

12-1-2015

The United Methodist Church and the Willingness to Embrace Change: Attracting Members of the Emerging Generation and a Return to Vitality

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Recommended Citation

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George Fox University

The United Methodist Church and the Willingness to Embrace Change: Attracting
Members of the Emerging Generation and a Return to Vitality

A Dissertation Submitted to The Faculty of George Fox Evangelical Seminary
In Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

By

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December 2015

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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Abstract

Christian culture within the United States has been experiencing phenomenal change related to shifts in the larger U.S. culture, as well as shifts taking place in the Church. As such, five sets of research questions were presented in this phenomenological study. These consisted of – What is the current state of the Church? Is the Church is divided doctrinally, theologically, and in areas regarding polity? If so, what is causing this division? What are the primary causes of the decline in membership currently being experienced by the United Methodist Church? What are the greatest challenges facing the Church? What are the United Methodist Church’s strengths, and how can the Church build on these strengths for the future of the denomination? These questions have all been answered in detail. The main problems found within the United Methodist Church today are a dramatic decline in numbers, issues concerning apportionments – how and where they are being used, and a general lack of accountability among the central agencies of the Church. The interviews and examination of the research in this qualitative study have also outlined leadership and structural models that are lacking, fewer numbers of pastors, and seminaries that are out of touch with what is taking place within the Church. The institutional division, loss of mission, and the role of evangelism need to be addressed. Using the example set by the Emerging Church Movement, and by returning to the core teachings of John Wesley, the United Methodist Church has the opportunity to create vital congregations where true missionary works and effective evangelism can take place within the wider communities in which the church is a part.

Acknowledgments

The process of earning a doctorate and writing a dissertation is long and arduous – and it’s certainly not done singlehandedly. I would like to begin by thanking the congregations of the Mt Bethel United Methodist Church in Marietta, Georgia, and the Stockbridge First United Methodist Church in Stockbridge, Georgia for allowing me the time needed for my studies. I am grateful to the faculty and staff of George Fox Evangelical Seminary, especially Clifford Berger, Loren Kerns, Dee Small and Heather Rainey. I appreciate my advisor, Roger Nam, for pushing me forward. I will always be grateful for the encouragement of Billy Watson, Tom Ingram and David Banks. I’ll never forget our time together! Thank you to Leonard Sweet for inviting me to participate in this journey and for the continued support and mentorship. The world around me will always be “fuzzy” and I will always look for the Spirit’s nudge.

However, the greatest thanks go to my family. Thank you, Shelley, Jennings, Carson and Robert. Without your encouragement and support this work would have never been completed – so I dedicate it to you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There is a growing wave of change taking place in the Christian culture within the United States today, and it is taking place without many church leaders, and (or) the organizations they serve, even realizing that it is taking place. These changes have led some members to wonder if Christianity is in the midst of the next great reformation? Only time will tell the whole story, but the invariable change occurring in the landscape around the Church, and the advent of new and vibrant faith communities, certainly suggest the possibility. The very suggestion that something new is evolving within our religious culture has created a larger discussion among many mainline denominations. This is especially true among members of the Emerging generation. Two demographic groups, Generation Y and the Millennials, presently make up the vast majority of the Emerging generation. These demographic groups consist of those born between 1984 and 2002, with the younger millennial group being born after 1990.¹

These two demographic groups should garner a high degree of interest among the leadership of the United Methodist Church, due to recent declining membership trends. The recent trends of double-digit decline in membership, coupled with the fact only 2% of the Church's existing membership consist of people under the age of 25, has many of the United Methodist Church's leadership scrambling to find effective ways in which to evangelize the Emerging generation.² In a recent report given to The Council of Bishops

¹Tim Elmore. *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future*. Atlanta: Poet Gardner Publishing, 13.

²Audrey Barrick, "Report: Mainline Protestant Churches Face Rockier Future," *Christian Post Reporter*, December 7, 2009, 1, accessed December 20, 2010, <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20091207/report-mainline-protestant-churches-face-rockier-future/>.

of the United Methodist Church, titled *A Call To Action Report: Reform Church in U. S* (released by the United Methodist News Service on October 25, 2010), reported that “the United Methodist Church needs to institute widespread reforms – from consolidating general Church agencies to holding bishops and clergy accountable for Church growth – to revitalize the denomination.”³ The Action Steering Team that put out the report further noted, “the status quo of a shrinking and aging U.S. Church is ‘toxic’ and unsustainable.”⁴ The report clearly articulates why multi-million dollar advertising campaigns and the new “Re-think Church” strategies, although commendable in their attempts, fall vastly short of creating the change, which must take place within the United Methodist Church if it is to remain viable.

Part of the “Re-think Church” campaign is to assess the question “What has God called The United Methodist Church to be in the 21st Century?” The United Methodist Church plans to spend \$20 million in ads over the next four years to convey the message that church is a verb, rather than a noun.⁵ The money may be better spent elsewhere, given that the declines in attendance have less to do with developing newer and more innovative programs and church strategies intended to attract a younger audience, and more to do with the loss of core Wesleyan theological beliefs. A rediscovery of these beliefs, coupled with the aid of certain Emerging Church teachings, is the key to the

³ Call to Action Steering Team, —Call to Action Steering Team Report, The United Methodist Church, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.umc.org/atf/cf/%7Bdb6a45e4-c446-4248-82c8-e131b6424741%7D/CTA_STEERING%20TEAM_%20RPT_1-44.PDF, 8.

⁴ Heather Hahn, “Leaders Ponder Funding Structural Changes,” www.ngumc.org, accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/leaders-ponder-funding-structural-changes>.

⁵ Audrey Barrick, “United Methodists: Church Is a Verb, Not a Noun,” *Christian Post Reporter*, May 2, 2009, accessed March 14, 2010, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/united-methodists-church-is-a-verb-not-a-noun-38420/>.

success, or failure, of the United Methodist Church (UMC) in the future. Without having a thriving population and sustaining community through true mission-mindedness and the evangelical spirit, the UMC may lose its way completely.

Background

Decline in Membership

The United Methodist Church's latest account, "State of the Church Report," showed that one-half of all United Methodist Churches have fewer than 55 people in attendance each week. A key finding revealed that 81 percent of the churches that closed never achieved an average attendance of 50 or higher. The numbers are significant given that having 50 members in attendance was cited as the strongest predictor of sustainability, according to a March, 2006 study by Richard Day Research reviewed by Audrey Barrick.⁶ Accordingly, 41 percent of U.S. United Methodist Churches did not receive a member by profession of faith in all of 2005, and the most telling statement in the report was that "There is a general feeling that times have changed and will continue to change rapidly, but the church has not changed correspondingly."⁷ Whether orchestrated by denominational leadership, or smaller groups of people who have left the Church to start new faith communities, it is obvious that change is happening in reaction to a significant shift taking place today.

It is far too early to offer any clear observations, but the landscape of the Church in the United States is certainly primed for, and experiencing, change. A closer look at

⁶ Audrey Barrick, "United Methodists Turning Tide for Growth," Christian Post Reporter, June 25, 2007, accessed February 10, 2010, <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070625/united-methodists-turning-tide-for-growth/index.html>.

⁷ Barrick, "*United Methodist Turning Tide For Growth.*"

the changes in Church attendance, the mass exodus of the mainline denominations, and the growing number of people who claim no religious affiliation, are proof enough that the Church is experiencing a dramatic modification of sorts. The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) of 2008 found that the percentage of Americans that claim no religion was at 8.2 percent in 1990, compared to 14.2 percent in 2001.⁸ This statistic ultimately reached 15 percent in 2008. Given the estimated growth of the American adult population since the 2001 census, from 207 million to 228 million, reflects an additional 4.7 million people who do not claim a religion. Additionally, the percentage of Christians in the U.S., which was at 86 percent in the 1990's, had decreased to 76 percent in 2008.

One of the most sobering facts is that 90 percent of the decline comes from the non-Catholic segment of the Christian population, largely from the mainline denominations, which include Methodist, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians/Anglicans, and the United Church of Christ. The mainline denominations represented 19 percent of the U.S. population in the 1990's, and represented roughly 12 percent of the population in 2008. However, there has been a significant amount of growth within the Christian population among those who identify themselves as "non-denominational." This group represented less than 200,000 in 1990, and expanded to well over 8 million by 2008. These figures represent a number of less than 1 percent in 1990, to roughly 12 percent in 2008.⁹

William J. Abraham, who many consider to be a prophetic voice within the United Methodist Church, sites ten problems the Church must begin to address if it is

⁸ Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, "Catholics On the Move, Non-Religious On the Rise," *Aris In The Media*, March 5, 2009, accessed February 16, 2010, https://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/2009/03/05/catholics_on_the_move_non-religious_on_the_rise/.

⁹ Kosmin, Barry A. and Ariela Keysar. "Catholics on the Move, Non-religious on the Rise."

going to come to a solution. These consist of 1) Decline of membership, 2) concern for apportionments or monies sent to the central bureaucracies, 3) lack of accountability among central agencies of the Church, 4) current leadership of the Church, 5) seminaries being out of touch with the Church, 6) the general moral and doctrinal hollowness of the Church, 7) the encroachment of a radical liberal agenda, 8) institutional division, 9) altered mission of the Church, and 10) the notion that the Church has lost its way spiritually.¹⁰ Dr. Abraham believes the United Methodist Church is suffering from what he calls “doctrinal amnesia.” He suggests the United Methodist Church is deeply confused about its doctrinal identity, and must therefore begin to develop a clear understanding of what makes up the denomination’s core tenets before beginning to face challenges that are more pressing. Dr. Abraham states, “Good doctrine, properly received, is like an effective medicine which will work wonders in the Church.”¹¹ One could certainly argue there is some validity to his concerns, and appreciation of his thoughts on what must happen to shift the decline.

Since Dr. Abraham’s assessment in 1995, the United Methodist Church has experienced decline each year. In 2013, of the 49 reporting U.S. annual conferences, there were over 83,000 fewer members combined, with more than 68,000 fewer members attending weekly services. These losses are consistent with the results of the previous year’s annual conference findings, as reported by United Methodist News Service. Ultimately, the United Methodist News Service’s analysis found a loss of 87,319 members total, and 50,895 fewer people in worship in 2012, based on 57 of the 59 annual

¹⁰ William J. Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of the Doctrine in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 81-85.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 29.

conference reports. Even more alarming is that worship attendance, during the same period, declined by more than one-third.¹²

It has also been noted that when looking at the population demographics, it seems neither the mainline, nor the non-denominational organizations, are having success evangelizing the 20 to 30 age demographic. This is a phenomenon, which warrants further attention. This generation appears to be skeptical of all things Christian – the faith itself, the people who profess it, the Bible, and Jesus Christ.¹³ However, several consistent themes have surfaced, based on the national studies regarding the newer generation’s beliefs regarding who evangelicals are. The primary viewpoint is that evangelicals are 1) anti-homosexual (91percent), 2) judgmental (87 percent), and 3) hypocritical (85 percent).¹⁴ Without question, if these are the general views held by others, in relationship to the United Methodist Church, then the population will continue to decline.

Perceptions of Christianity and the Church

Additional research made available, in books such as *UnChristian* and *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*, shed light on why the Church is not reaching the newer generation.¹⁵ Both of these works show recurring themes from countless hours of research conducted on members of the 20 to 40 age

¹² Heather Hahn, “Despite Declines, Signs of Vitality in 2012,” www.ngumc.org, August 8, 2013, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/despote-declines-signs-of-vitality-in-2012>.

¹³ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters*, Reprint ed. (Nashville, TN: Baker Books, 2012), 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 27.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 24.

demographic of those not within the traditional Church, and what this group says about Christians and the Church. These recurring themes included the notion that traditional Church-goers are 1) hypocritical, 2) judgmental, and 3) homophobic.

Upon taking a closer look at these themes, there exists both a level of truth to these claims, as well as the existence of a fair amount of misunderstanding. In truth, most Christians are not hypocritical, judgmental, nor homophobic. The vast majority of Christians believe that God is a God of love and acceptance. However, the real issue is not about arguing over what people think about Christians. Rather, the real issue is whether Christians are willing to work to change present day perceptions regarding who they are assumed to be, for the purpose of reaching this new generation of people. Namely, those individuals who have misconceptions about who Christians really are and about what the purpose of the Church really is.

The primary question to be asked is – is the Church willing to respond, with great humility, to those people who are open to hearing about Jesus, but who are a little skeptical of Christians? As evidenced within communities across the nation, there seems to be a growing number of non-denominational Churches, and even some denominational Churches that are up for the task, but once again, only time will tell. It should also be addressed that some of the perceptions surrounding Christianity, and the United Methodist Church today, are caused by an outdated structure and leadership. The question is then: Are Christians within UMC willing to work toward changing many common perceptions of Christianity, through embracing certain changes, while at the same time re-engaging with some of the core, and perhaps forgotten, tenets of the

Church? If these types of necessary changes are not embraced, the Church may be left behind in this ever-changing world.

Structural and Leadership Concerns

As strong as the desire exists to make Church relevant, there is also a very strong anti-Church sentiment for other reasons as well. The anti-Church sentiment is a reaction to frustration surrounding top down organized religious structures, which promotes the denominational organizations (or Church structure), wants over the needs of its members. These types of congregations tend to call themselves a “Church,” while at the same time neglect the poor and the disenfranchised within the community. As such, and although the Church may consider itself a decentralized organization, it behaves very much like a highly centralized entity. This has the consequence of affecting ministry at the local level, out in the community, where the true mission of the Church takes place.

In addition, there is considerable concern among United Methodist clergy and laity over apportionments paid to central bureaucracies due to a lack of accountability. Bishop Will Willimon, speaking about the high cost of the 2012 General conference, said, the “General Conference in Tampa made history as the most expensive (\$1,500 per minute!), least productive, most fatuous assemblage in the history of Methodism.”¹⁶ That particular Sunday evening’s “A Celebration of Ministry” fiasco, was a reflection of nearly two weeks at the Church’s expense. The costly event paid for of hours of belabored supplication by the General Commission on examining the Status and Role of Women, the development of five Ethnic National Plans, Strengthening the Black Church

¹⁶ Bill Willimon, “Don’t Blame Bishops for General Conference ‘fiasco,’” The United Methodist Reporter, June 3, 2012, accessed September 10, 2014, <http://unitedmethodistreporter.com/2012/06/03/dont-blame-bishops-for-general-conference-fiasco/>.

for the 21st Century, and the promotion of United Methodist Men, Girl Scouts, an Africa University, and a number of other agencies as well. A subtheme of that long night: even though we cannot cite specific fruit, please do not force us to change, or to spend less on ourselves.

Even after suffering this abuse, the General Conference succumbed to the agencies' pleadings. In a post-GC blog, Mike Slaughter (who, along with Adam Hamilton, eloquently—and futilely—warned GC that we must change or face certain death) told the truth: “Our denominational system continues to resist change by protecting archaic structures. From our seminaries to boards and agencies, institutional preservation was a strong resistant influence throughout GC. Entrenched organizational bureaucracies resist accountability ...”¹⁷

Bishop Willimon went on to discuss another of Dr. Abraham's problems with the Church when he made this statement regarding the current leadership of the Church, “My organizational guru Ron Heifetz speaks of the “myth of the broken system.” Heifetz argues that all systems are “healthy” in that systems produce what those who profit from the system desire. Though the CGC cannot produce a complicated, large scale, two-week convention, the CGC produces a General Conference that protects those in positions of power in our Church.”¹⁸ The lack of effective leadership is seen at every level of the denomination, and these issues have contributed to the already considerable institutional division occurring within the UMC.

¹⁷ Bill Willimon, “*Don't Blame Bishops for General Conference 'Fiasco.'*”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Institutional Division

Institutional division is at an all time high among clergy over issues regarding the authority of Scripture, mission and evangelism, and human sexuality. In many instances, these issues have become so polarizing that finding meaningful middle ground has been all but impossible. Yet, some still refuse to acknowledge this growing problem.

Nevertheless, it has been stated by Maxie Dunnam, a former President of Asbury Seminary that "We can no longer talk about schism as something that might happen in the future. Schism has already taken place in our connection."¹⁹

The most divisive issue presently facing the Church is over human sexuality. The only thing the two sides can seem to agree on is that this issue has the potential to push the denomination into an ever-deepening schism. The issue of human sexuality is not a new discussion within the denomination. United Methodists have been debating homosexuality since 1972. The Church's official stance is that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings. As such, United Methodist pastors are not allowed to officiate same sex weddings, nor can same sex weddings be held in a United Methodist Church. In addition, "self-avowed and practicing" gay individuals cannot be ordained. Since 1972, the denomination's top legislative body, the General Conference, has consistently voted to keep this language, and has expanded restrictions against allowing the open professing of gay clergy, and the recognition of same-gender unions. The schism taking place within the Church today is of major concern, and needs to be addressed on numerous fronts.

¹⁹ Timothy C. Morgan, "Is Gay Marriage Destroying the United Methodist Church?," [www.ChristianityToday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com), June 11, 2014, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/june/is-gay-marriage-destroying-united-methodist-church.html>.

Loss of Missionary Focus

Modern Methodism has lost much of the flavor that was predominant in its infancy and stands in contrast, on many levels, with what it once was. Nevertheless, the Church does have the capacity to regain focus and numbers, albeit in a shifted manner. The majority of United Methodist Churches today define Christian community through the program driven models of the Church. In this manner, it can be said that Christian community takes place in Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and during fellowship times offered in Church buildings. Although it is entirely feasible for Christian community to take place in these settings, there needs to be a focus on developing authentic communities.

