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WWW.Church: Consulting with 19th and 20th Century Congregations in a 21st Century World

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WWW.CHURCH:

CONSULTING WITH 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY CONGREGATIONS

IN A 21ST CENTURY WORLD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE

BY

EARL JAMES PIERCE

PORTLAND, OREGON

CONVOCATION APRIL 2005

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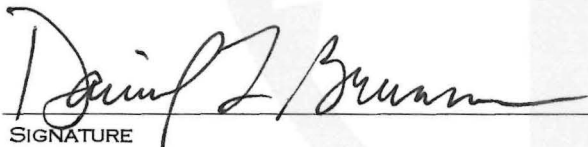
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CONGREGATIONS IN A 21ST CENTURY WORLD**

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To the memory of the Reverend Doctor Richard G. Kapfer, friend and mentor.
+ Sola Deo Gloria +

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ABSTRACT

A new pastor is called and excitement is high. Both the pastor and the congregation begin this journey with high hopes and expectations. Yet too often things get off track quickly and people are left wondering what happened and why aren't things going in the direction we hoped?

The problem comes from a failure to understand the unique nature of a faith community. Understanding the nature includes an understanding of the roles of and the relationship between values, vision and mission in charting a course to the future of their ministry together. This failure in understanding also presents itself when a congregation wants to continue effective mission and ministry and seeks to respond to the changes in their surrounding community.

What is needed is a guided process to help in the transition that any congregation goes through with the arrival of a new pastor or when a congregation attempts to transition into ministry to the emerging culture.

To address this problem, we propose a process by which pastor and people together may discover the basis for Christian community and common values. Through this process, they can develop a common unifying vision, one that will serve to bind them together in community. Once the common values and vision are identified, the third part of the process will focus on developing strategic planning which will guide the congregation in its ongoing mission.

In chapter two, we present biblical materials, which show that congregations have unifying qualities and reasons for being. Then, in chapter three, we present materials from Christian history and thought that demonstrate the role of the apostle/church planter in developing community in the early church.

In chapter four, we will examine the causes that lead to the reduction from five offices to one leading to the shift from an emphasis on mission and new community formation to a focus on maintenance with the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion in the western world. The fifth chapter will present materials from current research and thought which show that since the demise of Christendom congregations have been forced to recognize the need to return to a mission emphasis.

Chapter six explores current research and thinking in the fields of biology, sociology, and psychology regarding the nature of "bonding agents" in community and social interactions (that is, what holds communities together). Then, in chapter seven, we present materials from research and thought in theology, which show other alternatives to congregational renewal and revitalization.

Finally, we present our solution, which is a simple ongoing approach to recovering and reinstituting the biblical precepts underlying the nature and purpose of the church creating a vision for a positive future in the local congregation along with the tools to move the congregation into that future.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Story

Pastor Mark was graduating from the seminary at the top in his class. The excitement of call day (first placement) drawing near was all the talk during morning coffee after classes with fellow students and at home each evening with Mary, his wife of two years. Mark and Mary were ready for whatever assignment the Lord would offer. He knew all there was to know about isagogics, exegetics, hermeneutics, and all the rest that the church deemed necessary for a graduating seminarian to know. All, that is, except how to lead a congregation.

Call day finally arrived. The name of the congregation first, then the name of the town and state were read. The candidate's name came last. Down through the alphabet the dean droned on until the words came – Mt. Ebal Lutheran Church, Nowhere, South Dakota, Pastor Mark! That is it! This is where the Lord is calling him.¹

And, so, following graduation, Pastor Mark and Mary made plans to venture forth onto the Great Plains, which, for them having been raised in suburbia, would require not

¹ Nowhere, South Dakota was founded by German immigrants in the 1870s who were having trouble both with English and directions. When they arrived at what would become Nowhere, they first said, “Now where?” To which another one answered, “Now, here!” The name stuck after the German in them reduced the two words into one, thinking nothing of dropping the second “w.” Why they chose the name Mt. Ebal, on the other hand, see Deut. 11:29 ff. They wanted to be sure that those not of their clan received what was due those not blessed of God.

only a road map but a South Dakota dictionary as well. Nowhere, South Dakota was settled by German farmers over 100 years ago, with no intent of moving on, nor any intent of moving up, with no intention of going anywhere but Nowhere. The pigeonhole mailboxes in the narthex had over 150 slots and only five different last names.

There were the Schmidts, the Schulzs, the Loeschens and the Groehns. These took up about 95% of the boxes. Then there were the “late comers,” arriving in 1905, the Laeschs. They had seen candidates come from the seminary before, about every two years in fact. They knew they would be around long after this young whipper-snapper was long gone, off to greener pastures. “Yep,” said Wil Schmidt, one of the elder patriarchs, “guess we got us another one.” “Ya, schur, you betcha,” replied the grandfatherly Bob Loeschen. Bob obviously was multi-cultural and hung around dem Norwegians too much. Bob was the one who always took the kid from the seminary under his wing and explained the facts of life in the country church to him. After all, Bob had the biggest hay wagon trailer, so it fell to Bob to head down to Saint Louis, gather up the new pastor, his family and all their belongings and move them into the parsonage. This gave Bob plenty of time to brief the Pastor on the do’s and don’ts of Mt. Ebal church.

Pastor Mark was ready. He had heard the stories of these rural parishes, stuck in their ways, locked into the past, unwilling to reach out to the lost in their communities. Only a couple of days before call day Mark and Mary had received a phone call from a friend who had gone out the year before. Pastor John, likewise, was going to make a difference. “Well,” started Mark, “are you making a difference?” “I would like to think I am,” replied John. “I preach and preach and preach the love of Jesus. Each Sunday they

leave saying what a wonderful sermon it was. Nothing ever changes. I asked them about their unchurched neighbors. Even in the Dakotas most areas have about 40% unchurched or de-churched. They know each and every one of them. They know where they were baptized, which church they were married in, which pastor with whom they had a fight, which is why they aren't going to church now. The only thing they don't know is why in the world would we want them in our church? I've talked to my district president and he doesn't want to circulate my name yet. He wants me to get a little more experience. He also said that we need to keep these churches open because they are good givers for missions. I had to agree they did support missions, but they never seem to have enough to make the recommended district salary scale for their pastor."

Mark hung up the phone discouraged but undaunted. He would make a difference. His professors told him his logic in debating doctrine was impeccable. His sermon delivery would have them slain in the spirit (if Lutherans could do such a thing).

The trip to Nowhere was long; longer still for Pastor Mark in the cab of Bob's 1965 un-air-conditioned pickup watching all his priceless books bouncing along on the hay wagon. Mary followed in the couple's paid-for seminary-special Neon which was wheezing to keep up, likewise watching, hoping, praying that those crystal wedding gifts would be cushioned by the layer of hay still on the wagon.

"It's like this, Pastor," Bob explained, "our job at Mt. Ebal is to finish up what the seminary didn't." Mark listened. "We get us a new preacher every couple of years and when a bigger church comes along, off they go. Don't bother unpacking everything," Bob continued.

Bob was right. Two years later a professional moving van was in the driveway of the parsonage. Mark could not understand these people. They would not change. He knew that the church should be about reaching the lost in addition to caring for the church family. They only wanted to care for one another. He knew that the church should be involved in the community. They only wanted to be involved in their own lives. He knew that the pastor should be a voice in the town. They only wanted their pastor to tend to their needs, come to the hospital when they were sick, teach their children, and bury them when they died. He had a vision for tomorrow. They had a love of the past.

And it isn't just the "Pastor Marks," fresh from the seminary, that run into the realities of congregational life. With each new call, each pastor has to explore the territory, discover the landmarks and landmines in the new field, develop the relationships that are at the heart of congregational life. Maybe, just maybe, he will find what it takes for his ministry to make a difference.

Statement of problem

As pastor and people come together to begin a new pastorate, they often fail to understand the interrelated dynamics of common values, vision and mission which make up the character, the "DNA," or the soul of the congregation. For the congregation, which means pastor and people together, to have a future it is necessary to discover the unique nature of this community and find the common ground in all three areas (values, vision, and mission).

Proposal

I propose a facilitated process by which pastor and people together may discover their common bonds formed by Jesus Christ and reflected in the values which bring them

together as a congregation. In this process, the history of the congregation will be explored. Both individual and congregational values that shape the history will be examined. The process will allow opportunity for those involved to discover their personal values and how those values link them to the past, present and future of the congregation. As a result of this discovery, those involved will be able to reprioritize the values that exist in the congregation.

The second part of the process is discovering a vision. The reprioritization of the value system of the congregation will lead to the development of a common unifying vision, which will serve to bind them together in community. Having identified a prioritized list of common values and a common vision for a preferred future, the third part of the process will focus on creating an ongoing means of strategic planning which will guide the members and the congregation itself in their mission.²

Part of the reason for enrolling in this doctoral program was that I would be able to continue to develop theological, Biblical, and sociological support for this process. The Leadership in the Emerging Culture Doctor of Ministry program has allowed me to strengthen my theological understanding of congregational development and life, which is leading to a complete revamping of the VVM process. The current process will be

² The process I am suggesting is one that continues to evolve. It began around 1996 after I accepted my current position as Executive Assistant to the President for Missions and Stewardship for Iowa District West of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The initial framework was developed with Pastor Robert Riggert, my counterpart in the areas of Education and Youth. It has been referred to as the VVM process (Values, Vision, and Mission), and in some form has been used in 60 congregations of the 175 congregations in the district. In addition, VVM has been shared with other district executives, and it is currently being used in five other districts of the LCMS. It is being used not only in congregations with new pastoral leadership but in any congregation seeking to adjust to the changes they see going on in the culture around them.

outlined in chapters seven and eight. The new direction I am envisioning for this process will be outlined in the final chapter

Scope of the Dissertation

The new direction for the process is the result of this dissertation. This study begins with an exploration of the Biblical basis of community from both the Old and New Testaments. In the second chapter the reason for being and unifying factors within the congregation are outlined. How these (the purpose and unifying factors) were used in creating new communities of faith by the apostles is the subject of the third chapter. Moving to the sub- or post-Apostolic period the shift from mission to maintenance is explored in the next section. Chapter five moves to today as the discussion in church growth/church health research centers on bringing the congregational focus back to the mission around us in the emerging culture. The sixth chapter returns to the theme of community and how the subject is currently being explored in the fields of biology, psychology, and sociology and the implications of these new learnings in the sciences for the community of faith. Approaches to congregational redevelopment or revitalization, including my current process, are reviewed in chapter seven before presenting the proposed revised process which will be called WWW.CHURCH.

CHAPTER 2

BLOOD LINES

In this chapter, Biblical material will be presented which shows that Judeo-Christian religious communities have unifying qualities and reasons for being (purpose) derived from their relationship with God. The common failings of Old Testament Israel will be examined and compared with Christian communities of today, especially that of keeping the relationship with God at the center of their communities.

Before we begin to examine the Scriptural accounts, a definition of community is in order:

1: a unified body of individuals: **b**: the people with common interests living in a particular area; *broadly* : the area itself **c** : an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location **d** : a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society **e** : a group linked by a common policy **f** : a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests **g** : a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society **2** : society at large **3 a** : joint ownership or participation **b** : common character : **LIKENESS c** : social activity : **FELLOWSHIP d** : a social state or condition¹

As one may observe from the definition, a Christian community or congregation is very similar to any other community through history and across geography. It may be hoped that what makes a Christian community different is that the prime commonality is Jesus

¹ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary> (accessed July 4, 2003)

Christ. While this may be the case, what can be drawn from the above definition is that if this perspective is only seen from the human side, it could be concluded that community is strictly a human institution based on factors in common with all humanity. It could be argued that community forms out of some human need that draws it together around one of the factors listed above. However, if the causative agent is seen as something other than chance commonalities, such as location or interests, then a different picture of community will emerge. It will be demonstrated here that, rather than human commonalities, God is the one who “draws all men” to Himself, creating community out of chaos. The fact that it is God who creates community needs to be understood first and foremost as any congregation begins to enter into any revitalization process. Without an understanding of God’s role and purpose in creating both human community and Christian community, the unique character of the congregation will be overlooked.

