Total of 2–4 double-spaced pages, or 700–1,400 words).

Assignment 1.2: Select Text for Preaching Lab. Due Thurs, May 11 at 11:59 PM (Obj. #4)

Choose a text that will be used as the basis of the sermon that you will deliver in the classroom Preaching Lab. The reason you are choosing this text on the first

week is so you can let it "simmer" until the time you are to preach it in June. Other assignments will be built around this text, so choose carefully and intentionally. You may choose a text from any lesson of the Revised Common Lectionary between June 11– September 10. A list of Revised Common Lectionary texts may be found online at:

<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/lections.php?year=A&season=Season%20after%20Pentecost>

If you prefer, you may use a text of your choosing. Pick one that you plan to preach in your context between June 11 – September 10. For class, you will be writing a new sermon you have not preached before but will later use in your current context. (There is no reason to spend all this time in class and not use it in your church! Make it easy on yourself.)

Assignment #1.3: Congregation Survey

This assignment is not due until May 26th but please don't wait until the last minute to do it!

In week 4, you will be asked to create a year-long preaching calendar. Within the next few weeks, conduct a survey of your congregation to find out if there are any topics/books/ideas they would like you to preach on in the coming year. (An example will be posted in your online classroom.) The best way is probably to do this on a Sunday morning, but you can do it in any way that fits your context.

Assignment #1.4: Online Forum Discussion (Obj.#4)

Initial post due Tuesday, May 9 at 11:59 PM

Comments due by the following Thursday at 11:59 PM

1. Share your context with the group by copying and pasting the "Context" section from your Preaching Autobiography (Assignment #1).
2. Craddock writes that, "the key to consistently effective preaching is the discipline of daily work." (Craddock, 7). Hamilton describes his preparation process, saying that he "will spend between fifteen and twenty hours reading, researching, preparing, praying, and writing each sermon." (Hamilton, 32)

Describe and defend your sermon preparation method and the amount of time you spend in sermon preparation. Within your group, compare and critique your colleagues' different methods. It is expected that you will make your initial post by Tuesday night and comment on each of your classmates' responses by the following Thursday.

WEEK 2: ExegesisFriday, May 12th – Thursday, May 18th**Weekly Objectives:** At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Analyze a selected text using basic exegesis and a “Homiletical Notebook.”
- Create summary Form and Function statements for chosen texts.
- Create and contribute to a Homiletical Garden (Sermon Bucket).

Video: Overview**Video Lecture:** Ways to Approach a Text for Sermon Preparation**Video Lecture:** Creating Form and Function Statements**Assignments:****Read:** Craddock, chapters 1–2; Long, chapters 3 and 4. (Found in online classroom)**Assignment # 2.1: Exegetical/Homiletical Journal.** Due Thurs, May 11 at 11:59 PM. (Objs. #1 and 2)

Using the scripture text you chose for Assignment #2 (which will serve as the basis of your classroom sermon), create an Exegetical/Homiletical Journal. The Journal should be comprised of approximately 3–6 pages of the relevant material discovered during preparation. This paper will integrate at least four sources, two of which must be commentaries. The Long chapter found in the online classroom will prove particularly helpful for question #7.

This paper should be formatted as an essay. Please do not write the paper in a straight question/answer format. Please format your paper as a .doc file to make it easier for your instructor to grade.

You will turn this assignment at the end of this week (see above), but you will also turn it in again at the end of the course along with your sermon manuscript. Use this document as a working document throughout the entirety of the class. When you turn it in the second time, I will ask you to highlight any additions or changes.

Rationale for assignment: Preachers frequently borrow titles, illustrations, concepts, plots, and themes from others. This is neither a mistake nor a problem. But all work should be appropriately attributed. The purpose of this Journal is to get you started on your sermon as well as to see the sources you have been reading and how that reading has shaped what you are going to say.

The complete outline for this assignment will be posted in your online classroom. Please read the instructions thoroughly and carefully.

Assignment # 2.2: Online Forum Discussion (Obj.#4)

Initial post due Tuesday, by 11:59 PM
 Comments due by the following Thursday.

1. What do you do in terms of study for sermon preparation?
2. Do you think this level of exegesis (your assignment) is helpful? Do you think it is necessary? What do you think is the bare minimum?

WEEK 3: The Life of the Preacher
 Friday, May 19th – Thursday, May 25th

Weekly Objectives: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe and evaluate your current Preaching Rule of Life.
- Identify 4 preachers who might serve as a source of inspiration and input.
- Assess the effectiveness of a sermon based on a given rubric.

Video: Overview

Video Lecture: Preaching Rule of Life

Assignments:

Read: Barbara Brown Taylor, chapters 6–7 and Craddock, chapter 17

Assignment # 3.1: Sermon Evaluation (Obj. #3)

Watch the sermons and sermon segments found in the online classroom. Using the rubric provided, evaluate in term of context, style, delivery. (etc.)

Assignment # 3.2: “Sermon Bucket” Contribution in Online Forum

Wise preachers always pay attention to life in order to perceive God’s grace in action, and record their observations and insights. Some keep what they might call a “Preacher’s Notebook” or “Sermon Bucket,” consisting of observations from life events, movies, reading, television, radio, internet, and anything else which may show up on the “radar screen” of their awareness. We will participate in a shared, online version. Each student will post at least two illustrations per week, and comment on at least two per week. One of the illustrations should be one you could use in your in-class sermon. The goal is 1) to develop each student’s reflective “homiletic radar” to ferret out insights gleaned from ordinary life, 2) to provide a shared pool of such reflections for use in this course and beyond, and 3) to continually work on your in-class message. As preachers develop this habit of theologically reflective awareness, their dependence upon purchased collections of “sermon illustrations” will simply fade. The “illustrations”—and their theological significance—will abound in the preacher’s homiletic imagination. If you actively participate in contributing and commenting upon such reflections, your preaching will gain in breadth and

depth.

Assignment # 3.3: Online Forum Discussion (Obj.#4)

Initial post due Tuesday, by 11:59 PM
Comments due by the following Thursday

Comment on at least two of your colleagues' illustrations in the Online Forum. What are the strengths of the illustration? What other things might it illustrate?