The work of the Church must spread beyond these gatherings in order to be successful. Two areas that need to be examined, in the way in which they relate to the Church's lack of focus are: 1) the belief that mission takes place on the Church property and, 2) apportionment giving. Too often, United Methodist Churches define the mission of the Church as that which takes place on the Church property. We believe the redemptive work of God in the world is to attract people to our Church campus. Then, once they have become indoctrinated with "Church theology," they are put to work serving in the Church.

A second cause for low involvement in the mission sphere is due to the designated funding of missions as part of each Churches apportioned giving. When the local Church makes its quarterly apportionment payment, a percentage of the payment is designated to support predetermined missionary outlets. In one sense, this is a powerful tool because many churches working together can better fund mission programs, and it allows the

smaller Churches to participate. However, there is much more to participating in missions than simply writing a check – there must also be personal involvement. Over time, apportionments have become, for many churches, the only way the Churches participate in the redemptive work of God in the world.

One problem is that many United Methodist seminaries, specifically the theologically liberal seminaries, are out of touch with the Church and are declining, while at the same time the seminaries that are aligned with the mission and vision of the Church are growing in enrollment. This is suggestive. The failure of the local United Methodist Church to create congregations where vital community can occur is an obvious issue as seen in the double-digit declining numbers, in both membership and worship attendance. This fact is further evidence of the failure to effectively minister to the next generation of Emerging worshipers.

Problem Statement

Many United Methodist Churches are in a similar position today, as were many churches several decades ago during the flight from the town centers to suburbia. At that time, the population shift caused the areas surrounding the Church to change, and in many cases, the Church did not respond appropriately. Instead, these Churches tended to continue doing the same forms of ministry to which they had become accustomed. The change taking place today is that of a cultural shift, rather than a shift in the population. The move is toward a more postmodern and Post-Christian world, where the traditional views of long-embedded societal structures and beliefs are being challenged by new modes of thought and practice. Issues of morality, sexuality, and religious plurality are

the discussion topics that the Church must somehow engage with in a way that stays true to Scripture, while at the same time values the thoughts and opinions of others.

If the United Methodist Church is going to reach the Emerging generation effectively, it must first begin the process of “soul searching.” The Church must ask some hard questions regarding its current state of affairs. A conversation aimed toward change, in the Church’s relationship to concepts such as morality, sexuality, and religious plurality is critically needed. At the same time, an emphasis on staying true to scripture and engaging in community missionary work is vitally important to sustain if the Church is going to survive this transition.

The vast majority of United Methodist clergy believe there are serious and deleterious issues within the Church, and its future is uncertain. As such, many United Methodist Clergy, and laity alike, find themselves in a season of searching for answers as they consider the future of the Church, and their involvement in that future.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to assess and emphasize the need to reorganize and realign the United Methodist Church that it might more effectively achieve its fundamental mission of successfully evangelizing, as an extension of the love of Christ. This can be best achieved by embracing smaller decentralized communities in which the Church actively participates in wider community of which it is a part. Through an analysis of the Emerging Church Movement and the core teachings of John Wesley, discussed throughout this work, the United Methodist Church has the opportunity to be “re-envisioned” and return to full and devoted

membership, inclusive of individuals from all areas of life, and holding varying beliefs as well.

Definition of Terms

Authentic Community

A group of people that have made a commitment to learn how to communicate with each other at an ever more deep and authentic level.²⁰

Decentralization

The process of redistributing or dispersing functions, powers, people, or things away from a central location or authority.²¹

Emerging Church

The term 'Emerging Church' is used to describe a broad, controversial movement that seeks to use culturally sensitive approaches to reach the postmodern, un-Churched population with the Christian message.²²

Evangelism

The winning of persons to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. From the Latin word *evangelium*, meaning good news or gospel, evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel to individuals and groups by preaching, teaching, and personal and family visitation. It is

²⁰ M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, 2nd ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 45-48.

²¹ *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. "[Http: //www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/decentralization](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/decentralization)," accessed October 8, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

²² Matt Slick, "What Is the Emerging Church," www.carm.org, accessed October 8, 2014, <https://carm.org/what-emerging-church>.

the seeking by the Christian to bring others into a vital personal relationship with Christ.²³

Incarnational Living

Incarnational living is the basic idea is to live as Jesus lived while he was on earth.²⁴

Methodist Church, The

Formed in 1939 through the union of The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, South and The Methodist Protestant Church.²⁵

Mission

Christian mission is service to the world as an extension of personal salvation. By joining heart and hand, the goal is to ensure that personal religion, evangelical witness, and Christian social action are reflected in the world.

Prevenient Grace

The word prevenient means, “to come before” and it is the foundation for the beginning work of salvation found in everyone. In prevenient grace, God comes seeking us before we seek Him.²⁶

²³ “Glossary: Evangelism,” www.umc.org, accessed November 5, 2014, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/glossary-evangelism>.

²⁴ Bob Logan, “Incarnational Living: What Does That Actually Mean?,” www.churchplanting.com, accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.churchplanting.com/incarnational-living-what-does-that-actually-mean/#.VkuUQ4SBSIM>.

²⁵ “Glossary: Methodist Church, The,” www.umc.org, accessed November 4, 2014, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/glossary-methodist-church-the>.

²⁶ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 88.

Wesley, John

As stated by the United Methodist Church, John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist movement. John Wesley (1703-1791) was born at Epworth, England, the son of a church of England clergyman. He was graduated from Christ College, Oxford, England. For a brief period, he was a missionary to Georgia. In 1738, he had an intense religious experience at a meeting on Aldersgate Street, London. Following this, he began to preach throughout the country. He was a prolific preacher and writer, and his writings provided a core of standard doctrine and interpretation to guide the new Methodist movement. In 1784, he sent instructions to America for the formation of a separate Methodist Church for the United States²⁷.

Wesleyan

According to the Church, this term applies to those things related to John Wesley and the movement he began. The word *Wesleyan* is in many ways synonymous with the word *Methodist*.²⁸

Theoretical Framework

A qualitative, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was undertaken for this study, as it brings sensitivity to how individuals make sense of what is taking place within the United Methodist Church, and the subsequent

²⁷ “John Wesley,” www.umc.org, accessed November 6, 2014, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/john-wesley>.

²⁸ “Glossary: Wesleyan,” www.umc.org, accessed November 6, 2014, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/glossary-wesleyan>.

processes of change.²⁹ The interpretative processes of IPA are influenced by the traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Smith and Osborn contend that descriptions of everyday experiences and observations are gathered with the recognition that interpretation of the phenomenon occurs at both the participant and researcher level. The use of this methodology provides a better understanding of the Church's current position through the reflective experiences of those interviewed.

According to Langsdorf, phenomenological research strives to provide a detailed description about: (1) the uniformity of the lived experience (2) the structure and organization within that experience (3) the patterns of the activity in response to the context of the environment, and (4) gain knowledge of the experience from the viewpoint of the individuals whom have participated in it.³⁰ In this study, an examination of the perceptions of certain clergy members is guided by these four criteria. Further, through using inductive procedures, the study attempts to understand the relevant patterns and themes of these perceptions.

Role of the Researcher

There are several benefits to using the phenomenological method for this study. For one, it supports the use of semi-structured interviews, comprised of open-ended questions, to gather a pool of potentially valuable information. Meloy acknowledges the rich experience had by researchers in conducting in-depth interviews as the data

²⁹ Jonathan A Smith, ed., *Qualitative Psychology: a Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015), 55-57.

³⁰ Lenore Langsdorf. "Why Phenomenology in Communication Research?" *Human Studies* 17, no. 1 (1994): 1-8.

collection instrument.³¹ Through implementation of this process, the researcher of this work has had the opportunity to build a unique rapport with the participants, and to gather information by way of a dialogue. The method chosen allows for interpretation through spoken words and concepts – that cannot be captured within the limitations of quantitative a survey, or through a potentially under-developed questionnaire. As such, this dialogue created collaboration between the researcher and the participants, as the conversations unfolded in a natural manner.³²

On a more personal note, and as a United Methodist Church pastor, it is obvious the world around the Church is in the midst of great change. The question is – can the local Church change with the community, or will it continue its present decent? Can we make the needed changes in order to minister to new generations of people who see the local Church and Christianity in different ways? Or will we make the same mistakes that many United Methodist Churches made several decades ago when the community around the Church changed and they chose not to change with the community? These questions can be successfully answered by investigating the following research questions, questions in which hold personal meaning to me, given that being a pastor represents my life’s work.

Research Questions

The five research questions that guide this study are detailed below.

RQ1: What is the current state of the Church?

³¹ Judith M. Meloy, *Writing the Qualitative Dissertation: Understanding by Doing*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Psychology Press, 2002), 151-152.

³² Jonathan W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 2009), 136-37.

RQ2: Is the Church is divided doctrinally, theologically, and in areas regarding polity? If so, what is causing this division?

RQ3: What are the primary causes of the decline in membership currently being experienced by the United Methodist Church?

RQ4: What are the greatest challenges facing the Church?

RQ5: What are the United Methodist Church's strengths, and how can the Church build on these strengths for the future of the denomination?

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore and describe the current state of the United Methodist Church, with the intention of “re-envisioning” the Church. Therefore, a comprehensive literature review presents a synthesis of related historical, theoretical, and empirical research. Specifically, Chapter 2 provides a historical context for the study and addresses approaches to revitalizing the UMC. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the study. This chapter focuses on remaining objective (within reason), and the qualitative case study methodology. It also includes data collection systems and a brief discussion on the methodological assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Chapter 4 focuses on the research findings that were presented during various interviews conducted with a former bishop, a district superintendent, a congregational development director, a pastor of one of the largest Churches in Methodism, and two pastors from small to mid-sized congregations. Chapter 5 discusses the Emerging Church as a path forward for United Methodist Church. Chapter 6 addresses the viability of returning to Wesleyan distinctive – as a path forward for UMC. Ultimately, Chapter 7 promotes the

revival of evangelical spirit, through the teaching of John Wesley and lessons learned from the Emerging Church, as path forward for the UMC.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Whether Church leaders and (or) the organizations they serve realize a change is taking place, a significant change is occurring within the Christian culture in the United States today. Many United Methodist Churches are in a similar position today as were many churches several decades ago – during the flight from the town centers to suburbia. The population shift caused numerical and socioeconomic changes to take place around the Church, and in many cases, the Church did not respond. Rather, it chose to keep doing the same forms of ministry in which it historically took part. Yet, the change taking place today is more of a cultural shift, instead of a population shift, or solely that of a socioeconomic shift. The postmodern and Post-Christian world no longer holds a place for old ways of thinking.

The issues of morality, sexuality, and religious plurality must be addressed by the United Methodist Church if the organization is to remain vital. The most pressing issues facing the Church today are those of a decline in membership, especially in regards to the younger generation, how the Church and Christianity as a whole are perceived, structural and leadership concerns, and the institutional division that is wreaking havoc on the United Methodist Church today. The chapter concludes with an introduction to the Emerging Church Movement, and what it stands to teach the UMC, to enable the Church to return to greater numbers and vitality.

Decline in Membership

Decline in membership is one of the defining characteristics of ill health within the United Methodist Church today. In the “State of the Church Report,” it was revealed that

that one-half of all United Methodist Churches have fewer than 55 people in attendance each week. As previously noted, and according to a March 2006 study conducted by Richard Day, the research has found that 81 percent of the Churches that have closed never achieved an average attendance of 50 attendees or higher, which was cited as necessary as the strongest predictor of sustainability. This goes hand in hand with the statistic that 41 percent of U.S. United Methodist Churches did not receive any Church clergy in all of 2005. The most telling account in the report was the statement: "There is a general feeling that times have changed and will continue to change rapidly, but the Church has not changed correspondingly."³³ Without question, the United Methodist is in serious decline due to a variety of issues. The ultimate reflection of this and perhaps solution as well, is the declining numbers of Church members. Even more significant, the population decline in the United Methodist Church is most clearly seen in the absence of the younger generations.

Decline and Age of Membership

When looking at the population demographics, it seems neither the mainline nor the non-denominational organizations are having success evangelizing the 20 to 30 age demographic. For instance, the Barna Group's research found that in 2003, three of 10 people in their 20's, and four of 10 in their 30's, attend Church during an average week, compared to nearly half of those in their 40's.³⁴ The Church's statistical attendance data

³³ Audrey Barrick, "United Methodists Turning Tide for Growth," www.ChristianPost.com, July 25, 2007, accessed August 10, 2010, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/united-methodists-turning-tide-for-growth-28151/>.

³⁴ "Emerging Church Expands, Diversifies," www.ReligiousLink.com, June 19, 2014, accessed October 6, 2013, <http://www.religionlink.com/source-guides/emerging-church-trend-expands-diversifies/>.

for the 20 to 40 age demographic, reported by the Barna Group, suggests that the Church is missing an entire generation of people who hold Jesus Christ as their personal savior.³⁵ This data should send a very powerful message to all Churches – without regard for their denominational or non-denominational affiliations. The United Methodist Church, which is the second largest protestant denomination in North America, boasts a membership of 7.9 million. Of the 7.9 million members, the average age of the United Methodist membership is 54 years, and less than five percent of the membership is in the 20 to 30 age demographic.³⁶

These numbers soberly reflect a rapidly decreasing membership in the United Methodist Church that has been occurring over the next couple of decades, and further illustrates both the ARIS 2008 survey and the Barna Group’s findings. The Church, as a whole, needs to be extremely concerned with the research data, if it is interested in communicating and expressing Christ to new generations of people. In order to understand the research, the Church must begin to think critically of itself – in regards to declining membership numbers and ask “why?” the Church is not reaching the next generation.

Perceptions of the Church

Additional research made available, in books like *UnChristian* and *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*, shed light on why the

³⁵ George Barna, *Grow your church from the outside in*. Baker Books

³⁶ Scott Brewer. “Membership dips in U.S. but increases in other countries.” *United Methodist Church News Archives*. www.umc.org, April 21, 2006, accessed May 21, 2009, http://www.umc.org/site/c.gjJTJbMUluE/b.1568201/k.63D/Membership_dips_in_US_but_increases_in_other_countries.htm

Church is not reaching the next generation. Both of these works show recurring themes from countless hours of research relating to the 20 to 40 age demographic, and what the group says about Christians and the Church. These recurring themes, among those outside the Church, include a perception of the church and its members as: 1) hypocritical, 2) judgmental, and 3) homophobic.³⁷

Upon taking a closer look at these themes, there exists both a level of truth to these claims, but there also exist a fair amount of misunderstanding. The idea that Christians are hypocritical stems from a belief, among non-Christians and from Emerging Church Members, that “traditional” Christians do not practice what they preach. The belief falls in line with the idea that many Christians talk about the benefits of knowing Jesus Christ, and the difference he has made in their lives. Yet, in actuality, their lives, in many cases, do not express any kind of transformation. In their book, *UnChristian*, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons found that the percentages of Christians who gamble, visit pornographic websites, consume enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, or who use an illegal, nonprescription drug was statistically equivalent to those of non-Christians. Furthermore, among the young non-Christians that were polled, 84% said they personally know a “committed” Christian whose lifestyle was not any different from their own.³⁸

The second recurring theme relates to the notion that Christians are overwhelmingly judgmental. Far too many times traditional Christians have been guilty of pointing out the problems and behaviors of those outside the Church, and judging the

³⁷ George Barna, *Grow Your Church from the Outside In: Understanding the Unchurched and How to Reach Them*, Rev ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002), 43-44.

³⁸ David Kinnamen and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 47.

behaviors of others as morally right or wrong. Because of these types of behaviors, the Christian Church has become known for what it does not believe, rather than what it does believe. Many people have had the opportunity to read the articles and seen signs of protest, telling the world what the Church does not believe, and consequently condemning the actions of those who hold differing opinions.

Dan Kimball in his book titled, *They Like Jesus But Not The Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*, states that when interviewing members of the Emerging generation, most of them could articulate what they felt Christians believed.³⁹ The perception they have of Christians stems from reading about various things Christians protest against, such as the teaching of evolution in the schools, or the removal of the Ten Commandments monument from a courthouse, or homosexual marriage. Their perceptions come from seeing Christians on television who credit God for natural disasters to punish sinners, and on those personal occasions when they are confronted by Christians, who ask leading questions, for the purpose of evangelizing them.⁴⁰

It is based on this same premise of judgementality that the younger generations of non-Christians have come to believe that the Church is also homophobic. They hear the dogma of both Christians and Christian leaders on how gay and lesbian lifestyles are an abomination of God, and how those who practice such lifestyles are on the decent to hell. Thus, the perception becomes that Christians are homophobic. In truth, the issue is a nuclear subject, and people have very strong feelings about it. Conversations between parties on both sides are difficult, and the issues raised are extremely complex, often

³⁹ Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not The Church: Insights From Emerging Generations*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 99.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

affecting individuals and families on very deep levels. It is almost impossible to have a conversation on the subject because of the deeply held beliefs people bring to the discussion. Christians who do tend to engage in the conversation are often viewed as judgmental and self-righteous, and, at times, have approached the discussion in the wrong manner. This is not to say Christians have not been guilty of being hypocritical, judgmental, and even homophobic, on many occasions. This portion of the Christian population does exist. Rather, the intent behind this acknowledgement is that although some Church clergy and laity are narrow in their views, the vast majority of Christians are not motivated by negative impulses.