The Unifying Factors for the Old Testament Community

“And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.” (Matt. 3:9 NIV)

In this verse calling Israel to repentance, John the Baptizer chides the Israelites for losing sight of God, their cornerstone, and relying instead on their bloodline back to Abraham. As we move farther back in time we find that God is, indeed, the cornerstone of all human community, religious or otherwise. In Genesis 2:18 we read, “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’”

Here we find God creating of human community, founded by God for the benefit of people. Many have written that to be “in community” is part of the “image of God”

that is an identifying mark of humankind.² An obvious case can also be made that this God-created human community was to be a human/divine community, or religious community, with God at the head.

One could recast the entire *heilsgeschichte* around the concept of community. The community of God, the trinity, created man to be in community with it, creating woman to complete the community. All human beings fell with the fall of Adam and Eve and were left with only the human side of the divine/human community. The story continues as a series of attempts by God to restore the wholeness of community that was His plan from the beginning. No sooner than sin entered the world do we find God seeking Adam out, seeking to restore the relationship. As the human community expands and moves farther away from God, we see God continuing to draw people back to Himself, through Noah and the flood, through the dispersion of languages, down to the covenant with Abraham.

Since the community of Israel traces its roots to Abraham, it is here we begin to see the difference between a natural human community and a religious community. Jesus demonstrates the difference in John 8:39-42:

“Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do the things Abraham did. You are doing the things your own father does.” “We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here.”

² Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1973), 243; Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 213; Roderick T. Leupp, *Knowing the Name of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 29; John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 18.

Jesus is speaking here not to the Pharisees, not to the religious leaders, but to the ones who believed Him (John 8:31), who put their faith in Him (John 8:30). Even though they were coming to faith in the Messiah, they still relied on the bloodline back to Abraham as the source of their religious community. Jesus presses the point home and they finally admit to God as the source (v. 41). In the end these recent followers turn on Him, one could argue, because Jesus was putting faith before bloodline as the source of their community. Even today there are those willing to put bloodline before faith as the cornerstone of their community. This can be seen most evidently in light of the quote above in today's Jewish community. The more observant Jews continue to tell the story and practice the rituals and assume these are enough. They fall short in understanding these Old Testament stories and rites only to be a foreshadowing of the Messiah who came in the person of Jesus Christ. This same reliance on bloodlines occurs as well within the Christian context. It is commonly assumed that Jesus was a Jew because He had Jewish parents. While on the surface this seems innocent enough, the reality is that his ethnic heritage only insured that He would be a member of the human community of those ethnically Jewish. Gen. 17:14 indicates that circumcision is the sign of the covenant, not blood relationship to Abraham. It is God who brings someone into the religious community. Had Jesus not been circumcised He would have been an ethnic Jew but not a member of the household of faith.

While this seems like a small point, it underscores the difference between a community based on genetic bloodline and one based on the blood of the Lamb. It also underscores the continuing problems arising in the Old Testament faith community as,

again and again, they fail to recognize that it was God who created them in community and it is God who continues to bind them to Himself. (See Is. 1:3; Hos. 1:8-9)

As seen above to be an ethnic Jew did not automatically mean that one was a member of the household of faith. At the same time, God did choose to work through this ethnic community to create His religious community. That He was guiding its development both ethnically and spiritually can be seen in Isaac's instructions to Jacob in Gen. 28 to take a wife from a blood relative's family. The blessing was to be a community of peoples, created by God, empowered by God and serving God through faith in God. Paul in Gal. 3 argues the importance of faith over bloodlines where faith is shown to be the justifying factor.

In one of the more interesting debates in Scripture, Exo. 33, Moses argues with God. Moses takes what should naturally be seen as God's position that the ethnic community of Israel is only a religious community as well because of the ongoing presence of God in their midst, concluding with: "What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (Exo. 33:16b NASB)³ Again, we see the continuing struggle between bloodline and God-created as the source of community for Israel.

The Unifying Factors for the New Testament Community

As noted in the passages above (Matt. 3:9; John 8:39-42), by the time of Christ the community of Israel was again basing their faith community on bloodlines. There was a concern for keeping the law and external works of righteousness that became more

³ Michael R. Sullivan, "The Clarification of Values as a Foundation for Exploring a Transition of Washington Crossing United Methodist Church to a Cell Structure, Pennsylvania" (Ph. D. diss., Regent University, 2002), *DAI*, 63, No. 01A (2002): 67.

important than a relationship with God. In the pre-Christian era not only was there a lack of zeal for religious life but a growing laxity in practice as well.⁴ The call to a new community can be seen in the words of Jesus Himself: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to His disciples, He said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matt. 12:48 NIV) In this passage, Jesus calls for a new community brought about by God, focused on a heartfelt response to God’s call and claim on the believer’s life.⁵ The metaphor of family remains, albeit shifted to God as the Father and the believers as brothers and sisters.²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26)

Jesus continues to stretch the hearers. He envisioned a new visible community committed to Him and His mission of restoring Israel.⁶ Not only is this new community created by God but it ranks higher in priority than the natural bloodlines. The new communal relationship with God is of paramount importance if one is to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

In John 19:26, as Jesus makes sure His mother is cared for, we see again the priority of a relationship created by God in Christ as superior to blood relations. Jesus, from the cross, entrusted His mother to one of the disciples rather than to His own half-

⁴ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1981), 430.

⁵ Francois Bovon, "Family and Community in the New Testament," *Sewanee Theological Review* (Sewanee) 45, no. 2 (2002): 2.

⁶ Arthur G. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church: Context, Growth, Leadership & Worship* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 67.

brother James. Jesus, as God, would have known that James would come to faith and would become a leader in the early church. Even as He hung on the cross, Jesus took this opportunity to demonstrate the new community formed through His blood.

Even though Christianity was to be a new community built on Christ, it began as a religious system overlaying this earlier faith community, inheriting many of the same problems that the older Jewish system experienced. The disciples were worried about who would sit closer to Jesus (Matt. 20:21). They wanted to keep children away from Him (Matt. 19:13). They wanted the timetable for His conquest (Mark 13:4). Moreover they were ready to go to battle for the cause (Matt. 26:25). In other words, they still did not get it. Even as He ascended, the disciples were more worried about bloodlines than the power of the blood (Acts 1:6). This continued as a problem in the development of the church as can be seen in Acts 6, where complaints arose in the fledgling community about the disparity in food distribution based on language between the Greek-speaking Jews and those native to Palestine.

The shift from an ethnic-based religious community, a network of pre-existing relationships over which a religious identity is laid, to a faith-based religious community, one in which the relationships are created as a result of the message of the Gospel, begins with the expansion of Christianity outside of its Jewish homeland. How this expansion occurred will be more fully developed in the next chapter. For now, the following passage from the first letter of Peter demonstrates how these new faith communities of Asia Minor were seen and saw themselves as creations of the risen Christ:

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A

PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. (1 Pet. 2:9-10 NASB)

However, over time the struggle between bloodlines and a focus on Christ became a problem for the new Israel of God. By the time of Cyprian of Carthage, the development of the episcopate can be seen with the persecution of the church subsiding. One author suggests: “Since therefore confessors and martyrs retreated from prominence, ‘sovereignty passed from the ‘spiritual men’ to the bishops and their clergy.’”⁷ In the first chapter of Revelation, Jesus, speaking to the seven churches through John, attempts to draw them from who they are and back to whose they are:

“You have forsaken your first love . . . You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam . . . You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. . . . you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead . . . I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you . . . So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold I spit you out of my mouth.”

Comparison to Today

In my experience these words from Revelation, written to second- or third-generation Christian communities, could just as easily be addressed to many congregations today. As it happened in Asia Minor, it happens in USAmerica: congregations become lukewarm, depending on their bloodline rather than the blood.

Perhaps it is not their fault. Donald McGavran, the “father” of church growth, has proposed the homogeneous unit principle, which is, that churches grow fastest when

⁷ Alan L. Hayes, *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, 149.

appealing to their own kind of people,⁸ the evidence (below) is that the principle is true, to a point. Churches in the twentieth century grew fast by relying on existing kinship ties as the networking mechanism for spreading the Gospel. However, as will be shown, unless the Gospel message includes the proclamation of a new way of relating to one another and with all humankind, the new faith communities will be based on old relationships. This takes us back to the point of bloodlines or Christ's blood as the foundation of the community.

In the case of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, according to McGavran,⁹ it grew at the decadal rate of 420 percent from 1958 to 1962, leading the way of all mainline denominations, using the homogeneous unit principle. They began missions to reach “our people” out there. While there is nothing wrong with this emphasis, one has to ask whether, as a result of this approach, a religious covering was being applied to a pre-existing community. Another way one might express this is that a baptism was applied to the existing community, resulting in “a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5, NASB) to transform lives and relationships. In many of the congregations I work with, the bases for the relationships are multi-generational kinship ties not new communities in Christ.

This is not a new approach to missions in the United States for the LCMS (nor for other mainline churches according to McGavran). Rev. Friedrich Wyneken, the “Father of Home Missions” in the LCMS, wrote many an impassioned letter back to Germany seeking additional help in reaching “our people.” One such letter concluded:

⁸ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 369.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

Help, in the name of Jesus help! What will become of our brethren in 10 or 20 years if help does not come? To the disgrace of the German name, to the shame of the church, and to the eternal reproach before the Lord a German population that knows nothing of its God and Savior will inhabit the West, and subsequent centuries will point the finger at the people and church which in the midst of plenty in its own house has left its children to perish.¹⁰

This focus on “our people” has changed little until recently. A story from my internship in east Texas in the mid-1980s illustrates this point. While attending a circuit meeting in one of the neighboring towns I was told the story of the first LCMS missionary in east Texas in 1926. He had been sent by the district to explore new mission possibilities and traveled from town to town in this effort. He began by securing a copy of the local telephone book. He then underlined those names of apparent German heritage. Next, he conducted canvassing work, going only to those homes he had noted in the phone book. His first question at the door was “*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*” (Do you speak German?) If the answer were “*Ja*” the conversation would continue; if not, that was the end of the evangelistic effort. Closer to present day, I once served a vacancy in a congregation which had been on district support for over twenty years with no signs of expanding its ministry. I heard about one of the founding members who had gone to every home in town in an evangelism effort. I was looking forward to meeting this man. When I finally did and asked him about the early days of the congregation and his efforts, he told me that he did not go to every home, he only went to the ones that he heard were Lutheran. The congregation later closed because they were unable or unwilling to develop an effective outreach ministry.

¹⁰ Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod*, (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 97.

The result of this focus on bloodlines over Christ's blood can be seen in the findings of a 1997 survey.¹¹ Dr. Mueller found four kinds of LCMS Lutherans throughout the United States. "Type A" have been Lutheran all their lives. He found that this constituted between 50 and 80% of the respondents. Those who married their way in are referred to as "Type B." The membership is comprised of 20 to 25% of this type. "Type C" Lutherans are those who found the Lutheran Church "all by themselves," that is, they were on a faith journey and tried out an LCMS congregation and remained. As many as 15 to 20% are Type C. Mueller found an "infinitesimal" sliver joined as "Type D," those sought and won for Christ by a Missouri Synod Lutheran.

We must ask the stereotypical Lutheran question, what does this mean? It means that in the last two years the LCMS had a net loss of approximately forty thousand members with all signs pointing to a continuing drop in both membership and attendance. What does this mean for the church consultant working with these or other congregations that were formed based on pre-existing relationships? It means that in the task of congregational revitalization and refocusing the consultant must dig deep into the history and culture of the congregation to understand the bases of the relationships, the kinship ties and all the other factors that bring about community. This is not to say that Christ is not present, nor is it to say that the congregation is not focused on Him. It is to ask whether the relationships which formed the community first grew out of a relationship with Christ or were there other ties already in place. In many congregations experiencing problems, the problems are often the result of pre-existing interpersonal relationships rather than anything the pastor or other leaders are doing counter to good practices in a

¹¹ Charles S. Mueller Sr., *History, Mystery & Gift* (Saint Louis: Lutheran Church Extension Fund, 1997).

Christian community. It has been my experience in working with congregations that an underlying network of community that is not replaced by new bonding in Christ will continue to exhibit unhealthy, human-centered qualities rather than demonstrate the new creation in Christ that it is called to be. These are important questions not only for the consultant but for any pastor as he or she begins a new call.

