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Vile Methods: Bridging Divides and Expanding Churches' Understanding of Creativity

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

VILE METHODS:
BRIDGING SOCIAL DIVIDES THROUGH EXPANDING CHURCHES'
UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF CREATIVITY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

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has been approved by
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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to three of the most creative, kind, and beautiful people I know...

To my friend, Mike Murfin. Thank you for responding to the nudge in your heart to invest in me. Your support gave me courage to step into the unknown, and your friendship sustained me along this journey. Your passion for innovation has been a source of inspiration for this work and your cheers enabled me to push through to the end.

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GLOSSARY

Appreciation—Gratitude for one's gifts, as well as faith in the ability of said gifts to increase in their value to the community or increase the community's value.

Beauty—An essential quality of something that stimulates a reaction in an observer.

Personate—To manifest a reality as if an extension of something else, namely God, the divine spirit, or a greater cosmic energy force.

Creative Ability—The skill to turn an imagined thing into a real, new or novel thing for a particular context.

Creative Aptitude—The potential to generate a new or novel thing for a particular context.

ABSTRACT

Over the last 25 years, technology has made learning, sharing information, and connecting easier than ever before. Humans, especially in North America, have access to unprecedented amounts of information, ways to interact, and tools for relationship building. Yet, in the United States, humans find themselves in one of the most polarized times of the last 50 years. At the same time, the US church has been in major membership decline and its societal influence has decreased. Great numbers of the poorest US Americans are leaving the church and with that exodus gaps between social classes are widening as less spaces exist for people from different classes to build relationships with one another.

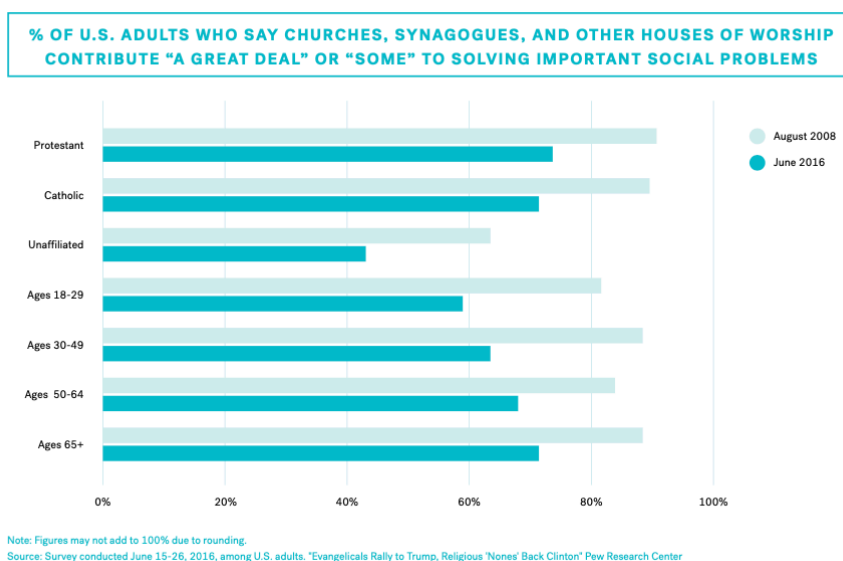
This thesis contends that churches possess the ability and responsibility to bridge social divides in order to bring healing to communities through shifting theological perspective and establishing enterprises that activate people's creative abilities. Section one states the problem of division amongst socio-economic classes and surveys the challenges that poverty generates in the fabric of society. Section two explores various tools and enterprises currently being used by faith communities to address the problem of poverty and class gaps. Section three provides a theological foundation for promoting churches' creativity, surveys creativity research, and examines ways to activate creative potential. It also highlights the history of the Methodist movement to find inspiration and direction for the future of the church. Section four details the dissertation artifact: a podcast, online community and website for equipping people to collaborate with their communities in creative ways. Section five gives specifications for the artifact. Finally, Section six analyzes the project's development, implementation, and future possibilities.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Over the past 50 years, mainline Protestant Christian denominations have been experiencing a steady decline in overall membership. The arrival of the internet has made resources for outreach and nurturing people's faith more accessible than ever, and yet few local churches with white majorities are any more engaging or creative than they were 50 years ago. Congregations continue to age and increasing numbers of younger generations fail to see the benefit of faith communities to society (Table 1).¹

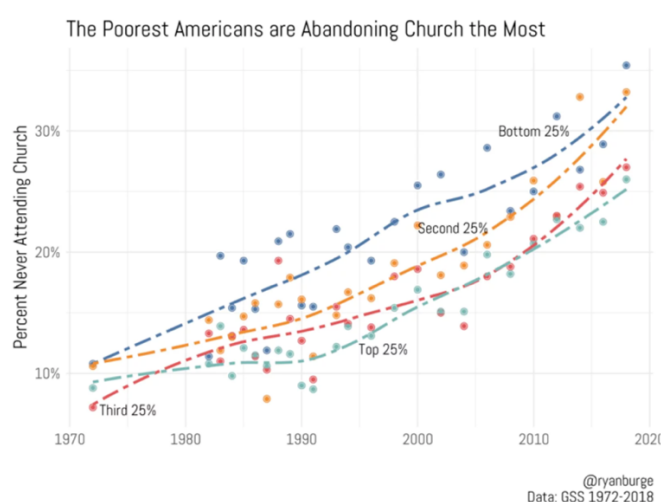
Table 1—Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Say Faith Communities Contribute to Solving Social Problems



¹ The Great Opportunity, Pinetops Foundation, 2018, <https://www.greatopportunity.org>.

In addition, class gaps are widening within the church. Ryan Burge reports that, “the inequality gap in attendance has now doubled” over the last four decades.² US Americans experiencing poverty are leaving church communities and as they do their God-given gifts leave with them. This exodus coincides with impoverished people’s reported increases in isolation from their communities. Furthermore, this means they are “losing out on social networks and social capital,” which they once found in the church.

Table 2—Poorest Americans are Abandoning Church the Most



During the same span of time that this decline and exodus has been taking place, a saturation of thoughts about the nature and practice of creativity in society has occurred. In the field of psychology, “creativity is defined as a novel yet appropriate solution to a problem.”³ Creativity researcher James C. Kaufman simplifies this definition with the equation “Creativity = Originality x Appropriateness.”⁴

² Ryan Burge, “Jesus Came to Proclaim Good News to the Poor. But Now They’re Leaving Church,” *News & Reporting*, Christianity Today, November 27 2019, www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/november/income-inequality-church-attendance-gap-gss.html.

³ D.H. Feldman, ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 74.

⁴ James C. Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 2nd ed. (New York: Springer Publishing, 2016), 5.

The mainline Protestant church has much to learn from the study of creativity that can aid them in bridging the gaps in society and equip people for expanding God's reign of love on earth. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how churches can respond to this reality. I will examine the challenges of poverty and troubles with socio-economic divides, outline a theological foundation that undergirds creativity in the church, survey creative church enterprises, and suggest a response.

The Problem

The church is uniquely positioned to combat people's isolation, misunderstandings, xenophobia, and hatred through activating people's creativity. There is an abundance of enterprises, tools, and tactics that exist to help people identify the assets available to them and aid them in addressing social divides in society by activating their creative abilities. The activation of these abilities and assets in a collaborative way can provide healing and wholeness to communities. But the church is not currently taking advantage of these resources. The goal of this work is to provide foundations, resources, and inspiration to aid mainline Protestant Christians, particularly United Methodists, in collaborating with their neighbors to claim and activate the creative power present in the communities where they reside.

The Story

It's another sunny day in Denver, Colorado when a couple of volunteers from one of the local United Methodist churches gather on a street corner in a downtown park to hand out sack lunches, socks, and hygiene kits. More than one hundred people experiencing poverty and homelessness are lined up along the sidewalk to receive the

food and goods. At noon, the clock tower bells of City Hall ring and people start through the line. In less than ten minutes, all of the lunches, waters, and supplies are handed out and the crowd has dispersed. Some of the recipients have gone back to work, some to trading, some to panhandling, and some to seeking out additional social services.

Today, one of the lunch recipients lingers until everyone else is gone before mustering up her courage to approach the pastor as he is packing things up.

She speaks in a hushed tone, “Hey, reverend, excuse me, would you pray for me?”

“Sure. I’d be honored. What’s your name?”

“I’m Emily, but everyone calls me Songbird.”

“What would you like me to call you?”

“I really like Emily. It was my grandmother’s name. She was an amazing woman.” As she claims her name and story, Emily’s voice begins to grow from a hushed quivering tone to one of quiet confidence.

“That name is a beautiful gift! What’s going on, Emily?”

“Well, to be totally honest, depression is dragging me down and I’m struggling to find any reason for living.” Emily tells how she was raised by her grandmother, who died suddenly a few years back. She says she got into a relationship with the wrong guy during her grieving and she became homeless after fleeing that abusive relationship. She shares about her abuser’s control, which meant she lacked a support network of friends and family, how she has struggled to “make it” due to Denver’s high cost of living, and that the women’s shelter is full. With tears in her eyes, she recounts the demoralizing effect a year of dependence on social services and handouts has caused her. She shares that she has become depressed and tried taking her life earlier that year. She ends her

sharing with these words, “I really appreciate all that you all are doing out here—and don’t worry, I’m not suicidal—but I need something to feed my soul, I need relationship, I need an opportunity to participate in something that gives me purpose and something to look forward to.” The pastor connects Emily with some additional social services, prays with her, and then leaves for home.

Later that evening, the pastor receives a call from one of the church members who had volunteered in the park earlier that day.

“Hey, pastor, this is Janet, do you have a minute?”

“Sure Janet, what’s on your mind?”

“I’m not sure where to begin. I’m feeling a push, a nudge, a conviction, whatever you want to call it, to take a step to do more. It feels good to hand out lunches in the park each week, but, if I’m honest, it is also draining to see the same people coming through the line. I feel like there is more to be done to help people transition out of the situations they are in and I feel a need to do something about it.”

A ripe moment has formed; will it be seized? The pastor, Emily, and Janet have each responded to a nudge in their spirit to take action, to seek something deeper. What happens next? How would *you* respond? How do you imagine the pastor responding?

A good response might include the pastor sharing with Janet about his encounter with Emily and saying, “As a matter of fact...someone from line came up to me today with a desire for something more.” After sharing about his interaction with Emily, the pastor invites Janet to brainstorm responses with him. (In other words, they avoid the mainline Protestant trap of sending the topic to a committee or a special team or task force where it will get contemplated and reviewed to death.) Maybe this pastor is a bit

more of a risk taker, so he asks Janet if he can connect her with Emily directly. Going even further, he says, “Would you be willing to meet with Emily, set up a regular coffee date with her and simply offer friendship and encouragement to her, and, if the occasion arises, mentor her?” Perhaps later on, Janet, Emily, and the pastor start scheming and start a company focused on employing women in similar situations, setting them up with mentors, and providing them with opportunities to grow and activate their creative abilities, as well as the assets at their disposal.

In both Emily’s and Janet’s cases, a deeper purpose, relationship, and transformation are all desired, but the specter of uncertainty and principality of naïveté are serving as preventatives to action. Another part of the problem is a reduction of identity. One person has been reduced to an identity of recipient, another to service provider, and a third to permission granter. The practical transaction of a lunch and goods met immediate needs, but more could be done to foster relationship and help each person activate their assets and/or creative abilities.

In this circumstance, it is possible for the pastor to act as a connector for relationship building and catalyst for the activation of creativity. This is a beautiful opportunity, but it is also problematic because power is centralized with one person. The concentration of this power to grant permission, connect, and catalyze means a reduction in the chances of having societal divides broken down and relationships built on a regular basis in order to multiply goodness in the world.

The opportunities for pastors to make connections and catalyze action are greatly diminishing. Citing a Gallup Poll from 2019, Jeff Brumley writes, “Research once again shows that confidence in organized religion remains at all-time lows...Televangelists and

sexual abuse scandals clearly have taken their toll.”⁵ In addition, Ronald Vaughan notes that the “basic feeling that you are a pretty good person if you are in ministry,” is no longer a given; rather, the current “culture is more skeptical of anyone who has any kind of authority.”⁶ The abuse of authority has led to an understandable distrust of it. How should church communities respond to such a reality where church community and clergy no longer hold the trust of society that they once did?

The erosion of clergy authority invites the church to let go of the use of hierarchical structures that concentrate power at a single locus and foster a space where some feel beyond reproach. As an alternative, the church is invited to disperse throughout the community of faith the power to grant permission, connect people, and catalyze the creativity of community members. For this to be, Christians must humbly enter their communities as those seeking to collaborate with non-Christians for the sake of the communities and people they love. This will require letting go of the desire for power and accolades. As Jesus puts it, “The last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16 NRSV). It will also require amplifying the idea of the priesthood of all believers and equipping people with tools for creative collaboration. In all of this, what is “at stake is...the very authenticity of the church’s witness to the transforming power of the kingdom of God.”⁷ However, before any of this action can take place, Christians making

⁵ Jeff Brumley, “Pastors Feel the Pain as Churches Hit ‘Another Low Point’ in American Culture,” *Baptist News Global*, December 18, 2019, <http://baptistnews.com/article/pastors-feel-the-pain-as-churches-hit-another-low-point-in-american-culture/>.

⁶ Brumley, “Pastors Feel the Pain as Churches Hit ‘Another Low Point’ in American Culture.”

⁷ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 15.

up the majority of church membership must expand their understanding of poverty and the creative potential of those caught in it.

Poverty and Its Variations

There are many myths about the experience of poverty that contribute to the barriers between those experiencing poverty extremes, especially homelessness, and those who are not impoverished. One of the prominent myths which Ruby Payne addresses is the notion that, “People in poverty are lazy.”⁸ By contrast Payne states that, “Actually, people in poverty are often problem solvers with limited resources who may or may not have the knowledge bases, tools, bridging social capital, and transportation to be employed.”⁹ Having to attack challenges in this way means that they bring new perspectives, gifts, and assets to problems facing their communities.

The challenge of poverty is, far too often, reduced to one’s lack of material or financial resources. But in fact, Payne identifies nine resources at play in the measure of one’s poverty and wealth. These nine resources include emotional, mental/cognitive, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships or role models, knowledge of hidden rules, and the ability to access middle and upper-class vocabulary, also called formal register.¹⁰ Building up each of these resources is important for the alleviation of poverty. Each one requires different tactics. However, there are macro motivations that lead one to address building up these resources. Payne has found that the “Four [macro] reasons one

⁸ Ruby Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty: A Cognitive Approach* (6th Revised Edition. Highlands, TX: Process Inc., 2019), 189, Kindle.

⁹ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 189.

¹⁰ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 247.

leaves poverty are: It's too painful to stay, a vision or a goal, a special talent or skill, and/or a key relationship.”¹¹ The nine resources enable one to capitalize on one of these reasons and sustain an escape from poverty.

Despite knowing the reasons one leaves poverty, aiding someone in escaping it remains a difficult task. Even when one is provided with the necessary resources, the manner in which the resources are provided makes a huge difference. Engaging in pity and doing things *for* someone ultimately stifles their ability to escape poverty or leads to their quick return. In order to best aid one in escaping poverty, and/or transitioning out of homelessness, one's dignity and self-worth must be honored. In addition, the concept of home must evolve to primarily be understood as “a relationship that is created and evolved over time.”¹² Ultimately, their own creativity must be activated.

In the breadth of research on poverty alleviation, it is largely held that without healthy relationships where one can find purpose, connection, support, and encouragement, it will be nearly impossible for one to escape poverty. It is also important to recognize that it is the splintering or destruction of relationships which most often leads to homelessness or poverty in the first place. David Nixon, in his research on a theology of homelessness for his book *Stories from the Streets*, found that, “Descriptions of pain, fear, suffering and isolation have usually accompanied the slide into homelessness.”¹³ He also found that “at the same time and within the same individuals

¹¹ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 210.

¹² Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 749.

¹³ David Nixon, *Stories from the Street: A Theology of Homelessness* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 143.

there is a fierce will to survive, to remain independent and to preserve a measure of human dignity despite the circumstances. Ironically, such a combination may prevent a homeless person seeking outside intervention before further crises (for example, of health) develop.”¹⁴ This reality highlights the importance of deep relationships in one’s battle against poverty and homelessness, because it is most often in deep friendships that one finds freedom to be their most vulnerable self, admit the need for help, take advantage of generosity or resources, and claim what power they do possess. Again, when people feel valued and feel they have something to contribute they are more likely to take advantage of the resources available to them.