Unfortunately, there are many misconceptions about the way in which Christians are viewed in today's society. Most Church leaders have experienced some type of negative feedback from a person who has a misunderstanding about Christians and the Church. These misconceptions seem to flow predominately from a vocal minority of people who use the Bible to promote their personal agendas. One also cannot deny the influence of mainstream media within the general population, in regards to these misconceptions. The media's negative press has certainly had an effect on promoting Christianity as a crazy group of fundamentalist who are judgmental, uneducated, and who hate homosexuals. At the same time, the media has had a very positive effect on promoting homosexuality in a positive light. Many movies and television shows now have homosexual storylines that accept homosexual lifestyles. This type of programming has had a great impact on promoting multiculturalism, in the newer cultural context. In turn, this serves to endorse the homosexual lifestyle as an acceptable choice.

The truth of the matter comes down to the idea that most Christians are not hypocritical, judgmental, or homophobic. The vast majority of Christians believe that God is a God of love and acceptance. As such, the real issue is not arguing about the perception of Christians in the U.S. Rather, the real issue is whether traditional Christians are willing to engage in a philosophy that aligns with a more postmodern approach to life. This alignment would entail a willingness to change attitudes, and to engage others by teaching them who Christians really are, and what constitutes Church culture and beliefs. Is the Church willing to respond appropriately to those people who are open to hearing about Jesus, but, who are perhaps a bit skeptical of traditional Christians? There seems to be a growing number of non-denominational Churches, and even some denominational Churches that are up to the task, but again, only through application and practice will the possibility of these fruits be realized.

UMC Structural and Leadership Concerns

The United Methodist Church is decentralized in theory, but only because its main governing body is that of the General Conference. The General Conference is comprised of delegates from the different specified regions of the United Methodist Church called the annual conference.⁴¹ The delegates from the annual conference have the ability to vote on the issues at the direction of each Church as a whole.⁴² The use of this structure is intended to allow all churches to be heard. However, the decentralization is lost in a governing system, which operates beyond the General Conference, which functions much like that of any centralized governing body. Each Annual Conference has

⁴¹ Thomas Edward Frank. *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of the United Methodist Church*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 120.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 120.

an Episcopal office of the Bishop (much like a president) who oversees the Annual Conference with the power to appoint ministers to a given Church within the system. Additionally, the Church must function under the rules and guidelines determined by the General Conference. From this standpoint, the United Methodist Church is not decentralized at all. This is not so very surprising, as many organizations that grow past a certain point tend to centralize as a means to stay in control.

Our culture in the United States has been rapidly changing for several decades and yet many United Methodist Churches are worshipping the same way they were in the 1950's, causing a decline in revenue. A number of factors have pointed to concerns among United Methodist clergy and laity over apportionments paid to central bureaucracies as well – due to the of lack of accountability. The leadership disparity at the local Church level can be plainly seen in the lack of growth in over 80% of the denomination's Churches, and yet the spending has not altered very much. This exhibits an inefficient system of leadership on the district level as well. When success is gauged on the percentage of apportionments paid, instead of the number of professions of faith, a culture of protect the status quo is produced. The lack of leadership over the last several decades has come full circle and the Church is presently in survival mode.

Furthermore, the vast majority of United Methodist Churches operate via the program model of church. In these types of church models, wide arrays of programs are offered in order to attract participation. In this scenario, the metric for success is based on the number of participants involved. This model of church makes obvious the influence of individualism and consumerism of present day society in church. These undermining ideologies must be re-appropriated or abandoned for creating space in which authentic

community can develop. One example of what can occur when outdated methods are embraced can be seen in the district south of metro Atlanta. In this area, the United Methodist Church is closing and consolidating churches, instead of planting new faith communities. The ability to focus on growing is stunted because the community spends most of its time trying to patch the holes of a sinking ship, and the monies now available are not being put to best use. These types of breakdowns in structure and leadership have also contributed to the significant institutional division taking place in the Church today, and ultimately serves to facilitate the further decline of the UMC.

Institutional Division

Currently, institutional division is extremely prevalent among clergy over issues regarding the authority of Scripture, mission and evangelism, and human sexuality. In many ways, these issues have become so polarizing that finding meaningful middle ground has been impossible. As briefly touched on in chapter 1, the most divisive issue presently facing the Church is regarding human sexuality. Currently, as United Methodists approach the 2016 General Conference, the debate over homosexuality has reached a fever pitch. You do not have to be in conversation very long with a United Methodist clergy member before the topic of homosexuality and the Church becomes a part of the conversation. There are a considerable number of clergy who adamantly stand against the Church's official position that homosexuality is immoral. For example, the Rev. Sandy Brown, a pastor at Seattle First United Methodist Church, said the Church's stance is "wrong, stupid, and evil." Furthermore, in the somewhat recent Iowa conference, more than 500 people signed a "Do No Harm" covenant stating the denomination's top lawmaking body made decisions that violated John Wesley's first

General Rule – failing to acknowledge that members of The United Methodist Church are divided on homosexuality.⁴³

In response to this, Reverends Adam Hamilton and Mike Slaughter proposed inserting language into the Book of Discipline that would clarify that United Methodists disagree on the issue of homosexuality, and that further urged the two sides to “co-exist.” The Rev. Maxie Dunham (former President of Asbury Seminary), also spoke against the present language in the Book of Discipline by saying, “It leaves out good teaching.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, Dunham has asserted, “There are conscience-bound persons who find it impossible to live in the United Methodist Church as we presently define ourselves in relation to human sexuality, forty years of wrestling with the issue is enough.”⁴⁵ The first disagreements among United Methodists over homosexuality began four decades ago, and many within the Church today feel as though the argument should have been resolved quite some time ago. What is most important about all of this is interest in finding a manner in which to work out differences, rather than spend time, energy, and funds to try to convince each side of the “right way.”

These conversations have led to groups being formed and statements being drafted to help bring unity to a much-divided denomination. Two of the more popular groups, that represent opposing viewpoints, have been outspoken in their regard to bridging the gap that the UMC is experiencing today. On one of the websites, and as a means to bring the denomination back together, Adam Hamilton has noted that “A Way

⁴³ Kathy L. Gilbert, “Conferences Reject Church's Stance On Gays,” www.umc.org, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/conferences-reject-churchs-stance-on-gays>.

⁴⁴ Kathy L. Gilbert, “Delegates Cannot Agree They Disagree On Sexuality,” www.umc.org, May 3, 2012, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/delegates-cannot-agree-they-disagree-on-sexuality>.

⁴⁵ Timothy C. Morgan, “*Is Gay Marriage Destroying the United Methodist Church?*”

Forward for a United Methodism” Is possible. Hamilton asserts that most United Methodists do not want to be divided over homosexuality, and offers “a way to allow us to live with our differences over how we interpret scripture regarding homosexuality.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the rift continues to divide the Church, and this contributes to the loss of focus being experienced by the Methodist community.

Loss of Focus

Most United Methodist congregations are more focused on individual learning, and personal accountability, rather than building open and authentic community among members of the congregation. The program models used by churches focus on offering a variety of options, from which the congregant can choose to participate, depending on the availability and preferences of the individual. In essence, this can be understood as the “consumerisation” of Christian identity, and it is the polar opposite of the communal characteristics described by Halter and Smay¹⁰ needed for a vital congregation. The failure of the local United Methodist Church to create congregations where vital community can occur is an obvious issue, as seen in the double-digit declining numbers in both membership and worship attendance.

Given the ability to choose how a member wants to serve, has allowed worship and prayer to become a routine, and mechanized series of events that take place a few hours a day, one day a week. This is a direct lack of incarnational living where individuals have the opportunity to experience an encounter with God. Today’s church program models do not serve the greater purpose of the Church to day, which is to foster

⁴⁶ Adam Hamilton, “A Way Forward for a United Methodism,” www.adamhamilton.org (blog), June 5, 2014, accessed June 8, 2014, <http://www.adamhamilton.org/blog/a-way-forward-for-a-united-methodism/#.VkuojISBSIM>.

community and willing participation based on the teachings of Christ. As such, there is a failure to effectively minister to the next generation of Emerging worshipers, given that a clear sense of purpose has been lost.

As has been discussed, the United Methodist Church also falls short in the mission sphere of incarnational living as well, not by orthodoxy, but rather in regards to orthopraxy. The United Methodist Church defines mission in the following manner:

We insist that personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. By joining heart and hand, we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness, and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing.

Scriptural holiness entails more than personal piety; love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and renewal in the life of the world.

For Wesley there is no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. The communal forms of faith in the Wesleyan tradition not only promote personal growth; they also equip and mobilize us for mission and service to the world.⁴⁷

The definition is great, but the practice is poor. Recent numbers suggest that less than ten percent of United Methodist laypersons are involved in any form of mission that goes beyond the walls of the Church. Seemingly, there are two main causes for this low percentage of involvement in missions: 1) the belief that mission takes place on the Church property and 2) apportionment giving. Too often, the United Methodist Churches defines the mission of the Church as that which takes place on Church property. Many Methodists believe that the redemptive work of God in the world is to attract people to Church campuses. Once these individuals have become indoctrinated with “Church theology,” they are then put to work serving in the Church. This is antithetical to one of

⁴⁷ United Methodist Church (U.S.), *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Pub. House), 47-48.

the main premises of being a disciple of Christ in that church member are no longer venturing out from behind the walls of the church to do God's work in the community.

A second cause for low involvement in the missionary sphere is due to the designated funding of missions as part of each Church's apportioned giving. When the local Church makes its quarterly apportionment payment, a percentage of the payment is designated to support predetermined missions outlets. In one sense, this is a powerful tool because many churches working together can better fund mission programs, and it allows smaller churches to participate. However, there is much more to participating in missions than simply writing a check – there must also be personal involvement.

Over time, apportionments have become, for many churches, the only way they participate in the redemptive work of God in the world. It is true that there are many great mission agencies connected to the United Methodist Church. One example is the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). UMCOR is an incredible organization and has been on the front line of relief efforts all over the world. Most recently, UMCOR has been working in Haiti to provide relief efforts to a country devastated by earthquakes.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, this is a program associated with the Church, rather than the Church itself engaging in the work directly. The main problem is there is a “heart disconnect” between the Church and the mission outreach, as seen in local communities.

⁴⁸ Christie R. House, “UmcOR Field Offices: A Side-by-Side, Integrated Approach to Development,” www.umcmmission.org, March 2013, accessed October 6, 2014, <http://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/New-World-Outlook-Magazine/New-World-Outlook-Archives/2013/March-April-2013/UMCOR-Field-Offices>.

The Emerging Church

This phenomenon, given the title “the Emerging Church Movement” by Church leaders who have been studying its evolution, is making an impact on the nature of Christianity in the U.S. The first question one must ask is “what is the Emerging Church Movement?” A movement is hard to define with complete accuracy, even among many of its leaders. So, rather than attempt to offer a futile attempt to define the movement it is better to begin by describing several of the movement’s characteristics. At first glance, there are several qualities of the Emerging Church that stand out. These consist of 1) the absence of traditional Church organizational structures, 2) being mission oriented, and 3) having a strong emphasis on creating authentic community.

Discussion regarding the Emerging Church continues to create strong controversy and heated debates among many protestant leaders as these Churches expand and gain numbers. Yet, it is important to note that there are a number of misunderstandings, as well as many unfair stereotypes circulating throughout the evangelical and protestant communities regarding the Emerging Church. Scot McNight, New Testament Scholar and early Church historian, has noted that Emerging Church Movements are often looked at with disdain, given the appearance of many of their participants, and are also judged for their seemingly more casual approach to living the life of a Christian.⁴⁹ Alternately, Emerging Churches do not truly align with these stereotypes. At this time, the most widely used definition regarding the Emerging Church comes from Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger. In their work, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in*

⁴⁹ Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” www.ChristianityToday.com, January 19, 2007, accessed May 13, 2010, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>.

Postmodern Cultures, they effectively describe Emerging Churches as communities that practice the way of Jesus, yet within today's postmodern culture. Their broad definition can be described through nine practices. Emerging Churches:

- (1) Seek to identify with the life of Jesus,
- (2) Transform the secular realm, and
- (3) Tend to live highly communal lives.

Given these three activities, enables the Emerging Church Movement to (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.⁵⁰

The Emerging Church's desire to identify with the life of Jesus is more than a casual association, methodology or a systematic belief system. It is a desire to incorporate the life and teachings of Jesus into their lives in a meaningful and consistent manner. For example, identifying with the life of Jesus is more than attending worship, participating in church related programs or being involved in missionary activities. Rather, it is about knowing and modeling the life of Jesus. To know Jesus is not an event, a ritual, a creed, or a denominational methodology. Instead, it is a journey of faith – trusting God to provide insight, courage, and strength for the pilgrimage.

Many of our modern interpretations of Jesus have the tendency to dismiss his life, and focus more on his death and resurrection as a means of gaining perpetuity. Although the Emerging Church does not discount eternity, their understanding of Jesus's gospel message is more than a personal salvation and a way to get to heaven. They are inspired,

⁵⁰ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 44-45.

by the gospel, to participate actively in the reign of the kingdom of God and the transformation of the individual. For members of the Emerging Church, the focus is more on the life of Jesus, and the good works therein. Theologically, Emerging Churches seek to regain an ancient understanding of the gospel as a means for directing all their decisions and actions. The “Good News” is more than Jesus’ death on the cross as a manner in which to forgive sin; rather it is God’s invitation to all people to participate in a new way of life through redemptive activities, for true reconciliation in the world.

Another key characteristic practice of Emerging Churches, according to Gibbs and Bolger, is in the move to transform secular space. In fact, given that Emerging Christians reject the idea of dualism, as they do not see any space in which God does not exist, Emerging Christians do not see the world through the lens of good or bad. To them, they try to recognize the sacred in everything, and believe that all life should be viewed as sacred. The notion that there is space, in which God does not live, is considered a product of an old approach to Christianity, and is quickly dismantled. Therefore, transforming secular space is the process of making all of life by choosing to see God in everything.

In action, this appears as tearing down those church practices that foster a secular mind-set that categorizes the world into secular space, times or activities.⁵¹ An example of transforming what has historically been interpreted, as secular space, is Tybee Bar Church located at Benny’s Tybee Tavern on Tybee Island, Georgia. The Tybee Bar Church is a local bar in which a space for worship has been erected. They meet on Sunday mornings, and have expanded their congregation considerably. In sharing breakfast and coffee together, instead of alcohol, which is the typical fare for bars, the

⁵¹ Ibid., 66.

Tybee Bar Church has truly taking the word of God out into the community, and stands as evidence that the Emerging Church Movement does not make distinctions about “where sacred exists” – as they believe it is all around us, all of the time.⁵² Although there has been a recent trend among many mainline denominations, including the United Methodist Church, is to use non-traditional “secular space” to plant new Churches and launch satellite campuses, most traditional churches continue to push back on the idea of “church in a bar.” Discussions among the leaders in the United Methodist Church, have been met with some resistance, due to the potential negative and divisive concerns that might arise due to the decision to use bars and nightclubs as worship space.

The emphasis on creating authentic community is another key characteristic of the Emerging Church, as defined by Gibbs and Bolger. Emerging Churches believe that being a member of the Church means to be connected with Christ through community with those who follow Christ.⁵³ This type of knowledge, regarding community, is a radical shift from the program driven model of churches where often participation at the community level is a secondary goal of program participation, verses whatever the main objective is for a particular gathering.

The Emerging Church’s passionate pursuit to establish authentic Christian community is a product of its desire to embody the kingdom of God as its main priority. This fundamental shift is a deviation from the program model of “doing Church,” to a more organic model, in the Emerging Church’s attempt to embody the kingdom of God. In Emerging Churches, ministry is developed based on the needs of the community where

⁵² “Web Exclusive: Church Service in a Bar,” ktre.com, June 18, 2012, accessed January 24, 2013, <http://www.ktre.com/story/18812979/church-service-in-a-bar,%202009>.

⁵³ Gibbs and Bolger, 89.

the Church is located geographically. In this way, the Emerging Church focuses its growth based on the vision of the church as a complete community. Given the Emerging Church's focus on interpreting all space as sacred in God's world, and their desire to minister out in the community, ministries that are no longer viable to the Emerging Church are evaluated and pruned in order to create new viable ministries. These newer ministries serve to better share the vision of the Church.

This process of disassembling and then reconstructing is considered an organic process, and not necessarily a strategic function of the organization. Long-term planning goals of the organizations leadership, with gaining numerical quotas, are not the main driver behind the Emerging Church movement, nor is it on expanding the institutional structure and acquiring new land and buildings. The shift to a "kingdom emphasis" from a "Church emphasis" does not simply mean a new style of worship or erecting the addition of new programs. It entails a radical restructuring, redirecting, and reenergizing of the Church.⁵⁴ Consequently, Emerging Churches are compelled to move out beyond the church buildings, and typical programs offered, to develop relationships and evangelize people in secular spaces, which are all considered places where God lives.