Another personal example of how this tension of bloodlines versus blood works itself out in the life of a congregation occurred many years ago. Before I attended seminary I was in the construction business, which required moving the family frequently. One such move brought us to Las Vegas, Nevada. We attended the closest congregation a few times but had not yet decided to join. One day while I was at a construction site, my wife had a flat tire. With no way to reach me, she called the church and asked for help. As it turned out one of the elders was off that day and was able to change the tire for my wife. Later the secretary asked her whatever possessed her to call the church. My wife said she saw the church as her community because of Christ and did not hesitate in making the call.

Purpose of Community

Old Testament

The example of helping with a flat tire is only one of many that can be seen as reflecting the unifying qualities and purposes derived from a faith community's relationship with God. Let us return to the original community of God descending from Abraham. The call of Abraham to leave his homeland to go to a place of God's choosing is the beginning of the community of Israel both as an ethnic unity and as a "holy

nation.”¹² However, it is more than the call and the promise of God that bound Abraham’s descendants together.

The Noahic covenant insured that God would not destroy humankind again by means of a flood. The Abramic covenant insured God’s promise to create through Abraham a large and unique people as numerous as the sands of the seashore. This same covenantal promise continued through Isaac and Jacob as God’s promise to bless His chosen people. Yet, we do not see the creation of what could be called a truly religious community, distinct from and yet inclusive of the ethnic community, until the Exodus event. This was unique in religious history. Other religions developed because of certain religious ideals or ethical principles. The religion of Israel rested on a historical event interpreted by faith and responded to in the same way.¹³

Following this demonstration of God’s desire to bless His chosen people we find the development of a unique cultus. The recognition of the Exodus event as the turning point in the history of the descendants of Abraham is highlighted in one of the rites established by God to be performed after returning to the Promised Land. Even though the community was referred to as Israelites even before they entered Egypt, this passage from Deuteronomy 26:5-10 shows that God had created a unique people for His purposes:

Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and

¹² Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 83.

¹³ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 148.

oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey: . . .” (NIV)

The change from Aramean to Israelite was due to the outstretched arm and mighty hand of God.¹⁴ While the earlier events involving Noah and Abraham provide the covenantal promises, the Exodus event provides the story and the rituals that become the unifying qualities and purposes for the people of God known as Israel.¹⁵ It is the continual telling of the story and practice of the ritual that provide the glue for the religious community.

The importance of the story and the ritual is found in the annual observance of the Passover Seder in which participants not only retell the story of what happened to their ancestors but also see themselves as participants in the event itself, transported, as it were, through time and space by the ritual. One section of the Haggadah (liturgy for the Passover) demonstrates this most effectively. In the story of the four types of the children,¹⁶ one of the children, described as the wicked child, asks: “What is the meaning of this service mean to you?” To which the Haggadah answers:

“Saying you, he excludes himself, and because he excludes himself from the group, he denies a basic principle of our faith. You in turn should set his teeth on edge and say to him: ‘Because of what the Eternal did for me when I came forth from Egypt’ I do this. For me and not for him (the wicked child); had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.”¹⁷

¹⁴ There is some debate within the Jewish community regarding the antecedent for “Aramean.” In the Haggadah mention is made of Leban as the antecedent rather than Jacob or Abraham offering a variation from the Biblical text. Shlomo Riskin, *The Passover Haggadah* (New York: KTAV Publishing, 1983), 74.

¹⁵ Bright, *A History of Israel*.

¹⁶ Riskin, *The Passover Haggadah*, 55.

¹⁷ Ibid., 58.

To be part of the faith community means to be part of the Exodus experience regardless of time or space. When we enter stories through rituals, the response is as if we were actually there.¹⁸ Likewise, to be part of the ethnic community of Israel does not automatically include one in the faith community, nor does lack of bloodlines automatically exclude one from the faith community (Deut. 26:11 ff; Gen. 7:12). The faith community is created by God through His actions and perpetuated and expanded through the telling of the story and participation in the rituals, which are the visual elements in the telling of the story. While the Passover Seder is an annual event, this is not to say that it is only once per year the story and ritual are to be remembered.

Maimonides infers that we are commanded to remember the Exodus not only on the Seder night but on every night – and day – of the year. This mitzvah is fulfilled by a mental and verbal recollection of the ancient events, or what we might refer to as cognitive remembrance.¹⁹

New Testament

If covenant, story, and ritual are the binding, formative factors used by God in the creation of the faith community of the Old Testament, are there similar factors for the Christian faith community? They are the same, not only in having a covenant, story and ritual, but the same covenant, story, and ritual.²⁰ The difference comes in the fulfillment of each through the coming of the Christ. The covenant with Abraham carries through to the descendents of Abraham by faith as Paul records in Romans 9: "In other words, it is

¹⁸ David A. Hogue, *Remember the Future Imagining the Past* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 145.

¹⁹ Riskin, *The Passover Haggadah*, 14.

²⁰ Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, "The Ordering of Community: New Testament Perspectives," *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 23.

not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." (NIV)

Regarding the story and the ritual, Ellen Bradshaw Aitken makes these points:

Some texts . . . present themselves explicitly as texts about Jesus, but through the medium of telling a story about Jesus, they function to shape a new community, promoting a particular lifestyle or ethic, . . . inculcating a "character" or self-understanding, and retelling a narrative that is understood as central to the community's identity.²¹

It is not only to provide the basis of a new community but to tie the new community to its historical roots as Aitken continues:

Similarly, the saying of Jesus concerning the cup – "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" – defines the meal in relationship to the narrative of the covenant at Sinai in Exodus 24, as well as to the reshaping of that narrative, in terms of a "new covenant" in Jeremiah 31. This saying does something further, however: it defines the cultic action of the Corinthian community in terms of the making and renewing of the covenant. Just as the cult legend is recalled and actualized in 1 Corinthians 10, so the words concerning the cup allow the practice of the Lord's Supper to be a reenactment of the foundational covenantal ritual.²²

Aitken sees the Passover ritual continuing in the communion ritual through the words of Jesus:

"Do this in remembrance of me." This phrase, placed on the lips of Jesus, makes Jesus the source and founder of the ongoing cultic practices of the community, that is, for its covenantal character. Jesus is thus envisioned as the initiator of the way in which Israel's cult legend, including the covenantal meal, is reenacted through the memory of his death.²³

Covenant, story, and ritual are what Paul would offer as the foundations of the new Christian communities he developed in his missionary journeys with the chief cornerstone being Christ. This concept will be further developed in chapter four, which

²¹ Ibid., 20.

²² Ibid., 25.

²³ Ibid.

will explore the role of the apostle (church planter) in creating new faith communities in the first century world with implications for church planting today.

A Common Purpose

As with the Old Testament community of faith, “joining the Jesus group meant accepting God as the maker of community.”²⁴ The purpose of the “Jesus group,” (Christian faith community) likewise is the same, which was/is to be the agency through which the Good News of a restored relationship with God would be shared with the world.

Old Testament Roots

Since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, God has been seeking to restore that relationship between Himself and humankind begun on the sixth day. Even as they fell, God sought them out (Gen. 3:9). Verse 15 of Gen. 3 speaks of God’s desire to restore the relationship through the promise of a descendant of Adam who will destroy the cause of the original temptation. Throughout the Old Testament is example after example of God calling His people to reach out to the rest of the fallen world with the message of God’s desire to reestablish a relationship with all of His creation. Even in the Exodus story, binding the Israelites as God’s community, comes the call to be a blessing to the alien.

The book of Jonah demonstrates God’s desire that none would be lost. God’s willingness to forgive the sinner is played out in stark contrast to Jonah’s unwillingness to share God’s love with those outside of the faith community.

²⁴ Jerome H. Neyrey, "Community Formation in the Early Church," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (Jan 2004): 183.

Beyond the role of the individual sharing the Good News, the community itself was to be seen as an example of the restored relationships between people and between people and their creator because of God's desire to bless all nations through them.²⁵ That Israel stood as a blessed city on a hill was to be seen as a beacon to the nations according to the psalmist:

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, *Selah*² that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.³ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.⁴ May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. *Selah*⁵ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. (NIV)

The prophet Isaiah, while foretelling of the coming Messiah, also offers words of instruction for the faith community of Israel: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." (Is. 49:6 NIV)

Israel failed in this responsibility to carry out its purpose.²⁶ Bloodlines won out over a desire to share the love of God beyond its ethnic community. God, however, continued the task of bringing all people back into a relationship with Him through His Son and the body of Christ, which is the Church.

The Blood of the Lamb Rather than Bloodlines

The purpose for the new Israel of God is found in what is known as the Great Commission of Matt. 28:18-20. The new Israel of God was not to be tied to bloodlines as

²⁵ LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 91.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

evidenced in “πάντα τὰ ἔθνη” (all ethnic groups – all nations) (v. 19). This new faith community was not to hold itself together through kinship ties, but by the presence of the living Christ in its midst: “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matt. 18:20 NIV) *The Augsburg Confession* builds upon this concept in declaring the Church to be wherever the Word and Sacraments are present: “The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the Sacraments are administered rightly.”²⁷

Peter also sees the power of the risen and living Christ as central to the creation of this new faith community: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 2:5 NIV) Rather than a building image, Paul sees the Church in terms of a human body dependent on the head, which is Christ, when he writes: “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Eph. 4:16 NIV)

Even this Christ-created unity is part of God’s mission to bring the Good News to all. Jesus, in His high-priestly prayer recorded in John 17, prays that the Christian community lives out its purpose in unity as a demonstration to the world of the power of God in its life together.²⁸

²⁷Tappert, Theodore G. *The Augsburg Confession : Translated from the Latin*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000, c1959.

²⁸ LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 210.

Action

The faith community did not only live out the Good News, but was active as the sending agency for mission work as can be seen in Acts 13:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1 NIV)

Not only do we see in this passage the role of the faith community in sending missionaries into the field, but also that the church was becoming the diverse community anticipated by Christ in His commissioning of the disciples. Those listed here as prophets and teachers, it would seem, do not share a common bloodline. Also of note is the fact that none of the "12" apostles are present for this event, further distancing bloodline from the new community of faith.^{29 30}

The faith community was not just to be a sending agency but a fellowship of disciples each of whom had received the call to "go and make disciples." The aorist, passive use of the verb can include the meanings: as you go, as you conduct yourself, as you live. The commission was given to disciples, not to an organization, not to an institution. It was given to followers of the risen Christ as their individual marching orders, the way they were to live, making disciples. The work is too important to be left to a committee or an organization. The importance of this concept in the life of the early church will be explored later in this dissertation.

²⁹ Scott Bartchy, *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, 96.

³⁰ The work of these missionaries in establishing new faith communities apart from the Old Testament bloodlines is the topic of the next chapter.

Scripture does give us examples of the simple, everyday Christians, some named, others not, carrying out this commission. The book of Acts records: “In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias.” (NIV) The seven verses in chapter 9 are all the record we have of him, yet, through his witness, through his willingness to share the Gospel, the persecutor Saul became the missionary Paul. Another example is Tabitha, “who was always doing good and helping the poor.” Through her healing by Peter, “This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.” (Acts 8:2 NIV) The first church to send out missionaries deliberately was itself founded by nameless disciples: “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” (Acts 8:2 NIV) Thus, the first missionary church is also the first faith community begun not only through the work of ordinary disciples, but the first to cross the lines of ethnicity and language. Through these efforts a congregation was started reflecting the multi-ethnic diversity of God’s creation, bound not by bloodlines but wholly and only through the blood of the Lamb.

In this chapter it has been demonstrated that the foundation of the community of faith was and is to be the blood of Jesus Christ. The relationship of the individual with his or her creator is a product of God’s desire to be in relationship with His creation. It is this same desire that creates a faith community by bonding the believers into a social grouping called the Israel of God in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament. In both cases, it is the power of God that creates the community. It is not an inherited right due to a prior relationship through an ancestor. How this power was evident in the expansion of the early Church from its roots in Judea is the subject of the next chapter

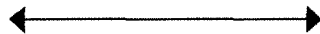
CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF THE APOSTLE IN CREATING COMMUNITY

This chapter will attempt to articulate the role of the apostle in the creation of Christian community. To arrive at that articulation, I will reexamine a definition of community and connection, both in additional Scriptural context and in the general understanding of the culture. Next, we will explore through Scripture how the apostles created community. Finally, the role of today's apostles will be discussed, leading to suggestions for implementation of a model of church planting which will take into account the need for community and connectedness in a new congregation. When working with an established congregation, the factors that were important in its founding, no matter how many years ago, need to be explored and recovered for the congregation to move forward.