Assignment #3.4: Preaching Rule of Life (Draft)

Write a 1-to 2-page draft Preaching Rule of Life. A Rule is a set of habits that will serve as a means toward your continued growth and maturity as a person and preacher. Set aside time to reflect upon your life and ministry, seeking to discern places and ways you desire to see growth and improvement. In creating your Rule you are making an intentional plan that will enable you to be more attentive to God and others and more disciplined in your work; to cultivate new habits; to increase your knowledge, to deepen your understanding; and to improve and sharpen your skills. More guidance is found in your online classroom. I have also put my personal Preaching Rule of Life in the Online Classroom—not as a model for you to duplicate, but just as an example for you to see. Your Rule only needs to be 1–2 pages long; what I'm asking you to create is on the final pages of my Rule.

WEEK 4: - Developing a Preaching Calendar

Friday, May 26th – Thursday, June 1st

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Evaluate the merits/weaknesses of series, lectionary, and event preaching.
- Critique the three types of preaching calendar methods and defend your selected method to your colleagues.
- Design a 1-year preaching calendar for use in your local ministry context.

Video: Lectionary vs. Series Preaching: A Discussion Among Colleagues.

Video Lecture: Annual, Monthly, and Weekly Preaching Calendars

Assignments:

Read: Hamilton, chapters 2 and 6.

Assignment # 4.1: Based on lecture content, your reading in the Hamilton book, and the Annual Preaching Guide in your online classroom, design a 1-year preaching calendar for use in your local ministry context. **(Obj.#4)**

For your assignment, I want you to document as much of your work as is helpful

to you. Fill in the preaching calendar with as much information as you can or as is helpful. You must have a sermon for every week in the coming year. For the next 3 months, I would like you to identify sermons, scriptures, some illustrations, etc. For the next 6 months, series and scriptures are fine. The idea is that you must have three months pretty clear, the next three a little less developed, and the next three even less developed; the final three months can just be sermon series and maybe themes.

Assignment # 4.2: Online Forum Discussion (Obj.#4)

Initial post due Tuesday, by 11:59 PM

Comments due by the following Thursday

Post at least three sermon illustrations, and comment on at least two others.

Consider posting illustrations that you might use in the message you are developing to preach in class. And feel free to "steal" your colleagues' illustrations for your message.

WEEK 5: Writing Introductions and Conclusions

Friday, June 2nd – Thursday, June 8th

Weekly Objectives: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Summarize at least 3 purposes of a sermon introduction.
- Prepare an introduction demonstrating at least one of those purposes.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of an introduction based on a rubric.
- Explain the differences between general and specific applications.
- Create a conclusion containing both general and specific applications.

Video: Overview

Video Lecture: Writing an Introduction: The Critical First Five

Video Lecture: The Conclusion: Making it Stick

Assignments:

Read: Hamilton, chapter 8 (particularly 83–85); Craddock, chapter 16

Assignment # 5.1: Due Thurs, June 8 at 11:59 PM. (Obj's. #1 and 2)

Using the information learned from the class lectures and reading, write an introduction for the sermon that you will deliver in class. It must demonstrate at least one of the purposes of a sermon introduction. Please state which purpose you are trying to demonstrate. Introductions should be no more than 5 minutes. You will video your introduction and share it

online. Instructions are in your online classroom.

Assignment #5.2: Due Thurs, June 8 at 11:59 PM. (Obj's. #1 and 2)

Using the information learned from the class lectures and reading, write a possible conclusion for the sermon that you will deliver in class. The conclusion should have a general application to the church ("Here's what this means for us") and a specific action step for the congregation or person ("Here's what I want you to do"). You will video your introduction and share it online. Instructions are in your online classroom.

WEEK 6: Pulling it All Together

Friday, June 9th – Thursday, June 15th

Video: Overview

Assignments:

Finish the sermon you will present in class next week. Much of your work should be done by this point. You should have completed your exegetical work, an introduction, illustrations, your form and function statements, and a conclusion. This week you must put it into a sermon that is 12–15 minutes long. After 15 minutes, points may be deducted.

Please prepare a full manuscript of the sermon to be handed in the day you preach. While these manuscripts do not need to be used during the sermon, they will assist the student in preparation and the instructor in grading. You are invited to use whatever you want in the pulpit, whether that be full manuscript, notes or no notes whatsoever. Each preacher's use of notes (or none) will be part of the discussion of the sermon—from which we will all learn.

Along with your sermon manuscript, please re-submit your Assignment # 2.1: Exegetical/Homiletical Journal, with any changes you have made highlighted in yellow. It is expected that over the course of our class together, you will have found additional observations about the selected text as well as ways to illustrate and communicate.

Final note: I understand that preaching for a class (and a grade) can be intimidating. We are all in this together and I hope this will be more of a learning experience than a terrifying one.

WEEK 7: CLASS - Friday, June 16th - Saturday, June 17th

Schedule for On Campus Weekend: June 16–17**Friday, June 16**

1:30–2:30 pm	Arrival, check-in; refreshments available
2:30–3:30 pm	Lecture: Creativity in Preaching
3:30 – 5:00 pm	Preaching Labs and Evaluation (4)
5:00-6:00 pm	Dinner – The Fellowship Hall
6:00–8:30 pm	Preaching Labs and Evaluation (6)

Saturday, June 17

8:00–8:30 am	Light breakfast/beverages available
8:30–11:00 am	Preaching Labs and Evaluation (6)
11:15 am–noon	Chapel – The Fellowship Hall
12:00–12:45 pm	Lunch – The Fellowship Hall
12:45–2:30 pm	Lecture: “Never Quit on Monday; What to do with Praise and Criticism.” Communion

WEEK 7: Post-Class Assignment: Sermon Evaluation

DUE Thursday, June 22th

Post-Seminar Assignment (Obj. #3)- Using the feedback received during the preaching assignment, provide a 2-page, double-spaced self-evaluation of the sermon you preached. Page One should concentrate on what you thought you did well in the sermon; Page Two should concentrate on what you need to improve based on the feedback received. This evaluation will be due one week following the seminar.