Differences in Structure and Leadership

What are the differences in leadership found within the Emerging Church, versus the differences in leadership found within the United Methodist Church? The Emerging Church is not a connected group of Churches like that of the United Methodist Church, but rather describes a movement that is taking place among a younger generation of post-

⁵⁴ Ibid., 95.

modern Christians. The Emerging Church, largely, operates on a leadership platform that is mostly decentralized. Decentralization is a form of Church organization, where governance takes place among all members of the faith community. Neil Cole refers to this concept as “organic Church.” He states, “Organic Church is not a model; it is a way of understanding the Church. Organic Church is really a set of principles that will work in any model.”⁵⁵ Emerging Churches are open systems, where ministry takes place in response to being engaged with the wider community. This is the reason for the decentralization. In decentralized organizations, ministry as a movement can make quick decisions and organically shift through the varied networks established throughout the community.

While the United Methodist Church appears to be decentralized, its General Conference is comprised of delegates from the different specified regions that represent the United Methodist Church. The name for this organization is called the Annual Conference.⁵⁶ As noted previously, these delegates have the ability to vote on the issues at the direction of differing churches as a whole.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, decentralization continues to get lost in the governing system, which reaches beyond the General Conference. This system of government operates much like that of any centralized governing body, and from this perspective, the United Methodist Church is not so decentralized after all.

⁵⁵ Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 121.

⁵⁶ Frank, 120.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

Unlike the manner in which the UMC is structured, Emerging Churches, in their truest form, are adaptable and open systems that seek to operate in a manner best suited to serve the needs of the community. They are always seeking to learn what is taking place around them in order to make the necessary changes to meet the present needs. Kester Brewin, in his book, *Signs of Emergence*, states that Emerging Churches, as open systems, evolve through a cycle of sensing, learning, adapting, and changing. As such, this process is taking place continually throughout the life of the organization. It is not a revolutionary change, that takes place through a single channel every four years, but rather it is an evolutionary change that permeates the whole organism and is continually effecting changes.⁵⁸ This type of structure is the antithesis of most denominational Church platforms with top down leadership structures, as opposed to a flat leadership model where leadership roles are distributed horizontally between a group of people. Contemporary business and Church models would argue that the lack of a traditional leader would send the whole organization into a state of chaos. Nevertheless, this method seems to function effectively.

Another area where the Emerging Church and United Methodist Church differ is in the clergy / laity relationship. Leadership, in Emerging congregations, is not simply a job solely for the pastor. Rather, Emerging Churches operate on platforms where the designation between clergy and laity is flat and everyone has the ability to contribute. Emerging Church leaders are generally opposed to any hierarchical understanding of leadership out of the conviction that it inevitably stifles people and creativity. In Emerging Churches, those who are the most passionate end up being the leaders – its

⁵⁸ Kester Brewin. *Signs of Emergence: A Vision for Church That is Organic/Networked/Decentralized/Bottom-up/Communal/Flexible/Always Evolving*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 104.

leadership by displaying enthusiastic and committed interest.⁵⁹ The Apostle Paul also dissolved the distinction between the pastor and laity. One of the characteristics of the Apostle Paul's writings is the absence of the word *hiereis*, priest. For Paul, the ministry of the Church was performed among the members of the Church community. Even in the official priesthood function that exists to mediate between God and humanity, for Paul, was a common priesthood with no distinction between clergy and laity.⁶⁰

The United Methodist Church leadership structure is quite different. The United Methodist Church believes that all persons, who have received God's gift of salvation, are called to participate in ministry. However, there is a distinct designation between the clergy and laity. Ordained clergy are those persons who respond to God's call and who are affirmed by the community to become ordained ministers.⁶¹ In this structure, ordination empowers certain "called" individuals to serve on a deeper level within the United Methodist Church. These ordained elders, who have been approved by the Board of Ordained Ministry within the United Methodist Church, have typically received the proper seminary education. As such, they are entrusted with the primary responsibility for ministering to the congregation through preaching and administering the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.⁶²

In the United Methodist Church, only the ordained clergy are allowed to consecrate the sacraments of Holy Communion and administer Baptisms. In addition,

⁵⁹ Gibbs and Bolger, 194 and 200.

⁶⁰ Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Cultural Setting* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 130.

⁶¹ Book of Discipline 2008, 203.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 204.

ministry that takes place within the Church is decided upon by the administrative council of the local Church, and is overseen by the pastor. Given this traditional form of structure within the vast majority of United Methodist Churches a wide array of programs are offered in order to attract participation, and the metric for success is based on the number of participants involved. This model of Church makes obvious the influence of individualism, consumerism, and control mechanisms experienced in today's culture, and within the traditional church setting.

Re-Envisioning the United Methodist Church

Within the traditional structure, many outdated ideologies must be re-appropriated or abandoned in order to create space for authentic community to develop. Some of the most cherished Church forms may be more of a hindrance than a help concerning the creation of space for God. When these forms are removed, often what are left are simply tight-knit communities that hunger for the coming of God's reign.⁶³ The shift to a "kingdom emphasis" from a "Church emphasis" does not simply mean a new style of worship or the addition of new programs are in order. Rather, it entails a radical restructuring, redirecting, and reenergizing of the Church.⁶⁴

This re-evaluation of the way in which churches function, in Emerging communities, is not just happening in isolated locales, but it is also happening across many communities and many denominations. Phyllis Tickle, in recent work titled, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*, discusses the phenomena in relationship to a "rummage sale." She argues that Church history shows us that every five

⁶³ Ibid., 91.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 95.

hundred years the Church goes through a season of “rummaging off” some of its parts, in order to create a new and vibrant faith community. Tickle believes, as do many other Church leaders that we are experiencing in our culture today nothing short of a modern reformation. Five hundred years before our twenty-first century’s Great Emergence was the Great Reformation, and five hundred years before the Great Reformation was the Great Schism. This five hundred year trend can be mapped out historically all the way back to first century Christianity.⁶⁵

This process of “rummaging” has taken place throughout Church history, and as forms of Christianity become more institutionalized, a younger generation breaks it down, opens it up, and ultimately a new more vibrant faith emerges and spreads. An example of such a movement was experienced during the Great Reformation. Christianity did not become a global religion until after the Great Reformation.⁶⁶

Many denominations have entered into the conversation and are planting new Churches that are drastically different from their traditional models. The United Methodist Church, through its Path 1 initiative, plans to plant 650 new churches in communities where no vital churches exists. Path 1 consists of church leaders from national, regional and local levels of the UMC whose mission is to train and equip new church planters to start new congregations. The immediate objective is to train and equip 1000 church planters for the purpose of reaching 9 million new disciples of Christ within 30 years.⁶⁷ The plan calls for healthy churches to plant new churches using the healthy

⁶⁵ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 25-26.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁷ “About New Church Starts,” www.umcdiscipleship.org, accessed October 6, 2013, <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/about/about-new-church-starts>.

churches people and monetary resources. The UMC has directed the largest portion of its apportionment dollars (outside of salaries) to this endeavor. This new vision of planting Churches is motivated to establish Emerging congregations and by the double-digit declines that are taking place within the denomination from different parts of the country, and the large number of older Churches that are closing their doors.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Generally, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to assess and emphasize the need to reorganize and realign the United Methodist Church that it might more effectively achieve its fundamental mission of successfully evangelizing, as an extension of the love of Christ. Through an analysis of the Emerging Church and the core teachings of John Wesley, discussed throughout this work, the United Methodist Church has the opportunity to be “re-envisioned” and return to full and devoted membership. More specifically, the purpose of this method of assessment, conducted through interviews, was to elicit feedback from pastors, Church planters, district superintendents, and bishops with at least 15 years of ministry experience, on their perspectives regarding the present condition of the United Methodist Church.

Research Design

The current study utilizes an empirical phenomenological method, rooted in the worldview of social constructivism. This method allows for analysis of the lived experience of the participants, from their perspective, in order to understand the essence of their experiences at the personal level of detail.⁶⁸ This approach allows for data collection of robust descriptions, which leads to structured and reflective analyses that will capture the spirit of those in the UMC community who are aware of the serious decline in numbers, and consequent loss of vitality. Among the benefits of this study is its ability to determine the need to shift the United Methodist Church into a more sustainable

⁶⁸ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2009), 76.

direction. As such, phenomenology is a manner in which to examine, personally, the actual experiences of those affected by an issue, in an attempt to foster understanding and promote change. Given that this is the aim of this study, phenomenology is a useful tool. This qualitative methodology was chosen because the researcher believes that the issues faced by all Church members (lay and clergy members) would be best understood through in-depth questioning and analysis of individual experiences.

Research Questions

According to Bentz and Shapiro,⁶⁹ the research must provide the opportunity for the data to emerge. As such, phenomenological studies involve the rich descriptions of phenomena, and their settings, to achieve that end. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What is the current state of the Church?

RQ2: Is the Church is divided doctrinally, theologically, and in areas regarding polity? And if so, what is causing this division?

RQ3: What are the primary causes of the decline in membership currently being experienced by the United Methodist Church?

RQ4: What are the greatest challenges facing the Church?

RQ5: What are the United Methodist Church's strengths and how can the Church build on these strengths for the future of the denomination?

⁶⁹ Valerie Malhotra Bentz and Jeremy J. Shapiro, *Mindful Inquiry in Social Research by Valerie Malhotra Bentz (1998-06-24)* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc; 1 edition (1998-06-24), 1800), 76.

Validity of the Study

Creswell defines qualitative validity as the procedure(s) used by the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the findings.⁷⁰ The validity strategies used in this study include engaging in crystallization and triangulation procedures, and reporting data with integrity. Creswell encourages the use of triangulation when approaching research in the qualitative paradigm to ensure valid results. Triangulation incorporates the use of different sources of preexisting data and research to be examined concurrently with data collection and analysis, in order to discern appropriate and relevant themes. Gathering data from multiple sources provides justification and rationale to support ongoing research as well. Given this, triangulation uses this grouping of information as a foundation on which to build the current study.

Creswell also recommends that the researcher clarify all pre-existing biases by offering honest self-reflection when analyzing the research being reported. Creswell states that effective qualitative scholars examine their own thoughts, in relationship to the research and analysis under study, acknowledging how these items affect the interpretation of the results of the study. Moustakas, who discusses *epoche*, a Greek word that means to refrain from judgment, contends that to distinguish and describe an experience in its true essence, researchers must adhere to a new way of looking at the world around them, and genuinely see what stands before them without pre-conceived notions.⁷¹ Van Manen also describes the act of suspending judgments in order to study phenomena in their natural structures.⁷²

⁷⁰ Creswell, 78.

⁷¹ Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1994), 35.

Practicing what is termed “phenomenological reductionism” requires the researcher to withhold personal opinions and biases when describing and interpreting the details of the experiences of the participants. Edmund Husserl, known as the father of phenomenology, believed that effective researchers are able to remove themselves from the experience at hand, and to examine it in such a way that reduces subjectivity and allows for open revelation of the experience. As such, phenomenological reduction allows the researcher to move beyond the everyday perceptions of what might be, and learn about the interviewees experiences as if they were brand new, at least to whatever extent possible, according to the work of Moustakas. While given the nature of this study, and the role of the researcher, this has proven a challenge. Nonetheless, there has been some measure of distance achieved in which to evaluate honestly, what the literature and the research participants have expressed.

Trustworthiness

The goal of qualitative research is to achieve a deeper understanding of a phenomenon, which is critical in evaluating the quality and substance of that which is discovered. In contrast to quantitative research, which evaluates trustworthiness by how well the threats to internal validity have been controlled, qualitative study evaluates its worth by establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.⁷² The importance of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research, and consequently how it compares to reliability and validity in quantitative research, can be framed using

⁷² Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (New York, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 54.

⁷³ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, 1985), 63.

Lincoln and Guba's criteria to establish trustworthiness. As such, credibility implies that the adoption of this research method is well established. Dependability implies the research is duplicatable, given a similar setting, transferability indicates that the research is generalizable to other studies and areas, and that confirmability, implies the researcher acknowledges some measure of subjectivity exists. Nevertheless, the objective is to take measures to stem this from altering the research. All four of these topics will be addressed, individually, through the methods outlined below.

First, member checks were conducted as informants were asked to read any transcripts of dialogues in which they participated. The emphasis was on whether the informants considered their words as matching what they had intended to say. Member checks serve to bolster a study's credibility. Second, iterative questioning was incorporated via the use of asking probing (but respectful) questions within the data collection process, to elicit detailed data and to uncover any detail that may have been lacking. In this way, the materials gathered can be considered authentic. Third, triangulation, which establishes confirmability, as well as credibility, was integrated to make use of preexisting data and research to analyze methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence.⁷⁴ The research utilized methodological triangulation by collecting data via interviews, and through previous extensive research. Fourth, and last, dependability and confirmability were accomplished via the use of an audit trail, as interviews and observations were documented at every step of the research process. Additionally, they were maintained in a research log. Rich descriptions were developed to allow readers, clergy and laypersons alike, to make decisions regarding transferability.

⁷⁴ Creswell, 83.

Setting of the Study

With anonymity in mind, the research was conducted at varying locations through the United States. The researcher met each participant, in person, at a location convenient to those being interviewed. Typically, the interview took place at their Church or office. They were met with individually, and the interviews lasted as long as necessary, and appropriate for the participant to glean as much information as possible. The participants were not given the questions in advance to ensure a more authentic response.

Participants Involved

The phenomenon examined dictated the method used and included the type of participants needed for participation. As such, criterion sampling was used, which involved selecting participants who met some predetermined criterion of importance. To meet the purpose of this particular study, the participants all had a minimum of at least 15 years of ministry experience. The participants themselves were a former bishop, a district superintendent, a congregational development director, a pastor of one of the largest churches in Methodism, and two pastors from small to mid-sized congregations. Given the wisdom and intimacy these participants share with the UMC community as a whole, they were found to be excellent subjects for the study.

Data Collection/Procedure

The data being evaluated was collected from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Tape recordings were made of all interviews, from

which transcriptions were developed by the researcher. The collection of data occurred over a relatively short span of time, and kept in a safe location to protect the views and opinions of the participants of the study.

Instrument

A semi-structured, open-ended interview technique was utilized to discern the perceptions and experiences of each of the participants. Interviews were in person, and an interpretive framework was used, which consist of the use of a flexible research practice, which attempts to be objective in nature, and does not privilege one paradigm or perspective over another. Questions were used to guide and describe the perceptions and experiences of those interviewed. The interview was reciprocal, as both the researcher and the participants engaged in dialogue, which was also recorded. The interview was carefully transcribed by the researcher. The interview questions were as follows:

Interview Question Set 1: Can you describe the current state of the Church?

Interview Question Set 2: Many pastors and laity have described the United Methodist Church as being divided doctrinally, theologically, and in areas regarding Church polity. Do you believe the Church is divided? If so, what are the issues causing this division?

Interview Question Set 3: The United Methodist Church is experiencing double-digit declines in attendance and membership nationally. What do you believe are the causes of the declines?

Interview Question Set 4: As you look to the future – what are the greatest challenges facing the Church?

Interview Question Set 5: What do you think are the United Methodist Church's strengths, and how can the Church build on those strengths for the future of the denomination?

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by describing the personal experiences of the participants with the phenomenon under study. A list of significant statements was developed, and they were then grouped into meaningful units. A textual description of what the participants encountered within their work in the church, in the community, as a member of the Methodist Church, and through personal observation was conducted as well. A composite description or "essence" of the phenomenon being addressed was also used, incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. This structured method of analysis, derived from the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, and modified by Moustakas, is the most practical and useful approach for phenomenological study. Lastly, the data analysis was completed by the researcher through many hours of transcribing and careful interpretation. The following chapter, Chapter 4, was used to analyze the results of the interviews, as a means to share them with readers of this work, and the United Methodist Church community as a whole.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In analyzing the results from the interviews conducted, the most fascinating element of each of these interviews was the unanimous belief in the core tenants of Wesleyan theology, which is more fully discussed in the coming chapters. Each of the participants, in the course of the interview, said that strength as a denomination resided in the Methodist Church's rich theology. They also all believed the present struggles and problems within the denomination overshadowed its theology and weakened the Church's ability to minister to the community in an effective manner. Although each person had a slightly different experience, and therefore interpretation, they all agreed that the UMC is in crisis. Most of their opinions about the Church's problems were the same issues William J. Abrahams sighted a number of years ago in his book – "Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia." In this book, Abrahams suggests that the United Methodist Church is deeply confused about doctrinal identity.⁷⁵ As such, Abrahams asserts that the Church must begin to develop a clear understanding of what is believed, before the clergy can even begin to face even more pressing challenges (as they arise) in the coming years.

Detailed Interview Results

The first interview conducted was with a pastor with forty-three years of ministry experience in the United Methodist Church. He has served as a pastor of one of the largest Churches in the denomination, and he was a former District Superintendent. Today, he serves as a church plant consultant where he mentors pastors during the initial

⁷⁵ William J. Abraham. *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of the Doctrine in The United Methodist Church*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 38.

phase of the Church plant. When we began the interview process, he stated, “the divisions in the Church are at a critical stage and the future of the Church will be decided within the next five to ten years.” Upon elaborating on the causes of the division, he further stated, “The primary issue is scriptural authority that sees itself reflected in our divisions over abortion, homosexuality, evangelism and mission, Church development, ordination, Baptism, and membership. The fruit of these issues are seen in the effective witness of the United Methodist Church and it’s clergy in the world.” He further stated, “a theology of Universalism taught in almost all our denominational seminaries; institutional inertia; ordination requirements; credentials at all levels and clergy compensation requirements has developed a corporate preacher who is focused on building the institution of the Church instead of preaching the gospel and ministering to God’s people.” He was passionate about what he viewed as the most pressing concerns on the Church today.