Teaching, encouraging, and inspiring people to claim and activate their resources has been a central task for Christian faith communities since Jesus first gathered his ragtag group of disciples from across the socio-economic spectrum. This work is far more important than many realize. According to Payne’s research, “religious social capital does more to move [one] out of homelessness than any other form of assistance.”¹⁵ This is because spiritual resources and “believing in divine purpose and guidance” offer hope, a willingness to claim resources, and a future story.¹⁶ For example, through something such as a discussion-based Bible study or discipleship group, people are taught to share their opinions, ideas, and feelings. This sharing leads individuals to view themselves as the protagonists in their own lives. In turn, they no longer “see themselves as hopeless and useless, but rather as capable and having worth and value. Furthermore, spiritual

¹⁴ Nixon, *Stories from the Street*, 143.

¹⁵ Payne *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 1875.

¹⁶ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 244.

resources provide a person with a ‘future story,’ which gives that person hope.”¹⁷ In these interactions one is not being *empowered* but rather being taught to claim their God-given power and that provides them a more robust foundation for their future.

By aiding people in development of a future story one establishes a direction, which combats fatalism and deterministic mindsets. “Destiny and fate are major tenets of the belief system” found among those experiencing deep poverty, especially generational poverty.¹⁸ An individual or group with a deterministic or fatalist mindset believes that they are stuck in and meant for a certain circumstance or situation. This prevents them from claiming their power and activating the potential of gifts and skills with which God has created them.

Biblical Direction and Confronting Toxic Charity

Micah 6:8 has become a staple billboard verse for many promoting what they believe to be at the core of God’s desire for how humans might live their lives. One English translation of Micah 6:8b reads, “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?” (NASB). People of faith have long wrestled with what the best response to such a requirement might be. How might we best live these principles out? Often, people emphasize one of these areas over the others. They can then develop a pompous attitude that belittles those working in a different area (e.g., people suggesting that creating just political policies is more important and better than immediate acts of mercy or than building relationships and

¹⁷ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 273.

¹⁸ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 1340.

empowering people to better connect with the living God). In these debates, people belittle the work of others using phrases like “toxic” or “careless” to paint broad brush strokes about another ministry. However, when living these principles is done in a coordinated fashion the potential exists for a beautiful multifaceted representation of the body of Christ functioning as a single unit in order to accomplish great works.

In divisive times, where people seem set on isolating themselves to their own sphere of influence and ideology, it is important to add nuance to the work being done. On one hand, groups must refrain from adding harm to an already difficult situation. On the other hand, it is important that the church not become the religiously apathetic who ignore the plights of others, as found exemplified by the religious elite in the story commonly known as the parable of the good Samaritan. In other words, it is important to recognize and acknowledge the difference between sharing a meal, handing out a sandwich, or giving a few bucks to someone who *requests* it, versus deciding by your own volition what would be good for someone else. A great example of the latter is shared by Corbett and Fikkert in their book *Toxic Charity* where they tell the story of Creekside Community Church beginning an outreach ministry to provide Christmas gifts for impoverished families. What began as a thriving volunteer opportunity diminished over the years as church members were discouraged by the fact that they were providing help for people whose circumstances never changed and whose fathers were never present. As a result of this perception the church members began to experience “compassion fatigue,” and “became less willing to help the low-income residents.”¹⁹ The church members perception, however, lacked details of the situation. In reality, the

¹⁹ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 63.

fathers, while present for their families, were too ashamed to be present as their children were provided gifts by strangers that they themselves could not afford.

This type of charity is not uncommon. The quality that leads Corbett and Fikkert to label it “toxic” is also fairly easily avoidable without simply doing nothing. The parents from the housing project could have been offered opportunities to work for the toys, to stop by the church for a free Christmas market, or to buy the toys at a discount. The biggest problem here is that something was decided without relationship and without collaboration. This is the definition of doing ministry *to* people instead of *with* people. Time and again what is revealed by such situations is the reality that an offering of material goods is not what makes for lasting change. Lasting change requires an altering of circumstances, or, as Reverend Cecil Williams puts it, “a truly radical program has more to do with an exchange of power than an exchange of clothes.”²⁰ A similar sentiment is provided by Laura Stivers when she states that “Too often, our charity functions to make us feel good about ourselves, masking the need to see and respond to societal oppression.”²¹ Shifting from this type of toxic charity requires a mindset shift.

Acts of mercy and justice can each be done in a way that does not recognize the dignity and potential of those who are primarily seen as the served. It can also be done in a way that magnifies their dignity and spotlights the image of God the Creator in each individual. It is important to keep in mind that while poverty is defined as “the extent to which an individual does without resources,” those resources are more than physical,

²⁰ Cecil Williams and Janice Mirikitani, *Beyond the Possible* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 64.

²¹ Laura Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness: Alternative Christian Approaches* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 105, Kindle.

material, or financial, and should be addressed with that complexity in mind.²²

Christianity is a faith system focused on a figure who was primarily occupied with breaking down barriers and manifesting jubilee living, which is about a fullness of life beyond mere material possessions. Liz Theoharis puts it this way, “Jesus was a leader of a revolutionary movement of the poor, who—rather than mitigating the unfortunate inevitability of poverty—called for a movement to transform heaven and earth.”²³ Seeing a need and seeking to fill it in the healthiest way possible is a good start toward this. However, Jesus’ reveals a next step when he recognizes the ability of others to claim and activate their God-given power when he states after a healing, “your faith has made you well” (Luke 17:19, Matthew 9:22, and Mark 10:52 NRSV). Rather than offering a buffet of healing options, Jesus allows the person in need to identify what is needed.

A Christmas Alternative to Toxic Charity

Michael Mather, Senior Pastor at Broadway UMC in Indianapolis, tells in his book *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything* of an alternative Christmas ministry that activated the creative abilities of some of the young men in his community. These young men were considered troublemakers by many of Mather’s congregants. Seeking to bridge the divides Mather began spending time to learn more about them. One day one of the young men, a teenager called Fat Mike, said to Mather, “The church doesn’t do anything

²² Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Kindle. 220.

²³ Liz Theoharis, *Always with Us?: What Jesus Really Said about the Poor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), 153.

around the community.”²⁴ Mather probed the conversation deeper and asked what Mike thought the church could do. Mike provided a few suggestions before offering “something from his heart,” saying, ““Me and my friends could dress up like Santa Claus and go door-to-door on our block on Christmas Eve.”” Mather asked what the church could do to support this idea and then took down notes as Mike described an evening of gift giving and merriment. Ultimately, what the church provided was some minor funds for them to rent Santa suits and buy some small gifts.

Mather describes that Christmas Eve evening this way, “After dark, the young men put on the suits and started down their block... I walked with them, but stayed on the periphery, not wanting to put myself in the center of the Santas’ activity... At the first house I worried that the appearance of three Santa Clauses would be confusing to the children. I was wrong. They received them as kings!”²⁵

When a church provides responses to a problem without relationally engaging with those in need it is a bit like setting a buffet for someone without first asking their food allergies. A delicious five course meal of things someone is allergic to is little help in nourishing that person. Whether it is a free Christmas market, a Christmas Eve door to door party, or any other number of outreach ministries, how one goes about the preparation for helping their neighbors matters. In the earlier story from Corbett and Fikkert the process left the men of the low-income families with feelings of inadequacy and shame. This harmed their self-confidence and that lacking makes other tasks in life, such as getting a job, increasingly difficult. In contrast to this approach, Mather

²⁴ Michael Mather, *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 49, Kindle.

²⁵ Mather, *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything*, 49.

approached Mike and his friends as individuals with gifts and creative potential. This helped the young men to claim their creative power and ultimately to be received as creative leaders in their community. These stories illustrate the challenges inherent in the work of addressing social divides and poverty, as well as the potential of the Church to be part of the solution through relationship building. This relationship building is dependent on Christians' understanding of who they are.

Identity – Theological and Biblical Grounding

Who Are You?

I cannot type, say, or think the words “Who are you?” without the famous song by The Who getting caught in my ears. There are many stories about the origin of Peter Townsend’s song, “Who Are You?” I have heard various versions during late night conversations at concert venues. As I recall it, the story begins with Pete leaving an intense meeting that freed the band from their manager, Allan Klein, who had been taking financial advantage of them. The result of the meeting was a substantial settlement that turned the members of The Who into instant millionaires. This moment weighed heavy on Pete as the identity of the band as those who raged against the establishment collided with a feeling that he had “sold out.”

After the meeting Pete wandered down the road until he came to a pub and went in for a drink. One drink turned into many. As he attempted to drink his worries away, a couple members of the Sex Pistols, a new band in the punk revolution, entered the pub and Pete was confronted once again with the weight of the moment. He looked down into

the bottom of his nearly empty pint glass, saw his muddled reflection, and said the infamous line of the now-famous song, “Who the fuck are you?”

Pete’s question is, at its root, a basic existential one that all humans confront: who am I? This question is not only about material substance, but also purpose. For Christians, this existential question is addressed in the book of Genesis, which establishes humans’ identity as God’s children, but it also offers a direction for living into that identity. The focus begins with drawing closer to God, but it quickly expands to inspiration and equipping people to live into their foundational identity.

Biblical Foundations of Identity

So, what is the nature of that identity? In order to uncover it, one must go to the beginning of the faith story. For those of the Christian tradition, the story begins with an account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis. Here, God’s marvelous artwork is poetically described as the play of an inventive artisan gardener and clay worker who proclaims after each subsequent day of creating that “it is good.” On the sixth day, God finishes generating the cosmos, and the entirety of his work, including humanity, is proclaimed to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31 NRSV).

When this proclamation is left out of the human origin story and one jumps directly to Genesis chapter 3, where Adam and Eve disobey God and transgress against the natural world, the declaration of goodness as humanity’s true foundational identity is missed. All too often, churches echo with the negatively posed refrain of original sin. The positively formulated human identity, as first stated by God, “you are good,” needs more press.

Stating one's identity affirmatively is vitally important because it makes a directional statement about the purpose and meaning of one's life. This is not an attempt to brush over the bad or painful parts of life or say someone won't make mistakes. Rather, positive affirmation of one's identity claims that humans are not merely neutral spectators until they choose to take action. Instead, it asserts that all humans have been created good and given gifts for cultivating new things in order to multiply God's goodness in the world. God's reign is experienced through this goodness. Being good, then, is a choice to activate one's foundational identity and live into who humanity is created to be, ultimately, creative image-bearers of God.

If all human beings are created in the image of God, then every person has the ability to create. Creativity is as much a part of a human's essence as the ability to breathe. Humans create every time we make vocal patterns of speech or song, connect with the world through our senses, or move our bodies. In these actions, we make what is imagined a reality. Creativity, therefore, is not an act that should be left to a few. Rather, creativity should be encouraged in everyone.

Expanding the Creative Community

Over seventy percent of mainline Protestants live above the national poverty line.²⁶ It is my experience that these individuals hold most of the power within established institutional churches and decide its direction. They constitute the teams, committees, and major workforce of mainline Protestant faith communities. If this holds,

²⁶ "Mainline Protestants by State," Pew Research Center, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/mainline-protestant/>

it means thirty percent of these churches' people are unrepresented in the larger decision-making processes. As a result, many of the thirty percent are relegated to being the served or apathetic rather than participants in the ministries of the church and the creative abilities of these individuals are not utilized. Put another way, mainline Protestant churches have regulated and reduced creativity to something that is done by a select few.

Jesus did not operate under the idea that creativity was something for a select few or only the financially affluent. Instead, he recognized the creative gifts people from a broad assortment of backgrounds and circumstances possessed and sought to nurture those abilities.

In 1 John 3:17, an ethical concern is raised: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" In response, many have taken to material poverty alleviation. However, as Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkar point out, "There is no 'one-size-fits-all' recipe for how each Christian should respond to this biblical mandate."²⁷ Fulfilling this mandate has become more difficult in recent years as increasing discussions have taken place about the harm that can be done through practices that are intended to help "the poor" and the reality that the "need" one sees in another's life may not be the primary need, or a need at all, for that person. Sometimes it is a giving-person's own desires, guilt, shame, or culturally constructed concepts of well-being that are at the heart of their desire to offer certain "needs" to others. This does not mean needs do not exist and assistance shouldn't be offered to those who require and/or desire help, but rather that those seeking to help should take a step back and spend more time discerning how to best help.

²⁷ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 13.

In his book, *Wealth of the Poor*, Larry M. James remarks that “When people feel valued, when they believe that they can make a contribution to the group and the cause of faith, they will come, often overcoming formidable barriers.”²⁸ Yet, those experiencing a state of poverty or homelessness are often not given such a chance because they are deemed incapable of contributing. Therefore, their gifts and creative potential go untapped. In his research for *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*, Elliot Liebow found that while some housed people “believed that homeless people are generally undeserving freeloaders, they did not hold this same opinion about the real-life [homeless] women they had come to know personally.”²⁹ Spending time with people experiencing homelessness and poverty drastically altered individual’s feelings about the potential of and reasons for someone being unhoused or impoverished.

Altering one’s view of another person is not reliant on the unhoused or impoverished person’s ability to bear the image of God; that ability is established by God. A shift in one’s view of another relies instead on a person’s ability to recognize the image of God in their unhoused or impoverished neighbor.

If the work of addressing homelessness and poverty alleviation extends from this theological premise, then the next move should be activating the *imago Dei* for the sake of bettering the world. This requires acknowledging that poverty, like homelessness, “is rooted in broken relationships, so the solution to poverty is rooted in the power of Jesus’

²⁸ Larry James, *The Wealth of the Poor: How Valuing Every Neighbor Restores Hope in Our Cities* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013), 35.

²⁹ Elliot Liebow, *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women* (Washington, DC: Penguin Books, 1993), 127.

death and resurrection to put all things into right relationship again.”³⁰ This means that faith must be more than placing apathetic words in Jesus’ mouth like, “Believe in Me, and I will transport your soul to heaven someday.”³¹ It means that the way one approaches their life matters and disciples of Jesus should follow his example of encouraging people to activate their innate power as those created to bear the image of God through the redemption and construction of relationships.

The construction of relationships creates community. John McKnight contends that “Community is about the common life that is lived in such a way that the unique creativity of each person is a contribution to the other. The crisis we have created in the lives of excluded people is that they are disassociated from their fellow citizens.”³² Services and programs that leave out this important part of life strip people of their need and ability to care for one another. In so doing, these counterfeits lead people to grow “doubtful of their common capacity to care,” and in turn people become “simply defined by [their] deficiencies” rather than their capacities.³³ Connecting people with one another for collaboration breaks this cycle.

Toward Activating the Creativity of All

Corbett and Fikkert summarize the aim of poverty alleviation work by stating that “The goal is to see people restored to being what God created them to be: people who

³⁰ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 72.

³¹ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 36.

³² John McKnight, *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 1235, Kindle.

³³ McKnight, *The Careless Society*, 1191.

understand that they are created in the image of God with the gifts, abilities, and capacity to make decisions and to effect change in the world around them.”³⁴ Given this focus, we shift to asking how a community makes such a goal of inclusion a reality.

Some of the most potent tools currently being utilized by Christian organizations are those that include those experiencing poverty and homelessness as partners. These include Asset Based Community Development, jobs preparedness ministries, savings-credit associations, micro-finance, and business as missions. Each of these have their strengths and challenges. Regardless of which is utilized, however, it has been found that successful endeavors are those which offer additional training for their collaborators in speaking with formal register, financial management, and community/friendship development. These skills help people build resiliency and endure trials.

The goal in collaboration is to help people develop a sense of home. According to Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh,

Home is a place of belonging, of recognition and acceptance rather than disdain and rejection. At home we feel included, we belong, and we have friends. When we are not “at home,” we feel like outcasts, are disinherited, and have few friends. In the fellowship of home there is a plenitude of healthy relationships, while outside the home—or in a dysfunctional home—we often experience a poverty of relationships.³⁵

It is the “poverty of relationships” that Jesus works to mend throughout his ministry life, death, and resurrection. One of the most poignant examples of this is Jesus’ table manners, the habits of who he eats with and where they eat.³⁶ This is witnessed not

³⁴ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 76.

³⁵ Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, 836.