VI: SEMINARY STANDARDS:

- A. Inclusive language:** United Theological Seminary has an official policy regarding the use of Inclusive Language. The policy may be found in the Seminary Catalog and is further explained in the Student Handbook. If you have specific questions, please see the instructor.
- B. Academic Integrity:** Student integrity regarding all work assigned in this class is a basic expectation of the Seminary community. A detailed policy regarding what constitutes a violation of academic integrity can be found in the Student Handbook.
- C. Online Confidentiality:** One of the highlights of the online classroom is that students can draw from the experiences shared during class discussions and in written work. However, it is imperative that students do not share information that is confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature. In addition, students are expected to honor the privacy and confidentiality of their classmates by not disclosing online conversations with those outside of the classroom.
- D. Statement on Disability:** Any student who may need accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Registrar's office.

VII: USING ONLINE RESOURCES:

Information about how to access United Online and where to find help can be found on the seminary website at <http://www.united.edu>.

VIII. EVALUATION:

- 15% Online Discussions
- 30% Final Sermon and Evaluation
- 15% Exegetical Journal
- 15% Sermon Calendar
- 25% Weekly Assignments (9)
 - Select Text
 - Preaching Autobiography
 - Sermon Bucket Contributions
 - Preaching Rule of Life
 - Write Sermon Introduction
 - Write Sermon Conclusion

Online Forum Grading

For the community of learning to be most effective, we all need to be engaged. You have seven days for each module. You must find time during those seven days to complete your assignments.

- Your initial post each week is due by Tuesday, 11:59 pm.
- Your responses are due by Thursday 11:59 pm.
- Church duties are not an excuse for absence or missed assignments. Your appointment to a local church takes into

account the need for school preparation. As part of your appointment, you are expected to be present.

The total scores determine the grades assigned according to the following scale:

100 – 95	A
94 – 90	A-
89 – 88	B+
87 – 84	B
83 – 80	B-
79 – 75	C+
74 – 70	C
69 – 00	F

UW–Unofficial Withdrawal (A student stops attending prior to semester's end)

W–Withdrawal (A student officially withdraws by the proper date)

IX. COURSE EVALUATIONS:

It is very important for students to submit course evaluations toward the end of the semester. Instructors do not see the student evaluations until they have submitted students' final, official grades. Students should feel free to evaluate the course without any negative ramifications.

X. ACADEMIC HONOR POLICY

The Course of Study School of Ohio requires that all material submitted by a student in fulfilling academic requirements must be the original work of the student. Violations of academic honor include any action by a student indicating lack of integrity in academic ethics. Violations include, but are not limited to, cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes seeking, acquiring, receiving or passing on information about the content of an examination prior to its authorized release or during its administration. Cheating also includes seeking, using, giving or obtaining unauthorized assistance in any academic assignment or examination. Plagiarism is the act of presenting the published or unpublished words or ideas of another [including online resources] as if it were one's own work. A writer's work should be regarded as his or her own property. Any person who knowingly (whether intentionally or unintentionally) uses a writer's distinctive work without proper acknowledgement is guilty of plagiarism. A student found guilty of a violation of the academic honor policy, after a review of the case, may be subject to one or more of the following actions:

- (1) warning
- (2) probation
- (3) suspension for the remainder of the course
- (4) dismissal from the Course of Study School of Ohio
- (5) failing grade for the course.

Regardless of the outcome, a letter will be sent to the student's District Superintendent and Board of Ordained Ministry.

Buttrick, David, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* - ISBN-13: 9780800620967
 Robert Stephen Reid and Lucy Lind Hogan, *The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching*

IX. Planning Day

On our final gathering in January, we will spend the day working creating a year-long preaching calendar. Within the next few weeks, I'm inviting you to conduct a survey of your congregation to find out if there are any topics/books/ideas they would like you to preach on in the coming year. For most people, the best way is to copy and pass out this survey on a Sunday morning, but you can do it in any way that fits your context. You may use any format you wish, but an example of a survey and some possible questions can be shared with you the first week. Adjust it to your setting as necessary.

X. Online Forum Discussions

Each week, group members are asked to participate in the Online Forum Discussion. We have a Facebook group where questions will be posted for your reflection and interaction. Group members are encouraged to analyze and question the subject matter presented by the instructor and classmates; we will then communicate our thoughts, experiences and ideas with the online community.

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Buttrick, David, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* - ISBN-13: 9780800620967
Robert Stephen Reid and Lucy Lind Hogan, *The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching*

IX. Planning Day

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E. Syllabus of Homiletics Course

Homiletics Strengthening Preaching through CoP

Instructor: Paul Risler
Cell:
Email:

This group begins online November 23, 2020 with prework and information gathering. Session 1 is on December 7, 2020, Session 2 is December 14, and January 4, 2021 will be a sermon planning session. A Focus Group is on Monday, January 18 for debriefing and feedback.

VI. Description:

The focus of this group is on the preparation and proclamation of the gospel through preaching. This group will focus on the preparation, proclamation and evaluation of sermons incorporating principles from Communities of Practice theory.

VII. Course Objectives

Listed below are the 4 major objectives for this when it was an actual course; these formed the core of what the class was taught during their weeks together. We will be doing a very abbreviated version of the classwork with more conversation and interaction. And no required readings. And no grading!

Students will be able to:

5. Articulate a theology of preaching in their specific local context. (Obj. #1)
6. Exegete a variety of biblical passages for preaching. (Obj.#2)
7. Evaluate sermons for biblical integrity, theological soundness, internal logic, delivery, and appropriate insights gained from the evaluation of their own sermons. (Obj.#3)
8. Develop plans for ordering, writing, and delivering sermons in their own congregational and communal context. (Obj.#4)

VIII. Suggested Reading: (Just sharing this with you. For my class, this is required)

Craddock, Fred B., Sparks, and Hayes, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching* - ISBN-13: 9780827205536
Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* - ISBN-13: 9781848253186
Adam Hamilton, *Unleashing the Word* - ISBN-13: 9781426707001
Sections from Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (provided) ISBN-13: 9780664261429

Supplementary:

Cleophus LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* - ISBN-13: 9780664258474
Joseph Webb, *Preaching Without Notes* - ISBN-13: 9780687090884

Paul's Suggestions:

Andy Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* - ISBN-13: 9781590525142

Buttrick, David, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* - ISBN-13: 9780800620967
Robert Stephen Reid and Lucy Lind Hogan, *The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching*

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Assignment: Preaching Autobiography. due Monday, November 30 (Obj. #1)

Take a few minutes, click on the link below and write a few paragraphs out of your own experiences with preaching. This will give us a sense of who you are, what you are passionate about, and how you approach preaching.