He believes that the turnaround needed to take place, for the future vitality of the Church, centers in the empowerment of young Church leaders and the laity to minister outside the Church, and within the community. Yet, he shared that he believes the United Methodist Church continues to make credentialing and ordination more exclusive, and in many ways repressive. This he shared did not further the true objectives of the Church’s mission.

Another interviewee, Dr. Riley Case, a former pastor and district superintendent from Illinois, echoed this by saying the Church needs seminaries to address the need for clergy leadership and theological development. However, in many cases the supported seminaries of the United Methodist Church are often directing students away from the

clear mission statement of the Church, which is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”⁷⁶

In further support of this critical issue, and as an aside not directly related to the interviews conducted, in 2014 the North Georgia Annual Conference deferred 55% of a seventy-two-member ordination class because they could not properly answer and expound on the ordination questions. Additionally, the conference also lost eight young pastors who decided not to enter the ordination process because they believed they were not theologically aligned with the beliefs of the United Methodist Church. All eight of these seminarians attended Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky, indicating a dramatic reorientation toward orthodoxy.

To understand this further, Dr. Case shared that the Church does not currently have an appropriate structure in place to free up the huge potential of many other would-be young leaders to work in the Church. Presently, denominational loyalty and the ten-year ordination requirements make it difficult to empower young leaders. As a result, these young leaders are walking away from the denomination, and the Church is losing the opportunity to minister to a younger generation of people.

The interviewee also asserted that the Church either does not know, or does not acknowledge, that they have left, and more opportunities are being lost all of the time. Dr. Riley Case’s sentiment ties in very well with the main reason why the median age of the people in the United Methodist Church is fifty-five years of age – congregations

⁷⁶ Riley Case, “Riley Case: Seminaries and the Decline of United Methodism,” *MethodistThinker.com*, January 7, 2011, accessed March 15, 2011, <http://methodistthinker.com/2011/01/07/seminaries-and-the-decline-of-united-methodism/>.

mirror the age of its ministers, and younger ministers are scarce in these times.

Ultimately, he doled out hard criticism with this statement,

The General Boards and agencies are so far removed from the local Church, especially growing and effective Churches that they continue to spew left-ist agendas that drive off even the faithful. They are so rife with corruption, deceit, ineffectiveness and incompetence that pastors and Churches are sick of the ever growing burden of apportionments to support a system that at best is ineffective, and at worst is corrupt to the core.⁷⁷

Another pastor interviewed has been in ministry in the United Methodist Church for twenty-eight years. He believes the Church is also divided in the areas of both theology and doctrine. He stated, “There is a day coming in the near future where our divisions over theology will be impossible to ignore.” In addition to the existent theological division, he believes another real problem is our “guaranteed appointment system.” He argues, “The Church doesn’t put its best people in its best Churches. We advance ineffective ministers because we don’t know what else to do with a guaranteed appointment process, and we are too grace-filled to tell folks they are not effective.” He further states, “When we don’t put our best leaders in the positions of leadership, the results trickle down through every church, board, agency, annual conference, jurisdiction, and general conference.”

This also correlates with other evidence, which suggests that it is true that the denomination does not reward innovation and risk taking at the local Church level. Rather, denominational leadership seems to be more concerned with making sure it collects apportionment dollars – often times at the expense of ingenuity. The pastor also told of a recent experience where his Church built a new sanctuary to accommodate his fast growing congregation – something less common in these times. The Church’s

⁷⁷ Warren Lathem, interviewed by author, Marietta, GA, May 12, 2009.

leadership decided to build a new sanctuary and a children's ministry area in what was probably the worst economic environment since the great depression. He has stated, as a reaction to his decision that "I have received much more criticism from my district superintendent and Bishop for falling behind on apportionments than I have received praise for the amazing things that have happened at the Church." The ability to expand in the manner in which the Church's leadership did was no small feat in difficult times, and was a testament to dedication and effective evangelism. Nevertheless, that was not the focus of the larger community's reaction, indicating the lack of focus so present in the UMC today.

His experience is unfortunately indicative of the current state of the United Methodist Church as a whole. There is a lack of real leadership and vision. This was further made clear when businesspersons, within this pastor's congregation, tried to point out to the district superintendent that by the Church branching out in a growth mode, they were able to build expenses into the budget so that within a certain timeframe the Church would return to being profitable and perhaps much more so than before. The capital outlay, for the new building, although not instantaneous, would eventually reap significant financial benefits in the form of increased apportionment dollars.

However, the district superintendent only cared about the present dollars owed, and this indicates shortsightedness within the church's greater governing body. In this specific situation, there was a lack of vision for the future, and a lack of leadership to see the long-term benefits of the Church's investment. In this particular case, the new building would have been able to facilitate the Church's present growth, as well as future growth, which in turn would pay hundreds of thousands of dollars over the next ten years

into the apportionment pool. These funds would have never been realized without risk taking and innovation on the part of the pastor and the laity of that local Church.

Without question, the fundamental problem behind this issue is that the United Methodist Church has become too “top heavy.” Yet another pastor interviewed, from the Midwest, had this to say about the situation,

We have become too top heavy with way too much money flowing into boards and general agencies that are not serving the greater Church. The General Boards and agencies are so far removed from the local Church that they have become a hindrance to the growth of the Kingdom of God. When the local Church exists to serve the denominational offices, instead of the denominational offices existing to serve the local Church, and its call to share the Gospel, there is a problem.⁷⁸

Words that continued to come up in the interviews, as a potential roadblock to future growth were “itinerancy” and “guaranteed appointments.” Itinerancy, as defined by the United Methodist Church, is a covenant agreement of an ordained elder, to go where sent by the residing Bishop – normally in service to the local Church.⁷⁹ Itinerancy, for the ordained elder, has traditionally brought with it the benefit of guaranteed appointment. The degree to which guaranteed appointments, which require bishops to appoint every elder in good standing to a local Church, is now up for debate. Consequently, this affects the quality of clergy leadership and effective ministry at the local church level.

Nevertheless, many believe the combination of itinerancy and the guaranteed appointment system, presently employed by the United Methodist Church, is a detriment to its future growth. As such, it is impossible for ministers, and the congregations they

⁷⁸ Warren Lathem, interviewed by author, Marietta, GA, May 12, 2009.

⁷⁹ L. Fitzgerald Reist and Neil M. Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2008* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008).

serve, to envision much beyond three to four years. In many cases, ministers are only planning ahead in six months increments. A retired minister, District Superintendent, and Director of New Church Development from the North Georgia Conference said when interviewed, “Most local Churches can’t grow because our appointive system stunts their ability to see God’s future for their Church.” He further argued, “Guaranteed Appointments married to itinerancy creates a cast system that destroys the serendipitous work of the spirit in the life of the local Church, breeds lackadaisical ministers, and kills vision.”

Finally, in speaking with a United Methodist pastor of ten years, who recently planted a thriving United Methodist in the Metro Atlanta area, he also echoed the negative impact the appointive process has on the local Church. According to him,

The United Methodist Church is more focused on growing apportionment dollars and exerting control; through an antiquated itinerate system, than growing people into disciples for Jesus Christ. Our Church has made decisions, that weren’t the best decisions for the future of the congregation, so that we could pay the Church’s apportionments. Growing Churches are forced to make these same types of decisions every year because not paying the Church’s apportionments is a quick ticket out of your present appointment.⁸⁰

As can be seen from the interviews undertaken, and shared in this research, the problems that exist within the UMC today are significant and potentially lethal. Through the hard work of those interviewed in this study, and through the commitment and diligence of others, the United Methodist Church has finally, and only recently, admitted there are substantial problems facing the Church’s future. In 2010, the Call to Action Steering Team was launched by the Council of Bishops to gather data in order to determine the current state of the Church. This included an objective operational assessment of all the United Methodist Congregations in the connection for reordering

⁸⁰ Olu Brown, interviewed by author, New York, NY, October 13, 2013.

the life of the Church. This was suggested as a means by which to grant the Church greater effectiveness in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.⁸¹

In another recent study, independent research was conducted by Towers Watson Research Group and a steering team, which consisted of clergy and laity appointed by the Council of Bishops. These groups were charged to assess the current state of the denomination and to offer advice on how to move toward a more effective ministry. They studied over 32,228 United Methodist Churches in North America to determine the characteristics of Churches considered “vital congregations.” The Towers Watson Congregational Vitality research concluded that there are eight key drivers that characterize “vital churches.” Those key characteristics include:

1. Inviting and inspiring worship.
2. Engaged disciples in mission and outreach
3. Gifted, empowered, and equipped lay leadership
4. Effective, equipped, and inspired clergy leadership
5. Thriving small group ministries
6. Strong children’s and youth ministries
7. Topical preaching on relevant issues
8. Longer pastoral appointments⁸²

Interestingly, of the 32,228 Churches that were studied, only 15% (4,951 Churches) were identified as having vital congregations.⁸³ The Churches that were

⁸¹ The United Methodist Church. *Call to Action: Steering Team Report*. (Nashville: The United Methodist Church, 2010) <http://www.umc.org/calltoaction>, 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.

considered “vital congregations,” were those that came in all sizes, all ethnicities, and were located in differing geographical locations.⁸⁴

According to the research, vital Churches are those congregations where great emphasis is placed on developing community through small groups. The institutional nature of the United Methodist Church has influenced the majority of congregations to become more corporate by nature, and therefore more program-driven in their ministry philosophy. This was largely due to the challenges faced by the Church in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the “Civil Rights Movement, the "Sexual Revolution," Vietnam, Women's Liberation, and new "alternative" religions (e.g., yoga, transcendental meditation, Buddhism, Hinduism).⁸⁵” This shift in thinking challenged the relatively stable Church environment, and “the church, along with the government, big business, and the military—essentially those composing "the Establishment"—was denounced by the young adults of the '60s for its materialism, power ploys, self-interest, and smug complacency.”⁸⁶ In the process of all this, the local Church has lost a number of the vital characteristics that made up the communal nature that once proved to be one of its greatest strengths. Over the last few years, and ironically due to the success of Churches outside the denomination, many United Methodist Churches have adopted small groups, into the life of the Church.

⁸³ Ibid., 37.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁵ Joanne Beckman, “Religion in Post-World War II America,” www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org, accessed May 31, 2014, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/trelww2.htm>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

However, these small groups in most United Methodist Churches lean more toward the traditional Sunday school classes, where the focus is on the curriculum and the consumption of knowledge, rather than on developing vital community. While the study of scripture should certainly make up a strong portion of the small group experience, one should not overlook the importance of fellowship as a means to develop a deeper sense of community. Bible studies and other topically based curriculums have the ability to lead to a greater understanding of the truth, but there is more to the process than just learning and consuming Biblical knowledge. As such, many of these smaller Churches still do not experience growth in discipleship among their participants, because, as noted, growth is more than just consuming biblical knowledge. Spiritual growth occurs at far deeper levels, amid intimate community, where one can go deeper and apply what has been learned in community, among other believers, and in one's daily lives. On this manner, smaller groupings then have the potential to become places where individuals can connect in community with other Christians, where the ministry of mutual support can occur, and where spiritual growth is cultivated.

This type of community, often referred to as incarnational living, can be seen in Halter and Smay's biblical examples of the three spheres of incarnational living, all found in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 4 we see evidence of the community sphere present among members of the early Church. Acts 4:32 (NKJV) states: "those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." Their lives were connected together at deeper levels, which were also manifested outside of worship, discipleship, and missionary work. There is also evidence of the communal sphere among members of

the Acts Church. In Acts 2:42 (NKJV) states: “They continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayers.” There is also evidence of the third sphere, missional, found throughout Acts. Acts 5:42 (NKJV) states, “And daily in the temple, and in every house they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

These early Christians were on a mission to bring redemption to the whole world. They were passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel, because they were persuaded that men and women were lost without it.⁸⁷ Like the early Christians in Acts, the current day manifestation of the Emerging Church Movement must be examined, given that it embodies the gospel as a part of everyday life. The gospel of the kingdom of God is much more than just a spiritual kingdom. It is also an alternative kingdom where those who so choose, can live life in a manner which moves them from simply proclaiming a message, to demonstrating a life lived within the kingdom.

⁸⁷ Michael Green. *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 17.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE EMERGING CHURCH

Theoretical Framework

The phenomenon being analyzed has been given the title “The Emerging Church Movement” by United Methodist Church leaders who have been studying its evolution, and perhaps learning from its methods. This chapter focuses primarily on defining the Emerging Church, while at the same time allowing for some contrasting of their methods with those of the UMC. As such, the first question one must ask is “what is the Emerging Church Movement?” A movement is hard to define with complete accuracy, even among many of its leaders. So, rather than attempt to offer a futile attempt to define the movement it is better to begin by describing several of the movement’s main tenets. In linking the Emerging Church with the goal of achieving vital community, this phenomenon can be further understood as incarnational.

Hugh Halter and Matt Smay describe this concept of incarnational living as taking place in three spheres: 1) the community sphere, 2) the communion sphere, and 3) the missionary sphere. The community sphere represents ‘togetherness’ and includes all aspects of a life lived together. The second, the communion sphere, represents the areas of intimate connection with God. Included in the communion sphere are worship, spiritual formation, and prayer. The third is the mission sphere, which represents God’s invitation to every Christian to participate in his redemptive work in the world.⁸⁸ While these tenets of the Emerging Church Movement suggest overlap between the traditional

⁸⁸ Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossy-Bass, 2008), 148-149.

tenets of the United Methodist Church and the Emerging Church, some aspects differ between the two.

At first glance, there are several qualities of the Emerging Church that stand out as unique, important, or both. The first is 1) the absence traditional Church organizational structures; the second is 2) being mission oriented, and the third is 3) a strong emphasis on authentic community. Given some of the differences, and the threat to numbers that the Emerging Church represents, the intense discussion regarding the Emerging Church continues to create strong controversy and heated debates among many protestant leaders. It is important to note that there are a number of misunderstandings, as well as many unfair stereotypes, circulating throughout the evangelical and protestant communities regarding the Emerging Church. Scot McNight, New Testament Scholar and early Church historian, in an attempt to undermine the urban legends surrounding Emerging Christians sarcastically defines its participants as those: “who confess their faith like mainliners—meaning they say things publicly they don’t really believe. They drink like Southern Baptists—meaning, to adapt some words from Mark Twain, they are teetotalers when it is judicious. They talk like Catholics—meaning they cuss and use naughty words. They evangelize and theologize like the Reformed—meaning they rarely evangelize, yet theologize all the time. They worship like charismatics—meaning with their whole bodies, some parts tattooed as well. They vote like Episcopalians—meaning they eat, drink, and sleep on their left side. And, they deny the truth—meaning they’ve got a latte-soaked copy of Derrida in their smoke- and beer-stained backpacks.”⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Ed Stetzer and David Putnam, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become A Missionary In Your Community* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 188.

Although there are certainly many false impressions and misconceptions regarding Emerging Christians, as noted by this satirical accounting, there is at least one undeniable truth. The wave of change being created by the Emerging Church Movement is a definite shift away from the evangelical and denominational Church institutions (as we understand them today) into a more organic faith movement, that is having profound effects on many mainline Churches.

Absence of Traditional Structures

What can we learn from this research? It is clear that at least a portion of the loss in numbers among the mainline denominational Churches can be attributed, in part, to the growing number of Christians who are leaving the denomination and aligning themselves with Emerging Churches. This is a not new phenomenon, but rather a movement that has been taking place within U.S. Churches for the last two decades. Those who have been involved in the United Methodist Church over this period either know someone who has migrated to the Emerging Church, or has made the move from the mainline denominational Church to an Emerging Church themselves. Ed Stetzer, in his book titled: *Breaking the Missional Code: When Churches Become Missionaries in Their Communities* further illustrates the move from mainline Churches to a non-denominational or Emerging Church.

Furthermore, Stetzer believes the Emerging Church is forking into three very distinct directions, which are described as those who are the Relevantists, the Reconstructionists, and the Revisionists. The more conservative fork, belonging to the Relevantists, believes and accepts the gospel and the Church in their historic forms, but seek to make them more relevant to postmodern culture. The second fork, the

Reconstructionists, accept the gospel, but tend to deconstruct the traditional Church form, and then reconstruct it into a more meaningful and relevant form for their particular culture (which many would say is the dominant culture today). The last and the most radical of the three forks, the Revisionists, question both the gospel and the traditional forms of the Church. This group, according to Stetzer, seeks to re-envision the meaning and the form of the gospel and the Church.⁹⁰ The notion that the Emerging Church has grown large enough, and diverse enough, to warrant three distinct categories is a further testament to the attraction they hold for so many individuals.

Mission Oriented

The second area of discussion involves the missional aspect of the Emerging Church at the local level. Emerging churches, in contrast to the missional aspects of the United Methodist Church, are exhibiting properties that were once very commonly found in United Methodist Churches. Emerging generations are individually missional, which makes them missional when they are together corporately. As any Church should not be corporately different than they are individually – their corporate expression in the world ought to be predicated by who they are individually. Missional communities are known for their missional integrity, missional clarity, and missional fidelity, and most importantly, their missional hospitality.⁹¹ Yet, the current day corporate model of the United Methodist Church, with its own missions department, has reduced missions to something carried out by a select few individuals, rather than the Church seeing itself to

⁹⁰ Ibid., 188.