Understanding Community

Obviously, the first connection is between God and man. Flowing from this relationship through the creative power of God was the creation of woman and the establishment of the first human community, husband and wife.



The development of community began with husband and wife, leading to families. The next larger social grouping would be clan, that is, "a people or group of peoples regarded

as deriving from a common stock.”¹ Continuing expansion of the human population led to tribes, “a social group comprising numerous families, clans, or generations together with slaves, dependents, or adopted strangers.”² The binding factor through all these groups is blood. A biological link, the bloodlines, is what brings them into community. It is through this community that God begins the process of restoring His created beings as can be seen in Genesis 17 where the covenant between God and Abraham is established through the circumcision ritual.

This covenant includes slaves and others not strictly within the bloodline as if they were part of the “family.” However, we begin to see the importance of the covenant over and against the bloodline with the threat of death to Moses for not circumcising his son while in exile in Sinai (Exod. 4:24-26). Likewise, the movement of God outside of the kinship community towards the alien begins to become apparent as the Israelites begin their trek to the promised land. God is seen in Deuteronomy 10 as one who shows no partiality and loves the alien. That the promise of God to restore both the vertical and horizontal relationships for those outside of the bloodline of Abraham can be seen in the provision by God for their inclusion in the Passover celebration if he is circumcised. (Exod. 12:48 NIV) Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple also shows that the community of faith is open to all whom the Lord calls. (1 Kings 8:41 NIV)

The faith community in the Old Testament can be seen as growing out of kinship ties through the covenant established by God with His creation. Provision is made for those outside of the bloodlines to be incorporated into the community through

¹ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.*

² *Ibid.*

circumcision or through baptism.³ However, the basic commonality or thread, that is, that which is held in common by the faith community, is genetic relationship along with the covenant which began with the ancestry.

Today's understanding of community, on the other hand, cannot be so neatly summarized. The online dictionary consulted above holds nearly a dozen definitions of community, from common interests to location to history and economics. In a chapter entitled "What Community Is and Why We Need It" in the 1993 book *Creating Community Anywhere* the authors define community in this way:

- Community is a dynamic whole that emerges when a group of people:
- Participates in common practices;
 - Depends on one another;
 - Makes decisions together;
 - Identifies themselves as part of something larger than the sum of their individual relationships; and
 - Commits themselves for the long term to their own, one another's and the group's well being.⁴

For new church development, gone are the concepts of kinship ties in community and of location as the binding agent for community today. The implications of this transformation for today's apostles are tremendous as shall be seen later.

Moving to the New Testament, the shift is away from natural kinship ties as the basis of community towards supernatural ones through Christ. The Louw/Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament finds over twenty terms, nearly all of them based on familial associations, in use in the New Testament to describe the relationships

³ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1967), 11.

⁴ Carolyn R. and Anundsen Shaffer, *Creating Community Anywhere*, essay (New York, NY: Tarcher/Putnam books, 1993), 10.

between believers. Jesus is forming a new community, a community based on His blood and His relationship with the individual and with the individuals interconnected as His church.

New Testament Church Planting



The vertical connectedness of God and people in Christ has come down to meet the horizontal connectedness between people. Restoring the vertical connection through His life, death and resurrection, Christ now empowers the apostles to restore the horizontal with the command: “Love one another.” However, given the fallen, albeit now restored, state of humankind, the lessons learned did not have immediate implications, as the church grew first through the older style kinship ties.⁵ At Pentecost “there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.” (Acts 2:5 NIV)

In other words, there were Jews, kinsmen, relatives, those already in community through the natural order. “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” (Acts 2:41 NIV)

The community, now established through the vertical connection created by Christ’s blood, began to discover the horizontal dimensions as we read in Acts 2:42 and following:

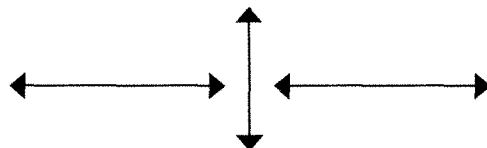
They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . . All the believers were together and had everything in common. . . .they gave to anyone as he had need. . . . they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

⁵ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 21.

It would take divine intervention for the new horizontal expression of community to move beyond the older forms of connection. Peter discovered that intervention through a vision and responded to the call from the Roman Cornelius: Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism.” (Acts 10:34 NIV) This began a shift from bloodlines as the primary methodology of connection, through the horizontal link of familial relationships to the vertical connection with Christ. The new God-given methodology of the connectedness flows from the vertical relationship with Christ to the horizontal connectedness with one another. Factors other than family of origin became the means through which the Gospel was communicated and the community of faith expanded. Greek-speaking Jews reached beyond the bloodlines, utilizing the commonality of language to create faith and new faith communities. At Antioch they began to speak to Greeks, not just Greek-speaking Jews, but racially, religiously, and culturally Greeks (Ελληνιστάς).

That a new kind of community was growing out of this effort can be seen in Acts 11:29: “The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.” (NIV) Here we have the use of a kinship term, brother, being applied to this new family unit, the Christian community.

Thus the model was developed for establishing new faith communities, using existing horizontal connections to restore the vertical connection so that new horizontal connections can be established. This was the case in Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Derbe, Lystra and Iconium.



The next major shift takes place when the apostles move their church planting efforts to Europe, beginning in Macedonia. If there was a Jewish community, it probably was not very large since there seems to have been no synagogue. Paul could not rely on bloodlines as the means by which to introduce the Gospel. He found instead Gentile women down by the river. There was still a horizontal connection here. Acts 16:14 tells us that Lydia was a “worshipper of God” or God-fearer in some translations. In other words, she knew the God of the Jews; she had a connection already as Paul brings her the complete connection through Jesus Christ. Her home became the center for the development of the community through her household members and through those who were brought to faith through the work of the church planters.

Paul’s experience in Athens demonstrates the importance of some preexisting connectedness for proclamation of the Gospel. With neither a synagogue nor a core of “worshippers of God,” Paul attempts to bring the Gospel and the relationship with God with less than inspiring results. “A few men became followers of Paul and believed” is the beginning of the church at Athens. From the Scriptural record, Paul did not return, nor is this church mentioned again except as part of a Pauline narrative in First Thessalonians.

Moving on to Corinth, Paul returned to the methodology of working through existing relationships and bloodlines. Finding resistance to the message, Paul resolved to take his message exclusively to the Gentiles. (No sooner does he say this than Luke records that the next converts were the synagogue ruler and his entire household.) Luke

then goes on to say that many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized as well, encouraging Paul to spend another eighteen months in Corinth.

Moreover, what did he do in those eighteen months? What was his methodology for creating the relationships necessary for this church to survive? As detailed in the first chapter, the desire for connectedness, both vertical and horizontal is inherent in the humankind, part of the image of God in which they were created. Paul proclaimed the Gospel, bringing people back into that relationship with God through Christ – the vertical connection. However, Paul also proclaimed a new relationship with one another as well:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. . . . Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; . . . All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. (2 Cor. 5:16 ff NIV)

According to Mark Strom, in Greek society the human needs for community were met in three overlapping ways: family, club, and citizenship. Greek thought was that humans existed in three expressions of relationships: family, tribe, and country/nation.

In a quite remarkable way, Paul's idea of *ekklesia* managed to encompass all three: 1. It is a voluntary association with regular gatherings of a relatively small group of like-minded people. 2. It has roots in, and takes some of the character of, the household unit. 3. These small local churches were invested with a supra-national and supra-temporal significance. . . . Only Paul's understanding of *ekklesia* embraces all three ideas of community to which people gave their commitment in the ancient world at the time. . . . the distinctive element in Paul's conception was its combination of all three models of community.⁶

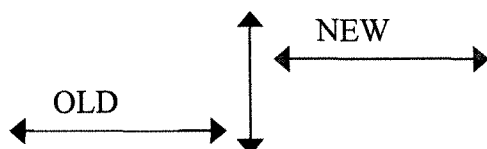
Paul's first step in creating the horizontal connection was through the vertical, following what was noted above: the participation in common practices.⁷ Through participation in

⁶ Mark Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace and Community*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 171-172.

⁷ Shaffer, *Creating Community Anywhere*, 10.

the Eucharist the concept of the unity of the many into the one becomes apparent.⁸ Paul uses the power of the Word and the Sacrament of Baptism to develop the new horizontal dimension of the faith community in 1 Corinthians 12:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. (NIV)



Here we see the power of the vertical, that is, the relationship of the individual believer with Christ transformed into relationships within the new faith community, connected to the Living Head through the water and the wine. The basis of community, that is, the horizontal connection based on bloodlines, location, or status is being replaced by the connection through the vertical, that is, through the blood of the Lamb, so that now the relationships all flow from the primary relationship with Christ.⁹ In addition to the verses above, Paul stresses this flow in Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (3:28 NIV) Again in Colossians: “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” (3:11 NIV)

Through this new horizontal arrangement based on the vertical relationship with Christ, the faith community finds its purpose and fulfillment in all the other aspects of

⁸ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 147.

⁹ David Meconi, "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic: The Early Church Was the Catholic Church," *New Oxford Review* (Berkeley) 68, no. 3 (March 2001): 2.

community that were outlined above (“Participate in common practices; Depend on one another; Make decisions together; Identify themselves as part of something larger than the sum of their individual relationships; and Commit themselves for the long term to their own, one another’s and the group’s well being”). Two other aspects, however, define the religious community which are not found in the non-spiritual communities described above. These are the concept of family described by Paul in Romans and Ephesians relative to Abraham¹⁰ and the concept of universality: “that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Cor. 5:19 NIV)

Christ is God reestablishing the vertical connection with the Father and through that connection reestablishing the horizontal community through Word and Sacrament. But what is the glue that binds this new community together? Mark Strom sees it as love:

It is clear that Paul led his communities into a new process of framing their identities and purposes. It was a profoundly relational strategy, crafted in the moment to demonstrate what it meant to choose the well-being of others in imitation of the dying and rising of Christ. Paul left the Corinthians having to work and learn together. . . . The centerpiece of Paul’s new way of living and conversing was love. . . . The way of love required service, partnership and edification. It eclipsed every gift, including prophecy, languages and knowledge.¹¹

Called together by God, bound together by Christ’s love, the new community formed is more than the usual voluntary association that we think of today. Paul makes this clear in an often-overlooked phrase found in Romans 12:5 where he writes: “so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

¹⁰ Adam G. Cooper, “In the Bosom of Abraham: Identity and Formation of Christians as ‘Sons of Abraham’ in the Early Church,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* (Adelaide) 34, no. 3 (Nov 2000): 7.

¹¹ Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace and Community*, 194-195.

It is one thing to belong to a club or a group. The image of this is of an individual to the many. However, it is quite another to visualize the one-on-one commitment that Paul is calling for here when he says that “each member belongs [*hooked in, tied, bound, obligated, linked, stuck, needed by*] to all the others” (emphasis mine). These few words belie the commonly held assertion in USAmerica that one can be a Christian without the Church and should serve as a foundational value for today’s apostle. This opinion is held not only by the culture, but within the church as well. In a new book, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian*, the author illustrates this point:

I remember sitting in evangelistic meetings as a young Christian hearing several well-meaning preachers (later, I myself was one such, I must admit) saying, “All you have to do to be saved is to accept Jesus into your heart. There is no church to join. There’s nothing to do. You can have a relationship with Jesus right here tonight all by yourself.” Usually the preacher would suggest that a good Bible teaching church would be helpful to the new believer (as vitamins help a diet), but what was most important was a “personal relationship by asking Jesus into your heart.”¹²

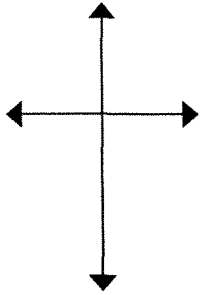
To see that this emphasis will resonate in the emerging culture one only needs to open Leonard Sweet’s book, *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church*, and turn therein to the letter C for Connectivity:

The basic unit of the future is not the isolated individual, not the communal collective, but the interdependent collective. . . . The church must connect people through communication in community for communion through both physical and virtual venues.¹³

¹² Tod E. Bolsinger, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 174.

¹³ Leonard Sweet, Brian D. McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer, *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 74.