³⁶ Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who’s Already There* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 178.

only in the spectrum of disciples he gathers, but also in his meals at common tables, Jesus constantly brings the ends of society together (cf. Luke 5:27-32, Luke 14:1-6, Luke 7:36-50). Throughout the gospels, we find instances of Jesus bringing the elite and the “least of these”—the marginalized—together, often around meals. In these moments, he constantly lifts up the image of God in those deemed “lesser-than” by society at large, whether financially rich or poor. It is these very acts that make “the Lord’s Supper the supreme act of disruptive witness.”³⁷ Not only does Jesus have meals with groups of outcasts, but in the breaking of the bread and drinking of the wine at his last supper, as a remembrance of his own life, Jesus declares that he will be found and exalted in the gathering of people from the ends of society. This stands “in stark contrast to the materialist world and the buffered self. It pulls against the way [US American Christians] think of ourselves as self-enclosed individuals by breaking into that self with a spiritual event grounded in history, occurring presently, with objective meaning,” and a declaration that humans are part of a great thing that cannot be whole without each piece, without one another.³⁸

It is for these reasons that underlying any major endeavor to manifest the reign of God must be accompanied by relationship, and why the church’s lack of doing so is deeply problematic. The presence of God exists in a uniquely powerful way when we are humble before God and toward God’s other children, especially those on the margins. After all, it is only by authentic relationship, even friendship, that objectification can be

³⁷ Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2018), 174.

³⁸ Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 174.

eradicated, as well as our idolatry of self.³⁹ Relationships make possible the work of mercy and justice in a lasting way. This is done by stoking one's imagination, activating one's creative abilities, and nudging them to mobilize their assets.

³⁹ Logan Robertson and Ryan Taylor, "Becoming Poor and Finding Friendship on the Margins," Ministry Matters, December 5, 2018, <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/9326/becoming-poor-and-finding-friendship-on-the-margins>.

SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

In the preceding section, insufficiencies in mainline Protestant churches' knowledge of poverty and how to build relationships across social classes were explored. This included examining particular examples of engaging with neighbors across socio-economic classes. The section that follows offers a survey of enterprises that seek to activate people's innate creativity through alternatives to the institutional church's common modes of operation.

Tools for Activating Creativity and Community Building

Existence of the image of God must be more than assumed theoretically. Its existence should be affirmed in practice. What follows is a survey of common processes and tools that can be used to recognize, validate, affirm, and activate the image of God in individuals and a larger community. Exploration of these ideas and principles will take place through a series of analyses, each tied to its own metaphor.

The Imago Dei Treasure Hunt

“I grew up in the shoes they told me I could fill. Shoes that were made for running up that hill. And I need to run up that hill. Fetch the bolt cutters. I’ve been in here too long.”

- Fiona Apple

The assumptions a person makes about another person shape the interactions between the two of them and larger communities. Attitudes and prejudices are difficult for humans to hide, and our micro-expressions, tone of voice, and body language often reveal the presuppositions we would like to keep hidden. Exacerbating this situation is a culture of leadership and management that sees people as objects with problems to be

solved and fixed. This is problematic because it brings into any situation a carload of baggage that one must sort through before meaningful and productive relationships can be built. But what if relationship and collaboration was approached in a different way? What if, instead of looking for the things that need fixing, we began with the assumption that every individual and community possess treasures to uncover?

The idea of discovering the treasures of people is at the heart of the tools of appreciative inquiry and asset mapping. Each is built on the foundational principle that people possess inherent abilities and opportunities that can be activated to better their lives. Also common to both is the belief that “building community is like a treasure hunt—it’s about discovering each other.”⁴⁰ In this way, these practices share a common thread with anthropological theologies that affirm human potential by highlighting the presence of the image of God in every individual. With that in mind, we’ll explore both of these practices in more depth.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is the social practice of seeking the best in people, and their communities with the goal of unearthing new possibilities. AI focuses on the strengths of a person or community and works to uncover ways their gifts might be used to benefit themselves and the community at large. David Cooperrider, Professor in Appreciative Inquiry at the Weatherhead School of Management says, “The principles and practices of appreciative inquiry (AI) suggest... that collective strengths do more

⁴⁰ Cameron Harder, *Discovering the Other: Asset-Based Approaches for Building Community Together* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2013), 122, Kindle.

than perform—they transform.”⁴¹ Building on this, “Human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about, and this propensity is strongest and most sustainable when the means and ends of inquiry are positively correlated.”⁴² Such a mindset has major implications for the way Christian communities go about their ministries.

It is not uncommon for Christian communities to see a need and seek to meet that need, following the idea that they are called to care for their neighbor. However, as explored earlier, these good intentions can often produce or reinforce negative tangential or even direct consequences that those providing the service did not consider. Sandhya Rani Jha suggests that a better approach to community development is a “strengths-based approach to care” that says “let’s look first at what people can do with their skills and their resources... People need to be seen as more than just their care needs—they need to be experts and in charge of their own lives.”⁴³ Appreciative inquiry helps them to do this because it starts at the assumption of capability and giftedness. In fact, AI “assumes that wisdom for ministry resides in the people.”⁴⁴ This assumption fits well with the idea that the body of Christ is comprised of people, called to share Christ’s love with the world.

⁴¹ David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005), 2.

⁴² Cooperrider and Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry*, 9.

⁴³ Sandhya Rani Jha, *Transforming Communities: How People Like You Are Healing Their Neighborhoods* (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2017), 10.

⁴⁴ Harder, *Discovering the Other*, 683.

Asset Mapping and Grants

Accompanying the powerful process of appreciate inquiry is the practice of asset mapping. While appreciative inquiry is about helping people and communities to recognize treasure, asset mapping is about marking where different treasures reside and noting how they might be utilized within a larger communal context. Far too often, communities are approached by outside developers that pitch what they can do *for* the people of a particular place. A local economy that has mapped its assets functions differently. Instead of seeking outside influence to bolster or implant a single gift or opportunity within a community, an asset approach assumes that all which is needed is already present in that community. This strengths-based approach makes members of a community more than recipients of others' aid.

One common alternative to an asset mapping approach to economic development is the grants approach. Cormac Russell, Professor at the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute at Northwestern University in Chicago, distinguishes between the two in the following way. A “grants economy... plants a concept of money in people’s minds, which is that you start out with a lot (of money), and at the end you spend it and have nothing... this is the reverse... of an asset-based economy,” because an asset, “starts small and, if you connect it well, it ends up big. It’s a multiplier of what people have, from something little to something bigger, not huge but bigger.”⁴⁵ Russell additionally points out that there is nothing evil about grants, but that one must recognize

⁴⁵ Cormac Russell, *Asset-Based Community Development: Looking Back to Look Forward: in Conversation with John McKnight about the heritage of ABCD and Its Place in the World Today*, (N.p.: N.p., 2015), 833, Kindle.

they are not always what is needed by a community and their use can often have detrimental effects. In the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth's teachings, we might say, "You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24 NIV). The trouble that often arises with grants is that they can easily lead people to focus on money rather than activating the abundance of assets and abilities God has already given them.

There are many forms of aid that seek to empower people. The fundamental difference with appreciative inquiry and asset mapping is that they seek not to simply empower people, but to help people claim and activate the power they already possess, but do not exercise. These alternative approaches to community development are exemplified by Jesus throughout his ministry. Cameron Harder points this out in *Discovering the Other* when he writes,

Jesus's servant ministry was certainly powerful. But it was not one in which he exercised power over others (making them do what he wanted). Nor did he exercise power for others (doing for them what they could do for themselves). He didn't provide power under others (serving as a safety net for them when they couldn't function). These forms of power, when used consistently, infantilize communities. They make them dependent and keep communities from developing their full capacities.⁴⁶

Ultimately the tools of appreciate inquiry and asset mapping are about affirmation of people as children of God and calling upon their giftedness for the transformation of the world. As Leonard Sweet points out, humanity is hiding from God, and living in the light of God's truth requires "coming out of hiding... to reveal one's presence and personage."⁴⁷ The tools of appreciative inquiry and asset mapping help one to draw

⁴⁶ Harder, *Discovering the Other*, 664.

⁴⁷ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 99.

people out of hiding by recognizing where God is moving. Then having identified these gifts Christians can join in God's redemptive community building.

Various Expeditions, Various Equipment

“If we start to notice [the hidden treasures that are all around us]
we will see more and more of them.”

- Simon Jordan

When I was an outdoor recreation expedition leader, it was my job to help people experience the treasures of the natural world. The treasures people sought on these expeditions varied widely from the rush of paddling whitewater in a tight canyon to the exhilaration of taking in a sunset from an alpine mountain summit to the serenity of silence in a cavern covered in ornamental calcite formations. Many of the same basic principles and skills were used on these various journeys; however, each expedition also required specialized equipment based on what treasure was being sought. The task of helping people to recognize, validate, affirm, and activate the *imago Dei* in themselves and their communities can be viewed in a similar way. In this section I will explore five types of social treasure hunting expeditions (methods/organizations/systems) communities are implementing. These five types are the Community Development Corporation, Business as Mission, Employment Social Enterprise, Fresh Expressions, and the Art of Neighboring.

Community Development Corporations (CDC) have evolved a great deal over the past 40 years. The focus of CDC's over the past 15 years will be reviewed here. These organizations seek to empower the individuals of a given community by providing various levels of social services. These range from creation of affordable housing to entrepreneurial education. Lula Bailey Ballton, Director of the West Angeles Community

Development Corporation, one of the nation's premier CDCs, says their mission is "to increase social and economic justice, demonstrate compassion, and alleviate poverty as tangible expressions of the Kingdom of God through the vehicle of community development."⁴⁸ These corporations are often set up as a complement to the traditional work of a church due to the understanding that sustained transformation requires a holistic approach. This model for engagement uses grassroots activism, appreciative inquiry, and asset identification to connect resources and people for the enhancement of a community.

Next is Business as Mission (BAM). The modern notion of this model focuses on sharing the gospel by utilizing "the remarkable capacity of business to reach people virtually anywhere in the world, including places where the gospel still struggles to gain a foothold."⁴⁹ By creating "jobs and wealth for the local people, as well as [addressing] other physical, social and spiritual needs," those running businesses as missions hope to draw attention to themselves and then use the attention to point to Jesus.⁵⁰ Rather than planting churches with a particular system, process, or parachuted culture, BAMs focus on building up local employees disciples and then equipping them to build a church community that is deeply contextualized to its local culture. Essentially, they give these employees training in scripture interpretation, prayer, organizing, and evangelism to

⁴⁸ Lula Bailey Ballton and Rae Lynne Johnson, *Extraordinary Ministry in Ordinary Places: A Guide to Christian Community Development* (Chicago: Urban Ministries, 2019), 448.

⁴⁹ Neal Johnson and Steve Rundle, "Distinctives and Challenges of Business as Mission," *Business as Mission*, 2014, <http://www.businessasmission.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/DistinctivesAndChallengesOfBusinessAsMission.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Johnson and Rundle, "Distinctives and Challenges of Business as Mission."

enable them to plant a faith community without prescribing particular worship or aesthetic styles.

An Employment Social Enterprise (ESE) is a business that employs, empowers, and invests in people to help them find stability through the use of transitional jobs, life-skill curriculum, and job-skills training. Churches that operate as or with an ESE recognize that most truly deep connections, learning, and life-transforming growth do not take place in a pew on Sunday mornings but during intimate everyday interactions. When asked why he transition his youth ministry to an ESE-based approach, Matt Overton, Youth Pastor at Columbia Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, Washington, said, “Too often, our churches make people passive recipients of ministry and even of faith itself...They feel excluded or ancillary to the mission of God. They think their presence, passions, talents and dollars aren’t really needed. I wanted my congregation to discover the value of each member’s engagement.”⁵¹ While working closely with some youth on a mission trip, Overton was struck by the plethora and depth of conversations he had with members. At home, the youth were pulled in many directions, but at the work sites, he had their undivided presence, if not attention. After some reflection, Overton came to the conclusion that a prolonged time of job training would not only meet youths’ need for employment but help him find the time to ground them in the faith without having to compete for their time. He says of the endeavor, “We talk about faith and about people coming fully alive (John 10:10), but we don’t give our participants much of anything. Their dignity remains intact, and they are given a chance to move forward.”⁵² Not all

⁵¹ Matt Overton, “Why I Started a Social Enterprise at my Church,” Faith and Leadership, April 17, 2017, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/matt-overton-why-i-started-social-enterprise-my-church>.

⁵² Overton, “Why I Started a Social Enterprise at my Church.”

ESEs are focused on youth, but they do share in common the basic premise Overton highlights. Their goal is to help people know their worth, claim their power, and overcome the barriers that surround them.

A great resource of those looking to begin a Social Enterprise is the Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF). The mission of REDF is to support “social enterprises that employ and empower people overcoming barriers to work.”⁵³ One example of a REDF-supported enterprise is Purple Door Coffee of Denver, Colorado. Their mission is “to reclaim and sustain the lives of homeless youth and young adults through supportive and meaningful employment.”⁵⁴ This is carried out through job training wherein young people learn to roast and brew high-quality coffee. By providing such training, Purple Door gives their employees skills to succeed in a fast-growing industry, as well as transferable skills for holding down steady employment.

Foundational to the work Purple Door does is the belief in the residence of the image of God within all people or, as Purple Door’s Director Mark Smesrud puts it, “our belief is that every life has unsurpassable value,” and our goal is “helping [our employees] see that value in themselves.”⁵⁵ That sentiment is the whole point behind the company’s name Purple Door. It is a statement about who they believe each person to be. The word door is used because they seek to be a pathway for people to reclaim their life. While the word purple, the historic color for royalty, is used to emphasize who the leaders of Purple Door believe their employees, and all people, to be.

⁵³ Roberts Enterprise Development Fund, accessed February 13, 2020, <http://redf.org>.

⁵⁴ Purple Door Coffee, “Who We Are,” accessed February 2, 2020, <http://purpledoorcoffee.com/about>.

⁵⁵ Mark Smesrud, Purple Door Coffee Director. Interview via Zoom, April 23, 2020.

Over a period of eight years, Purple Door has had thirty-five employees go through their 8- to 12-month program and has graduated twenty-four of them. The longest anyone can stay in the program is 12 months. These parameters are set because the goal of Purple Door is not to merely get people off the streets, but to help them transition into a meaningful and more stable life for them. They achieve this by taking employees through a curriculum where they establish a firm foundation of belief in themselves and knowledge about resources that will make them successful in life.

Another model for community engagement is called Fresh Expressions. This began as an initiative of the British Methodist Church and the Church of England. The Fresh Expressions group describes themselves as “an international movement of missionary disciples cultivating new kinds of church alongside existing congregations to more effectively engage our growing post-Christian society.”⁵⁶ Their primary focus is on “forming faith communities” that consist of people “who have never been involved in church or have left the church.”⁵⁷ In other words, it is a place in the institution of the church for those who are not attracted to pre-existing forms of worship and service. It is also often a place that more easily embraces contemporary culture and those with different creativity styles. Its primary benefit is that it makes space for those interested in the teachings of Jesus and being part of a community of disciples but don’t want to be churchy or religious.

Neighboring is the final of the five types of engagement and is likely to take the least material resources, but possibly the most creativity and persistence. The neighboring

⁵⁶ Fresh Expressions US, “About,” October 17, 2020, <https://freshexpressionsus.org/about/>

⁵⁷ Fresh Expressions US, “About.”

movement is about moving into a community, learning the assets of the people there, building relationships bit by bit, and then utilizing the gained social capital to enhance the lives of all who live in the community and transforming it to reveal the kingdom of heaven more and more as time goes on. This idea is based on the construction of the early church. JR Woodward puts it this way: “A new temple was being constructed, but it wasn’t made of stones. Rather it was a relational network of communities illuminating the centrality of love.”⁵⁸ In this endeavor, disciples are taught to see their community as a garden to till in preparation for the treasured fruits that God will bear there. “Many churches today have...an attractional approach to church planting. The road less traveled involves a go-and-be-with approach to mission, which is incarnational.”⁵⁹ Woodward does not condemn the former but suggests the latter is what we need more of in the world today, due in part to the fact that it better allows for spiritually rich and robust disciples to be formed. It is a community built primarily on the actions of its members, with little focus or time spent on worship services; therefore, it is difficult for a person to be merely a spectator when part of the community. In this model, everyone is expected to be a participant in the game.

A variation in the Neighboring movement model can be seen in the relationship building done at Network Coffee House in Denver, Colorado’s urban center. Despite being titled a coffee house, Network is not another hip place to purchase one’s daily mud. Instead, Network is a gathering place where people meet in a space that looks like a café, set up in the living room of a historic house that is affectionately referred to as “The

⁵⁸ Woodward and White, *The Church as Movement*, 172.

⁵⁹ Woodward and White, *The Church as Movement*, 196.

Living Room of Christ.” Inside there is free coffee and occasionally free food available. There is nothing to purchase. Inside the space, people can relax, get showers, converse, use the restroom, and relax out of the elements.