⁹¹ Leonard Sweet. *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 76-77.

be on a mission. This concept was further inoculated into the DNA of most United Methodist Churches when apportionment giving began to include money for missions.

By adding missional giving to the local Churches apportionments, the individual Church member was removed from being connected to the mission opportunity. This practice has had a negative effect on the missional mindset of the local congregation, because there is no heart connection to the ministry. A key practice for the benefit of the United Methodist Church would be to re-establish and re-empower the notion that every member is on a mission. It would be wise to turn to the Emerging Church on how to reinstitute this goal into Church life, as they have become very adept at holding the missionary aspect of the church close to their hearts and communities.

Emphasis on Authentic Community

The emphasis on authentic community is another key characteristic of the Emerging Church, as defined by Gibbs and Bolger.⁹² Emerging Churches believe that being a member of the Church means to be connected with Christ through community with those who follow Christ. This type of knowledge regarding community is a radical shift from the program driven model of United Methodist Church, where often time's community is a secondary goal of program participation, verses the main objective for the gathering. The vast majority of United Methodist Churches operate via the program model of Church. In these types of Church models a wide array of programs are offered in order to attract participation and the metric for success is based on the number of participants involved. This model of Church makes obvious the influence of a consumer

⁹² Gibbs and Bolger, 89.

culture on present day UMCs. Some of the most cherished Church forms may be more of a hindrance than a help concerning the creation of space for God. Yet, when these forms are removed, often what are left are simply tight-knit communities that hunger for the coming of God's reign.⁹³ Some of this has been reflected in the Emerging Church. If the UMC wishes to make the shift back to an authentic community, these ideologies must be reengaged in order to create space for authentic community to develop.

As is clear today, in so many local UMC congregations, an authentic Christian community is almost non-existent. The Church has been greatly affected by a busy secular society. If the United Methodist Church is to reach the Emerging generations of people, it must recapture a deep sense of community life, where authentic relationships can be established and nurtured, as people grow and live life together. The pursuit to live life according to Christ's example is what forms the major bond within an authentic community. The goal of this type of community is that Christ would be made manifest in the authentic relationships of the Church community and the Holy Spirit would be the guide for all of community life.

With this in mind, the goal of "community," among Emerging Churches can best be further described as "incarnational," and this aspect is expressed in the newer Emerging Church Movement. As previously addressed, Hugh Halter and Matt Smay describe this concept of incarnational living in the three spheres of the community, the communion, and the mission. The Emerging Church's community sphere represents 'togetherness' and includes all aspects of life as people live together. The second is the communion sphere, which represents the areas of intimate connection with God. Included

⁹³ Ibid., 91.

in the communion sphere are worship, spiritual formation, and prayer. The third is the mission sphere, which represents God's invitation to every Christian to participate in his redemptive work in the world.⁹⁴ While the UMC has seemingly lost some of these values, the Emerging Church holds some of them as a reflection of the love of Christ in the world.

Emerging Key Church Practices

Presently, the most widely used understanding among scholars, regarding the Emerging Church comes from Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger. In their book, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, they offer a description of the Movement by describing Emerging Churches as communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. Their broad definition can be described through nine practices seen in the Movement. Emerging Churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.⁹⁵ While not all of these aspects of the Emerging Church are discussed here in detail, the main premises, those which play a role in the both the downward spiral, and potential comeback, of the UMC are examined.

⁹⁴ Hugh Halter and Matt Smay. *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossy-Bass, 2008), 148-149.

⁹⁵ Gibbs and Bolger, 44-45.

Identify With the Life of Jesus

The Emerging Church's desire to identify with the life of Jesus is more than a casual association, methodology, or a systematic belief system. It is a desire to incorporate the life and teachings of Jesus into their day-to-day lives. For example, identifying with the life of Jesus is more than attending worship, participating in church related programs or being involved in mission activities. It is about knowing and modeling the life of Jesus. To know Jesus is not an event, a ritual, a creed, or a denominational methodology. Rather, it is a journey of faith trusting God to provide insight, courage, and strength for the pilgrimage. Many of our modern interpretations of Jesus are prone to dismiss his life and focus more on his death and resurrection, as a means of gaining eternity.

Although the Emerging Church does not discount eternity, their understanding of the gospel message is more than a means to achieve personal salvation and a way to get to heaven. They are inspired, by the gospel, to participate actively in the reign of the kingdom of God and the transformation of the individual. Theologically, Emerging Churches seek to regain an ancient understanding of the gospel as a means for directing all their decisions and actions. The "Good News" is more than Jesus' death on the cross to forgive sin; rather it is God's invitation to all people to participate in a new way of life through redemptive activities of reconciliation in the world.

Transforming the Secular Realm

Another characteristic practice of Emerging Churches, according to Gibbs and Bolger, is to transform secular space. Emerging Christians reject the idea of dualism because they do not see any space in which God does not exist. Emerging Christians do

not see the world through the lens of good or bad, but through the lens that all life should be experienced as sacred. The notion that there is space in which God does not live, is considered a product of modernity and is quickly dismantled. Therefore, transforming secular space should be the goal of making all of life sacred by tearing down those Church practices that foster a secular mind-set, and that categorizes the world through the adoption of secular space, times, or activities.⁹⁶

An example of transforming secular space, or rather acknowledging that all space is sacred, is the Emerging Church's Tybee Bar Church, located at Benny's Tybee Tavern on Tybee Island, Georgia. The Tybee Bar Church transforms the seemingly secular space of a local bar into a worship space that meets on Sunday mornings at 10:00 am. "The Bar Church" started with five people and has grown to over one hundred and fifty people. One of the participants of the Tybee Bar Church says, "Bar Church takes church to where the people really are, instead of churches requiring people to go where church is." When the Bar Church congregation gathers on Sunday mornings there is no alcohol consumed. Instead, they share breakfast and coffee together.⁹⁷

The recent trend among many mainline denominations, including the United Methodist Church, is to use non-traditional secular space to plant new Churches and launch satellite campuses. Recently, the United Methodist Church has incorporated using strip malls, movie theatres, and coffee houses for these types of Church ventures. However, most traditional Churches have pushed back on the idea of "Church in a bar." Discussions among the leaders in the United Methodist Church, to use bars and

⁹⁶ Gibbs and Bolger, 45.

⁹⁷ "Church Service in a Bar," www.ktre.com, June 18, 2012, accessed January 24, 2013, <http://www.ktre.com/story/18812979/church-service-in-a-bar,%202009>.

nightclubs as worship space, have been met with some resistance due to the potential negative backlash that might arise because of such a venture. However, a recent decision by the Perdido Bay United Methodist Church, to start a satellite campus in a nightclub called the Flora-Bama Lounge, is an attempt by one mainline denomination the reach beyond its traditional walls into a secular space which has been long been viewed as off limits. The new outreach of the Church called “Worship at the Water” is now a church to approximately 450 regular attendees. Jack de Jarnette, the founding pastor of the Church, believes the Church “Is the sort of place he (Jesus) often went and hung out with people – when you cannot get people to come to Church, the alternative is to bring the Church to them.” Although “Worship at the Water” does not meet all the characteristics of an Emerging Church, as defined by Gibbs and Bolger, it is an example of a mainline Church reaching out and transforming secular space.⁹⁸

Highly Communal Life

Another characteristic of the Emerging Church is that they live “highly communal lives.” Highly communal “lives” means that every aspect of Church life flows out of Church members and out into the community where people can minister. In this manner, identity, as a congregation, flows from their ethos as a community. Emerging Churches are not defined by Church buildings or denominational structures, but rather by the individuals within an area who are connected to Jesus Christ through a common bond.

The Emerging Church’s passionate pursuit to establish authentic Christian community is a product of its desire to embody the kingdom of God, as its main priority.

⁹⁸ “Bibles and Booze Mix Sunday Mornings at Iconic Bar,” [www.FoxNews.com](http://www.foxnews.com), August 15, 2013, accessed October 13, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/08/15/bibles-and-booze-mix-sunday-mornings-at-iconic-bar/>.

This radical shift is a deviation from the UMC's program model of "doing Church," to a more organic model – in an attempt to embody the kingdom of God. In Emerging Churches, ministry is developed out of the needs of the community, where the Church is located geographically, and tends to grow based on the vision of the entire Church community.

In the same way, Emerging ministries that are no longer viable to the community, are evaluated and pruned in order to create new ministries, which the Church community believes will better serve the vision of the Church. This process of disassembling and then reconstructing is an organic process, and not necessarily a strategic function of the organization. Long-term planning goals of the organization's leadership, with attainable numerical quotas, are not the driver behind the Emerging Church movement, nor is it focused on expanding the institutional structure and acquiring new land and buildings. Rather, one of the predominate characteristics of the Emerging Church is the practice of inclusiveness.

Inclusiveness is not just a new Church slogan, but rather it is a very important and highly emphasized quality within the Emerging Church Movement. It does not merely mean the Church is just welcoming people through the front door, but rather they demonstrate inclusiveness by identifying with people of all lifestyles.⁹⁹ The Emerging Church intentionally seeks to break down barriers of gender, sexuality, race and religion that have all too often been used to divide people of faith into "them and us." Seeking to bridge the relationship divide, from an Emerging Church perspective, is being faithful to the teachings of Jesus. The practice of inclusiveness means the door of the Church swings

⁹⁹ Gibbs and Bolger, 119.

both ways: it is always open for all visitors to enter and to engage the Church community as well as to send members out as ambassadors for the kingdom.

Due to some influence on the UMC by the Emerging Church Movement, the concept of inclusiveness is a growing strength of the United Methodist Church and is considered an important area of focus for the Church in the years to come. The United Methodist Church has a section, in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, for the sole purpose of outlining its stance on the practice of inclusiveness within the denomination. Section VI, paragraph 140 of The Book of Discipline states:

We recognize that God made all creation and saw that it was good. As a diverse people of God who bring special gifts and evidences of God's grace to the unity of the Church and to society, we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus' ministry to all persons.

Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that should enable all people to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world; therefore, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination. The services of worship of every local Church of The United Methodist Church shall be open to all persons. The mark of an inclusive society is one in which all persons are open, welcoming, fully accepting, and supporting of all other persons, enabling them to participate fully in the life of the Church, the community, and the world. A further mark of inclusiveness is the setting of Church activities in facilities accessible to persons with disabilities,¹⁰⁰ which is frequently done in Emerging Churches. Seemingly, the United Methodist Church can learn quite a bit from the Emerging Church, in regards to it's the Emerging Church's communal and leadership properties.

¹⁰⁰ The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 99.

What the UMC can Learn from the Emerging Church

Based on present shifts in the religious life of the U.S., the Emerging Church Movement has the potential to have a profound effect on the United Methodist Church, and the future of Christianity. This is both exciting and frightening at the same time. The excitement lies in the potential to see a church emerge that is more biblical in scope than the mainline Church has been for the last few centuries. A church where orthodoxy and orthopraxy operate together, to produce stronger faith communities that model themselves after the Scripture, and participate in ministering to social problems and public issues, is an exciting prospect.

On the other hand, there is a frightening side of the Emerging Church movement that must be addressed. If the changes, re-thinking, and revisions of the gospel and the Church are not filtered through the scriptures, it is quite certain that the product of this season of change will fall drastically short of what God intended the Church to be. As such, can the denominational Church and specifically, the United Methodist Church, make the changes necessary to reach people in Emerging generations, while at the same time encourage increased engagement and adherence to scripture? Anything is possible in God's world. Yet, it is clear that the main reason there is an Emerging generation of Christians is due, in part, to a general discontent with the mainline Church. As a means to address, and change, the deeper issues surround the UMC, the organizational structure of the United Methodist Church must first be considered as that which could benefit from significant change.

As such, is it possible for the United Methodist Church to become a completely Emerging organization, with decentralized authority structures, and where power is

distributed evenly among the team? There is little evidence that suggests this would be successful, but there is the possibility that the United Methodist Church could decentralize areas of its structure and allow the local Church to become more autonomous. Making this step would require the local Church leadership (pastor/lay leadership) to have more authority on issues of governance, which would allow for a more bottom up approach to the problems. An approach such as this would have to re-evaluate the itinerant system and to rework apportionment giving at the local Church level. These factors alone would help the United Methodist Church to become closer to what Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom call a “hybrid organization.” Hybrid organizations combine the best of both worlds – the bottom-up approach of decentralization and the structure, control, and resulting profit potential of centralization.¹⁰¹

Three Objectives to be Adopted

One of the most profound ways that will affect both the communal and leadership nature of the Church is to begin to see the local Church in a new way. The United Methodist needs to shift from a program-driven and clergy-led institution that services its membership, to an organization that is involved in the redemptive process in the world by serving people outside the Church. This takes place as we change how we view the community, communion, and mission of the Church. Community would no longer be that which takes place by chance in the programs that are offered, but rather community would take place as we strive to live life together authentically – in small group settings

¹⁰¹ Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and The Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 164.

that are designed for fellowship, worship, prayer, study and accountability. Outside of the direct Church community is where Christians can experience deeper levels of communion with God and with each other together. We are only able to grow a relationship with God to the degree that we can grow in authentic relationships with those around us. It is only through a renewed sense of fellowship with God, and the acknowledgement of that fellowship in our communities, that we can truly see God's redemptive work in the world. It is not that the Church has a mission, but rather the mission has a church.¹⁰² This would be the byproduct of working in community with other believers, being in communion with God, and embracing mission in the world as a vehicle for the Church.

A second way the United Methodist Church can learn from the Emerging Church is in the area of empowering young leaders. The United Methodist Church has a difficult time ministering to an Emerging generation because it lacks young leaders working in ministry. In the Emerging Church world, the pattern for young leaders entering the ministry is 1) their Christian experience; 2) their call into ministry; 3) and their ministry effectiveness; 4) after which comes the seminary training, ordination, and credentialing that is required by the denomination. The process for ordination, as required by the Discipline of the United Methodist Church, must occur along a much simpler path than what is required. The process, as it presently stands, has become a roadblock for young leaders entering the ministry, as opposed to a process that empowers young leaders. Unless the Church can begin to formulate new ideas and ways for empowering young

¹⁰² Cole, 59.

leaders, the Church will continue to see declines in membership, and worship attendance, as congregations continue to age.

The third way the United Methodist Church can learn from the Emerging Church is by planting Emerging faith communities that meet the spiritual needs of the younger generation. This process begins by listening to the spiritual needs and the ministry passions of the younger generation, rather than moving forward with a church plan that has been developed out of ignorance. The second part of the process is gathering the next generation of young Christian leaders together for the purpose of re-imagining Church. United Methodist leadership needs to develop what Dwight J. Friesen calls “Christ-Clusters.” Christ-Clusters are relational groups of people who are responsible for discrete, Holy Spirit guided thought. When united, and guided by these principles, what is given away is that which is needed most. The UMC needs to come together and empower young leaders to re-image the soul of the denomination so that the Church can move forward in effective ministry.

CHAPTER SIX: RETURN TO WESLEYAN PRINCIPLES

Conceptual Framework

Wesleyan theology is the theology for the Emerging generation. The core beliefs of grace, conversion, and sanctification are in roads for further discussion among members of the Emerging Church. It is vital that the United Methodist Church re-discover these core beliefs if it is going to be an effective witness in today's post-modern culture. John Wesley, in many ways, could be characterized as an emergent leader. He was a product of two cultures, the traditions of Anglicanism and the rationality of an Oxford education.¹⁰³ Wesley lived amidst a transitory period in England during the dawn of the Enlightenment.

This period was defined by its rapid intellectual and cultural change, starting with the British Industrial Revolution, the availability of printed books, and the rise of Whig politics.¹⁰⁴ The Enlightenment met the Church head-on by opening conversations on topics that had been previously off limits. The great progress in the area of science and technology, helped to foster the idea that religion was “old fashioned” and was no longer a viable need in the lives of modern people. Enlightenment thinking pushed a social science methodology that promoted morality over the truths of doctrine.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Dean G. Blevins, “Emerging Ecclesiology: Preliminary Observations of Horizon Churches in a Postmodern World,” <http://didache.nazarene.org>, 2009, accessed September 10, 2014, <http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-6-1/46-6-1-blevinsemerge/file>.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Justo L. Gonzalez. *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day, Vol. 2.* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2010), 215-216.

Our postmodern American society is also in the midst of an intense transitory period. Our industrial economy is being taken over by an intellectual economy that is increasingly powered by knowledge, creativity, and ideas.¹⁰⁶ The monumental move into the information age, that began to emerge in the later part of the twentieth century, has made Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press seem insignificant because of the availability of information and knowledge, channeled through computers and networks from any place in the world. During this time, science and technology has produced some of the greatest innovations in history as well. As an example, with the invention of the artificial heart and liver, fuel cell technology, artificial intelligence, and the power to connect with anyone in the world through vast social media networks, life has certainly changed. Not to mention, we are living through one of the most fundamental economic transitions in the history of the world, as our traditional modes of commerce, communication, and learning are changing at a rapid pace. Much like the time of transition in John Wesley's day, this present period of new enlightenment thinking has reopened the door to rethink the traditional modes of the Church and to reevaluate morality and doctrine.