Review of Current Practices



In a review of church growth and church planting material, we find that following the Pauline model of connecting the unbeliever first to Christ and then to fellow believers has not been the singular focus for new churches in the United States. This lack of intentionality concerning the creation of new communities flowing out of the redemptive power of the cross has led to churches that have not, in turn, exhibited the same missionary zeal we find so apparent in the early church.¹⁴

Moreover, while some would argue that Paul exhibits the multi-tasking skill of a modern entrepreneur¹⁵ developing a fully equipped congregation, I tend to agree with Strom who sees the “*ekklesia*” as Paul’s model for the new humanity flowing out of the individual and corporate connections with Christ.¹⁶ To an extent, Paul’s approach to church planting flows out of his personality:

Extroverted NT’s [referring to the Myers-Briggs scale] often excel as missionaries . . . [Paul’s] theology of the priority of faith, of Truth as a natural perception and of the principle of love are approaches of an NT mind combined with the strong extraverted emphasis on congregational life.¹⁷

¹⁴ Andras Koranyi, "Mission as Call the Metanoia and Witness to Hope-a Historical Survey," *International Review of Mission* (Geneva) 88, no. 350 (Jul 1999): 268.

¹⁵ Ken Behnken, "Apostolic Entrepreneurs: A Study of the Book of Acts as It Speaks of Entrepreneurial Church Planting," presented at the Mission Partners (New Orleans, LA: LCMS, 14/Nov 2001).

¹⁶ Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace and Community*, 170.

¹⁷ Peter Tufts Richardson, *Four Spiritualities: Expressions of Self, Expressions of Spirit - A Psychology of Contemporary Spiritual Choice*, (Palo Alto, CA: Davis-Black Publishing, 1996), 68.

This same personality would assume that new patterns of thought and behavior would come through the transforming power of Christ into the horizontal relationships. The centrality of the meal, story, and conversation amongst members of the new community regarding Christ, that is, the vertical connection, during the church planting phase of the development of a new mission field would lead to horizontal connections unbounded by an organizational framework.¹⁸

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod produced the *Manual for Church Planters* in the early 1980s.¹⁹ This three-ring bound manual of over 400 pages served as the “textus receptus” for church planting in the LCMS for most of the next two decades. It has since been abandoned in favor of a more flexible approach to the topic. The manual grew out of the experiences in the LCMS during its high point in home missions in the late 1950s – early 1960s. The manual focuses on working through existing horizontal relationships: kinship ties, location, etc. as the means to develop the vertical connection.

Once established, however, the development of the congregation is based on organization principles and practices found in existing congregations. There is little attention paid to the creation of a new community; rather, the assumption is of an existing community that now has added the vertical dimension.

Coming through training using that resource, I have been personally involved in planting eight congregations between 1983 and 1996. Whether unconsciously, serendipitously, or whatever, the congregations that were established through my work do exhibit signs of

¹⁸ Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace and Community*, 172.

¹⁹ Roger W. Leenerts, *Manual for Church Planters*, (Saint Louis, MO: Board for Mission Services; North American Missions LCMS, 1980), 450.

new horizontal connectedness different from the usual congregation in our church body. While this was not intentional by design, it was probably due to my personality type and the fact that I am a convert to the Lutheran Church. This is important to note because in being a convert I have no history, no connection, no preexisting community experience on which to base my approach to what a church should be.

Recommendations

In my current role as a mission executive I have been working with my missionaries so that they would go into their fields with the intent of creating new, unique, faith communities. If this focus on community creation is not intentional, the church plant may develop dependent on the church planter as the source and focus of the connectedness of the congregation. In the past, when the assumption was that the planter would become the first resident pastor, that dependency on the planter was not necessarily a bad thing. Aside from the issues of a personality cult, the concept of the planter becoming the pastor allowed a congregation to develop with a unified vision. The downside, obviously, is that when the planter/pastor leaves, so does the vision and in many cases, the congregation splinters because the horizontal connections flowed through the planter, not through the vertical connection in Christ. That is, of course, unless the planter developed the ownership of the vision within the congregation, which is what creating community is all about. To develop ownership of the vision, the planter would have to develop the horizontal connections, the relationships, through Word and Sacrament, through Christ flowing into and through the lives of the members. The ownership of a new vision of community life necessitates a break with the past, again, as

mentioned above, the vertical intruding into the horizontal. The new vision is one focused on Christ and the life together He intends for them.

Today, the model being followed is much closer to the overseas model that does not expect the apostle/planter to become the pastor. The apostle is to develop a worshipping community and raise up local leaders, ala Timothy and Titus, and then move on, having established a new faith community. For this kind of church planting to take place, today's apostles have to be aware and committed to developing both dimensions of connectedness in their approach to mission work. This awareness will grow, to an extent, out of self-awareness and the need to explore and expand, if need be, the apostle's skills in social awareness. The Mission Planters' Institute of the LCMS is moving in this direction with its approach to training today's apostles.

If you cannot speak like angels, If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus, You can say He died for all.
If you cannot rouse the wicked, With the judgment's dread alarms,
You can lead the little children To the Savior's waiting arms.

This verse, from the hymn "Hark, the Voice of Jesus Calling," demonstrates well the two dimensions of church planting. First, there is the bringing of the Gospel to people who have not heard and second, the creating of a new faith community. The apostle/planter needs to work deliberately in both fields to expand the kingdom of our God throughout the earth, restoring people into the vertical relationship with their heavenly Father through Christ and through that relationship into restored relationships with one another.

In this chapter, the beginning of the Church, as well as the beginning of each congregation, has been shown to be a creation of God working through the apostle or church planter to create a unique community focused on reaching others with the Gospel. The apostle works through a web of relationships using the power of the Spirit to create

new relationships resulting in a new faith community. How this initial zeal for the spread of the Gospel both in the first century and in the life of each new congregation fades over time is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE SHIFT FROM APOSTOLIC TO PASTORAL

In this chapter, materials from Christian history and thought will be presented that show how the nature and purpose of the local congregation have shifted from mission to maintenance with the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion in the western world. This shift is important to understand when examining the situation in the local congregation today. While the local church may have a limited history, its understanding of its role and place in the world is to some extent due to what has gone before.

The Reduction

In the anti-war ballad, penned by Paul Kantner of Jefferson Starship and David Crosby of Crosby, Stills and Nash, the question is asked:

I can see by your coat my friend that you're from the other side
There's just one thing I got to know
Can you tell me please who won?¹

As my research into the offices given by God for growing the Church listed in Ephesians 4:11 developed, this question, “who won?” came to the fore. It will be demonstrated that from the Scriptural record that five “offices” were established for the growth of the Church during the initial phase of expansion of the Church from its Palestinian home into the furthest reaches of the Roman Empire. However, also during this phase a contraction

¹ Paul Kantner, David Crosby, and Steven Stills, *Wooden Ships* (Roswell, Georgia: Intersound, 1975).

began from the five offices of the Ephesians list down to one, that being pastor (with the offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon encircling and/or flowing from the office of Pastor).

How and why this reduction took place will be explored. The influence of the culture and the role of the civil government in relation to the growing Christian movement seem to offer the best explanation, leading to the question: “Did the Church win over the government/culture or did the Church become a servant of the government/culture?” Hence, the question posed above, “who won?” In either case, the loss of the gifts or offices or their subsumption into the office of pastor also contributed to a loss of missionary and evangelistic fervor in the church when compared to the initial outburst of growth in the early centuries. Martin Marty describes it this way: “So, too, with space: the apostolic impulse ‘beginning at Jerusalem’ . . . changes to a more static and absolutistic claim to possess and guard the deposit of doctrine at a specific locus, namely Rome.”²

The Offices in Acts

While these offices, with some exceptions, are not recognized as positions within the Church today, the question remains, are the gifts or offices listed in Ephesians 4:11 still being given by God for “the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ”? (NASB) Based on my personal experience in domestic mission work and on my recent experience in Sudan (November 2003), the

² Martin E. Marty, *A Short History of Christianity* (Cleveland, OH: William Collins Publishers, 1979), 157.

answer would be yes, God is still growing His Church through the gifts He has given through His Son Jesus who is still building His Church “and the gates of hell will not overpower it.” (Matt. 16:18 God’s Word)

The primary record of early church expansion is the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Obviously, from the name itself we see the gift of apostle at work. This gift does not seem limited to the original twelve at the outset as at least two are seen as qualified to replace Judas (Acts 1:23). Other passages suggest a greater number than twelve as well. Barnabas is referred to as an apostle in Acts 14:14. Paul mentions Andronicus and Junias and implies that they, too, are apostles. (Rom. 16:7)

Likewise, prophets are mentioned in Acts as gifts for the development of the church. Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. (Acts 11:27) In Acts 13 a list of prophets is given. Prophecy was not limited to men: “Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.” (Acts 21:9 NASB)

Teachers are also mentioned (see above) during this time. The apostle Paul also saw himself gifted in this way: 1 Timothy 2:7 “Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, *and* lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.” (KJV)

Philip is the only person listed as an evangelist (Acts 21:8), although the work of evangelism is seen throughout the book. Paul calls Timothy to this task in these words: “But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Tim. 4:5 NASB)

It is interesting to note that the only one of the five gifts or offices that is not demonstrated nor even found in the book of Acts is that of “pastor.” Nor is it found in

another parallel listing of gifts in 1 Corinthians: “apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” (1 Cor. 12:28 NIV) This same office, pastor, is the only one to have survived the Apostolic age and to be acknowledged as an office today.

The Reduction Begins

What happened to the other offices? How quickly did they disappear as official positions in the early church? Historically, many commentators³ have concluded that the first three offices were extraordinary and/or of limited duration.⁴ Others conclude that the final two are in reality only one, that of pastor/teacher, the argument being that there is but a single article for the two.⁵ Exceptions to this theory include Calvin who argues that while all pastors have a duty to teach, “a man may be a teacher who is not qualified to

³ John Calvin, *Ephesians 4:11-14*. 1849, Calvin Translation Society, http://www.ccel.org/c/calvin/comment3/comm_vol41/htm/iv.v.iii.htm (accessed February 12, 2003); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1937); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971); Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory of the Whole Bible*. 1871, <http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/jfb/view.cgi?book=eph&chapter=004> (accessed February 12, 2003)

⁴ These commentators all worked from within Christendom. That is to say that their understanding may be shaded by their own experience in a predominately Christian culture which, as is argued here, did not see the need for the other offices. More research should be done to discover commentators whose experiences have been from outside of the European Christendom context.

⁵ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983).

preach.”⁶ In addition, Jamison defines the difference thus: “the teacher [builds up] the faith already received. The pastor had the outward rule and guidance of the Church.”⁷

Church history also acknowledges the two as separate offices. Hinson says, “By the middle of the [3rd] century, bishops had supplanted teachers such as Clement and Origen as the trustworthy conservers of the faith. The action taken by Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria, against Origen in 228 and 231 doubtless signified the triumph of the episcopal office over the teaching office.”⁸

The Evangelist

From Paul’s instruction to Timothy noted earlier, the office of evangelist seems to have become more general in nature, referring more to the itinerant work of sharing the Gospel outside of the local congregation. Michael Green notes: “As early as Acts 8 we find that it is not the apostles but the ‘amateur’ missionaries . . . who took the Gospel with them wherever they went.”⁹ The spread of the Gospel into all the world seems to be, in many ways, accountable to these nameless, faceless multitudes who carried their faith with them outside the bounds of official recognition. Scudieri writes:

In the second century, Christian communities were founded by itinerant missionaries, people who do not appear to have been authorized by any person or community, many Christians became unwittingly itinerant out of sheer necessity –

⁶ Calvin, “Ephesians 4:11-14.”

⁷ Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, “Commentary Critical and Explanatory of the Whole Bible.”

⁸ E. Glenn Hinson, *The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 180.

⁹ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 173.

to flee for their own lives from persecution. The Lord used such eruptions of Satan's attacks to ultimate good – church expansion.¹⁰

The tradition of the itinerant evangelist is carried on today in the mission field in much the same way. In Sudan the shift came from clergy/missionary outreach to a more lay dominated movement through two factors. The first was the independence of Sudan in 1956 and the second was the current civil war beginning in the early 1980s. With independence and then civil war came a removal of foreign missionaries until very recently. The expansion of Christianity in the southern sections of Sudan could not be continued through usual missionary-led means. One example comes from the Nuer Catholic movement:

After the expulsion the movement accelerated, with small teams of catechists, mostly untrained, traveling from Ethiopia westward through the major centers of Nuerland, building chapels and forming congregations. . . . All this was achieved without any direction or assistance from Catholic Church authorities, and was, as a result, a non-clerical and non-sacramental movement. Church worship consisted of hymn singing, prayers, Bible reading and a homily. . . . However, it still remains that the great majority of baptized Catholics in Upper Nile have never received the Mass.¹¹

This pattern is repeated again and again through a variety of Christian traditions in many areas of Sudan.¹² In the past two years over 30 new Lutheran congregations

¹⁰ Robert J. Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church* (Chino, CA: Lutheran Society for Missiology, 1996), 39.