A few housed neighbors will stop by to connect with homeless patrons, maybe even play a game of chess or cards, but mostly the room is filled by people experiencing homelessness. There is a range of 25 to 50 of these people, and two to five volunteers/staff present for any given three-hour shift. Network has one shift in the morning and one in the evening.

Many of the individuals in the community Network serves have experienced severe trauma and have accompanying struggles such as low self-worth, drug addiction, a lack of common social etiquette, and broken family relationships. The challenges created by these circumstances are typically exacerbated by the way those in mainstream society perceive and treat them. It is into this gap that Network enters. As Director Ryan Taylor puts it, “As humans, we all need a sense of family. We all need to feel connected. I see pain here. You will see pain here. But you will also see contentment, and joy, and get a more holistic view of people.”⁶⁰ The services and goods provided are not the focus of Network’s ministry; rather, these things are gateways to connection and building trust wherein redemptive relationships may be formed.

The point of the relationship building that takes place at Network is to help people see themselves as the beloved children God claims them to be. Proof that this is happening can be witnessed in the words of my friend, BabyGirl, who is a Network regular. She says that she chooses to live a “homeless lifestyle” because she is treated

⁶⁰ Ryan Taylor, interview in person, January 8, 2020.

better on the streets than she ever was while housed and that she is determined to “live this life to the fullest,” with every day she’s been given.⁶¹ Her identity is not dictated by a status or circumstance, and that is a powerful foundation for living her life.

Common Obstacles

There are three main arguments that I encountered in my research. They were recurring threads which I will summarize. The first argument is that asset building is harmful to its own ends, because once people increase their means and wealth, they will leave their community. This argument might prove true in some circumstances. However, one can imagine the great sense of loneliness and loss that would cause someone to refuse to leave a community or eventually return. Additionally, if someone decides another situation is better for them once they’ve become more socio-economically stable and upwardly mobile, should that really be scorned or viewed negatively?

The second argument I found in my research was that “The biggest consequence of moving to a community alternative is that a lot of people lose their jobs.”⁶² While this has been proven true in the short term, it has also been found that “low-income communities facing hardship can, and often do, become stronger and prosper.”⁶³ This is largely attributed to the fact that neighborhoods using community alternatives are more resilient because they are not dependent on a single industry or employer for their well-being.

⁶¹ Emily Dykes, “The Network,” July 24, 2019, 2:22, <https://vimeo.com/349821102>.

⁶² Russell, *Asset-Based Community Development*, 737.

⁶³ Russell, *Asset-Based Community Development*, 162.

Finally, many charitable enterprises exist that seek to address people's material needs. In those types of ministry, it is not uncommon for people to get viewed as objects and/or labor commodities. Neighboring movements and Social Enterprises such as Network and Purple Door uniquely address this by striving to provide for the relational, emotional, and cognitive needs of the people they serve. These organizations are limited in the amount of service they can provide and the number of people they can serve. However, the work they do in helping people to escape poverty through relationship building is something that organizations focused on handouts simply cannot accomplish. Essential to this accomplishment is their belief in the sacred worth of each person, the importance of relationship, and the ability to appreciate what someone has rather than what they lack, that is, to focus on assets.

Through this research it became clear that relationship builders and belief in the existence of people's abilities are key to their wholistic future. This type of work does not just empower people with the creativity to see a new future for themselves, but also invites them to claim their innate creative power.

When someone wants to take the next step in community engagement, it can be alluring to look for the perfect solution. None of these five models claim that they bear the crown as the sole way to live out the Christian faith, nor that they are the antidote to all that ails society. However, each have been used to affirm the belovedness and potential of the individuals and communities they seek to help, by activating their greater potential as innately creative beings. In order to choose or develop a path forward a resource is needed that will help churches get started and discern a way forward.

SECTION 3: THESIS

Introduction

Section one introduced the problems that class divides and the nuances of poverty cause in limiting people's creative potential. It also examined the limitations the church currently places on itself due to theological and biblical foundations that fail to recognize the potential power present in each person as a creative bearer of the image of God. Section two built upon the explorations of section one by surveying a few of the options being used by various organizations to help people claim and activate their creative power. In each of these first two sections, the focus was broadly on mainline Protestantism. In section three this focus will be narrowed down to the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the United States, the United Methodist Church. The direction of this thesis will turn to focus on the claim that the UMC should, must, and can change for the current times. This will include a further examination of creativity research and an assessment of practical tools that Christian communities can utilize to activate the creative abilities of their full membership, as well as the abilities of those in the surrounding communities through collaboration.

The Body of The Good Shepherd

In the tenth chapter of the Gospel According to John, Jesus proclaims, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:11 & 14 NIV). This proclamation that Jesus makes is proceeded by an illustration of how a good shepherd acts. Jesus calls upon the imagery of

a shepherd serving as the gateway to a livestock pen. While on a Holy Land tour in 2018 I learned that in the Israeli highlands, when there is no gate on a pen, it is common for a shepherd to serve as the gate and gatekeeper of the pen, going so far as to sleep in the gateway to keep the sheep safe.

One essential component to the task of the shepherd to care for the sheep is that the sheep know his voice. When the shepherd needs the sheep to come to him, he does not herd them like a dog. Instead, the shepherd uses his voice to call the sheep to him. Still, sheep occasionally wander off. A good shepherd knows each of his sheep, cares about them, and notices when one has gone astray. If one gets lost, the good shepherd goes to find them.

Growing up I pictured Jesus' searching for lost sheep as a solitary enterprise. I assumed that the shepherd placed the sheep in a safe place or left them with a trusted friend and then went out to find the lost one. In 2018, during a children's sermon, a child changed my understanding of this story. I told the children the story and then asked them, "What would you do if you were a sheep and the shepherd, the person you relied upon for food and safety, left you to go find another sheep that was lost?" Without hesitation a nine-year-old boy, Jackson Fike, spoke up and said, "I'd follow him." Of course! Why hadn't I seen that before? The one they follow is walking away; their comrade is lost. Why wouldn't the sheep follow after the shepherd?

The good shepherd is an important head of the community, the one to which all the members of the flock tune their ears. However, it must be noted that it is in the collective of the flock that real safety and power is provided. The voice of the good shepherd unites the flock, but it is the sheep's relationships to one another that provide

the largest resource of protection. The good shepherd calls forth their power, but it is when they unite that the power is most fully activated. If the power of the flock is going to manifest, then perhaps the flock should be going to where Jesus resides. Maybe it is time to start assuming that Jesus has already left the familiar pen in order to seek out and be with the lost and those of other pens. Perhaps it is time to follow where his voice leads, as is the task of disciples, to connect and collaborate with others in the flock.

Addressing the Arguments

Three major arguments might be made against this work of addressing poverty through relationship and involvement of those typically being served. One argument is that those experiencing poverty and homelessness do not have the time to address the concerns that affect them. The second is that these individuals do not have the privilege of being paid for their work nor the energy to sustain work on such a task. And finally, the argument might be made that an individual experiencing poverty lacks the education to aid in this work.

During my time in research and immersion experiences, I came across examples that counter all of these arguments. Addressing the first argument, I must note that in each of my field research trips, I found out about and personally met individuals experiencing homelessness or poverty that were deeply committed to this work or mentioned that they would be willing to make the time for such work because it was so important to them. The case against individuals having the energy to stay focused during such work was a legitimate concern raised by both impoverished people and those that collaborate with them. Nutrition challenges are fairly easy to address; however, lack of a good night's sleep due to a lack of a quality shelter is more difficult. Yet, ideas for how to

make such provisions are not lacking and grants, as well as other funding, might easily take care of this. The final argument about educational limitations is true in regard to formal instruction; however, as mentioned above in Payne's list of myths of poverty, intellect "is largely a measure of acquired knowledge" and many of those living in poverty or homelessness are self-taught authorities on the issues affecting their lives, not to mention the possessors of invaluable firsthand knowledge.⁶⁴ In response to all of these arguments one might simply say, "Stop viewing people experiencing poverty and minorities as incapable!"

Current Circumstances

At 6.7 million members—as of 2018—the United Methodist Church is the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the United States.⁶⁵ It is a descendant of the Methodist movement begun by John Wesley, Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and a few of their peers at Oxford University in England. The term methodist was first used as an insult by other students, who mocked this group of students for their rigorous Bible study, piety, and disciplined lifestyle. In addition to devotional scripture reading and personal reflection for growth, the Methodists' disciplined lifestyle included visiting strangers in prison, spending time in charity to the poor, and preaching in open fields to those in lower socio-economic classes. Eventually, the Methodist became known for their overall way of living out their faith and engaging others.

⁶⁴ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 190.

⁶⁵ UMDData, accessed March 24, 2020, <http://www.umddata.org/UMFactsHome.aspx>.

In 18th century England, some clergy were repulsed by the idea of preaching and teaching outside the walls of a consecrated sacred space. Wesley counts himself among these clergy when he writes in his journal, “I had been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.”⁶⁶ However, evangelist George Whitefield was convinced that if the gospel was truly good news for all people, it should be shared with all people. He took to preaching in open-air spaces, prisons, and fields near coal mines where the impoverished were often found. After deciding to answer a call to minister in the colonies of North America, George Whitefield invited his friend, Anglican priest John Wesley, to take his place preaching in these uncouth places of England. Initially, Wesley was hesitant; however, he eventually agreed to take on the task, writing in his journal that

At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people. The Scripture on which I spoke was this: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”⁶⁷

That first experience of open-air preaching hooked Wesley and the wider Methodist revival began.

As Wesley began to reach more and more people, he encountered a need for a societal structure that would help people to connect with one another and mature as

⁶⁶ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*. Ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), <https://ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal/journal.vi.iii.i.html>, 527.

⁶⁷ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, 527.

disciples of Christ. He did not simply anticipate but *expected* that people's conversion would lead naturally to their desire for greater transformation in their lives. In response to this, he created a method of organization that linked Christians to one another in small groups, which provided them encouragement and accountability in their discipleship journey. This method of organizing helped Wesley ensure that Christianity was a way of life for people and not simply a one-time event or a list of dogma to memorize.

Wesley wrote about his concern for the future spiritual health of the people called Methodist if this method of relational living, of community building, were to disappear, noting, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power."⁶⁸ Wesley's concern arose after witnessing the power of relationships to shape and transform lives when compared to what he viewed as the stagnant spirituality of many in his own Anglican tradition. He worried that without commitment to one another in groups with shared principles, the Methodist movement would lose its direction and purpose. Relationship building has always been central to the existence of the Jesus movement and its ability to transform lives. One might say that Wesley was doubling down on his faith in this power.

According to Mark Tooley, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, "Every year United Methodism loses nearly 100,000 members in the USA."⁶⁹ As the United Methodist Church continues to experience decline, many are beginning to rethink

⁶⁸ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, 527.

⁶⁹ Michael F. Haverluck, "UMC's Finances Decline with Attendance, Morality," One News Now, February 20, 2020, <https://onenewsnow.com/church/2020/02/20/umcs-finances-decline-with-attendance-morality>.

what it means to be the church. Some church leaders and members are responding by designing more engaging, sensory-rich, and professionally designed Sunday morning worship services. In this effort, a great many resources are spent on a single hour of public engagement with the community. This type of work can have a powerful impact, but the return on investment is fairly limited in reaching those in the larger community. Worship services located in church-owned or -leased facilities lack an organic reach to unchurched (nones) and dechurched (dones) people. Movements and enterprises like those explored in section two contend that in order to increase their interaction with and impact on the surrounding community, churches must diversify the ways they engage with the world, the places they worship, and the ways they go into the world. These endeavors center the importance of relationship building in order to maximize and sustain their impact.

According to a 2016 study by the Public Religion Research Institute, fewer of the religiously unaffiliated are looking to join a religious group than in previous generations. PRRI breaks the religiously unaffiliated into three subgroups: rejectionists, apatheists, and unattached believers. The likelihood of these religiously unaffiliated people seeking a religious group out to join is four percent, three percent, and 22 percent, respectively.⁷⁰ This is extra troubling when one considers that “one-quarter (25%) of [US Americans] claim no formal religious identity, making this group the single largest ‘religious group’ in the U.S.”⁷¹ What these numbers reveal is that in addition to a decrease in the number

⁷⁰ Betsy Cooper, Daniel Cox, Rachel Lienesch, and Robert F. Jones, Ph.D., “Exodus: Why Americans Are Leaving Religion—and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” PRRI, September 22, 2016, <http://www.prri.org/research/prri-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>.

⁷¹ Cooper, Cox, Lienesch, and Jones, Ph.D., “Exodus.”

of churches' current active participants, the likelihood of previously unaffiliated people even checking out a religious group is nearly non-existent.

Looking at the declining numbers of church membership can be distressing and discouraging. However, it can also be viewed as an encouraging refining of the church and preparation for opportunity. The church is becoming a place where fewer people can exist as spectators and fewer people are persuaded to attend church due to cultural pressure. This is seen in the fact that in 2016, "a lack of belief in teaching of religion was the most commonly cited reason for disaffiliation (60%)."⁷² This refining has brought about an increasing opportunity to activate the power of those who are present and to encourage them to go to new places where they can experiment with what it means to be the church. This relationship-heavy model of church requires contextual intelligence and equipping people with tools to engage with the communities where they reside.

One example of a church doing this contextual excavation and equipping is AfterHours UMC in Denver, Colorado. It is a faith community that does not possess any facilities. Instead, AfterHours relies on relationships with local partners to find spaces to accomplish what they want to do. The primary task of the group is to share the grace of God with unchurched and dechurched people in bar settings, and the power of unconditional love with those experiencing homelessness. For this reason, AfterHours "worship" services look significantly different than those of most churches. The first reason is due to the constraints of the surrounding atmosphere as they meet weekly in bars. Second is that the people found in these settings are not interested in being faith spectators; they want to be participants. In response, the weekly gathering is more than

⁷² Cooper, Cox, Lienesch, and Jones, Ph.D., "Exodus."

simply transplanting a typical Saturday evening or Sunday morning worship service into a bar on Monday night. The community's fellowship format is modeled after gospel stories of Jesus' talks, where he sat down with people to a meal, shared a parable or saying with them, then engaged in conversation and the sharing of concerns or prayer requests with one another. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the experience, however, is the way worship at AfterHours begins. Rather than a spoken invocation, AfterHours' time of worship begins with a tactile call to worship. During this time, the group gathers around common tables to make sack lunches, which they distribute the next day to people experiencing homelessness in Denver. This way of beginning worship makes a statement about the common principles of the group as those who believe faith requires acts of compassion. At the same time, it provides room for relationship building through forming casual conversation space.

Based on understandings of ministry and church explored in section one, thinkers such as Corbett and Fikkar might refer to the AfterHours community's ministry of providing sack lunches to those in homelessness as "toxic charity." Following the premises of creativity research, however, it is possible to view this in another way. AfterHours meal service fills a specific niche need within the social service industry in Denver. By providing a safe and free to-go meal to people experiencing homelessness or extreme poverty, the recipients are enabled to use their energy to claim and activate their power for accessing other needs.

One powerful example of the ability for charity to enable transformation in people's lives was shared by Kristin Miale, President of the Good Shepherd Food Bank in Maine, at TedxSMCC in 2016. In the talk, Miale shares about an experience she had

while at a luncheon to discuss homelessness. It began with her pondering the question, “Are we really helping people or are we just a Band-Aid?” As she pondered this thought, the keynote speaker of the event came and sat next to her. The speaker’s name was Liz Murray. Murray is author of the book *Breaking Night*, which “chronicles her story growing up in deep poverty, a child of addicts, finding herself homeless at the age of 15,” connecting with some key people, and eventually graduating from Harvard.⁷³ After finding out that Miale ran a food bank, Murray’s demeanor shifted. She leaned in close to Miale, placed her hand on her arm and told her, “You saved my life. Once I found a food pantry I didn’t have to spend my nights looking for food, I could spend my nights focusing on studying instead.”⁷⁴ If one wants to understand, in even the slightest, what Murray meant, they need only think about the difficulty of thinking clearly when hungry.

During her TedTalk, Miale uses Murray’s story as anecdotal proof of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and specifically emphasizes the importance of the middle needs in Maslow’s pyramid being met, stabilized, and sustained. These middle needs include the need for security, assurance of *belovedness* or belonging, and self-esteem. The reason Miale places emphasis here is because these are the needs most neglected by social service organizations. Our society, Miale contends, expects “people to go from basic needs to self-fulfillment in a single step... This is why every attempt...made to end the cycle of poverty in [the United States] has failed.”⁷⁵ The more difficult it is to find

⁷³ Kristen Miale, “Moving Beyond Basic Needs to Break the Cycle of Poverty,” Tedx Talk, May 17, 2016, 13:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8SbHzW-8Es>.