Followed the basic outline of the main headings (in bold and underline) but you don't have to answer every sub question. These questions are simply to prompt your reflection.

<https://forms.gle/HjSKFRJJUeEAEc2T7>

Facebook Prompt

We have a Facebook group created. This is a closed group (although Facebook does not assure confidentiality). If you don't have access to this group, please message Paul.

Craddock writes that, "the key to consistently effective preaching is the discipline of daily work." (Craddock, 7). Hamilton describes his preparation process, saying that he "will spend between fifteen and twenty hours reading, researching, preparing, praying, and writing each sermon." (Hamilton, 32)

Describe and defend your sermon preparation method and the amount of time you spend in sermon preparation. Within our group, let's compare and critique your colleagues' different methods. Feel free to just make short notes. This is not intended to take a huge amount of your time. We will discuss this when we are together.

WEEK ONE - MORNING: Ministry Context and Theology
Monday, December 7 at 9 a.m. Zoom link will be provided in Facebook group

Optional Reading for Overachievers:

Read: Hamilton, chapters 3–4

Objectives:

- Share with each other the factors shape both your context of ministry and your practice of preaching.
- Share your current process of sermon preparation and writing.
- Evaluate and defend your preparation methodology. What keeps you tied to that methodology?

MORNING SESSION:

Welcome/Overview

Context: Share your name, appointment, tell us about your ministry context and how your context impacts your preaching.

Process: How do you plan, prepare and deliver sermons? How long are your sermons and why do you preach for that amount of time? How has COVID impacted your preparation?

As someone who preaches and listens to preaching: What insights have you gained as a listener of sermons? What makes a sermon great? What makes for a bad sermon? What do you listen for as you hear a sermon preached?

What is the future of preaching? Discuss which trends or changes in preaching you welcome and see as beneficial? Why? Discuss which trends and changes cause concern? Why?

[CLIP: New Video Lecture]: Preaching as Stew: The Ingredients of a Sermon, part 1*

Discussion:

- What stood out to you in this lecture?
- What do you think so far about the “Preaching as stew analogy?” Is it helpful or not? What elements do you tend to neglect and why?
- What do you think of the concept of vegetables adding health? How do you teach the deeper stuff of theology or exegesis?

Take a break – Back in 10

[CLIP: OLD Video Lecture]: Preaching as Stew: The Ingredients of a Sermon, part 2.*

Discussion:

- What stood out to you in this lecture?
- What about the idea of starch? Filler? What is the purpose of filler?
- What do you think about the idea that now “authenticity is power?” How do we as teachers use authenticity with integrity? (Craft and Character)
- “People know the difference between preacher stories and your story.” What is a preacher story to you? Do you tend to use them?
- List of 8 – How do you make sure your illustrations are reaching a wide group of people?
- Share some examples of times you used “seasoning.”
- Simmer Time – “The longer we can sit on an idea, often the better it is.”

“Don’t preach because you have to say something, but that you have something to say.” Do you feel this tension? How do you personally keep fresh so that there is urgency to your preaching?

Homework: Survey Congregation

- On our final gathering in January, we will spend the day working creating a year-long preaching calendar. Within the next few weeks, conduct a survey of your congregation to find out if there are any topics/books/ideas they would like you to preach on in the coming year. For most people, the best way is to copy and pass out this survey on a Sunday morning, but you can do it in any way that fits your context. You may use any format you wish, but an example of a survey and some possible questions can be sent to you this week. Adjust it to your setting as necessary.

Take a break - Lunch

WEEK 1: AFTERNOON: Exegesis

Monday, December 7 at 1 p.m. Zoom link will be provided

Optional Reading for Overachievers:

Read: Craddock, chapters 1–2; Long, chapters 3 and 4.

Weekly Objectives: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Analyze a selected text using basic exegesis and a “Homiletical Notebook.”
- Create summary Form and Function statements for chosen texts.
- Create and contribute to a Homiletical Garden (Sermon Bucket).

[CLIP: NEW Video Lecture]: Ways to Approach a Text for Sermon Preparation*

Discussion:

- What stood out to you about this video?
- “You have to do exegesis to do homiletics, but all of your exegesis doesn’t become your homiletics.” We all tend to be on one extreme or the other. Do you think your preaching leans more toward preaching academic exegesis or away from it? Why?
- What is your exegetical process?
- What is the bare minimum we need to do in order to accurately preach?
- “Harvesting vegetables.” The modern need of curation.
- Let’s talk plagiarism! How do you handling using other’s material?

[CLIP: NEW]: “Upon this Rock”*

Break:

[CLIP: OLD]: **Video Lecture:** Creating Form and Function Statements*

Discussion:

- What stood out to you about this video?
- Do you personally use these kinds of statements? Do you usually start or end with them?
- Focus Statement – If you can summarize your sermon in a single statement, what would it be?
 - “Sticky Statements” – What do you think about this idea? Is it simplifying too much?
 - “PREACH” – Picture. Rhyme. Echo. Alliteration. Contrast. Hook. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this kind of preaching?
- Function Statement – What the sermon will create or cause to happen in the hearers? How does this look to you in practical terms? Is specific application always necessary? Does every sermon have a call to action? Do you consider individual vs. corporate calls to action? What does this say to you? To us?

I sent you a copy of the exegetical journal I have my students do as a class assignment. What about this do you personally find helpful or not?

Online Forum Discussion (Obj.#4)

3. What do you do in terms of study for sermon preparation?
4. Do you think this level of exegesis (your assignment) is helpful? Do you think it is necessary? What do you think is the bare minimum?

Individual Diary Entry (Obj.#4)

After each of our three sessions, I'm going to ask you a question or two to capture your reflections, thoughts, emotions, questions, and concerns in real time. This is a part of my research so please take a few minutes to do this step. The goal of this exercise is to give me your individual reflective thoughts that may or may not be shared in either the written survey or the ending focus group.

WEEK 2: The Life of the Preacher

Monday, December 14 at 9 a.m. Zoom link will be provided

Optional Reading for Overachievers:

Read: Barbara Brown Taylor, chapters 6–7 and Craddock, chapter 17

Weekly Objectives: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe and evaluate your current Preaching Rule of Life.
- Identify 4 preachers who might serve as a source of inspiration and input.
- Assess the effectiveness of a sermon based on a given rubric.