¹¹ Andrew Wheeler, ed., *Land of Promise: Church Growth in a Sudan at War*, Faith in Sudan, vol. 1 (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 19.

¹² My experience in central Sudan bears this out. At the invitation of the rebel government (SPLA/SPLM – Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Sudanese People's Liberation Movement – now one organization in peace negotiations with the national government) our missionary in East Africa helped provide staff and supplies for a primary school in a mountainous area. Within a very short time this school has grown to two and now numbers over 1100 students ages 5 to 20 in two locations. Through this

representing over 8,000 souls have started. The growth is fast outpacing the ability of local pastors to minister. The next step in this development is to provide theological training. The first such training had begun as I arrived in the Nuba Mountains on November 9, 2003. Our missionary in Kenya had sent a Kenya-native pastor into Nuba to conduct a six-week initial training program at the village of Karindi. Even though it was the middle of harvest over 55 men began attending, coming from as far as a four-hour walk.¹³ These lay evangelists are part of the church and are recognized as official positions in the church. They wear a special green shirt in worship to mark them as evangelists. The fruit of their labors is apparent. We visited one of these lay-started congregations about an hour's walk from Karindi. In less than three months, the congregation is averaging over 200 in worship and has laid the foundation for its own building of stone and thatched roof. While the evangelists can preach and teach, the church does not allow them to administer the Sacraments. In another area there were over 300 new Christians waiting for Baptism. Distance and weather conditions delayed sending a pastor to baptize them. In the meantime, the evangelist preaches and non-Communion services are conducted.

It is not hard to imagine this kind of excitement and anticipation evident as the church moved out from its home in Palestine into the Roman Empire, but somehow, this enthusiasm was lost over time. From my research this was due to a three-way convergence or collision of what became orthodox Christianity, what became judged as

start, being allowed to teach Christianity along with English, churches have begun through lay evangelists.

¹³ On our way out from Karindi at 5:30 a.m. we met and visited with one of these trainees who had already been walking for two hours with two left to go to arrive in time for class to begin.

heretical Christianity and the state. The first and most obvious victim in this clash was the office of apostle.

The Apostle

The use of the word “apostle” as a term to describe a religious messenger is unique to the New Testament.¹⁴ The word cannot be found with that usage in other pre-Christian Greek literature. There is, however, a Hebrew word, *שליח* that carries a similar meaning. “It is in this word and its Jewish precedents which furnishes the true source for Jesus’ innovation of the apostolate.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, the use of the word was not confined to the emerging church. Another author sees its use first among the Gnostic Christian movement.¹⁶ Schmithals sees the Gnostic use of the term apostle as well as the Gnostic emphasis on organized mission work as preemptive to the orthodox use of the term to which the church was forced to respond.

The response was to develop its own mission program including the development of Christian communities outside of both Palestine and Judaism. This included the church at Antioch sending Paul and Barnabas as apostolic missionaries. In large measure, this provided a stronger base for emerging orthodox Christianity over against the Gnostic movement, which, according to Schmithals, did not “think in terms of community organization” preferring “the free operation of the spirit without hindrance.”¹⁷ The

¹⁴ Robert D. Culver, "Apostles and the Apostolate in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. Ap-Je 1997 (1977), 2.

¹⁵ Culver, "Apostles and the Apostolate in the New Testament," 3.

¹⁶ Walter Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church* (Abingdon Press), 115.

¹⁷ Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church*, 200.

success of the emerging orthodox church was due to the formation of Christian communities whose sustained efforts modeled a preferred lifestyle. Hinson writes: “Christians astounded the ancients with their charity. . . . Christianity had to back up their claims in its product – above all, in the lives of its members.”¹⁸

However, very early in the church, concern was growing regarding the office of apostle. By the end of the first century, the *Didache* gave this advice: “Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord. But he is not to stay more than one day. But if he stays three days he is a false prophet.”¹⁹ While there is much evidence that the designation apostle was held by far more than the twelve²⁰ the shift was coming to restrict the definition so as to limit the possibility of false apostles. This shift can also be seen in the *Didache* with the beginning of inclusion of the other offices into that of the pastor: “appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons . . . for they too carry out for you the ministry of prophets and teachers.”²¹ By the beginning of the second century, it seems that the limited definition held sway.²²

To an extent, the gift of apostle as found in Ephesians 4:11 comes down to definition. If one holds to the limited definition found in Acts for replacing Judas – “Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time

¹⁸ Hinson, *The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages*, 63-66.

¹⁹ Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, *Didache* 11.4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 264.

²⁰ Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church*, 18.

²¹ *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, *Didache* 15, 267.

²² Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church*, 18.

when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22 NIV) – Paul would be excluded. If one were to allow for Paul’s inclusion through divine intervention, what case could be made for Barnabas, Andronicus and Junia, and others? Rather than neglect the gift of apostle given by God, might it not be wiser to adopt a definition closer to the meaning demonstrated in Scripture? Dr. Scudieri suggests one: “a commissioned missionary, authorized for evangelistic work in territories which did not know Jesus as Lord.”²³ As can be seen, Scudieri’s definition applies to how the term was used in the past. Can this same definition be used today? The gift is at work today as seen by the growth of the church in Africa. Could missionaries there be called “apostles”? Under the definition given above, yes. But what of the work of others such as church planters in the United States that may not be seen as a territory which does not know Jesus as Lord? Could their work be called “apostolic”? This is an issue of debate for what I believe to be very similar reasons to the issues at work in the first century (more on this topic in the next chapter). George Hunter argues in favor of apostolic as an adjective, but against its use as a title fearing pretentiousness.²⁴ Scudieri sees the return to the use of the term apostolic for the church and her pastors as imperative today “because there is no missionary office in the church.”²⁵ To which one might ask, why not? Reggie McNeal asks this question in *Present Future*, but likewise is not prepared to go so far as to use the title or open the

²³ Ibid., 25.

²⁴ George G. Hunter III, *Radical Outreach* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 17.

²⁵ Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church*, 81.

door to such an office, but opts instead for the phrase “apostolic leadership.”²⁶ All three see a need to return to the concept described by McNeal as “a group of leaders ready to charge hell with a water pistol.”²⁷

Why is it that, having once had a missionary office, the church chose to focus instead on the pastoral office to the neglect, discredit and demise of the office of apostle? As mentioned above, the emerging orthodox church was facing enemies on two fronts simultaneously. Against the what will come to be called heretical movements, the church chose to “draw the wagons in a circle” defending the gains made and holding to the teachings of the apostles while abandoning further outreach beyond the borders of the Empire. This territory the church left to the Gnostics, the Nestorians, the Arians and others.²⁸ And into these fields these groups took their message, while the emerging orthodox church was content to remain within the confines of the Empire. The seeming wisdom of this action is shown in the short term with the conversion of the Empire into a fully Christian state under Theodosius.²⁹ However, MacMullen notes “the churches would have been wise to take a closer look at Theodosius’ gifts, for in subsequent centuries they would exact a high price, not the least part of which came in the form of persecution.”³⁰ By failing to address the issue of heresies directly and allowing

²⁶ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 120.

²⁷ Ibid., 130.

²⁸ Hinson, *The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages*, 226.

²⁹ Ramsey MacMullen, *Christianizing The Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 101.

³⁰ Hinson, *The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages*, 217.

missionaries to the barbarian groups to convert them, the church would be faced with a stronger challenge when these now Arian-Christian groups moved against Rome.

This failure further pushed the church into a tighter relationship with the state. This relationship developed in two directions as did the Empire itself.³¹ In the eastern Empire, the church became a servant to the state. While the church in the east needed the state to enforce its orthodoxy, the state used the church to bring together the divergent populations into one entity. Here “the church was in some senses ‘a department of the state.’”³²

In the west, however, the opposite was true. “Princes must bow to him [the Pope], emperors receive their power from him as the moon draws light from the sun.”³³ During this period great strides were made in missionary efforts to reintroduce Christianity into the edges of the Empire. However, now the efforts were through the office of bishop and pastor rather than apostle. Scudieri writes: “It was believed that the apostle’s task had been to bring the Gospel to the whole world, which, it was assumed, they had. Missionaries, therefore, could not be called apostles, because they were no longer the first to preach the Gospel to the nations.”³⁴ Pope Gregory became known as the “father of missions” bent on the task of converting the uncivilized, bringing them into the Roman fold for the sake of the state as much as for the sake of their souls, it would seem.³⁵

³¹ Ibid., 298.

³² Marty, *A Short History of Christianity*, 141.

³³ Ibid., 166.

³⁴ Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church*, 48.

³⁵ Marty, *A Short History of Christianity*, 125.

Others came through the pastoral ranks into the mission field: Patrick as apostolic bishop to Ireland; Willibrord, apostle to the Frisians; Columba, apostle to the Scots; among them.³⁶

The Result

Therefore, we are back at the beginning; mission work going on at the edges of the Roman Empire (now seen as Europe and North America), using all of the gifts of God given by Christ through the Spirit, while the Empire itself is limited to preservation and control using only one of the gifts, that of pastor. Is this why many see Europe and North America as today's mission field? In 2001 a survey showed that the number of Americans with "no religious preference" doubled from 1990 to 2000, reaching 14 percent of the population. Another showed that the unchurched population grew from 24 percent to 34 percent in the same time. Yet another, using the Evangelism Explosion questions, found the number of "born-again" at 65 percent for those over 57 years old, 35 percent for those over 40, 15 percent for those over 25, and 4 percent for those over 17.³⁷ As mentioned above, many commentators in discussing the offices listed in Ephesians agree that the first three – apostle, prophet, evangelist – were extraordinary offices. They were necessary for the birth and early growth of the church. These commentators were all writing from within Christendom, all working from the perspective of a church culture and society. The church they were a part of did not need those offices. But what of the church today? In Africa today trained missionaries are doing very much what the apostles

³⁶ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, The Penguin History of the Church, vol. 6 (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1966), 69 ff.

³⁷ McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 3.

did in the first century, they and evangelists are bringing the Gospel into new areas.³⁸ In America these gifts are expressing themselves outside of the established structures and organizations. Recently I was visiting my sister and her three sons in southern California. On Tuesday night my nephews were hosting a home Bible study. It began a number of months before with two of them and a couple of friends. Since then it has grown to a regular meeting numbering into the 50s. The majority of the attendees are (were?) unchurched. The leaders are untrained, but with a burning desire to share Christ with their friends. The gatherings begin about 7 p.m. and last until 11 p.m. or later. What began as simply Bible study now includes singing, prayers, and discussions. I was awakened at 4 a.m. by conversations continuing on the back porch by a remaining group of eight or so. Can the church recognize and honor the work of the Spirit going on in hundreds of homes such as this or will we simply use the business term NIH – not invented here – and ignore what seems to be the work of the Lord.

God gave the early church all that it needed to spread the Gospel throughout the known world at that time. The church, once it had thought it had completed that mission, failed to continue as a missionary force as an essential reason for being. Missions continued and continue as the Gospel is still to be preached to the ends of the earth, but the zeal, the commitment on the part of the whole body waned. Missions became “out there,” away from the local expression of the church.

³⁸ I am not including the gift of prophet at this point. I was unable to find information regarding the disappearance of the office in the early church, neither was I able to find examples of the office at work today in any mission efforts.

Reclaiming the Gifts

Today, many are seeking to reclaim this mission zeal for the local community. Hunter and Scudieri, among others, challenge the established congregation to rediscover her apostolic heritage.³⁹ While others such as McNeal seek to empower a new generation of apostolic leaders.⁴⁰ All of this is being done within the framework of existing structures, organizations and offices. While I will not deny the power of the Spirit to overcome the barnacle encrusted planks of the hull of the established church, I believe there might be room for building some new runabouts. As most agree, new churches reach new people. In my denomination (LCMS) it has been demonstrated that the greatest growth from new converts takes place within new churches in the first few years of their existence. But, again, in these cases, we are still working with the overall established structure with its limits on office and service in the church.