⁷⁴ Miale, “Moving Beyond Basic Needs to Break the Cycle of Poverty.”

⁷⁵ Miale, “Moving Beyond Basic Needs to Break the Cycle of Poverty.”

answers to questions like “Am I loved?” the more energy one must spend on meeting that need.

This is where the opportunity of the church and John Wesley’s methods for community building come back into play. Meeting needs, according to Maslow’s hierarchy is not a one-time event; rather, it is stable and sustained action in a specific area. Put in the simplest of terms, telling people they are loved is a good start, but love is known through connection and action. Wesley’s preaching and service to those in need informed people’s awareness of God’s unconditional love for them and their potential as God’s children. However, people’s ability to act upon that knowledge and activate their potential required consistent reminders. In response, Wesley designed a system for relationship building that would provide stability and sustained encouragement in people’s lives. In other words, the goal was to provide resiliency through purpose and connection. As Kristin Miale points out, counter to popular belief, “resiliency is not an individual character trait;” rather, it is a social resource “created through healthy and supportive environments, relationships, and policies that allow growth to happen.”⁷⁶ Ultimately, resources beyond finances are essential for developing resiliency, which in turn enables humans to make progress in life.

The importance of intimate community relationships in building resiliency and enabling people to activate their potential should dictate where the church devotes its time, money, and energy. People need skills of relationship building and supportive communities because it is through those connections that people experience belonging and find the ability to claim their power to have a positive impact on the world. Wesley

⁷⁶ Miale, “Moving Beyond Basic Needs to Break the Cycle of Poverty.”

also found that having a “place for believers to accept people from various social backgrounds... helped to break up the rigid class standards of 18th century England.”⁷⁷ It was common for early Methodists to be accused of disrupting the socio-class structure of English society.

Field preaching, it turns out, was not the only vile thing that Wesley endeavored to do. People did not take too kindly to his advocacy for women’s rights, pamphlets supporting the abolishment of slavery, and going beyond his studied area of expertise – spiritual matters – to addressing people’s material needs such as finances and health. However, Wesley viewed life and faith in a dynamic and wholistic way, which led him to address people’s material realities. As Leonard Sweet points out, “To live a dynamic faith with intensity and passion opens one to criticism. ‘Love your enemies’ doesn’t mean ‘don’t make any.’ The more dynamic your faith, the more you will draw the attention of those who are threatened by your passion, people who will do and say anything to hush your song.”⁷⁸ In other words, to some a decision to do good by ‘the least of these’ and promote the wellness of all is a repulsive, uncouth, and vile thing.

Through use of Wesley’s methods for gathering and exercising one’s faith in action, Methodists were slowly ridding society of the assumptions and prejudices that separated people. This was not received kindly by those whose power was jeopardized by it. But Wesley believed one’s relationship with God should wholistically transform their

⁷⁷ “John Wesley’s Small Groups: Models of Christian Community,” Holiness Today, December 2009, <http://www.holinesstoday.org/john-wesley-small-groups-christian-community>.

⁷⁸ Leonard Sweet, *The Greatest Story Never Told: Revive Us Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 1875.

lives. However, Wesley refused to back down and his message of the potential of all people to know God's love and share God's love with others proved contagious.

This, in turn, increased the assets available to the church's work of manifesting God's reign of love on earth. The underlying premise of this engagement is that "every person is a story wrapped in skin" and each of those stories is a treasure to uncover.⁷⁹ Christians are therefore called to join God in seeking one another out in order to more completely build up the beloved community, the reign of heaven on earth. This task is about recognizing the sacredness of others as God's image bearers filled with potential for great things and proclaiming that when humanity comes together, we are best able to manifest the *imago Dei*. Put another way, when God's image-bearers unite in their diversity, God's image is most fully realized.

With less and less people coming to the church and the church becoming more isolated in its Sunday morning rituals, the opportunities for engaging people in transformational work can seem to be diminishing. The reality is that relationships with non-Christians are exceedingly less likely to be formed organically within church facilities; therefore, the church must increase its level of humble invitation and/or its level of expedition, leaving its brick and mortar facilities to be with the community.

What is Creativity?

Before elaborating further on humans' foundational identity as creative image-bearers of God, a base comprehension of creativity needs to be established. Creativity is largely accepted as an activity or process by which something new, which is also

⁷⁹ Sweet, *From Tablet to Table*, 33.

appropriate to its context, is developed. Yet, the popularity of some lay writings on the subject have caused the definition of creativity to be erroneously expanded. One way this has taken place is through what is called “the thesaurus problem,” in which words like originality, novelty, imagination, artistry, and innovation have become synonyms for the word creativity.

Here are a few definition clarifications to distinguish these aforementioned words from creativity.⁸⁰ First, originality is the generation of something new. The generation of something does not necessitate that it is useful or appropriate to its context. Second, novelty is the quality of being new and unusual. This is typically a status held for a brief period and in a specific context. Next, imagination is mentally conceiving something. Imagination does not necessarily include the tangible generation of an object or action. Fourth is artistic ability. This is the skill to generate aesthetically pleasing compositions with various media. Various art forms are exercises of creativity because they are an activation of creative ability. Finally, innovation is the activity of implementing a new concept. Innovation can be viewed as creative but is more about applying a transformative process or actions to a fairly established and stable system.

In many of these definitions, it is possible for the key traits of creativity, originality and appropriateness, to exist without the other. In this paper, a novel act that does not involve relevance to a situation is called *originative* or *generative*, but not *creative*. To be considered creative, an action must include both originality *and*

⁸⁰ These definitions were developed based through my research using *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* and James Kaufman’s *Creativity 101*. See these book for further definition clarifications.

appropriateness to a particular task or setting. Using these distinctions, we will now explore creativity further.

The Four C's

Part of the confusion that arises in the transition from the academic study of creativity to popular conceptions of creativity is a lack of a description of creativity's developmental trajectory. In other words, popular writings often lack the nuance of the levels of one's creativity. In academic creativity research, this trajectory includes four stages of development called the Four C's, or Four Creativities. These stages are mini-c, little-c, Pro-c, and Big-C. Mini-c and little-c include what is generally known as everyday creativity, whereas Pro-c and Big-C refer to professional levels of creativity. The examination of the Four C's Model is important because research shows that under the right circumstances a trajectory of creative development can be nurtured to mature over time. Essentially, one can "level up."

The Four C's can be clarified by considering a jazz player. For mini-c, "the emphasis is on the personal meaning that the creative idea or product has to the individual;" it is not held up to the same standards used for professional creativity.⁸¹ A mini-c creative endeavor is the junior high trumpet player honking scales or arpeggios while listening to a recording of a professional band. Second is little-c; this includes creative endeavors wherein others can begin to recognize something as appropriate to the task at hand. Here we can imagine that same child now in high school, a little more mature in his playing, displaying his development after landing the solo for the next

⁸¹ Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 18.

school concert or perhaps landing a scholarship for his skill. Next is “Pro-c,” which stands for “professional creators.” These creators “have not reached highly eminent status” but may be able to make a living from their creative activity.⁸² Here we picture the child as a man who can obtain gigs or other compensation for his skill. Finally is Big-C, continuing with the same analogous vein of a jazz trumpeter, one might think of Miles Davis or Louis Armstrong. “Big-C is the kind of creativity that will last for generations.”⁸³ At each level of creative enterprise, the standards are different, but at each of the first three the potential exists for expansion into something more grandiose.

The Four P's

Each level of the Four C's trajectory is affected by surrounding circumstances. In the field of creativity research these circumstances are examined by the Four P's. The first of these is process, which refers to the parts of the brain at work. The findings around brain activity during creativity provide clues for how it might best be nurtured.

The first finding is that “the frontal lobes and the right hemisphere are [the areas] most centrally engaged during creative thought.”⁸⁴ The second is that the popularly assumed bifurcation of the brain into a creative right hemisphere and logical left hemisphere is an overly reductive explanation of how the brain actually functions. In reality the bifurcation is into a right hemisphere that handles detecting complex regularities, contingencies, and covariances in our environment, while the left hemisphere

⁸² Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 18.

⁸³ Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 17.

⁸⁴ Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 117.

handles advanced abilities of planning, reasoning, and hypothesizing.⁸⁵ Creativity happens in the bringing of these various functions. The prefrontal cortex receives input from these, as well as other areas of the brain and then deduces appropriate courses of action. New research shows that it is the prefrontal cortex that truly makes one creative. In fact, archaeological findings have revealed that the growth of humanity's prefrontal cortex has corresponded with the development of our creative innovations (i.e., tools).

Even with all the science pointing to the notion that creatives are born with specially equipped brains, neuroscientist Kenneth M. Heilman, MD contends that creativity can be encouraged in all people by supplying a stimulating environment. There exists decades-old research on rodents that supports this, as “young rodents reared in a stimulating environment are shown to have a much richer neural network than their siblings that are not raised in such an environment.”⁸⁶ Suggested from this research is that, although helpful for Big-C accomplishments, “intelligence is not a crucial ingredient” for creativity.⁸⁷

The next two P's are more easily understood through common knowledge and therefore need less explanation. The second P is product. This includes pre-existing things that shape one's perspective, expectations, or direction, such as works of art, inventions, publications, and musical compositions. It also includes the particular product one is working to generate.

⁸⁵ Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 286.

⁸⁶ Balzac, “Exploring the Brain's Role in Creativity,” 19-20.

⁸⁷ U. Kraft, “Unleashing Creativity,” *Scientific American* 16 (April 2005): 17.

The third P is the press—also occasionally referred to as place. This is the answer to, *where* are we creative? The press includes environmental surroundings, but also the cultural contexts, management, and regulations in which a creative endeavor is pursued. This is arguably the most easily controllable of the variables.

Lastly, is personality. The key traits of personality that are most associated with creativity are independence and openness. These traits, when paired with creative aptitude, generate new and appropriate products. Personality is regularly discussed using the Typological Model of Creativity, which contends that aptitude, independence, and openness are the three core competencies of creativity. All three are required for creativity to manifest, but only two must be present at high levels. The Typological Model of Creativity details the various ways these combinations affect one's creative endeavors by discussing them as various profiles. Here I will summarize these models as defined by James C. Kaufman.

Profiles in the Typological Model of Creativity

The first profile is Subordinate Creativity. Kaufman suggests that this is what companies “actually desire when they say they want creative workers.”⁸⁸ Those classified with Subordinate Creativity register higher in openness and aptitude. Their lack of need for independence makes them fit better within a managed system or group.

The second profile is Rebellious Creativity. This describes people high in creative aptitude and independence. These people are often less open to outside influence and

⁸⁸ Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 27.

management. They may still be willing to collaborate, but they function best if the relationship supplies less structure and direction.⁸⁹

The third is a combination of high openness and independence, called Self-Actualizing Creativity. In this profile, the individual is acting in a way that is consistent with who they see themselves to be. Identity exceeds creative aptitude for these people. An idea may be extremely original and produce something extremely beneficial, but if it does not coincide with who the person understands themselves to be it will not see the light of day.⁹⁰

The fourth profile is Complex Creativity. This is witnessed in people who display high levels of all three traits. An organization might be tempted to find a person that fits this profile, but it is not necessary. While an organization cannot completely control the level of creative aptitude of its members, the organization's own openness and allowance of independence can be controlled.⁹¹ Additionally, through targeted exercise, one can grow their creative aptitude over time.

In order to maximize humanity's creative potential, environments need to be designed where individuals or groups that match these various profiles can thrive. It is my experience that Subordinate Creativity and Self-Actualizing Creativity are the profile types most often found in mainline Protestant church settings among both staff and lay people in leadership positions. The goal of this research is, in part, to explore how mainline Protestant institutions, particularly the United Methodist Church, might better

⁸⁹ Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 27.

⁹⁰ Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 27.

⁹¹ Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 27.

engage individuals that fit more naturally into the Rebellious Creativity and Complex Creativity profiles.

Domain General vs Domain Specific

Beyond the P's, one might wonder about the extent that one can apply their creative aptitude in various areas. In creativity research, this is referred to as domain application. A domain-general view of creativity argues that a “set of skills, aptitudes, traits, propensities, and motivations can be productively deployed in any domain.”⁹² That is to say, creative ability is an overarching quality that can be used regardless of what type of task a creative person is doing. In contrast, those who argue for domain-specificity contend that creative ability is not an overarching quality, but rather centralized to one's knowledge and skill set.⁹³ Recent neuroscience studies have concluded that creativity is much more complicated than either of these views on its own. What is affirmed by advocates of *both* views is that proficiency in an area is a prerequisite for creativity. The young trumpet player mentioned earlier must first gain the proficiency to make identifiable notes with his trumpet before moving into more technical realms of play. This idea is famously stated in Malcolm Gladwell's suggestion that it takes ten thousand hours of disciplined practice within a particular skill set to gain proficiency. An example of this in music is the “day after day of practice in the fundamentals of an instrument,” such as, “the discipline of playing scales...for forming the facility with the [instrument] that equips a musician to create a new song or perform

⁹² Feldman, *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*, 321.

⁹³ Kaufman, *Creativity 101*, 27.

an old one with [originality] and fidelity [appropriateness].”⁹⁴ The goal is to practice scales, arpeggios, and other skills to the point that they become second nature and one no longer has to think about them while playing, thereby allowing for greater levels of creativity to be reached.

Divergent and Convergent Thinking

Building upon the topics above, activating creativity for particularly innovative solutions follows two cognitive approaches. These are distinguished by the terms divergent and convergent thinking. “Divergent thinking is cognition that moves in different [unexpected or uncommon] directions.”⁹⁵ It is often referred to as a web-like approach where one focuses on the connections between ideas in order to multiply a wide array of options and use things in novel ways.

Convergent thinking is “where correct or conventional ideas and solutions are discovered (Guilford, 1968).”⁹⁶ Convergent thinking is linear and systematic. It seeks to narrow down a multitude of ideas into a single solution. Need for such thinking arises when a challenge presents itself and defining the problem is what turns it into something workable.⁹⁷ Rather than being at odds with one another, divergent and convergent styles of thinking are best used in complementary and coordinated ways to accomplish tasks while obtaining fresh perspectives on challenges.

⁹⁴ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009). 77.

⁹⁵ David H. Cropley, Arthur J. Cropley, James C. Kaufman, and Mark A. Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 288.

⁹⁶ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 289.

⁹⁷ Mark A. Runco, “Creativity,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 55 no. 1 (2004): 675.

Conclusion

Creativity is an ability to generate new things that are relevant to a particular context or task. While some individuals are born with a greater propensity to form the connections which make for creativity, every human has the innate ability to create. By utilizing the awareness developed by the field of creativity research, one can help individuals and communities activate their creative abilities.

Addressing the Dark Side

Although creativity is often discussed in a positive light, there is also an ongoing debate in academia over what is known as the “dark side” of creativity. Creativity research professor Mark Runco, PhD, declares that “creativity does not have a dark side. Creative products and efforts can be malevolent, but that it is apparent in their impact and is not an inherent quality nor a requisite trait in the creative personality. Claiming that there is a dark side to creativity is much like arguing that hammers are evil because they can be used to dismantle [or kill].”⁹⁸ Runco further states that although “the process can go awry...the positive, desirable breaking away from the conventional...can cross the line and become pathological, leading to maladjustment and neurosis, or manipulation.”⁹⁹ A prime example of this, Runco points out, “is the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, which was greeted with delirious gladness by some—especially allied soldiers whose lives it may well have saved—but ultimately killed

⁹⁸ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 241.

⁹⁹ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 158.

hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians.”¹⁰⁰ However, one can see in this example how Runco could be confusing the act of neurotic origination with the act of creativity. We now turn to explore this distinction further.

A base tenet in creativity research is that “creativity without morality” is actually neurotic innovation or neurotic originality.¹⁰¹ Creativity and neurotic originality are difficult to distinguish because people who employ both creativity and neurotic originality “live outside mainstream life and adopt an ‘entrepreneurial approach’...characterized by a willingness to challenge the status quo.”¹⁰² Basically, there is a difference between making something and creating something. Neurotic origination means making or developing something that is meant for destruction rather than creation. Robert Sternberg “argues that people like Hitler and Stalin produce what he calls ‘originality’...but that in the absence of moral goodness (and the presence of malevolently destructive forces) they cannot be said to be creative.”¹⁰³ Put another way, according to Sternberg, creativity is not neutral, as Runco suggests, because creativity is ultimately about conserving and conceiving something, therefore Hitler and Stalin cannot be considered creative. Destruction can lead to creativity but is not itself creative. Sternberg emphasizes this by making “the point that both [Hitler and Stalin] introduced high levels of effective novelty (including systems for suppressing opinions differing from their own and previously unknown systems that worked well for murdering people)

¹⁰⁰ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 110.