Morning Session:

[CLIP: OLD]: **Video Lecture:** Preaching Rule of Life*

Discussion:

- What stood out to you about this video?
- “A Rule of Life” is our intentional conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do.” Is that how you understand a rule?
- Do you practice a Rule of Life? What do you regularly do to stay close to God? What are the practices, relationships and experiences that you are currently committed to as a teacher/preacher?
- Are there things that we need to “cut out” that will form us into a better preacher? “Anything that dulls your sensitivity to God is sin for you.” What are the things that dull your sensitivity to God that might not even be sin per say?
- What things might you commit to that will make you a better preacher?
- How do you get encouragement in preaching? (encouragement folder, colleagues). Why is preaching such an isolating event?

Assignment: Preaching Rule of Life (Draft)

- I would encourage you to write a 1-to 2-page draft Preaching Rule of Life. A Rule is a set of habits that will serve as a means toward your continued growth and maturity as a person and preacher. Set aside time to reflect upon your life and ministry, seeking to discern places and ways you desire to see growth and improvement. In creating your Rule you are making an intentional plan that will enable you to be more

attentive to God and others and more disciplined in your work; to cultivate new habits; to increase your knowledge, to deepen your understanding; and to improve and sharpen your skills. I have included my personal Preaching Rule of Life—not as a model for you to duplicate, but just as an example for you to see. Your Rule can be a few sentences or it could be 1–2 pages. what I’m asking you to create is on the final pages of my Rule.

[End of Morning session] – write? Take an hour and a journal

Afternoon Session:

Monday, December 14 at 1 p.m. Zoom link will be provided

Optional Reading for Overachievers:

Read: Hamilton, chapter 8 (particularly 83–85); Craddock, chapter 16

Writing Introductions and Conclusions

Weekly Objectives: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Summarize at least 3 purposes of a sermon introduction.
- Prepare an introduction demonstrating at least one of those purposes.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of an introduction based on a rubric.
- Explain the differences between general and specific applications.
- Create a conclusion containing both general and specific applications.

[CLIP] Video Lecture: Writing an Introduction: The Critical First Five

Discussion:

- What is the purpose of a sermon?
- “The goal of the sermon is to get the text into the people.” Information doesn’t always equal transformation.
- What is the goal of a good introduction? (find common ground/shrink the gap, create passion/urgency, create tension (message intro for half-truths), I think most preachers don’t use or hold tension enough – unresolved story, hard questions). Seeding an idea that will grow later on.

[CLIP] Video Lecture: The Conclusion: Making it Stick

Discussion:

- What are initial observations about the video?
- How do you finish the majority of messages?
- What did you think about giving a clear action or response? Take home stuff?
- “Clarity is greater than creativity.” What do you want people to do? “What’s it like to be, on the other side of me?”

Individual Diary Entry (Obj.#4)

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Exegetical/Homiletical Journal*

*Please retain the **bold titles/headings** in this document to serve as a template for your report. Anything not in bold can be deleted when you submit your “Notes”.

1. Your Name:

2. Scripture Text and translation: Cut and paste an English translation of your text and identify the translation you are using (e.g., NRSV, NIV).

3. Possible Sermon Title:

4. Congregational Description (*Describe the congregational context where you typically preach*) (about 250 words)

- a. Location of church: rural, small town, urban, etc.
- b. Age of the church: when was it established
- c. Demographic composition of the congregation: age, education, income, etc.
- d. Theological identification
- e. Predominant Style of Worship
- f. Any other dynamics that inform the preaching context

5. Rationale for Text: Why did you choose this text? If it is a text of your choice, explain how and why it was selected. If it is a part of a larger series, where does it fall in that series? If it is a lectionary text (or otherwise assigned text), explain why you choose to shorten, lengthen, or keep the assigned pericope.

4. First Questions: As you approach the passage, what are your “first questions?” *This should be done before consulting any outside sources.* First questions are insights and issues that come up in your *initial* readings of the text. These may be questions you want to research or ideas simply to keep in mind as you proceed. At this point, *answers* to these first questions are not expected. Just list them. down. Craddock refers to this as the “first naiveté”—the first exposure to the text in total naiveté. (Craddock, 37).

5. Technical Studies: These include any/all of the following. You may want to consult the model used by Long in chapter 3 of “Witness of Preaching” for a fuller version of this section.

- **Background:** What is the context or setting of the text and how does it impact the meaning? Note any historical, geographical, political, or social customs. Are there “extra biblical sources,” events, traditions, practices, understandings, etc., which may shed light on your understanding of the biblical text? (please cite sources).

- **Word Studies:** What are the key words and phrases in the text? Do you notice repetition of words or ideas? This section should include your research using lexicons and dictionaries, bible parallels, bible encyclopedias, etc.
 - **Theological Insights:** Look at the theological issues that arise in the text. This section should include research using books and materials that address the theological concerns of the text. It is here, in this final stage of your technical work—and usually not before then— that the student will consult a few well-chosen commentaries.
 - **Final Insights and Observations:** These “concluding observations” indicate how the discovery work of preparation has moved you toward a sermon idea. Here, you draw conclusions; answer lingering questions; show how the text points you toward a useful message for your context.
6. **Comment on the following in a single sentence:**
- a. **What does the text say about the character and activity of God?**
 - b. **What sin, or sins, does the text expose or address?**
 - c. **How does the text “preach” the Gospel of God’s self-disclosure in Jesus Christ?**
 - d. **What personal response/s does the text require of us to be heard and enacted?**
 - e. **What response/s from the Church does the text require?**
 - f. **What would the life of the church be like if we were to take this text seriously?**
 - f. **What is surprising, strange, or offensive in this text?**
 - g. **What is comforting, assuring, and promising in this text?**
7. **What are the Focus and Function statements for your sermon?** (If you need help in how to formulate these statements, please refer back to Long’s *Witness of Preaching*, pp. 78-91). Here are Long’s definitions:
- **Focus statement:** “a concise description of the central, controlling, and unifying theme of the sermon.” In short, this is what the sermon will be about. It’s the “sticky statement.”
 - **Function statement:** “a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers.” This is also what you want them to do.
8. **Bridging the context:** What illustrations, insights, examples, etc. might give clarity to the preaching of this text? You do not need to write them out in full, only note them. Be sure to cite all sources. Again, there is nothing wrong with using another person’s ideas,

but please attribute sources. **You will have the chance to change and add to this as the class progresses. This is where you are right now.**

9. Answer the four questions of preparation:

- What does my congregation currently think about this topic?
- What do I want them to think?
- What is the single most persuasive idea? (Usually the Focus statement)
- What do I want them to do? (Usually the Function Statement)

10. What are you most passionate about in this message?

11. Bibliography or Works Cited:

Note: Sources for all your studies are expected at the end of your Journal in typical bibliographical form. However, it is expected that attribution of other people's work be followed in all sermons and throughout the Exegetical Journal. That said, the journal itself is more of an academic document. When delivering sermons, please use subtle but clear references to indicate borrowed ideas or phrases. Please do not overdo this. You do not footnote a sermon or apologize for using someone else's material. Just cite it.