One model that is being implemented in the business world is the sub-corporation that is tied to the mother corporation for resourcing and expertise, but freed from it as far as structure and possibilities for innovation. The most recent example of this is Delta Airlines which is spinning off a daughter airline – Song. This new baby Delta has the resources of Delta but is allowed to experiment, streamline, and innovate in ways that would be impossible in the structure of the larger corporation. While it would be extremely difficult to reintroduce the Biblical offices of apostle and evangelist into existing structures, what if a similar venture were attempted within an established church body? Rather than a parachurch model that is not tied to a denomination which leaves

³⁹ Hunter III, *Radical Outreach*; Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church*.

⁴⁰ McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*.

issues of doctrine somewhat nebulous, a “baby Synod” would have the resources, theological and otherwise, to maintain integrity, while at the same time have the size and flexibility that would allow for maximizing the opportunities for mission and outreach that are before us.

A dream? Perhaps. Nevertheless, the apostles of Gnosticism are again amongst us, now in the cover of New Age.⁴¹ The appropriate response would seem to be the same as was done in the past, release all of the gifts of God – apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher – through the people of God, and fight fire with fire, the fire of the Holy Spirit working through the water of Holy Baptism.

The local congregation of today is the recipient of two thousand years of church history. For those congregations in the western tradition, much of this history has taken place in what is known as Christendom, that is, what seems to be a church culture with all of the rights and privileges won by the church through the conversion of the Empire. The cost of this success can be seen to be the loss of the evangelistic zeal that motivated the church in the early centuries. For the congregation of today to be expected to be a mission outpost in a society increasingly at odds with its faith and culture it must know its history and the tools that were given by God to meet the challenges and difficulties inherent in being citizens of heaven while citizens of earth. Reclaiming all of God’s gifts for His Church is part of restoring vitality to the local congregation.

⁴¹ Pontifical Council for Culture, *Jesus Christ: The Bearer of the Water of Life*. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20030203_new-age_en.html (accessed September 12, 2003)

CHAPTER 5

BACK TO BASICS

In chapter five, materials from current research and thought are presented which show that since the demise of Christendom congregations have been forced to recognize the need to return to a mission emphasis. However, many see this as a call to return to “Apostolic leadership”¹ rather than a call to rediscover and recover the principles and emphases that grew the church from a minor cult to a world-wide religion. I will attempt to demonstrate that the need in the established local congregation is not apostolic but missional pastoral leadership. As shown in the preceding chapter, the gift of apostle was given for the establishment of new churches, while the gift of pastor is for the nurture and development of those in the church for the fulfilling of their calling as missionaries of God.

Apostolic Leadership

This chapter will explore a definition of apostolic leaders, examine how the principles of the apostolic leadership were at work in the early church, compare these to

¹ Apostolic leadership, while there is no solid agreement in definition, seems to be call for strong, forceful, entrepreneurial leadership as seen in the original apostles and in many Biblical leaders such as Moses. The current emphasis is that we are in a post-Christendom culture with the implication that there needs to be a return to pre-Christendom approaches. With the lack of examples of early church pastoral leadership (see chapter 3) C. Peter Wagner and Reggie McNeal, among others, suggest using the models we do have from Scripture primarily from Acts, therefore the use of the term Apostolic leadership.

the leadership principles being proposed today and conclude with a personal vision for leadership in the emerging culture.

In the book *Men of Strength for Women of God*, the author opens the discussion with the words: “Has the time come for shared spiritual headship?” To which he quickly and emphatically answers “no!”² The balance of the book is a defense of that answer. The same sort of question was on my mind as I began work on this chapter: “Has the time come for a return to apostolic leadership in the local church?” My research has led me to the same answer as noted above, no!

This is not to say that there is not a need for a return to recognition of the apostolic office for church planting. The importance of the apostle, which I have defined as the gift of church planter, is as vital as ever. This was made clear in the second and third chapters. Nor am I saying that there is not a need for leadership in the local congregation. The Scriptural evidence is sufficient for this case. However, what I hope to demonstrate in this chapter is that the current emphasis on “apostolic leadership” might reflect a misreading or a misunderstanding of the reasons for the growth of the early church that many of the proponents of “apostolic leadership” desire to recapture. I will also discuss the growth of the church in the early post-apostolic era and provide some of the reasons for such.

Before embarking on this course I was as convinced as any that, since we are living in what is becoming a more and more post-Christian world which has led many to

² F. LeGard Smith, *Men of Strength for Women of God* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1989).

conclude that it is also pre-Christian.³ With this false assumption, one could argue that all we need to do is do what the apostles did in the early church and the church will come roaring back to life. Working with older congregations it was my thought to apply apostolic leadership principles to current congregational situations. This would assist them in adapting to the changing culture.

It made sense. Much of the current literature is suggesting that we need stronger leadership modeled on Paul and the other apostles. Reggie McNeal writes: “Apostolic leaders in the first and twenty-first centuries evidence distinctive characteristics.”⁴ Dr. George H. Hunter III also issues the call: “This book proposes the ‘apostolic renewal’ of tens of thousands of churches . . .”⁵ Even the “dean” of the church growth movement, C. Peter Wagner, is calling for apostolic leadership, claiming for himself the gift of apostle.⁶ Among the current authors writing for the church audience, one of the only ones not addressing “apostolic leadership” seems to be Dr. Sweet. A simple “google” search of the internet brings up over 78,000 hits on the term “apostolic leadership.”

It made sense. The currently held assumption is that the early church grew rapidly from the time of Christ’s resurrection and its foundation at Pentecost. Since the apostles were the ones leading the church at that time, it can also be assumed that there was something about them that had a part in the growth. It could also be argued that once Christianity had become the religion of the Empire over three hundred years later, the

³ McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 2.

⁴ McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 126.

⁵ Hunter III, *Radical Outreach*, 18.

⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Golden Harvest Ministries*. 2002, <http://www.globalharvestministries.org/index.asp?action=about> (accessed March 30, 2004)

success of Christianity was assured and growth accelerated as a result of government edict. The problem with these assumptions is that the lives of the apostles were brief compared to the three hundred years of the early church from foundation to state religion. It was not as if the founding apostles handed off the church to the Emperor Constantine. In fact, the two best known apostles, Peter and Paul, along with the best known leader, James, died within approximately 30 years of the church's beginning.⁷

Given the fallacy of these assumptions, I decided to research the post- or sub-apostolic church for evidences of "apostolic leadership" that could be brought forth for the benefit of the church in the emerging culture. The more I read the fewer evidences I found which led me to the answer of my opening paragraph. Other factors were at work, other issues to be considered in looking at the growth of the church, issues and factors which still have relevance for the future of the church today. I have grouped these into three pairings that will serve as the basis for the following discussion: organism versus organization; inclusive versus exclusive; and apostolic versus pastoral. It will be my intent to demonstrate that the growth of the early church was due not to "apostolic leadership," but to the devotion and dedication of the individual followers of Jesus Christ and the power of His Gospel.

⁷ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997), 186.

Organism versus Organization

Is the church an organism?⁸ The answer to that question will lead one to develop an approach to ministry and a vision for the future based on one or the other or in some cases, both organic and organization. The recent cell church/house church model is an example of answering the question that the church is an organism. Since the church began in homes, organically, naturally through relationships, as it were, that is the model to be followed into the future. John White states: "Christians met in small, essentially autonomous house congregations. As with Roman Judaism, little or no central organization existed."⁹ The same author goes on in another article, "But how effective was this simplistic brand of 2nd century house church? Apparently it was very effective."¹⁰ Some will even go to extremes of exegetics to discount the notion of

⁸ Organism is defined here in the sense of a naturally occurring social grouping developing organically or in the sense of the church, a supernaturally caused gathering (see chapter one). Organization, on the other hand, can be defined as a humanly developed structure for accomplishing certain objectives. I would not include a divinely ordained structure because there does not appear to be the Scriptural evidence for one particular organizational structure.

⁹ John White, "1 Clement Vs. The Shepherd of Hermas," 3/14/2004 <http://www.dawnministries.org/regions/nam/johnwhite/history/clement.html> (accessed March 14, 2004) John White is a director for Dawn Ministries in North America. He is an advocate for house church multiplication through what Dawn Ministries calls "saturation church planting."

¹⁰ John White, "Pliny's Problem with a Simple Church," 2 pages, 2004 <http://www.dawnministries.org/regions/nam/johnwhite/history/pliny.html> (accessed March 13, 2004)

organization.¹¹ Evidence that the church was not to develop into an institution can be seen in the attitudes of both Jesus and Paul that Jesus would soon return.¹²

On the other side of the argument is the position that the church was established to be an organization, finding Scriptural defense for their case. Raymond E. Brown argues in discussing the pastoral epistles: "Paul's interests are now no longer primarily missionary but pastoral; he is concerned with tending the existing flock."¹³ Even among those writing from a post-modern perspective, this view is prominent. In the collection of essays edited by Dr. Sweet, Michael Horton writes: "We ought to beware of separating the soul of the church (as a movement) from its body (as a visible institution)."¹⁴

During my research I found a chart from a conference on church consulting that I attended in 1999. This chart parallels five models answering the question, "What does an effective congregation look like?" The five researchers are Christian Schwarz (Natural Church Development), Kennon Callahan, Search Institute, Bill Easum and George Barna. The characteristics measured for an effective church range from seven for Easum to twelve for Callahan, each addressing the institutional needs of the church. The language used throughout is organizational and not organic. Love, in and of itself, is not mentioned

¹¹ Ken Brown, "Leadership in the Early Church," 7 pages
http://www.voiceofonecrying.com/leadership_in_the_early_church.htm (accessed March 14, 2004)

¹² Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church: Context, Growth, Leadership & Worship*, 62.

¹³ Raymond Edward Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 31.

¹⁴ Leonard Sweet, ed., *The Church in Emerging Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 135.

once among the characteristics of an effective congregation; however, Schwarz does include loving relationships in his list of eight characteristics.¹⁵

Those who do find a connection between organism and organization, for the most part seem to imply that the organism is to serve the organization. Among those finding this connection is George Hunter who quotes Father Patrick Brennan:

Small communities are absolutely crucial so that people are involved in faith-sharing spirituality rather than the kind of mindless volunteerism that marks too much of what we think of as ‘successful’ churches. Brennan’s last comment represents the four best-kept secrets about large growing churches . . . and all four secrets relate to small groups.¹⁶

The smallest community is a community of one and it is here that at least one author finds the connection between the organization and the individual organism.

MacMullen says:

That adds up to the fact also recognized in the abstract: that, after Saint Paul, the church had no mission, it made no organized or official approach to unbelievers; rather, it left everything to the individual. . . . We cannot find in these institutions any adequate explanation for its growth, whether or not they may have produced an occasional convert.¹⁷

While congregations did have organized evangelistic efforts,¹⁸ MacMullen maintains that the importance of the individual Christian in outreach is paramount.

This last point is one that I have been making for some time in my church consultation role. That is, the church is not to be in the business of evangelism as an organization, rather it is the business of the church to “prepare God’s people for works of

¹⁵ Christian A. Schwartz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church* (Saint Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), 271.

¹⁶ Hunter III, *Radical Outreach*, 115.

¹⁷ MacMullen, *Christianizing The Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*, 34-35.

¹⁸ Daniel Brunner, dbrunner@georgefox.edu (07/10 2004).

service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” (Eph. 4:13 NIV) It is the task of the individual Christian to share the Good News with those around him/her. Or to use the oft-quoted line attributed to either Martin Luther or missionary to India, D.T. Niles:

“Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where the bread is.”¹⁹ When evangelism is seen as the responsibility of the congregation, it has been my experience that the individual tends to neglect any personal responsibility for outreach. My approach to this in consultations is to clarify the difference between evangelism and mission. Evangelism is, as mentioned above, one Christian sharing the Gospel with an unbeliever, which I call the connection. Mission, on the other hand, is providing the context where this connection can take place. I encourage congregations to explore and examine each of their activities and events to determine if that activity or event can be used as the context for the connection. The congregation does have an organizational role in outreach, but not to the usurpation of the individual Christian’s responsibility in this area.