¹⁰¹ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 175.

¹⁰² Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 204.

¹⁰³ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 172.

and had very substantial impact on their societies,” but this originality and the resulting innovations were neurotic and destructive.¹⁰⁴ What this all leads to is the contention that evil takes place when humans abuse and misuse their abilities to originate and generate new things.

Theological and Biblical Response to the Dark Side

Christians do not need to get bogged down in the debate over creativity’s moral nature that plagues creativity researchers. This is due to the notion in the Christian faith that creativity requires wisdom and should be focused on “[maximizing] the common good.”¹⁰⁵ What is sometimes referred to as the dark side of creativity, from a Christian perspective, is instead viewed as desecration of creation through misuse of God-given abilities.¹⁰⁶ From a Christian perspective, “the essence of human nature is to give birth, not destroy.”¹⁰⁷ Despite this, there exists a negative opinion by many Christians in regards to what are popularly known as creative pursuits (e.g., visual art, music, videography, culinary art). Jason Shepherd states this conundrum by saying that some Christians “question the relevance of [creativity and the arts] to the Christian life,” by asking, “why Christians should waste their time with frivolous and non-essential endeavors such as [creativity and the arts] when they have more important things to do

¹⁰⁴ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 170.

¹⁰⁵ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 180.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Fox, *Creativity: Where the Divine and Human Meet* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2002), 35.

¹⁰⁷ Fox, *Creativity: Where the Divine and Human Meet*, 25.

such as evangelism and disciple-making.”¹⁰⁸ However, through creativity and the arts humans experience profound emotions and express ourselves in ways words alone fail to do. In short, creativity and the arts enable us to connect in deeply meaningful ways, thereby giving birth to relationships through which we can collaborate to maximize the common good.

The essential nature of creativity in relation to Christian mythology is recognized not only by some Christians, but also secular creativity researchers. As Robert Albert points out, “The earliest Western conception of creativity was the Biblical story of creation given in Genesis about the artisan doing God’s work on earth.”¹⁰⁹ The Genesis story declares that “people become a community through their belief in a Creator and His Creation,” and in this they “confirmed their creative powers through...sharing qualities of God, their intimate and voluntary relationship to a Creator-God.”¹¹⁰ Building on this, “Christianity, by turning... to the future, played a leading role in the discovery of our power to create.”¹¹¹ So when the biblical poet “declares that we are made in the ‘image and likeness’ of the Creator, [the author] is affirming that creativity is at [humanity’s] core just as it lies at the core of the Creator of all things.”¹¹² Humans are, from both a biblical and neuroscientific point of view, uniquely endowed with the capacity for self-

¹⁰⁸ Jason D. Shepherd, “Redeeming the Arts: Creativity as the Primary Component of the Humanitas Attributes in the Imago Dei” (DMin diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1997), TREN Id 001-0627. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Feldman, *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Feldman, *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*, 5.

¹¹¹ Feldman, *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*, 5.

¹¹² Fox, *Creativity: Where the Divine and Human Meet*, 28.

actualization and creative intelligence. In the biblical meta-story, this endowment is understood as the image of God.

As those created *imago Dei*—in the image of God—it is wise to reflect upon the characteristics of God. As Matthew Fox points out, “God is above all a generative being. We who are made in God’s likeness are also generators and life givers. Creating is our imitating of Divinity. We are here to imitate Divinity. We generate in communion with the Divine who dwells and generates within us.”¹¹³ As Christians, we find our definition of creativity rooted in our grounding story, which declares that “Not only did God create something new,” but created it “for the *good* of others.”¹¹⁴ For Christians, creating is primarily understood to be about relationship with God, other humans, and the rest of creation.

Why Should Christians Care About Creativity?

Creativity is innovation upon what has been previously generated. This is first seen in scripture when Adamah cultivated names for all the animals with the only precursor from which to create those names being named Adamah by God. Language is one of the essential building blocks of culture. By giving a name that means from the earth, God establishes a culture that is about connection. Adamah’s own name was then the very ground from which further names could be cultivated. This asserts that as cultural animals, humans’ first task in life is simply to learn their cultural grounding.¹¹⁵ In

¹¹³ Fox, *Creativity: Where the Divine and Human Meet*, 77.

¹¹⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 26.

¹¹⁵ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 76.

other words, humans are generated to cultivate and create. This story declares that God wants humans to claim and activate their powers of cultivation and creation.

In the *Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*, researchers note that creativity in the people-of-faith called Christians is predicated on the foundation that God is the Creator of humanity, and humans are created to be ambassadors for God's presence on earth.¹¹⁶ Given such a foundation, it is necessary for Christian leaders, practitioners, and theologians to understand God as the ground of creativity. Another way to put this is to say that, as the One "who brought something out of nothing, God was the first entrepreneur."¹¹⁷ Whether or not one subscribes to the theological concept of *ex nihilo*, the implication remains that when a person creates, they are emulating their Creator.

Emulation of God is more than imitation. If God is comprehended as the ground-of-being, one can go so far as to say creative acts personate God. That is, being creative takes the abstract form of God and embodies it. Jesus the Christ spent his earthly days as God's ultimate image-bearer, emulating and personating the entrepreneurial creative character of God. If God is the first entrepreneur whom we are created to emulate, then Jesus provides an ideal example of how that should occur. In other words, God's image is made most fully known to humanity in Christ.

¹¹⁶ Feldman, D.H., editor. *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 5.

¹¹⁷ Jordan Raynor, *Called to Create: A Biblical Invitation to Create, Innovate, and Risk* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 11.

And All That Jazz: Polycentrism and Variation

“Not all treasure is silver and gold, mate.”

Captain Jack Sparrow

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl

Asset building and community development are meant to bring people into relationship for the betterment of all. After the gifts, talents, and resources of a community have been inventoried, there are two major topics that need to be addressed. One is organization and the other is contextualization. Organization is mainly about identifying a form of leadership that will most help the individuals of a community to flourish. Contextualization is an aid to the objective of community flourishing, but focuses more particularly on how various gifts, talents, and resources are utilized and when.

Different forms of organization and leadership possess various strengths and weaknesses that are best suited for meeting particular objectives. In the objective of relationship building, the common models of leadership are the hierarchical and flat approaches. Each pose particular problems that get in the way of community building. Hierarchical approaches often form bottlenecks and elevate the power of some over others. Flat approaches often leave entire groups feeling a lack of power to move forward. A third approach, polycentric leadership, breaks down the concept of leader and moves groups into deeper relationship because of its focus on collaboration.

In order to explore the concept of polycentric collaboration a bit further, we turn to consider the performance of a jazz quintet whose leader is a player in the band. The leader begins by presenting a piece of sheet music to the band members or calling out the name of a standard tune, someone counts off the tempo, and then play begins. The band

starts off with the typical foundational chords and a clear melody over the top. After the band has gone through the basic melody once with some harmonies added, one of the players is invited to take the lead and improvise a new melodic line. What takes place in this situation is a treasure hunt for beautiful new melodies that are riffs on the original. This is created by shifting the leadership role throughout the band.

Polycentric collaboration is also reminiscent of the leadership dance of the Trinity coined “perichōrēsis...by Eastern Orthodox theologians in the seventh century to describe the mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit.”¹¹⁸ Like the best jazz quintets, the power of the Trinity flows effortlessly from person to person. What allows this to happen is intimacy, which Priya Parker says “is essential for useful, positive, productive things to happen” in communities.¹¹⁹

In a jazz ensemble, there exist basic guidelines that help the players create variations on the theme in their own time that is new and yet grounded in shared principles. These help players to collaborate in making something beautiful and pleasing to all of them. Polycentrism contains similar parameters. Enabling intimacy and a flow of originality in polycentric collaboration is done through provision of what are called The Six Freedoms of Appreciative Inquiry. These include the freedom to be known in relationship, freedom to be heard, freedom to dream, freedom to contribute, freedom to

¹¹⁸ JR Woodward and Dan White Jr., *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 172.

¹¹⁹ Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why it Matters* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 913.

act with support, and freedom to be positive.¹²⁰ These freedoms provide boundaries that help communities create something that is life-giving for all involved.

Polycentric leadership does bring its challenges. In instances where a clear ultimate leader is lacking, it is inevitable that someone will overstep or make an error that hurts the larger group. This is difficult for some to accept. However, the beauty of polycentric collaboration is that it provides a path for redemption and reconciliation, because at its center is not an individual but instead the community as a whole. And the beauty is, if polycentrism doesn't work for a particular group, they can always move to the hierarchical model or flat model of leadership.

Learning how to move beyond the potential troubles that arise with use of a polycentric model, we can once again take a note from jazz ensembles. Jazz musicians learn to overcome accidental and intentional offenses alike by playing their way out of them. They ritualize them and turn them into motifs or grace notes that move the composition back to the original melody. Like jazz musicians, practitioners of polycentric collaboration learn to lean into relationship, create rituals for overcoming pains, and repurpose mistakes into learning opportunities for the betterment of the community. In the midst of all this, the importance of relationships is centralized so that someone does not swoop in to fix the problem. Instead, people are encouraged and supported to find a solution in community. As Harder puts it, "God is not a lonely monarch but is a rich, dynamic community that acts as one because each person takes the others into account."¹²¹ In other words, all this is modeled after God's trinitarian essence since

¹²⁰ David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney. *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005), 56-60.

¹²¹ Harder, *Discovering the Other*, 1988.

humanity is created *imago Dei* and called to personate God in the way our communities live.

Utilizing a polycentric approach to community development is uncommon and therefore difficult because people are entrenched in hierarchical ways of being. Due to this, there are bound to be many failures while transitioning to a polycentric model. However, in the midst of it all, Jesus promises to be present to practitioners by declaring that if two or more are gathered he will join the party.

The Creative Christ

Theologian Gordon Kaufman builds upon the earlier ideas of divine creativity by establishing that “The early Christian message was a gospel, the good news that the creator of the heavens and the earth, the ruler of the universe, had sent his son to earth in order to save humankind from all the sin, suffering, and other evils into which they had fallen.”¹²² This son of God sent to earth was the anointed one, the Christ, the ambassador of the divine on earth, sent to call humanity back into line with their original purpose. This person is no less than the wisdom force of the divine which guides raw creativity and has been an agent of such since time immemorial. This point can be further emphasized by pointing out that ‘image’ derives from the Greek word *χαρακτηρ*, transliterated into English as character. Following from this, Jesus as the Christ can be understood as the ultimate character-bearer, personator, of God.

Mark Runco contends that personality development and living into one’s unique identity are themselves creative processes of “self-actualization,” which require “resisting

¹²² Gordon D. Kaufman, *In the Beginning...Creativity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 89.

pressure from the surrounding society to conform.”¹²³ However, since everything builds on something else, resistance of conformity to societal pressures must be accompanied with conforming to something.

The word conform is a compound word created from ‘form,’ meaning to build up or give structure, and ‘con,’ meaning ‘with.’ Humans are always being conformed to something. For Christians, that which is being conformed to is the primordial Christ. Jesus then, as the Christ, is the ultimate example of this conforming non-conformity. This means, “no postmodern disciple feels, or acts, as any normative standard ‘oughts’ them to feel or act,” because they are conformed to a separate standard.¹²⁴ This concept was explored earlier in the discussion of Ruby K. Payne’s work on the power of locating, claiming, and activating one’s resources.

Gordon Kaufman builds upon the idea of normative standards by pointing out that “The life to which Jesus called his followers involves a *reversal* of ordinary social and political, cultural and... religious standards, according to which power over others signifies one’s importance, and serving others is regarded as demeaning.”¹²⁵ The alternative is how Christians conform themselves to God, while being non-conformist. As Mark Batterson puts it, Christians often “grossly underestimate how unconventional Jesus was. And the question is this: are we following in his leadership footsteps?”¹²⁶ Are

¹²³ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 155.

¹²⁴ Leonard Sweet, *Aquachurch 2.0: Piloting Your Church in Today’s Fluid Culture* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 273.

¹²⁵ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 111.

¹²⁶ Mark Batterson, “Right-Brain Leadership: The Church Ought to Be the Most Creative Place on the Planet,” LifeWay, January 1, 2014, <http://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/right-brain-leadership>.

those called Christians placing themselves in service to one another, collaborating across societal divides, loving those labeled their enemies, and disseminating power?

Dr. David McDonald contends that to ensure we *are* following Jesus' footsteps, Christians should seek to "live an in-spirited life or an in-the-spirit life, a God breathed life which enjoys the life of the future now."¹²⁷ The first step is to closely examine the example Jesus set. If Christians are going to be the body of Christ, examining what Jesus did with his body while alive would be wise.

What personality traits of a creative individual are witnessed in Jesus? There are two I want to highlight here. One of the easiest to identify includes how "highly creative people doubt, question, and often reject norms, traditions, and conservative ideology."¹²⁸ This is seen clearly in the choices Jesus made about who he interacted with, especially his crossing of ethnic and socio-economic boundaries. This type of resistance is called "contrarianism," in which an individual defies the crowd and "resist[s] society's pressure to conform."¹²⁹ On numerous occasions, Jesus was chastised by religious leaders for his fraternizing with society's unclean, marginalized, and oppressed. He refused to conform to the standards of the religious elite. He did not ask what was allowable by the letter of the law, but rather what was morally and ethically correct. This is witnessed in his defense of a woman from those that seek to stone her (John 8:7), and interaction with a woman from a different ethnic background at a well (John 4:4-26).

¹²⁷ David McDonald, *Then. Now. Next.: A Biblical Vision of the Church, the Kingdom, and the Future* (Jackson, MI: Westwinds Community Church, 2017), 299, Kindle.

¹²⁸ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 415-420.

¹²⁹ Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, and Runco, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, 157.

The second is the way Jesus demonstrated openness, inclusion, and affirmation of the abilities of people regardless of their social location or circumstance. He did not center people's cultural or ethnic lineage, material wealth or poverty, status or lack of it, ability or inability, but rather their faith, their ability to see that an alternative was possible. Jesus recognizes people's creative aptitude and helps them to claim it. We can see this in various instances when people cross conventional boundaries to come to him, such as when the Roman Centurion ask for his servants healing (Matthew 8:5-13), when he engages the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-36) and the woman with the alabaster jar anoints Jesus' feet (Mark 14:3-9). But perhaps most poignantly in the willingness of his disciples to come together despite their differences.

Through these affirmations, one can deduce a central tenet of Jesus that, regardless of what level of creativity an individual or group is capable of, all are called to create. This means, "The highest calling is not being a pastor, but becoming all God called you to be, namely a person who glorifies God in all you do."¹³⁰ Jesus constantly reset this framework of understanding by declaring the importance of people's actions.

As explored earlier, creative ability can be exercised at various levels (see The 4 C's) and creative aptitude can mature over time, especially if an individual gains proficiency in a particular area. Mainline Protestant churches exercise creativity in numerous ways. However, many of these are of the mini-c or little-c variety, because they measure low in either novelty or appropriateness. This is the reality of much mainline Protestant worship, programming, and outreach. Respective examples of each of these include hymn singing, Wednesday night Bible study, and ice cream socials. These

¹³⁰ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 47.

things can be said to be good, but they measure low on the index of creativity since they fit into rote formats, therefore lacking novelty.

Living an authentic faith requires that Christians seek to bring the ends of society together, activating creativity through collaboration, and becoming deeply invested in particular places. Or as Leonard Sweet puts it, “How can you be a disciple of Jesus and not love your zip code enough to cry over it, as Jesus did over Jerusalem?”¹³¹ Church communities that focus solely on attractional programming and worship to draw people into their buildings run the risk of being detached from their communities. Christians need to learn to love their zip codes better. The recognition of God’s creative potential everywhere also means Jesus is already out in the zip code, out amongst the people. The focus needs to shift to joining with Jesus in what he’s already doing there.

There are churches partnering and collaborating with residents of the surrounding community to better their shared parcel of earth and enhance life in their zip code. What follows is an exploration of a tool that can be used to identify and activate the gifts of a community in order to begin collaboration for community enhancement.

SOAR Analysis

A SOAR analysis is an appreciative inquiry tool that can be used in brainstorming for strategic planning. The acronym stands for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. Strengths looks for assets the community already possesses, opportunities ask what the surrounding community desires, the aspirations section seeks to identify the

¹³¹ Leonard Sweet, *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 218, Kindle.

group's passion areas, and results asks what a successful project would look like. By going through this analysis, an organization or group identifies, chooses, and implements a relationship building plan that is appropriate for their context.