I have attached an example of an exegetical/Homiletical notebook in your on-line classroom. I do not expect this level of thoroughness or length in your work, but this is the only assignment you have this week other than the Online Discussion. Also, the questions in my example are slightly different so please understand, I only offer the paper an example to give you a sense of the project.

*Adapted from "Seminar I: The Pastor Formed through Preaching" with Michael Pasquarello and Stacy Minger. Asbury Theological Seminary.

WEEK 3: Planning Day
Monday, January 14 at 9 a.m. Zoom link will be provided

Opening catch up

Video: Preaching Calendar

This was super fun to do before COVID, but I'm not as sure how this will work online!

For your assignment, I want you to document as much of your work as is helpful to you. Fill in the preaching calendar with as much information as you can or is helpful. There is a "quiz" you will take that will give you additional points for each of the steps you say you complete. (Although I don't need you to turn in your Preaching Calendar booklet, I do want to know if you did the steps.)

When you are finished, you must have:

1. For non-lectionary preachers: a Theme (usually the series title), and a Topic (usually a sermon title or main idea) for every week in the coming year.
2. For those who preach lectionary, you should have a Topic and select a primary scripture for each week of the year.

For the first three months (September, October and November): You must fill in all the categories on the sheet: the Series Theme, Topics, Scriptures, as well as some notes (these may include some key words that point to illustrations, or events on the calendar, etc.). The notes don't have to make sense to me, only to you. Again, if you are a lectionary preacher (or don't preach in series), you may choose to omit the "Theme" column, but the lecture will tell you how to use each column to your benefit.

NOTE: If you preach the lectionary – Make sure you do the steps in "Creating an Annual Preaching Calendar" even if you preach the lectionary. You may even want to develop themes that you would like to cover over the year. What pastors often find is that when you begin to look at the lectionary, those themes will emerge or help you hone your focus for a passage or a week. If you don't have it, here is a link to the [Revised Common Lectionary \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

Individual Diary Entry (Obj.#4)

After each of our three session, I'm going to ask you a question or two to capture your reflections, thoughts, emotions, questions, and concerns in real time. This is a part of my research so please take a few minutes to do this step. The goal of this exercise is to give me your individual reflective thoughts that may or may not be shared in either the written survey or the ending focus group.

F. Online Journal Prompts

Online Journal Prompts

(Developed in collaboration with Dr. Brittany Peterson)

JOURNAL 1 (BEFORE the first session):

Preaching Autobiography.

Please post by Monday, November 30 (Obj. #1)

Write a few paragraphs out of your own experiences with preaching. This assignment is designed to give me and the group a sense of who you are, what you are passionate about, and how you approach preaching. We will talk about these in more detail when we gather, this is just to get your thinking.

Although I'd appreciate it if you followed the basic outline of the main headings (in bold and underline) you don't have to answer every sub question. These questions are simply to prompt your reflection.

Discuss your experience of preaching:

Context: Tell us about your ministry context and how your context impacts your preaching. How do you plan, prepare and deliver sermons? How long are your sermons and why do you preach for that amount of time?

As someone who preaches: What has formed you as a preacher? Who do you listen to and why? What are your convictions about preaching and why do you hold them?

As someone who listens to preaching: What insights have you gained as a listener of sermons? What makes a sermon great? What makes for a bad sermon? What do you listen for as you hear a sermon preached? Discuss which trends or changes in preaching you welcome and see as beneficial? Why? Discuss which trends and changes cause concern? Why?

What are your hopes for the group?

What more would you like to learn about preaching? Where do you hope to grow as a preacher? What areas of your own preaching do you wish to see improve? What would you like to focus on in this group?

After you post here, take a few minutes and go to our facebook group and share you answer with the group.

JOURNAL 2 (AFTER the first session):

- What comes to mind when you think about the word, community?
- As a pastor, do you believe you have a community based on your definition above? Explain.

JOURNAL 3 AND 4: (Same prompts apply for after sessions 2 and 3)

- When you think about class this week, what is one thing that will linger with you?
- Was there anything that you found yourself resistant to or that you disagreed with? Explain, and why do you think that is?

JOURNAL 5 (AFTER last session):

- When you think about this entire experience, what do you think was most meaningful to you?
- How, if at all, has your approach to preaching changed?
- As you think about your role as a pastor/preacher, would this kind of ongoing Community of Practice be beneficial? Why or why not?

G. Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, _____, will be assisting the researcher (Paul Risler) by
_____ (specific job descriptions)

I agree to abide by the following guidelines regarding confidentiality:

1. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual(s) that may be revealed during the course of performing research tasks throughout the research process and after it is complete.
2. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., electronic files, recordings, transcripts) with anyone other than Paul Risler.
3. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., electronic files, recordings, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession (e.g., using a password-protected computer).
4. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g., electronic files, recordings, transcripts) to Paul when I have completed the research tasks.
5. After consulting with Paul Risler, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to Paul Risler (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

By signing below, I am agreeing to these terms:

(Signature)

(Date)

H. Guide to Creating a Preaching Calendar

Creating an Annual Preaching Calendar

A Step-by-Step Guide to Better Preparation



Paul Risler

For COS 324 and 2020 CoP Group

Why Create a Preaching Calendar?3
 “But I can’t work that far in advance!”3

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 Pray4
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Section 2: Summarize priorities.....8
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Section 3: Calendar Work.....10
 Take out your personal and church calendars, as well as your Sermon Planning
 Spreadsheet (below or on line).....10

Section 4 - Followup and Followthrough15

Why Create a Preaching Calendar?