John Wesley believed that authentic community was a vital part of the Christian experience. He argued that one of the failures of the Church of England was that it did not adequately promote Christian community. Speaking of the failure, Wesley wrote at one point,

Look east or west, north or south; name what parish you please: is this Christian fellowship there? Rather, are not the bulk of parishioners a mere rope of sand? What Christian connection is there between them? What intercourse in spiritual

¹⁰⁶ Richard Florida. *The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 111.

things? What watching over each other's souls? What bearing of one another's burdens?¹⁰⁷

It was out of this burden that John Wesley started class meetings. He believed these class meetings represented the genius of primitive Christianity, and that God had given him a vision of the way in which these groups could be the means of spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land.¹⁰⁸ Wesley's class meetings were small group environments where fellowship, worship, prayer, study, and accountability could take place in community. He further believed that mutual support, and care, was a necessity in the life of every Christian, and that it could be accomplished in these small group settings.

Wesley's class meetings were established with a set of six goals for each group. They were to, 1) meet once a week, at the least; 2) To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason for lateness; 3) To begin exactly at the hour with singing and prayer; 4) To speak (each of us in order), freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting; 5) To end every meeting with prayer suited to the state of each person present; 6) To desire some person among us to speak his own state first and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be concerned their state, sins, and temptations.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Lovett Hayes Weems, Jr., *The Gospel According to Wesley: A Summary of John Wesley's Message* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1982), 28.

¹⁰⁸ Colin W. Williams. *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1960), 151.

¹⁰⁹ Weems, 29.

However, the influence and application of class meetings did not end when the class was over. Wesley provided further instruction for Christian living through what he called “works of mercy.” Wesley listed these under three headings: doing no harm, doing good, and attending upon all the ordinances of God.¹¹⁰ “Doing no harm,” meant to avoid evil of every kind. Wesley included such things as using or selling liquor, fighting with your neighbor, or wearing gold or costly apparel as “doing no harm.” By “doing good,” Wesley meant to take care of the poor and those in need, visiting the sick, and those in prison. “Attending upon the ordinances of God” for Wesley was to attend public worship of God, ministry of the word, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, fasting, and attending Bible study.¹¹¹

Furthermore, rediscovering of the core Wesleyan theological beliefs of grace, conversion, and sanctification are vitally important because it is from these foundational beliefs that a passion for evangelism and mission is motivated. These same theological beliefs that motivated John Wesley’s passion were also the catalyst for the Wesleyan Revival. The main message of Wesley’s 40,000 sermons, over the course of fifty years, was a message of salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ. It was through Christ that grace would be available to all people. This message was so important that Wesley charged his growing group of itinerant ministers: “You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work.”¹¹² Although we live in a different age, and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Alan P.F. Sell, ed. *Protestant Nonconformist Texts, Vol. 2, The Eighteenth Century*. (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 408.

therefore the methods of evangelism will invariably differ from those of John Wesley's day, the theology behind his evangelism is as relevant today as it ever was.

Wesley and Grace

John Wesley's greatest gift to the world was his theological understanding of God's grace. Grace is God's love that cannot be earned by any of our human efforts, but rather is freely offered to us. John Wesley stated emphatically in his sermon titled "Free Grace" that "The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is free in all, and free for all."¹¹³ God's grace, as Wesley understood it, had nothing to do with what we can do for God, and everything to do with what God does for us. Wesley saw the saving power of God at work in every human being through prevenient grace. He also believed there were not two distinct categories of people, the elect and the damned, but only one category, sinners who are loved by God, and who have worth and dignity by virtue of that love.¹¹⁴ The word prevenient means, "to come before" and it is the foundation for the beginning work of salvation found in everyone. Wesley states this belief when he writes, "Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) "preventing grace"; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning His will, and the first slight, transient conviction of having sinned against Him. All these imply some tendency toward life, some degree of salvation, the beginning of a deliverance from a

¹¹³ John Wesley, "Free Grace: Sermon 128," www.umcmission.org, accessed October 6, 2013, <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-128-Free-Grace>.

¹¹⁴ Hal Knight, "John Wesley and the Emerging Church." *Preacher's Magazine*. Advent/Christmas 2007-2008. Accessed April, 15 2010. <http://www.nph.com/nphweb/html/pmol/Emerging.htm>.

blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God.”¹¹⁵ In prevenient grace, God comes seeking us before we seek Him. Prevenient grace gives the power to respond to God either positively by accepting God’s grace or negatively by rejecting God’s call.¹¹⁶ Our positive acceptance of God’s grace brings us to repentance, whereby we are able to receive the gift of salvation. God’s grace is an essential part of the Christian experience, and serves a vital role in the move to grow in godliness.

Grace and the Emerging Church Movement

The Wesleyan theological perspective of grace being for everyone, and not just a select few, is a natural thought process and belief for the Emerging Church Christians. Gibbs and Bolger highlight this view when describing the Emerging Church: “there are no longer any bad places, bad people, or bad times. All can be made holy. All can be given to God in worship. All modern dualisms can be overcome.”¹¹⁷ For the Emerging Church, grace is not something that is merely preached or talked about, but rather grace is a lifestyle that is lived in service to the community. It seeks to tear down the barriers that hinder relational activities.

It should be acknowledged that the Emerging Church is cynical in regards to the preaching and the practice of many mainline Churches. This is often because they see hypocrisy among the Church, when what is preached is not what is emulated and

¹¹⁵ John Wesley, *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.* (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1831), 236, accessed October 8, 2013, <https://books.google.com/books?id=IA5HAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA236&lpg=PA236&dq=All+these+imply+some+tendency+toward+life,+some+degree+of+salvation,+the+beginning+of+a+deliverance+from+a+blind,+unfeeling+heart,+quite+insensible+of+God+and+th>.

¹¹⁶ Weems, 14.

¹¹⁷ Gibbs and Bolger, 68.

practiced among the membership. From the Emerging perspective, there is disconnect between what many mainline Churches present as a core theological belief and what is practiced by the UMC. The Emerging Church Movement sees a gross neglect, and perhaps impossibility, to preach grace and not practice grace. As Gibbs and Bolger discuss, it is through, “humble service that expresses generosity toward others, which is the root meaning of grace.”¹¹⁸ Like John Wesley, the Emerging Church sees no bounds to the free grace of God. “Wesley was fundamentally hopeful about the possibilities of God’s grace working now, in the present, both in individuals and in society.”¹¹⁹

United Methodists have a great opportunity to connect with Emerging Christians through the theology of grace. John Wesley’s theology of grace was his greatest gift to the world and it is a point of major connection between the two groups. Like many Emerging Christians, the Wesleyan understanding of grace is the foundation of Methodist theology. It is through the understanding of God’s grace that insight is gained into God’s gift of salvation and transformational process of sanctification. It is the basis for understanding one’s role as a Christian in the world.

This connection of grace between the Emerging Church and the United Methodist Church is extended even more deeply because, like Emerging Christians, everyone is welcome to participate, regardless of the individual’s background or present beliefs. Within the United Methodist Church, one is welcome to belong even before that individual believes. This is grace at work by offering grace to a stranger, and by doing so,

¹¹⁸ Gibbs and Bolger, 130.

¹¹⁹ Howard A. Snyder. *The Radical Wesley: And Patterns For Church Renewal*. (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996), 84.

the kingdom of God increases. Many United Methodists believe that by extending grace, a conduit for sharing the presence of God with others opens up.

This is not just a statement but it is also a practice of the United Methodist Church. For example, in Holy Communion, people are invited to participate by receiving the sacraments before they profess their faith. The idea of receiving God's grace before you believe is what Wesley called "Prevenient Grace." Wesley understood grace to be God's active presence in our lives. Prevenient Grace is the grace that goes before and seeks people out, before they even know that God was there. This active work of grace is not dependent on human action or human response. Rather, it is God's free gift of unmerited favor to all. This view of faith is the same core belief among Emerging Christians, as they seek to live highly communal lives and to welcome strangers into their life circles. As such, there is a great opportunity to minister to the Emerging generation of post-moderns through teaching and practicing grace.

Wesley and Salvation

Another core belief that the United Methodist Church must rediscover is the Wesleyan theological understanding of "salvation." Wesley's theology of salvation was at the heart of the Wesleyan Revival. Wesleyan historian Lovett Weems states, "There is no way to understand anything Wesley said without first understanding his passion for a theology of salvation. His preaching was a preaching of salvation. His teaching was a teaching of salvation. His ethics were an ethics that emerge from the experience of salvation. His understanding of stewardship evolved out of his theology of salvation."¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Weems, 54.

Salvation, through the lens of John Wesley, was the experience of salvation whereby through repentance God forgives sin and justifies the sinner. Salvation was much more than merely praying the “sinner’s prayer,” but rather there was a process to the experience that was evidenced in the life of the believer.

The process of salvation, as Wesley described it, is rooted in the existence of original sin that all of humanity is born into because of the “Fall” of Adam in the garden of Eden. At creation, God created both male and female in a perfect state fashioned in the image of God – a state God pronounced was good. This state of perfection Wesley described in the following terms:

In the image of God was manmade; holy as He that created him is holy; merciful as the Author of all is merciful; perfect as his Father in Heaven is perfect. As God is love, so man, dwelling in love, dwelt in God, and God in him. God made him to be an ‘image of his own eternity,’ an incorruptible picture of the God of glory.’ He was accordingly pure, as God is pure, but was inwardly and outwardly sinless and undefiled.”¹²¹

But because man chose to be disobedient, sin entered the world and the perfect state was lost and continuous fellowship with God broken. Given the state of humans as fallen, there is an inherent draw toward sin present in everyone, essentially a pull away from what ought to be. For Wesley, the heart of it all is this basic pull of Adam’s sin – the sin of overreaching, trying to be what we cannot, being dissatisfied with being human, demanding that we be God.¹²² It is from the inherent pull of sin that humankind is desperate for salvation. It is from this point of desperation that the process of salvation begins, as humankind acknowledges their sin. From acknowledgement of sin, through God’s prevenient grace, repentance is possible. Repentance is not so much remorse as it

¹²¹ Edward H. Sugden, ed., *The Works of Wesley Sermons Volume 2 (Wesley's Standard Sermons, 2)* (Wilmore, KY: Francis Asbury Press, 1955), 116.

¹²² Weems, 10-11.

is a self-understanding, which encompasses an earnest desire to escape from one's present condition, and enter the door of the kingdom of God.¹²³

The first step into the kingdom of God, according to Wesleyan theology is “justification.” Justification is the pardoning of our sin that takes place through faith in Jesus Christ. On June 18, 1738, eighteen days after his conversion experience, Wesley preached a sermon at St. Mary's Church in Oxford titled: “Salvation by Faith.” In his sermon Wesley stated, salvation which is through faith, even in the present world: a salvation from sin, and the consequences of sin, both often expressed in the word justification; which, taken in the largest sense, implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment.”¹²⁴ Wesley, however, makes a distinction between justification and new birth. Justification is what “God does for us” and new birth is what God does “in us,” and although he states that justification precedes new birth, it is in that moment when a person is justified, and consequently they experience a new birth.¹²⁵ As such, justification deals effectively with original sin through faith in Jesus Christ, and a new birth enables the process of regeneration in the life of the believer.

Wesley speaks to this idea when he states, “If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental they are undoubtedly these two – the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth. The former relates to that great work, which God does in forgiving our sins; the latter to the great work which God

¹²³ Weems, 15.

¹²⁴ John Wesley, “Sermon 1: Salvation by Faith,” <http://wesley.nnu.edu>, accessed August 15, 2013, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-1-salvation-by-faith/>.

¹²⁵ Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley's Sermons: an Anthology*, eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 336.

does in us, in renewing our fallen nature.”¹²⁶ The enormity of the change, which takes place in the life of a person at the moment of conversion, is emphasized by Wesley’s sermon titled: “The New Birth.” There he writes,

From hence it manifestly appears what is the nature of the new birth. It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life: when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is ‘created anew in Christ Jesus.’¹²⁷

Salvation and the Emerging Church Movement

The concept of salvation is one of the hardest Wesleyan theological positions to define among members of the Emerging Church. This is due, in part, to the overemphasis among many denominations to preach salvation, yet without life change taking place. Author and speaker, Brian McLaren, considered by many to be the voice of the Emerging Church, suggests that our historical views of salvation are incorrect. In his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, he states: “we have demoted Jesus from Lord while retaining him as Savior . . . It seems evident that we have also misconstrued, reduced, twisted, and torqued the whole meaning of what words like savior, save, and salvation are supposed to mean. For example, in the Bible, to save means “rescue” or “heal.” Emphatically, it does not automatically mean “save from hell” or “give eternal life after death,” as many preachers seem to imply in sermon after sermon.”¹²⁸ On the other side of the equation are Emerging Church pastors like Mark Driscoll who believe that salvation by faith in Jesus

¹²⁶ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 201.

¹²⁷ John Wesley, “Sermon 45 - New Birth,” [www.wesley.nnu.edu](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-45-the-new-birth/), accessed October 6, 2013, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-45-the-new-birth/>.

¹²⁸ Brian D. McLaren. *A Generous Orthodoxy*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2004), 99 and 101.

Christ is the key to eternal life. The doctrinal statements list on the Mars Hill Church's website (where Mark Driscoll is the lead pastor) states the following about salvation: "We believe that salvation is the gift of God brought to man by grace and received by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose precious blood was shed on Calvary for the forgiveness of our sins (Ephesians 2:8-10; John 1:12; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19). Regarding eternal security it states: "We believe that all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Romans 8:1; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; 1 Peter 1:5). We believe that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word..."¹²⁹ It's important to note that under Mark Driscoll's leadership, Mars Hill Church, is one of the fastest growing Churches in the country among the Emerging generation. Mark Driscoll and John Wesley, although they do not see eye to eye theologically, have one thing in common: their stance on salvation is certain in the midst of a transitioning culture in which there are few certainties.

Wesley and Sanctification

The third core Wesleyan theological belief, which the United Methodist Church must rediscover is that of "sanctification." Sanctification is an essential part of the "fundamental doctrine of the people called Methodists."¹³⁰ The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church makes this statement regarding sanctification:

Sanctification is that renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Ghost, received through faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood of atonement cleanseth from all sin;

¹²⁹ Mars Hill Church. "What We Believe." www.MarsHillChurch.org, Copyrighted 2007. Accessed February 12, 2009, <http://www.marshillChurch.org/about/what-we-believe>.

¹³⁰ Weems, 33.

whereby we are not only delivered from the guilt of sin, but are washed from its pollution, saved from its power, and are enabled, through grace, to love God with all our hearts and to walk in His holy commandments blameless.¹³¹

Sanctification is the process where “new birth” continues to grow and develop in a person’s life, as a work of the Holy Spirit illuminates the heart. Wesley believed as a person grows in their relationship with God, their lives are changed from sinfulness to holiness. This is not holiness that is without sin, but rather a holiness of living. It is growing in Christ-like character, whereby we attend to good works, works of mercy, and the rejection of sinful living. Wesley believed and preached that “growth in grace” toward the goal of Christian perfection, (sanctification) was a necessity for Christian living.

Yet, this process of sanctification did not end with the individual believer, but also carried with it certain social implications. As such, there is a strong connection between the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification and social change. As the lives of individuals change, so must the community in which they live. For John Wesley, separation between a person’s individual life and the community in which they lived did not exist. Wesley states, “The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness.” He further states, “Christianity is essentially a social religion...and to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it.”¹³² This is evidenced by Wesley’s approach to ministry. Early Methodists, under Wesley’s leadership, were committed to ministering to the poor, to provide for destitute widows and orphans, and to work toward the abolition of slavery. Wesley’s focus on ministry to the poor, and those neglected by

¹³¹ The United Methodist Book of Discipline, 66.

¹³² Weems, 38.

society, has helped to spark the Wesleyan Revival. Like the Wesleyan forefathers, when the faithful are true to the heritage of the Wesleyan Revival, vital and life-changing religious experience is found side-by-side with vigorous and unrelenting social righteousness.¹³³

Sanctification and the Emerging Church Movement

The Wesleyan theological position of sanctification and social holiness, as it relates to social change, are easy points for continued conversation between Wesleyan philosophy and members of the Emerging Church. Much like John Wesley and the early Methodists, Emerging Church members are focused on living out their faith. Emerging Churches are also radically incarnational and pre-eminently missional. They believe they have the great opportunity to participate in the redemptive work of God in the world. For Emerging Churches, evangelism takes place in the form of presence rather than proclamation.¹³⁴ Their understanding of Church is not where they meet, but rather where they serve in the community. The Emerging Church understands Church structures not as ends in themselves, but as a means to mission. They are not focused on gaining members but on inviting others to join in the mission.¹³⁵

In periods of extraordinary transition throughout history, where there are great periods of cultural change, there is also great uncertainty. The strength of Wesley's clear theology, anchored in the gospel message, and practiced in relevant methodology, brought stability to the uncertainties of life. In the same way, the United Methodist

¹³³ Ibid., 44.

¹³⁴ Gibbs and Bolger, 129.

¹³⁵ Knight, 4.