After establishing the macro-goal of relationship building, the group moves to brainstorming for each SOAR category. After discovering the areas in each category where the most interest lies, the group then identifies common threads between these interests. Finally, this information is used to formulate a plan of engagement.

Invitation-Focused SOAR Thread

I had the opportunity to use the SOAR model with a congregation I was serving at the West Campus of First United Methodist Church in Lawrence, Kansas. The culture of the church is as an invitational church body. As such, here is how they implemented the SOAR analysis. They chose to focus on the strengths provided in their facilities, land, and volunteer corps. They then identified the opportunity for engaging young families who desire safe and fun environments to connect with other young families. Next, the group identified their aspiration to be one of the first places people think about when they recall memories of Lawrence, Kansas. Finally, some results include visions of a future where people are participating in additional church life and volunteer events.

Keeping the above in mind, the West Campus Fruitfulness Team identified a unifying thread and set an objective of providing spaces for building relationships by hosting community events at their property, which would encourage church family to invite friends and neighbors to gather and interact. The group desired that this would nurture the congregation's growth from being a church community that greets outsiders with a warm welcome to being an exceedingly invitational community.

Along with forming bonds with the community, the events created by the Fruitfulness Team designed opportunities for members of the larger First UMC family to become more invitational. This was done by developing a cycle of events that spanned a year-long period and were open to the greater Lawrence community. These events were designed to increase congregants' comfort with outreach and increase unchurched people's comfort with the Church. The events that the team developed were as follows. In July, the team hosted a picnic and fireworks celebration on July 3 with family-centered activities. Congregants were encouraged to bring friends or family members and enjoy the outdoor spaces of the West Campus. The atmosphere was more secular. In late August, the team held a back-to-school event to celebrate the beginning of the school year. Area teachers and students were invited, congregants were encouraged to invite friends-of-friends, and a ministry fair coincided where people could learn more about opportunities at the church. Around Halloween, the team utilized the outdoor nature space to provide interactive Halloween activities for families. This event was open to the community and advertised more broadly utilizing more professional forms of advertising such as print and media ads. The goal was to showcase the fun and joyful spirit of the FUMC family in a safe environment. The fourth event was an expansion upon an existing Hanging of the Greens Advent Fair that I originally began as a fun church family gathering two years previous. Through a grant program, the event was expanded to become an occasion where the unchurched could explore faith stories in a non-intimidating and safe environment. The final event that took place the following spring was a fundraising 5k run/walk. This had three main micro-objectives. The first two were to serve as a way to help congregants increase their comfort with inviting people into the

life of the church, and to increase non-church families' comfort level with the church grounds and church family. The third micro-objective was to partner with the larger community to support a local non-profit together. Further expansion on this relationship building might include involving non-church community members in the strategic planning.

Expedition-Focused SOAR Thread

We have already explored one way that expedition relationship building might take place by looking at AfterHours UMC's utilization of public spaces instead of owning or leasing facilities. The most recent version of SOAR analysis with the AfterHours Leadership Team involved identifying ways this might be expanded and deepened. After doing their own SOAR, the Leadership Team discovered a desire to aid in providing the next level of Maslow's hierarchy to those to whom they serve sack lunches in Denver's Civic Center Park each day. While this type of stable support exists due to AfterHours daily presence in the park, the relationships are difficult to expand upon regularly. This is where a SOAR analysis shifts. In the expedition version of SOAR, a group looks at the assets available to the surrounding community as a whole instead of simply the assets they personally possess. For AfterHours, one of the assets available to them is the physical resources of other social service provider organizations. One of those providers is Network Coffee House, mentioned in section two. Utilizing the strength of its dependable volunteer corps, AfterHours was able to connect with people in that space and nurture relationships with those they see briefly in the park. AfterHours' identified strength was a solid volunteer corps and a desire to provide support that would further help people move out of the cycle of poverty. That desire was further activated to provide

the next level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, psychological support, and encouragement through relationship.

Conclusion—Relationship is Essential

Discipleship is often reduced to evangelistic efforts of getting people to join Christians on their own property, for their own Christian events. What if evangelism is more about going to where Jesus is already revealing his good presence to others and then joining him in those locations and rejoicing over the new things that are already going on there? The largest challenge this may pose is the reality that many struggle to activate traditional forms of creativity within their faith communities, let alone begin new ventures. And yet, the faith foundations explored earlier, along with neuroscience and creativity research, reveal that the potential for creativity in this circumstance already exists. In God-talk, one might say it is encouraging that time and again God takes the clay of what is and re-forms it. God refuses to let humanity continue as lifeless lumps of mud.

Wesley and the early Methodists believed that the gospel was meant to be spread to all people and God's love manifest in tangible ways. As United Methodist Bishop William Willimon puts it, "[Wesley] had this strange notion that you could take a group of utterly ordinary people and make them into saints... He devised all sorts of creative strategies for that."¹³² The Methodist movement was a spiritual revival, but thanks to John Wesley, it was also one of the most strategic moments of discipleship development in the history of the church.

¹³² Dean Nelson, "Q&A with Will Willimon," Holiness Today, February 2011, <http://holinesstoday.org/QA-Will-Willimon>.

At least one documentary film claims John Wesley as “The Man Who Saved England”¹³³ from a bloody revolution such as that seen in France during the 18th century. The basic premise of this claim is that England was on the verge of facing a similar revolution to that seen by France and the countries adjacent to it, but Wesley’s uniting of people from across social classes preempted such a revolution. The French revolution was about disenfranchised people rising up. In bringing people together at common tables people were able to better see one another’s plights and create collaborative solutions. Wesley during the time was treated as a vile man for his wholistic approach to ministry. However, the things mentioned above which he was deemed vile for saying, promoting, and doing were actually the precise things that helped England to more peacefully get over its divisions and create a better society.

It may be said that the United States faces a similar challenge today as disenfranchised rioters and protesters take to the streets. Black Lives Matter protests, pride parades, and the capitol riot all point to the feelings of anger and sadness that underly trials, fears, and disenfranchisement. Methodist once again need to amplify their voices on matters of social injustice and create spaces for bringing people together.

In the 18th century dissemination of information meant pamphlets, street preaching, letter writing and home meetings. The question becomes, where should Methodists go to disseminate their message and make connections today? Leonard Sweet gives some direction for this when he points out that, “Early Methodist...followed the water flow, through mountains and across chasms, because that’s where the settlements

¹³³ Kent, Gary, and Robyn Kent. *John Wesley: The Man Who Saved England*. The Incredible Journey. May 2019. www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwjD_DjB0ok.

were.”¹³⁴ We similarly must ask, where are the settlements today? What are the flows that we should be following to find people today? At least one answer is, on the newest and most popular media platforms. Blogs, TikTok, Video Apps, and Podcasts are the major media flows of the present day. When the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic is over Methodists will need to ask themselves where the in-person settlements are as well. Society will be craving social in-person interaction and Methodist will have great opportunity to unity people by creating enterprises such as those mentioned in section two.

Methodists need to reclaim their foundations, to be more vile, and go be with the people. As revealed in section two, there is no silver bullet to the challenge of bringing people into relationship with one another across societal silos. There is no specific single solution that will work best for every situation, context, and circumstance. There is one macro action that must be taken, however, and that is to enter into relationships with non-Christians in the community and collaborate with them as equals. What is needed is an increased awareness of the possibilities, successful examples, and knowledge of foundational tools for engaging people.

The realities of uncertainty and naïveté suggest that what is needed from the church today is increased awareness and access to resources and examples of collaborative creativity and asset activation. People need a resource where they can learn about creativity activation and be inspired by existing exemplary ventures. Since every context is unique, a one-size-fits-all response will not help meet needs. Instead, people

¹³⁴ Sweet, *The Greatest Story Never Told*, 240.

need a resource that nurtures their creativity, gets them out of their own way, provides them with resources, and inspires them.

What is need is a common hub where conversations can begin, tools can be accessed, inspiring stories can be heard, and resources procured. John Wesley was a firm believer in mastering and employing the primary media and information sharing formats of his day in order to reach the masses. If the church is to activate people's creative abilities, it must disseminate information in the same spirit. Living in an increasingly digital and internet-based society has made the dissemination of information easier than ever before. My goal is to create a hub for the wheel that will help church communities to discern the best venture for their context. If Christians want to permeate society with God's love, it is going to take all sorts of vile methods.

SECTION 4:

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The artifact has four main pieces. They are a website (vilemethods.com), a Facebook community group, a Linked In page, and a weekly podcast entitled *Vile Methods*. I have chosen the combination of these four things because, like the Gutenberg press and John Wesley's disciple organizational system, the combination of these platforms is shifting how humans archive, disseminate information, and collaborate. In addition, people's lives are increasingly being lived in virtual and hybrid settings. If the Church is going to reach people where they are, it must be in these settings as well.

Together these four things will provide people with resources and learning communities to help them seek and share the love of Jesus in practical ways. Much like the way a traditional church operates as a gathering place to send people out into the field, Vile Methods will serve as a hub where people find inspiration and resources to go out and collaborate with their neighbors for the transformation of the world.

John Wesley embraced the technology of his day and used it in conjunction with community groups to help people claim their power. He used tracts, community groups, and field oration to reach people, which aided in the power of the First Great Awakening.

For the artifact presentation, I will provide links to the website, LinkedIn page, and Facebook community group. I will also provide an example of the podcast preparation guide that I will send to guests, and a sampling of podcast episodes that includes the trailer and five episodes, each 30-60 minutes in length.

SECTION 5:

ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Goals. The primary goal of this artifact is to create an online and cloud-based resource and learning community that encourages and equips people for the work of activating the creative potential and assets of themselves and their communities. The podcast will have weekly releases throughout the year. In order to accomplish this, multiple episodes will be recorded each week and then released over the course of the month. My secondary goal is to increase Denver-area social service organizations' understanding of one another, what each does, and how they might collaborate to fill in service gaps. In addition, these discussions will serve as an inspiration to communities beyond Denver.

Audience. The target audience is Christians who are looking to reimagine how the Church exists in the world and reform what the Church looks like in practice. The primary focus will begin with those in the Denver metro area. Discussions will be aimed at members of organizations who work with the marginalized and those who support those organizations.

Scope. The podcast will be released weekly in order to maintain consistency for subscribers. The website will have links, lessons, and outlines on how to reach out to non-church members in the larger community and collaborate with them. There will also be a Facebook group where practitioners, pioneers, and dreamers can share insights and wisdom with one another.

Content and Subject Matter. The primary focus of this artifact relies on the work of this dissertation exploring creativity and the Church. Discussions will revolve

around enterprises that exist beyond church-owned facilities and traditional worship forms. Guests will be interviewed about what their ministry does, share inspirational stories, and then be invited to discuss hopes and challenges in the work.

The five episodes contained in the artifact give an overview of what will be shared on the channel. These will include exploring existing enterprises, specifically starting with those in Denver.

Post-Graduate Considerations. In order to continue building on this artifact after graduation, dedicated time will need to be set aside each week for recording and editing. I will also need to allocate funds for equipment and software upgrades, and/or consider outsourcing to a professional producer.

Standards of Publication. The artifact website and podcast will follow professional standards while seeking to keep costs as low as possible. The website will have a user-friendly interface and a mobile-friendly responsive design.

Podcasting evolved out of talk-radio shows and audio-blogging that began in the 1980s. In the early 2000s, what is currently known as podcasting took hold. The ease of accessibility means that standards range widely. The simplest way to start a podcast is to record oneself speaking on a smartphone and then upload to a podcast hosting site such as Anchor.fm.¹³⁵

The other extreme of podcast recording includes a plethora of tech equipment such as a full, sound-insulated studio complete with computer, microphones, audio interface, mixer, pop filters, headphones, headphone amplifiers, mic stands, shock mounts, cables, editing software, and a podcasting hosting website. There is a wide range

¹³⁵ Andru Morgan, Zoom interview, November 15, 2020.

in the quality available for each of these items and they are priced to match, from tens to thousands of dollars.

Due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, we are in an era when listeners are very forgiving of podcasters' recording quality. However, poor recording can result in sounds that are unpleasing to listeners and make them unlikely to return to the show. Keeping these challenges and financial limitations in mind, with the guidance of my expert advisor, Andru Morgan, I have put together a podcasting set up, which will allow me to accomplish producing a quality podcast that maximizes pleasure to my listeners while minimizing financial costs.

The final standard I will be following is archiving practices for podcasting. The files are to be kept in a .wav format when possible and use a numbering system 000-000. The first three numbers denote the season and the second three denote the episode. Hence, 001-001 refers to season one, episode one. If a producer should be used in the future, this system makes it easy for them to locate tracks for editing and uploading.

Morgan has made it clear that the most important thing is to get started. By remaining humble, learning as I go, and trusting that the podcast will get better over time, it will indeed get better.

Dates. Beginning December 23, 2020 and going through January 12, 2021, I plan to do one or two podcast interviews every Wednesday. Exact days will depend on interviewees' availability. The website and Facebook community group will also be worked on this day.

SECTION 6:

POSTSCRIPT

Summary of Execution

This dissertation responds to the problem of socio-economic class division. It suggests that the church is well situated to address this problem by expanding its inclusion of people across socio-economic classes and bridge divides between classes through creative collaborations. My initial interest was in innovation and creativity in the church. At the beginning of my studies, I was serving a 600-member church campus made up of predominantly young families. A year into my dissertation studies I was reappointed to a small church community that meets in bars and focuses on serving meals to those experiencing homelessness. Each of these faith communities is fairly homogenous and were seeking to be more missional and inclusive beyond weekly worship gatherings. My research turned to a common thread of helping faith communities discern what creative enterprises and outreach programs could aid them in building relationships with their neighbors.

As I delved into material about creativity, innovation, the challenges that socio-economic divides present, and how some faith communities are addressing this problem, I began to uncover a lack of information dissemination. There are programs and opportunities for engagement and many people that want to get involved and start something, but they don't know where to begin or their theology gets in the way. In response I set to establish a foundational theology that encourages action and to provide a knowledge base for people discerning where, how, and when to get involved. With the

help of my advisor, Cal Habig, I then discerned that creating a podcast, website, and online learning community would be the best way for me to help people and groups in the process of their discernment.

Analysis of Dissertation Track Efficacy

While writing the dissertation I felt constrained in my opportunity to present all I have learned and questioned whether I should have gone with the lengthier track 1 format. However, this track 2 format that includes an artifact, specifically my podcast, is proving a great tool for growing awareness. Interviewing various guests helps me to connect the information with their spheres of influence and introduce them to people or organizations with which they can partner. Going with track 2 gave me the accountability I needed to develop this artifact.

Gains Made and Lessons Learned

If one searches intently enough, resources for innovation in the church can be found. However, this information is dispersed all over the place. Unearthing and compiling a record of numerous opportunities and ventures in a single location has been a wonderful gain made for missional outreach, creativity activation, and collaboration with neighbors. I was hesitant to get started due to concern about how the project would be received. I learned that people are willing and delighted to participate for free when there is value provided to them. In this case the value is free advertising and raising awareness of the work they are doing. I also learned that people are more likely to engage with something when it is easily accessible. This includes the vocabulary and medium. The podcast makes it easy for people to slip educating themselves into their daily routines.

Further Research Suggestions

The more I researched for this dissertation I found amazing things going on in the work of bridging social divides, resources for enabling this work and new avenues to pursue. There is a bounty of information about some of the fundamental tools for community engagement that can still be mined for insights. At the same time, there is a lack of research about how churches might use business innovation practices to become greater assets to their communities. Finally, there is a lack of research on Jesus' creativity and further research would be helpful in formulating a guide for humans' exercising of creativity today.

Personal Discovery

Through the process I discovered the importance of activating my own creative potential. While producing this podcast I discovered a new passion. In the endeavor of creating this artifact I have discovered my power to nudge others to recognize the potential God wants to activate in them. I have always been a person filled with curiosity, wonder, a desire to learn, to teach, and to spread social good. Through creating this podcast, I have found a new and thrilling way to bring these things together.