One common complaint that I have heard from almost every pastor I have ever met is how they wish they had more time to work on sermons. It was certainly true for me as well. It seems there is always another priority pushing out sermon preparation time: another meeting to attend, another visitation, another hospital call, another emergency to respond to at the last minute. Add to that the additional time challenges faced by part-time or bi-vocational pastors. Then there are the complexities of family, health, continuing education... the list is endless. There never seem to be enough hours in the day. For these reasons and more, a year-long preaching calendar may be the best way to improve the overall quality of your life and allow you more hours of “simmer time” for your sermons.

“But I can’t work that far in advance!”

Yes, you can. You really can. It takes some practice but you don’t need to do it perfectly. This is not a rule to strictly adhere to, but rather a structure that will help you the more you use it. The goal is to develop categories of sermons for the next year. For those of you who preach in series, this approach will help you focus your research. So for example: You decide to do a series on forgiveness. If you were doing a single sermon, you would research passages, ideas, illustrations... you most likely would have more material than you could ever use in a single sermon. But now, rather than a single sermon, you have material to create an entire series spread over four weeks.

One of the best tricks I’ve learned in preaching is to take a three-point sermon and turn it into a three-message series. So let’s go back to our forgiveness example. You begin thinking about forgiveness and you realize that there are different angles to it. There is vertical forgiveness—this is forgiveness between you and God. God forgives our sin when we confess and give it over to God. But once that happens, there is also the call to forgive our neighbor. The bible talks about this as much as, if not more than, God’s forgiveness of us. We are to forgive one another. There is yet another kind of forgiveness, and for many it’s often the hardest thing: forgiving ourselves. What does that look like? How does this work?

There was a time when I would have covered the topic of forgiveness in a single three-point sermon. Now, I would turn it into at least three different sermons, if not more. This approach enables me to go into much greater depth on each aspect of forgiveness!

Even if you preach lectionary, you will find common themes. If you preach through a book of the bible, the research on the entire book will be very helpful. Historical research, contextual research... all will serve you well for the entire series.

Section 1: Pray, read, survey

Getting Ready

The first step in creating a preaching calendar involves preparation. It's getting our hearts right with God and gathering the information we need in preparation to work.

Pray

Preaching is, first and foremost, a spiritual task that begins with prayer. Mark off the first hour on your calendar to simply pray: "God what is your desire for our congregation over the next year? What do you want us to know, become, and do? What is going on in the life of my congregation, community and the world we live that we must address as a congregation?"

I would advise you to bring only these questions and a journal or notebook with you during this time (or, if you are walking or driving, a voice recorder). This is not the time for bible study or looking over books you have read. Trust that God will speak to you and lead you. As you pray the prayers below, make notes on where God may be leading you.

"God, what are the primary struggles of my congregation?"

"Is there something we need to celebrate?"

“What do we as a congregation need to learn? Why?”

“What characteristics do you want to form in us in the coming year?”

“What is going on in the life of my community as well as the world we live that we must address as a congregation?”

Read

What have you been reading lately that is speaking to your soul? This may include books of the bible, but it may also include books or devotionals you have been reading about Christian living. Have you read a good book on prayer? Heaven? Marriage? Evangelism? Have you heard a good sermon that touched your heart or impacted your life? Make notes of those things. Also, have you read any good books or articles about stuff in the culture or seen something in the news that jumped out at you? Note those below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for the student to write their notes as instructed in the text above.

Survey

Survey your congregation. You can use the format below, or you can create your own. Keep it to no more than four questions. Look over the completed surveys for your congregation's feedback. It always helps to ask "real people" what topics they want you to cover. This may include books of the bible, theological themes or topics.

Congregational Survey

The following survey is being conducted in order to help in planning bible-study and small-group opportunities throughout the coming year.

What topics/issues should our congregation address in the coming year?	What questions do you have about faith, life, or the Bible?
Topic:	Question:
Topic:	Question:
Topic:	Question:
Topic:	Question:
Name a book of the Bible, an idea you have encountered while reading the Bible, or a Bible story you would like to hear a sermon about in the coming year.	Name an issue (or issues) that you wrestle with personally, spiritually, or in your relationships.
Book:	Personally:
Idea:	Spiritually:
Bible Story:	Relationships:

Section 2: Summarize priorities

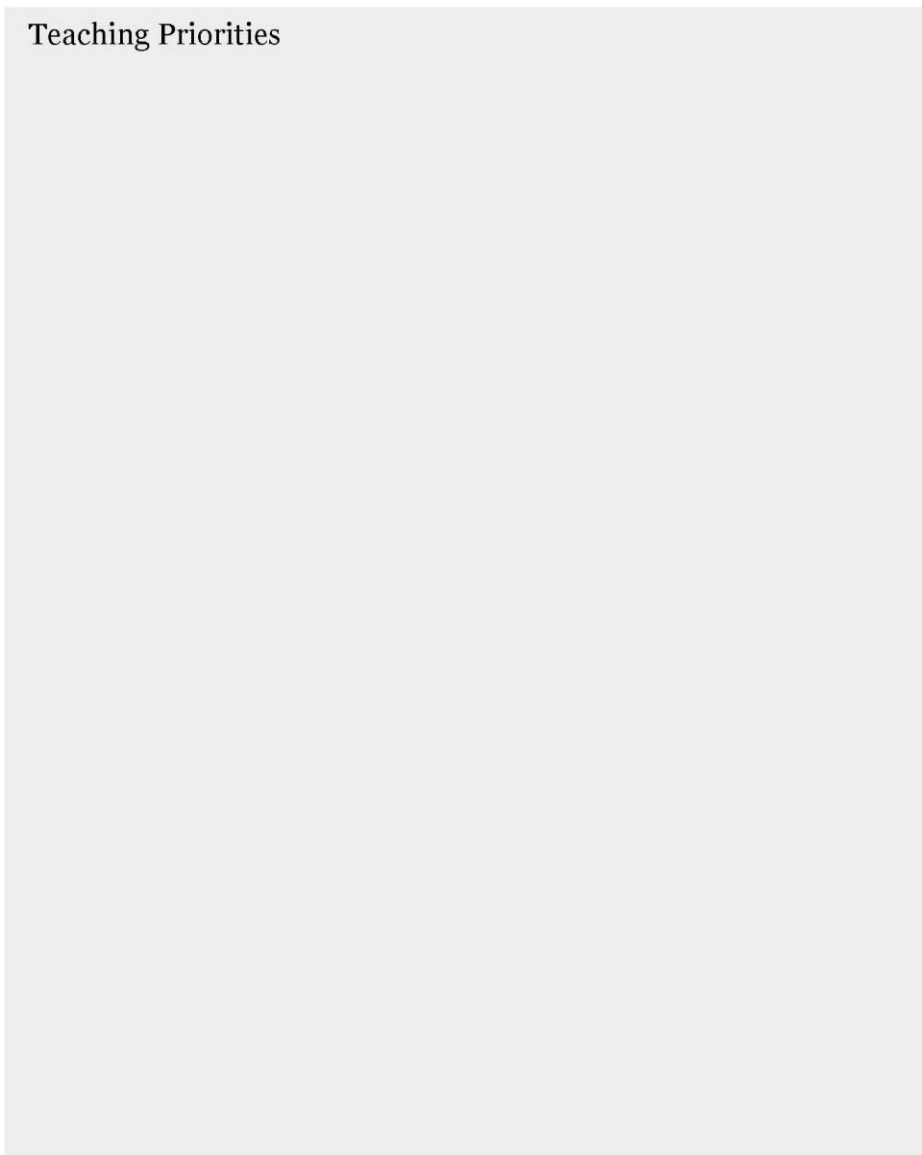
Pulling your ideas together

Teaching Priorities

Using the information gathered in section 1, summarize and write your teaching priorities below. Your list might look something like this:

- There are a lot of people struggling with illness and suffering. Maybe something on where is God in suffering? Maybe tie in the book of Job?
- I would like to do a series on Biblical finances
- Several people suggested a series on the book of James
- Names of Jesus (the I AM). Bread. Shepherd, Door. Resurrection and Life
- At least 3 gospel presentation days where we encourage our congregation to bring their loved ones (Easter, plus at least 2 other days).
- There is a lot of division going on right now. Maybe something on biblical unity? The “one anothers” of the bible? (Love one another, Serve one another, etc)
- I really loved that book I read on prayer: “The Circle Maker.”
- At least one message (maybe a series) on volunteering/serving
- Several have questions around refugees and why people are so upset.

Teaching Priorities



Section 3: Calendar Work

Take out your personal and church calendars, as well as your Sermon Planning Spreadsheet (below or on line)

On your Sermon Planning Spreadsheet, note holidays, known local church events and celebrations, and major school holidays. Depending on your context, you will want to note the beginning and ending of the school year. Look at your attendance from the year before. Is there anything that causes your church to grow (or to shrink) that you want to be aware of as you plan? *Do this BEFORE you start filling in series information.* This will keep you from preaching a sermon on the passage in Revelation about the “Great Whore of Babylon” on Mother’s Day. (Not that that has ever happened to me. Well, okay, I did that.)

Consider the seasons of the year. January is a great time to talk about personal finances or Biblical stewardship. Our culture is thinking about “regret and resolutions.” People outside and inside the church do more reflection during this time of the year than at any other. People resolve to lose weight and get out of debt. People evaluate their life and look to a new year. January is also a great time to talk about forgiveness and starting fresh.

If your church celebrates Lent (the 40 days before Easter, not including Sundays), this is an excellent time for a series on discipleship. Series like The Lord’s Prayer, or Spiritual Disciplines, the Kingdom of God, or the Nature of God.

The Spring might be a good time to do series to do on relationships, because it involves Mother’s Day.

During the summer season, people think about relationships. As the days grow longer people connect more through activities like vacations, summer cookouts and fireworks. This might be a good time to do a sermon about inviting new people to church based around a fellowship event you have planned. Summer is usually “lighter” in theme. It’s also a great time to bring in guest preachers.

As fall rolls around, people think about “starting back.” Back-to-school shopping, a new football season, and new activities fill up the calendar. The early fall, when kids go back to school, is a good time to talk about the vision of the church and why you do what you do. It’s also a good time to start a book study.

Advent is the four weeks before Christmas and is an excellent time for a series building to Christmas.

Finally – Don't forget your vacation! Once you get a feel for the church year, figure out when you want to be gone. Mark out adequate time for rest. Do not schedule yourself so you come home from vacation on a Friday and have to preach on a Sunday. Who might fill in for you so you can get adequate rest and relaxation? Is there someone in the congregation? A retired pastor? A District Superintendent? A combination of all of the above?

Note: The time between Christmas and New Years is a slow time for most churches and an excellent time for you to take some time off or do to annual or additional sermon planning.

Date	Theme	Topic/Title	Scripture	Notes
1/3				
1/10				
1/17				
1/24				
1/31				
2/7				
2/14				
Ash Wed				
2/21				
2/28				
3/7				

Date	Theme	Topic/Title	Scripture	Notes
3/14				
3/21				
3/28				
4/4	EASTER			
4/11				
4/18				
4/25				
5/2				
5/9				Mother's Day
5/16				
5/23				Pentecost
5/30				
6/6				
6/13				
6/20				
6/27				

Date	Theme	Topic/Title	Scripture	Notes
7/4				
7/11				
7/18				
7/25				
8/1				
8/8				
8/15				
8/22				
8/29				
9/5				
9/12				
9/19				
9/26				
10/3				
10/10				
10/17				
10/24				

Date	Theme	Topic/Title	Scripture	Notes
10/31				
11/7				
11/14				
11/21				
11/28				Advent
12/5				
12/12				
12/19				
	Christmas Eve			
12/26				
1/2				

Section 4 - Followup and Followthrough

What plans do you need to make to accomplish and supplement your calendar?

If you are taking a vacation in July and another week in December, why not contact some preachers now who could fill in for you? Are there people in your congregation or community who might add their voice to your series and make it better? Say you are doing a series on suffering; think, "I wonder if Mary Smith would share her story about when she had cancer?" If you ask her soon enough, you can work with her to develop and practice her talk. If you are doing a series on a book about prayer, you might suggest your congregation buy the book the month before. Maybe you could design a bible-reading plan for a season based around your messages. Would you want to develop a community outreach or dinner to go along with an evangelism series? So much is possible when you plan ahead.

What things do I need to do to follow through on my plans?

Preaching weekend or Topic	Action Step
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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