Church of today must recapture its rich Wesleyan heritage, founded in core theological beliefs and practice, if it is going to be an effective witness during this present time of uncertainty. In the midst of the massive changes, that are taking place within today's society, it is important that the United Methodist Church remember its historical lineage so that the Church can be a compelling voice of hope in the future.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REVIVAL OF THE EVANGELICAL SPIRIT

One of the issues facing the United Methodist Church today is the perceived negative reaction toward evangelism and evangelistic Churches. The words evangelical and evangelism have deep roots in Christian history, but because of the many negative connotations that surround these words, as well as the many differing definitions they hold, it is important to take a closer look at what these words truly mean. The words evangelical and evangelism are derived from the Greek word “evangelion,” which means: “the good news” or “glad tidings of salvation.” The term “evangelical,” by definition, stresses the need for a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ by faith. Therefore, the word “evangelism” means to share the “good news” of Jesus Christ.”¹³⁶ Yet, studies show that people outside of the Church have a very skeptical view of Christians – especially among the younger generation between the ages of 16 to 29. Due to media attention, which typically focuses on only a small fraction of Christians and Churches, which tend to be extreme. As a result, the public perceives them to be a reflection of the whole. The United Methodist Church, because of public perception, has shied away from being seen as overly evangelistic because of the negative stigmas associated with the term.¹³⁷

To further discuss what the word evangelical, it essentially means that a person believes in three core beliefs, the centrality of the Bible, the centrality of the atoning

¹³⁶ Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 96.

¹³⁷ Donald W. Haynes, “Rethinking Church Means Refocusing on Evangelism,” [www.RonnieCollin.com](http://ronniecollins.com), June 11, 2009, accessed April 25, 2011, <http://ronniecollins.com/2009/06/23/rethinking-church-means-refocusing-on-evangelism/>.

death of Christ, and the centrality of the need for personal conversion. Evangelism then is the active mission to convert others and to do good works in society.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, the modern United Methodist Church is not taking evangelism seriously. Unfortunately, the Church has taken John Wesley's great saying, "The world is our parish," and has turned it into "the parish is our world." The United Methodist Church must take to heart John Wesley's practice of meeting people in their own spaces, and in their own terms, if the UMC is truly going to be an effective witness. As discussed in preceding chapters, the vast majority of United Methodist Churches have become focused inwardly on the needs of those within the Church, and neglected the needs of those outside of the Church. The Church has lost touch with the flow of the culture because so few United Methodist Churches are actually engaging the culture. In other words, very few United Methodist Churches are participating in effective evangelism that meets people in their own context, for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. This may play a significant role in the population of the Church, but it is imperative that the local Church begins a radical refocus on the communities in which it is called to serve, rather than focusing on membership. Shifting from an internal to an external focus usually requires a radical change of mindset on the part of the leadership, away from being ruled by the constraints and scorecards of the internally focused system.¹³⁹

Unless the rediscovery core beliefs are re-established, and the Church refocuses its energies from institutional bureaucracies to establishing effective modes of evangelism, it will continue the decade-long struggle and decline. Statistics show that the

¹³⁸ Scot McKnight, "The End of Evangelicalism? 1," www.patheos.com, April 25, 2011, accessed April 25, 2011, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2011/04/25/the-end-of-evangelicalism-1/>.

¹³⁹ Reggie McNeal. *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2009), 26.

Church has dropped more than 40 percent of its membership, from 11 million in 1968 to fewer than 8 million, in 2008. In this same period, the Church has closed more than 12,000 local Churches.¹⁴⁰ Clearly, the Church has focused its attention on issues revolving around the institutional development of the denomination and social justice issues instead of developing ways to revitalize waning congregations, and effective means for sharing the gospel. The declining membership and worship attendance of the Church is a direct result of its failure to transmit effectively its faith within the culture, which is now threatening the very survival of the denomination. While there are some effective examples of disciple making and ministries that focus on social issues throughout the Church, these efforts have not proven to prevent the loss of membership and worship attendance. The “Call to Action Report,” published by The United Methodist Church for reordering the life of the Church for greater effectiveness states, “we have pursued self-interests and allowed institutional inertia to bind us in ways that constrain our witness and dilute our mission. We have been preoccupied more with defending treasured assumptions and theories, protecting our respective turf and prerogatives, and maintaining the status quo for beloved institutions.”¹⁴¹

Strategies to Reinvigorate UMC

The Methodist denomination, over the last few years, has developed numerous strategies to help counter the decline. These strategies include: “Offer Them Christ,” “Growth Plus,” consultations with large Church pastors, Church school growth, a

¹⁴⁰ Haynes, “Wesleyan Wisdom: Rethinking Church Means Refocusing on Evangelism,” Accessed April 25, 2011.

¹⁴¹ The United Methodist Church. *Call to Action: Steering Team Report*. (Nashville: The United Methodist Church, 2010), 8.

telephone hotline to help retain relocating UMC families, special emphasis on baby boomers, Hispanics, and Asians.¹⁴² The United Methodist Church's renewed response to the overwhelming decline is the development of a new campaign strategy, which attempts to re-brand the image of the denomination, cleverly titled "Rethink Church." This new campaign strategy, which was approved by the 2008 General Conference, is expected to cost 20 million dollars over the next four years in advertising campaigns. The idea behind "Rethink Church" is not a call to find a new theology, but rather a "call to refocus our ecclesiology" and "to see Church in a way that is more aligned to Scripture, as well as to be more faithful to the tradition of John Wesley who believed the world was his parish."¹⁴³

The main "refocus on United Methodist Ecclesiology" is to re-birth a spirit of evangelism among United Methodist congregations. Over the last forty years, United Methodist have distanced them from being seen as "overly evangelistic" and focused more on social justice causes as a means of evangelism. Professor George Hunter, of Asbury Seminary, speaking to the United Methodist Congress on Evangelism in January 2011 said, "The people called United Methodists cannot recall who they are, if indeed most of our present members ever knew – they are no longer rooted in scripture or in any recognizable version of Methodism's theological vision." Hunter further states, "Thousands of our Churches are analogous to mules – which are creatures that are so genetically compromised that they are incapable of reproduction – don't expect much

¹⁴² Bruce A. Greer, "Strategies for Evangelism and Growth in Three Denominations (1965-1990)," www.hirr.hartsem.edu, accessed October 6, 2013, <http://www.hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/Church&Denomgrowth/ch&dngrowth-ch3.pdf>.

¹⁴³ Barrick. "United Methodists: Church Is a Verb, Not a Noun," Accessed March 14, 2010.

vitality, much less reproduction. There is not much vitality or reproduction anywhere the gospel is in absentia.”¹⁴⁴

The old saying is true: “You are either growing or you are dying.” That is exactly where the United Methodist Church finds itself today as it continues to experience serious declines in membership and worship attendance. For far too long the Church has focused on issues and agendas outside of the doctrinal standards of the Church, which have caused division among clergy and have diluted the effectiveness of ministry across the entire connection. The mission and ministry of the local Church, as defined in the United Methodist Book of Discipline 2008, are clear “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The local Church provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.”¹⁴⁵ When the Church removes itself from the work of evangelism, which reaches people with the gospel message, it is impossible for the Church to then “disciple people for the transformation of the world.” Every local congregation is charged to proclaim the good news of God’s redeeming grace through effective witness, and by demonstrating a common life of gratitude and devotion, witness and service, celebration and discipleship.¹⁴⁶ The vitality of each local United Methodist congregation is dependent upon these principles and they are foundational doctrines of the Church. It is imperative that the UMC begins to redirect her primary focus and commitment on evangelism and congregational vitality. As it stands now, current culture

¹⁴⁴ Mark Tooley, “Evangelism Professor Likens United Methodists to Non- Reproductive Mules,” www.juicyecumenism.com, February 7, 2011, accessed October 23, 2014, <https://juicyecumenism.com/2011/02/07/evangelism-professor-likens-united-methodists-to-non-reproductive-mules/>.

¹⁴⁵ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 87.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

and practices are resulting in an overall decline that is toxic and constricts missional effectiveness.¹⁴⁷

A Return to Wesley's Evangelism

If the denomination is going to refocus her ecclesiology to be more faithful to the tradition of John Wesley, then we must re-visit our understanding of how he viewed evangelism. For Wesley, evangelism was the communication of the evangelion: the whole story of God's gracious dealings with man over the whole range of human existence, and yet also the appropriation of the evangelion, in a life that is a new creation in Christ.¹⁴⁸ Wesley's idea of salvation begins with his theological understanding of God's grace, as that which is available to all of humanity. Grace is God's love that cannot be earned by any of our human efforts, but rather is freely offered to us. Wesley emphatically stated in his sermon titled "Free Grace" that "the grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is free in all, and free for all."¹⁴⁹ Wesley understood God's grace to be sovereign, but also included the divinely created free will of humanity. Because of God's sovereign grace and man's free will, Wesley completely dismissed the doctrine of predestination. He believed in total depravity, meaning that all of a man is corrupted by sin and not just part of him. However, he emphatically rejected any doctrine of "tee-total depravity," which meant there was no righteousness at all in fallen man.¹⁵⁰ Wesley saw the saving power of God in every human being through prevenient grace.

¹⁴⁷ The United Methodist Church. *Call to Action: Steering Team Report*, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Outler, 30-31.

¹⁴⁹ John Wesley, "Sermon 128: Free Grace."

¹⁵⁰ Outler, 33.

Wesley states this belief when he writes, “Salvation begins with what is usually termed “prevenient grace;” including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning His will, and the first slight, transient conviction of having sinned against Him. All these simply imply some tendency toward life, some degree of salvation, the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God.”¹⁵¹

Wesleyan evangelism began with a passionate desire that people would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through hearing the word of faith, or the proclamation of faith. It was then, only by prevenient grace that a person could respond under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. When Wesley said that the Son of Man came into the world to save sinners, Wesley understood this to mean that in Christ’s redemptive mission there were no exceptions.¹⁵² God loved the whole world, and to that end Jesus died for the sins of all humanity. No one was outside of God’s redemptive work and every human being has the ability to respond to God’s offer of salvation, because the proclamation of faith assumes the preexisting activity of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer.

Wesley’s mode of evangelism, for reaching the masses, was to meet people in their own particular contexts. His main method for reaching the masses was through field preaching, an approach he learned from George Whitefield. Field preaching was not the chosen method for Wesley; however, he could not deny its effectiveness in reaching the un-Churched masses. He once wrote in his journal, “What marvel the devil does not love field preaching! Neither do I; I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, a handsome

¹⁵¹ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 136.

¹⁵² Robert Emerson Coleman, *Nothing to Do but to Save Souls: John Wesley's Charge to His Preachers* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 2006), 31.

pulpit. But where is my zeal, if I do not trample all these underfoot in order to save one more soul?"¹⁵³ In field preaching, Wesley met people in their context often preaching on street corners, in front of factories, in open fields, and on the steps of buildings in whatever city he might be visiting.

While conversion was always the chief aim of field preaching in Wesleyan evangelism, it did not stop there. On the contrary, the point of an individual's conversion was only the beginning of the process. The next step in the evangelism process was to connect the new convert to a "class meeting." As noted previously, class meetings met in the neighborhoods and communities where people lived, and were often referred to as "societies." Wesley believed the class meetings were his God-given vision to disciple, guide, and nurture the new convert into scriptural holiness.¹⁵⁴ A lay leader, who was a member of the group, led the class meetings and a lay preacher would oversee several classes within a geographic area.

The class meetings became the foundation for the Wesleyan Revival, and the movement the most successful mode of evangelism. Wesley would never preach where he could not follow the meeting up with establishing the class meetings for nurture and discipleship. He was so emphatic about creating a place for Christian nurture that he once stated, "Converts without nurture are like stillborn babies." "Follow the blow," he said. "Never encourage the devil by snatching souls from him that you cannot nurture."¹⁵⁵

Another aspect of the Wesleyan model of evangelism, that seems to be lacking in the majority of local United Methodist Churches today, is the development of effective

¹⁵³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵⁴ Weems, 29.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 28.

disciples for Jesus Christ. Until the 1960's, Christian education and Sunday school were major emphases, but since the early 1970's, the Church has shifted its focus to social justices issues.¹⁵⁶ A Barna Group study recently concluded that United Methodist were among the mainline denominations declining in biblical literacy. The research sited “that the theological free-for-all that is encroaching in Protestant Churches nationwide suggests the coming decade will be a time of unparalleled theological diversity and inconsistency.”¹⁵⁷ The Call to Action report suggests that Churches who ranked among the high-vitality United Methodist Churches where those who placed a high priority on effective small groups, for nurturing and discipleship. These Churches also placed a high priority on spiritually engaged lay leadership, which is both developed and mentored.¹⁵⁸ This is akin to the way in which Wesley treated the newest members of his congregation.

In this manner, the class meetings, that John Wesley organized, gave its members the opportunity to connect to other Christians for prayer, nurture, discipleship, and accountability. The effectiveness of Wesley's model of ministry was dependent on the effectiveness of the leaders and lay pastors. This is the reason why he spent so much time developing effective leaders to lead and oversee the class meetings. In these small groups people felt a sence of belonging, grew in biblical literacy, and were ministered to by other members of the group. It was truly a time of successful evangelizing.

¹⁵⁶ Haynes, 1.

¹⁵⁷ “Six Themes Emerge from Barna Group Research in 2010,” www.alliancealert.org, December 12, 2010, accessed August 14, 2012, <http://www.alliancealert.org/2010/12/13/six-themes-emerge-from-barna-group-research-in-2010/#>.

¹⁵⁸ The United Methodist Church. “Call to Action: Steering Team Report,” 24-25.

The last aspect of John Wesley's model of evangelism that is lacking in many United Methodist Churches today is, once again, the concept of "works of mercy." There is a need to focus on the "doing good" category of "works of mercy" because it is cited by "The Call to Action" report as a deficiency among United Methodist Churches. The Call to Action report suggests that vital congregations are those who are in ministry to the poor and passionate about missions. High-vitality congregations are engaged in outreach, witness, and mission in the local communities and the world,¹⁵⁹ and this is a cornerstone of evangelical principles.

Mission-Mindedness and Evangelism

The United Methodist Church has many effective ministry opportunities available. One of the best-known ministries, under the United Methodist Church umbrella, is the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). UMCOR has an outstanding reputation for effective ministry throughout the country and among the United States Government. UMCOR's relief efforts around the globe have been astounding. These efforts have provided food, clothing, and shelter to thousands of people, more recently in Haiti and Japan. However, there is little connection between UMCOR and the majority of local United Methodist Churches. This is due, in part, to the apportionment dollars paid to the Annual Conference by the local Church and the hyper focus on growing the institution of the denomination. Apportionments have given the local Church a means to give money to many worthy causes, but over the last forty years apportionments have taken the place of active participation, by the local congregation, as

¹⁵⁹ The United Methodist Church. "Call to Action: Steering Team Report," 125.

seen through missionary work. As a result, very few United Methodist Churches are truly mission minded. One of the keys successes for effective Evangelism in the local Church is to become mission-minded. Kennon Callahan, an expert in Church development, states: “The age of the local Church is over. The age of the mission station has come.”¹⁶⁰

Revitalization in Action

Within my particular ministry context, small groups provide a place for discipleship development, and nurture what would otherwise be impossible for the pastoral staff. Our small Church groups are led by trained lay leaders, who facilitate the nurturing and discipleship of the members of the group. A continual process of leadership development takes place throughout the year to help develop existing leaders, as well as to disciple new leaders. This process, although far from perfect, has grown exponentially over the last three years, both in spiritual depth and in worship attendance numbers. Our Church’s small groups have also been a powerful evangelism tool for reaching non-Christians in the community, as well as re-igniting members of the congregation that had become inactive for various reasons.

Final Thoughts

Clearly, it cannot be denied that Christian culture within the United States is experiencing a phenomenal change. The five sets of research questions presented in this study – What is the current state of the Church? Is the Church is divided doctrinally, theologically, and in areas regarding polity? If so, what is causing this division? What are the primary

¹⁶⁰ Kennon L. Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strong, Healthy Congregations Living in the Grace of God*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 8.

causes of the decline in membership currently being experienced by the United Methodist Church? What are the greatest challenges facing the Church? What are the United Methodist Church's strengths, and how can the Church build on these strengths for the future of the denomination? These have all been answered in detail.

Traditional mainline denominations are declining in numbers, there exists serious concern surrounding apportionments being funneled to the larger central bureaucracy, and then those being used unwisely, and a general lack of accountability among the central agencies of the Church has been occurring for years. The current leadership and structural models within the Church are lacking, and there are fewer and fewer numbers of pastors now, especially younger ones, than ever before. As one might imagine then, seminaries are out of touch with what is taking place in the Church, there is great institutional division, the mission of the Church has been altered, and evangelism all but forgotten. These observations have been unequivocally confirmed by both the research presented in this work, as well as through the qualitative and phenomenological study conducted.

Yet, through the example set by the Emerging Church Movement, much of what has been lost can be reclaimed. In learning from their core tenets of the Movement – their absence of traditional organizational structures, being mission oriented, and placing a strong emphasis on creating authentic community, the United Methodist Church can expand to include its own set of emerging members. The United Methodist Church can benefit from being more decentralized in nature.

Nonetheless, and not entirely in line with the Emerging Church Movement, UMC can also reclaim some of its lost focus by returning to the core teachings of John Wesley,

a pioneer in the church, whose love for Christ, missionary work, and evangelizing within the community can be used to once again enrich the work of the United Methodist Church. In this newest era of reform, the United Methodist Church has the ability to align more closely with scripture, the traditions of John Wesley, and to shift its focus to fostering vital congregations, as it is here that the real work of God takes place through evangelizing. Adapting to the post-modern world through the example set by the Emerging Church Movement, the United Methodist Church has the means to embrace all with “Holiness of heart and life.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Outler, 21.

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