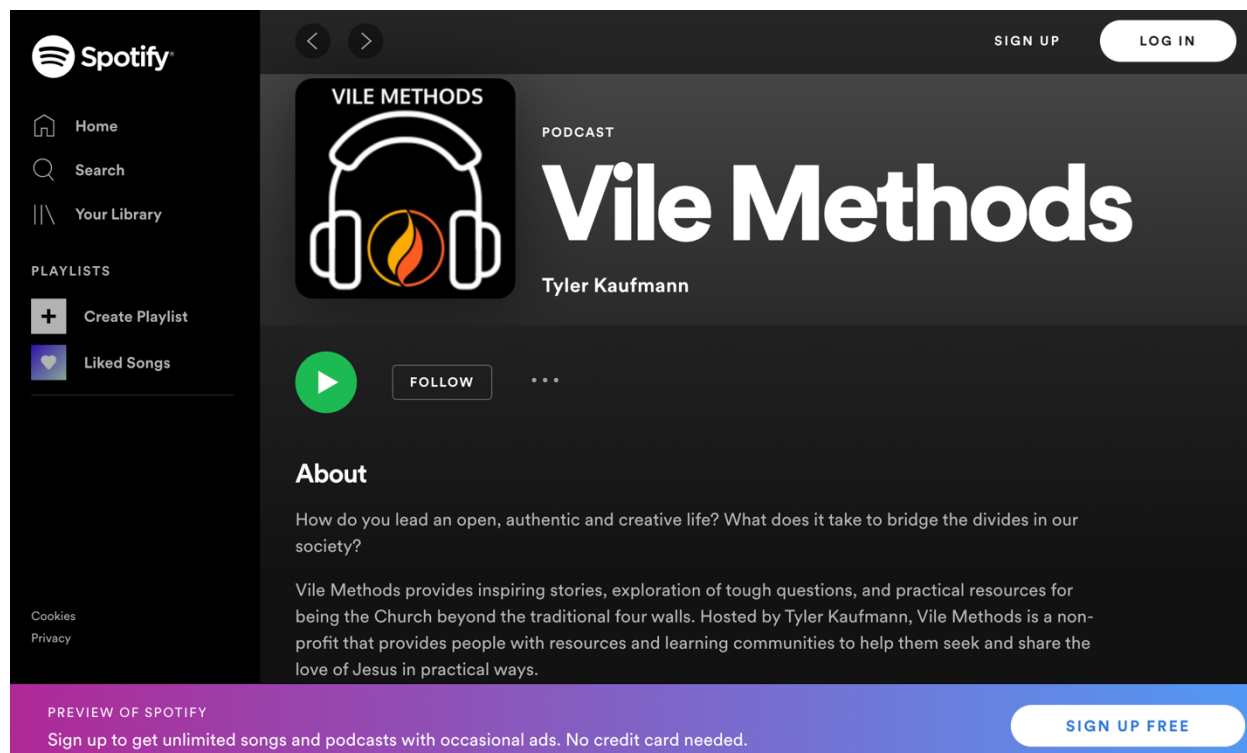
APPENDIX A:

ARTIFACT

Contained in this appendix are screen shots of the artifact pieces that are detailed above in sections four and five.

Podcast

The Vile Methods podcast was put together using Anchor, GarageBand, and the Zoom PodTrak P4. It can be found on Spotify, Google Podcast, and anywhere else you get your podcast. Below is a screen shot of the Spotify page and the document I send to show guests.



VILE METHODS PODCAST PREP GUIDE



Thank you for agreeing to be on the show and sharing with the Vile Methods audience.

It means a lot to me that you would take time out of your busy schedule to join me for this show!

This document provides basic information to ensure we are set up for a successful recording.



ABOUT ME

I am a pastor, podcaster, and community builder with a passion for helping the Church rethink the way we interact with the communities where we reside, bridging the divides in society, and helping people to see the good and potential in every one of their neighbors. I am currently finishing my

doctoral studies on how to equip the Church to leave the traditional four walls and collaborate with their neighbors for community development.

I am a rock climber, disc golfer, snowboarder, and runner. I am passionate about Husker football. And I enjoy Christmas Movies...year around. I know.

I am married to Nicole who is a talented musician and a Chaplain at a nursing home. We have a son, Theodore (Theo), who is a connoisseur of playgrounds and monster trucks, and celebrates Halloween all year long.

I live outside of Denver, CO on West Colfax and get away to the mountains as often as possible. The Vile Methods podcast is a new venture for me.

ABOUT THE SHOW

The show's title is a tribute to the methodical practices of John Wesley, father of Methodism, who decided to do a vile thing in his era and leave traditional church gathering places to go be with the people. He formed social communities that bridged social divides and was accused of destroying social class barriers. May we all be accused of such boldness. This show is about honestly, authentically and creatively engaging the reality of bridge building and collaboration work.



You can find more information at anchor.fm/vilemethods and vilemethods.com.



RECORDING INFORMATION

Date Of Recording: Day of Week, Month Day#, Year

Time Of Recording: ##am (MT)

Length of Recording: About 1 hour. Please Allow 1 Hour and 15 minutes.

Topic: Title

KEYS TO A GREAT RECORDING:

- Choose a quiet location. (Please turn off fans and other noise making devices.)
- Please put animals away.
- Record from a location with great cell phone or internet reception.
- Use headphones with a good microphone. (This is important because putting the phone on speaker makes for a poor recording and an hour is a long time to hold a phone to your ear.)
- Close any apps and software on your phone or computer.
- After we have connected go to settings and turn do-not-disturb on.
- Most importantly, be yourself and have fun. My intention is for this podcast to sound like we are simply a couple friends having drinks and chatting about meaningful life stuff.

All interviews are pre-recorded and things can be cut. If you end up saying something you wish you had not said, you can let me know right there or later and I will make a note to cut it out.



INFORMATION I NEED FROM YOU

How Do I Pronounce Your Name (Phonetics):

Official Position in Current Job:

Resource You Would Like Me To Promote:

Where Can Guests Find Out More About You and Your Organization:

WHAT TO EXPECT

PRE-CONVERSATION:

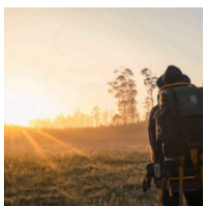
- I will call you and make sure we have a good connection/reception.
- I will mute you and do a short intro (example: Hey there listeners, welcome back, I'm glad you're here. We have a wonderful show for you today. I am here today with my friend _____ who is a _____ at _____, an outreach organization here in Denver, Colorado. _____ and I know each other through _____ and have had some wonderful conversations that I am excited to bring you all in on. She/he/they is/are _____ and I know you'll be inspired by her/him/them as much as I am. _____, welcome to the show.)
- I'll unmute you, you can say hi, whatever else you want and then we will start chatting.

DURING THE CONVERSATION:

- Be yourself. Don't script out responses, it doesn't come off well on interview podcasts.
- After some chatting I'll ask you what you do and how you got there.
- The questions are pretty free form after that.
 - I'll typically ask your favorite part about the work and any significant stories
 - Some people find it helpful to have a piece of paper with a few names, key words, or quotes jotted down to trigger their thoughts
- After 10-15 minutes we'll wade into a heavier topic, we can pre-select this if that is helpful
- Remember this is an informal interview style as if we are meeting up over drinks to chat
 - Feel free to ask questions, disagree, and talk however is comfortable to you.
 - The conversation format is open for a reason. If you want to go a certain direction, let's go there. Remember I can always edit and have you back on another time.
- After we reach a good stopping point I will transition us to a fun final segment where I ask you the most important questions like (Best Free Activity in Denver? Gloves or Mittens, and Would you rather?...). The point of this segment is to add an extra dose of humanity for our listeners.

POST CONVERSATION:

- Be sure to stay on the line after we "say goodbye" and we will talk through any process stuff you have questions about.
- After a few days I will email you a link to the show, along with social media slides for you to use in posts.
- Your sharing drives the audience of Vile Methods and helps introduce the show to your audience which ultimately benefits this ministry of bridging the divides in society.



Where I Plan On Taking The Conversation

Topics are in no particular order.

We'll go where the organic conversation takes us.

- Where are you working and how did you get there?
- Tell us a little about the organization.
- Obstacles facing this type of ministry.
- Favorite aspect(s) of this work.
- Fun topics about you (Denver faves, this or that, would you rather)

Thank you for taking time, giving the energy and making the commitment to have this conversation with me. I know we are going to have a blast. I would love to return the favor, so if there is anything I can do for you in the future, please let me know. At the very least, I owe you a drink sometime.



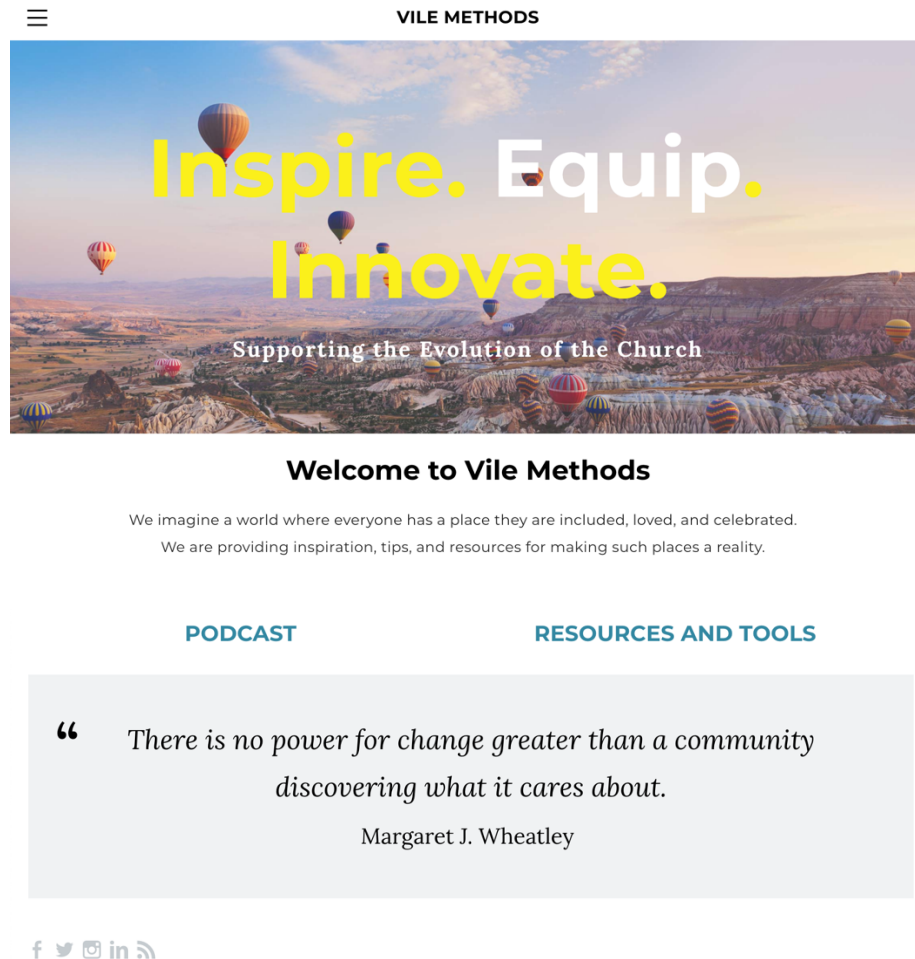
Feel free to reach out to me with any questions you have via email at vilemethodist@gmail.com or phone/text at 913-260-6001.

Cheers!

Tyler Kaufman

Website

The website was created using Weebly and is located at vilemethods.com. The main pages are: *Home*, *Get Started*, *About*, *Podcast*, *Resources and Tools*, and *Ministry Examples*. Screen shots of these pages are provided in referenced order.





The Correct Approach Changes Everything.

Starting

If you are new to missional ministries that concentrate on neighborhood transformation through deep relationships such as community development, neighborly, social enterprises, and creativity activation, we suggest listening to the Vile Methods podcast and reading the Introduction to Vile Methods [blog](#).

Browse Our Resources

We have over 8 different types of resources to help you build community and collaborate with your neighbors. You can find these under the Resources and Tools, Learning Communities, and Ministry Examples tabs.

Learn By Topic

Already know what you are looking for? Have a specific resource need in mind? Check out our Resources and Tools page [here](#).

You can also search for your specific topic in the podcast archive now available on all major podcast platforms.

Services.

Online learning communities are being established now. You can sign up by joining the Facebook group or emailing Tyler at tyler@vilemethods.com.

01 OUR BUSINESS

We Inspire and Equip Innovators to Build Community

02 OUR MISSION

Inspire. Equip. Innovate.

Who Is Tyler?



Tyler is an ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church. He currently serves as the Senior Pastor and Executive Director of AfterHours Denver. Tyler's full-time ministerial service has taken him around the country from Montana to Kansas and New Jersey to Hawaii. Everywhere he has served Tyler has collaborated with others to develop new, innovative, and unique ministries. One of Tyler's favorite ministry projects was "The Underground" an alternative spiritual gathering service with instrumental jazz. The gathering was based around people who wanted to hold deep conversations and participate in regular service projects. Tyler believes that it is in the contextual mix of relationship building and missional service that the divine is most closely experienced. In response, he seeks to create and nurture spaces where such experiences can take place.





VILE METHODS

Established in 2020

Founded by Rev. Tyler Kaufmann in 2020, Vile Methods is focused on providing people with resources and learning communities to help them seek and share the love of Jesus in practical ways.

Our Mission

is to inspire and equip neighbors to collaborate in activating the potential of their community.

Our Team



Rev. Tyler Kaufmann
Founder and Executive
Director

Why the Church?

"I grew up in and had some wonderful experiences in the community of faith. It was in my faith community and through the gospel that I was challenged to grow in compassion, to live justly, and pursue a more peaceful world. Despite what US-American religion has done to Jesus, I still believe that communities centered in the way of Jesus have the potential to transform the world for the better."

Why Beyond the Walls?

"It is where Jesus would be, and indeed where Jesus is already. It is time for us to join him."



Could This Be You?
Chief Strategist

Your bio here.

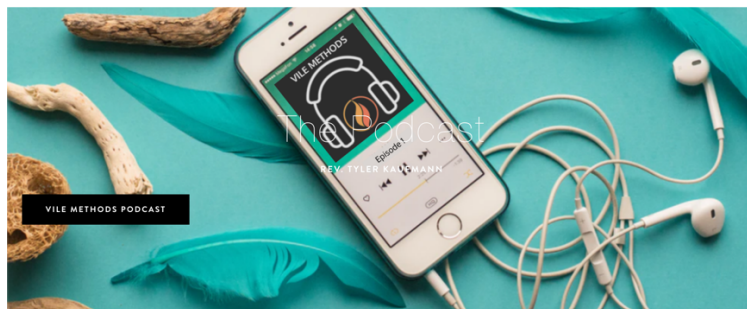


Could This Be You?
Chief Researcher

Your bio here.



VILE METHODS



PODCAST PREMIER EPISODE!

1/10/2021 [0 Comments](#)

Episode 1. Jennifer Kloeppe - Showers for All!

ARCHIVES

[January 2021](#)

[December 2020](#)



VILE METHODS

Resources and Tools



We provide guides on how to locate the gifts in your neighborhood, tools for vision casting, lists of additional educational resources, and links to additional organizations that can support you on your journey.

Below are community analysis tools, links to organizations that can offer further support, and book recommendations for forming groups. If you are looking for inspirational examples of organizations and ministries that already exist visit the Ministry Examples page [here](#).

Explore By Topic



ASSET MAPPING



SOAR ANALYSIS



BOOK
RECOMMENDATIONS



SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS



ICE BREAKERS



TEAM BUILDING EXERCISES



CREATIVITY EXERCISES



APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY



Learning Communities

Sign Ups are now open for the inaugural Vile Methods Learning Community (VMLC) - admission to VMLC 001 can be requested on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3349570778486919>



Showers for All - <https://www.showersforall.org/>

Dry Bones - <https://drybonesdenver.org/>

Purple Door Coffee - <https://www.purpledoorcoffee.com/>

Colorado Village Collaborative - <https://www.coloradovillagecollaborative.org/>

The Network - <https://networkcoffeehouse.org/>

Denver Homeless Out Loud - <https://denverhomelessoutloud.org/>

AfterHours Denver - <https://afterhoursdenver.org/>

Wagon Coffee - <https://wagoncoffeeroasters.com/>

Impact Humanity - <https://www.impactlocally.org/humanitystore/>

SoCe Life Neighboring Movement - <https://neighboringmovement.org/>

Sleep in Heavenly Peace - <https://www.shpbeds.org/>

United Way 211 - <https://unitedwaydenver.org/2-1-1/>

Interfaith Alliance of Colorado - <https://interfaithallianceco.org/>

Facebook Community and LinkedIn Page

The Facebook community page where people can interact with one another can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/VileMethods>. The LinkedIn page is <https://www.linkedin.com/company/vilemethods>.

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