The organizational approach to empower the individual is the approach that Christian Schwarz takes in his book, *Paradigm Shift in the Church*. Schwarz has been maligned for his rather mechanistic approach to church analysis called “Natural Church Development.” I attended a conference in January 2004 where the speaker (another church consulting “authority”) spoke very disparagingly of the process. Schwarz wrote this book as a theological defense of his work and I believe he has done so. What many fail to understand about Natural Church Development is the underlying paradigm with which Schwarz is working. Schwarz’s paradigm places an emphasis on fixing problems

¹⁹ I have not yet been able to find the source of the quote, it is attributed nearly equally to one or the other of the two named above. One attribution shared by one of my readers was to Niles but the quote was incorrect.

in the organization which may seem mechanical. However, this approach leaves the organism to develop naturally as will be explained next.

Rather than an either/or approach, Schwarz works from a both/and assumption. The church is both an organization and an organism. “On the one hand, the development of the church as an organism inevitably leads to the creation of institutions. On the other hand, the aim of these institutions is to be useful in stimulating the development of the church as an organism.”²⁰ From this understanding, his emphasis on the organizational factors becomes apparent as the means by which the organism can be freed to develop “naturally,” to use his phrase. Both are needed as can be seen in the growth of the early church. While Schwarz is not dealing with early church history, the implications and applications are there. As Brown argues²¹ one of the reasons the apostles set up the organization was for the protection and empowerment of the individual Christian (organism), which is the point MacMullen misses. Because there was an organized church, individual believers could share the Gospel and invite others into a relationship with Christ and with the Church. As Glenn Hinson observes:

Formal traveling evangelists played a key role only during the second century. “Casual” evangelism, on the other hand, was important throughout the early period. Responding to criticism that Christians were just a bunch of country hicks, Origen agreed that common folk accounted for Christianity’s spread. The planting of Christianity in Georgia, for example, resulted from the witness of a captive woman named Nino.²²

²⁰ Schwartz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church*, 20.

²¹ Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*.

²² E. Glenn Hinson, “Ordinary Saints at First Church”. *Christian History*, no. 57 (1998): 5 pages, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ch/1998/57/57h018.html> (accessed March 13, 2004)

Inclusive versus Exclusive

The role of the individual Christian in the Church and in the society takes us to the second pairing, that of inclusive versus exclusive. “What is truth?” The words of Pilate from John 18:38 reflect the inclusive nature of the Roman culture. Rather than philosophical or rhetorical, his question, it would seem, was genuine in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and pluralistic religious environment that was the Roman Empire at the time of Christ. This push towards inclusion worked against the expansion of Christianity, which was seen to be “atheistic” because of its denial of other gods.²³

This insistence on inclusion, which is becoming more and more part of the fabric of American culture,²⁴ is not something that ended with the conquest of the Roman Empire by the church only to reappear today. I remember a conversation I had with a retired missionary to India. He had been in the field over 40 years and returned to retire in his boyhood town in southern Missouri. I was still a seminary student, serving a small congregation in the area. As we were developing a mission statement for the congregation, he cautioned me about leaving the word God too generic. From his time in India, he knew that not spelling out the name and claim of Jesus Christ allowed the Indians to simply incorporate this new god into the pantheon already in place.

While exclusive in terms of the claims of Christ, the early church was inclusive as far as ethnicity. “When the Apostolic Council decided not to require converts to observe the Law, they created a religion free of ethnicity,” according to Rodney Stark, a

²³ MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*, 15.

²⁴ Thomas G. Bandy, *Fragile Hope: Your Church in 2020* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 22.

sociologist.²⁵ Stark, writing as neither a historian nor a theologian, brings a unique perspective to the study of the early church. He applies social science principles and theories to his work on accounting for the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire. As a result, he finds many of the traditional explanations for the growth of the church faulty because of this lack of understanding of the social dynamics of conversion.

Stark argues that the failure of Judaism to impact the culture was not because of the exclusive nature of the theology, but the exclusive nature of the Jewish culture.²⁶ The shift in Christianity, then, to an inclusive culture provided, according to Stark, what was missing in Judaism not only for the Gentile believer but also for the Hellenized Jews who had been marginalized in Roman society because of their exclusivity, putting forth this proposition: “People will attempt to escape or resolve a marginal position.”²⁷

Religious movements can grow because their members continue to form new relationships with outsiders. . . . Movements can also recruit by spreading through preexisting social networks as converts bring their family and friends. . . . It is network growth that so distinguishes the Mormon rate of growth – meanwhile, other contemporary religious movements will count their growth in thousands, not millions, for lack of a network pattern of growth.²⁸

The ability of the early Christians to maintain open networks can be seen as a major reason for the growth of the church. Conversely, for the church today the implication for the lack of comparable growth in existing churches is that these networks have closed in favor of fellowship within the body. An unresearched and unverified thesis I have worked with for a number of years is *the longer a person is a Christian the fewer non-Christian*

²⁵ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 59.

²⁶ Ibid., 67.

²⁷ Ibid., 52.

²⁸ Ibid., 56.

*relationships one will have.*²⁹ This would seem to be validated through Stark's research of the early church and of the Mormon movement.

Research into the sociology of conversion in current movements also led Stark to the conclusion that it is open networks, not public proclamation of the Gospel (street corner or market place) or the conversion of the Caesar, which can account for the growth of the church. Stark found that if simple mathematics is used to calculate the growth of the church from 120 on the day of the ascension to something over thirty-three million after Constantine, a 40% decadal growth rate is needed.

This is a very encouraging finding since it is exceedingly close to the average growth rate of 43% per decade that the Mormon church has maintained over the past century. Thus we know that the numerical goals Christianity needed to achieve are entirely in keeping with modern experience, and we are not forced to seek exceptional explanations. Rather, history allows time for the normal processes of conversion, as understood by contemporary social science.³⁰

While inclusive in ethnicity, the early church was exclusive in its theology. This exclusivity, too, can be demonstrated as reason for its growth. "Christianity presented

²⁹ There is a formula $X=Y(Y-1)$ that defines how many relational/conversational links one can maintain. X is the number of relational links. Y is the number of people involved. If you involved in a conversation with one person $Y=2$ so $X=2$, that is, 2 links, you and the other person. X increases exponentially as Y increases arithmetically. It can be posited that this is the rational behind the logic of a small group of 12. With 12 as Y, X would be 132 links. It would seem logical to suggest that this would hold with the number of relationships one can maintain. If there is a limit to the number of social relationships one can maintain, then the validity of the statement can be seen in that as one becomes involved in a Christian community, new relationships develop in that context resulting in a decrease in the number of relationships sustainable with those outside. This would be compounded as the differences between the lifestyle, values, ideals, etc., of the two worlds grow as one grows in relationship with Christ and the church.

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

ideas that demanded a choice, not tolerance,” according to MacMullen.³¹ The believers not only would not accept the possibility of other gods, they worked hard to dismantle the status quo of a multitude of deities.³² They were seen as “anti-social” by the Roman public because Christianity presented a “kind of polarization to its audience at various points in what may be called pagan theology – a polarization that pricked or alarmed the observer.”³³ The Roman author Celsus wrote: “But they [Christians] alone, they say, know the right way to live, and if the children would believe them, they would become happy.”³⁴

According to Stark, this exclusivity provided a stability that otherwise was lacking in the fast growing Roman cities where ethnic diversity and a rapid influx of newcomers undercut the social fabric.

Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity.³⁵

The need for exclusivity within Christianity was important for the development of the Christian way of life, seen as key not only from Scripture but in early writing as well.

Paul writes to the church at Corinth: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of

³¹ MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*, 17.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 19.

³⁴ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 97.

³⁵ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 161.

Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1) And again to the church at Philippi: “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” (Phil 3:17) Wilkens states: “Christians attempted to convert their neighbors and others through evangelism . . . not simply by sharing the message of Jesus but also by living a life that demonstrated their own conversion.”³⁶ A sermon from John Chrysostom, quoted by Wilkens, illustrates this need explaining that “unbelievers would not have been won to the Christian community through eloquent speaking, but through right living. . . . ‘Let us win them by our life,’ he exhorted his audience.”³⁷

Exclusivity also contributed to the growth of the church in a biological way. With its prohibitions on abortion and infanticide, the Christian community experienced a higher birth rate than the general population, which at the beginning of the common era was falling below replacement rates. Were it not for the constant influx of immigrants into its cities, the Roman Empire would have declined rapidly.³⁸ The focus on orthodoxy and orthopraxis increased the social standing of women as well. This respect for women drew them to the church in greater numbers than men. As a result, while in the general population men outnumbered women, because of the practice of female infanticide and the high death rate of women in childbirth and abortions, the opposite was true in the Christian community. This led to a high rate of what is called “secondary conversion” as Christian women married pagans.³⁹ While many today, especially in the Lutheran

³⁶ Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 115.

³⁷ Ibid., 133.

³⁸ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 116.

³⁹ Ibid., 111.

community, joke about conversion through marriage, it does appear that this has been a long standing method within Christendom.

Summary of the First Two Pairings

The pairings we have reviewed so far, in an attempt to understand the growth of the early church, have included organism versus organization and inclusive versus exclusive. It has been demonstrated that in both cases, the answer has been both/and rather than either/or. The church as Christ's body is an organism, living, breathing, and expressing itself in the lives of the members. It was through those members' lives that the Gospel was shared and took root. However, as with any but the most primitive organism, a structure is needed to hold it together and give it shape. For the church, this is organization, which will be more fully discussed in the final section of this essay.

The early church was inclusive regarding with whom the members would share the Gospel. This was a radical shift from its Jewish roots and, according to at least one author, this provided not only a means for providing community not only to the multi-ethnic diversity of Roman society, but also for the Hellenized Jews who had been marginalized in that society.⁴⁰ While inclusive in terms of its outreach, the church remained exclusive in terms of its theology and the claims of both its Founder and its God. Because it was not willing to fit in, but rather went to extremes in excluding other teachings from both within and without, the church was able to maintain its distinctives in a pluralistic society.

What those distinctives were are important to know before moving to the final pairing, because it is in those distinctives that ultimately the church found its power and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 59.

the power to conquer the Empire. When viewed strictly as a sociological phenomenon, one could say that the proto-orthodox church won out over the multitude of competing cults and sects because of the two factors outlined above. By and large, both the competing cults and the sects within Christianity failed to become organizations and maintained themselves as organisms which could not compete with the structure which empowered the church. On the other hand, the church was able to continue as an organism, able to move within networks to spread its message, as opposed to the state religion, which was an organization but failed to expand itself through organic expression.

Christianity was able to triumph over Judaism and other ethnically-based cults because of its inclusive nature. At the same time, its exclusivity kept it from being absorbed into the general milieu of the day and become yet another god in the pantheon.

However, these factors do not take into account the power that was the church's due to the uniqueness of its message. Two parts of that message stood out as striking when compared to the other teachings of the day. The first was relational. No other cult taught that one could have a relationship with the supreme being. While all cults offered gods, these gods did not communicate with people, nor did any have a concern for the well-being of humankind. Only Christianity and Judaism held out this possibility. "The idea that God loves those who love Him was entirely new."⁴¹ It was only the Christian message that provided for this relationship through God's initiative, not through human initiative.

⁴¹ Ibid., 211.

The second was the message of resurrection. According to MacMullen, “Resurrection in the flesh appeared a startling, distasteful idea, at odds with everything that passed for wisdom among the educated.”⁴² Life after death was not a completely new concept in the ancient world, but eternal life, body and soul together, provided yet another contrast to the offerings of competing cults. Contemporary examples of this exist as we witness the explosion of the church in Africa, where the Gospel stands in stark contrast to both animism and Islam. I experienced this first hand in central Sudan in November of 2004, meeting a man from the western Nuba Mountains who had walked four and a half days to come to the village where I was staying because he heard that there was someone there who could tell him about Jesus.

Apostolic versus Pastoral

So, we are left with how that message was carried into the Roman world and how organism and organization worked together to insure the spread of the Gospel through the then known world. This takes us to the issue of apostolic leadership and the pairing: apostle versus pastor. As mentioned at the outset, the term “apostolic leadership” is getting a lot of press today, both on-line as noted, and in publications. *Christianity Today*’s web site links to over 200 organizations regarding apostolic leadership. From Lyle Schaller writing *Revolution in Leadership: Training Apostles for Tomorrow's Church* to George G. Hunter’s *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry & Evangelism*, the rush seems to be on to resurrect apostles. Hunter suggests that C. Peter Wagner “jacked up his car, removed ‘postdenominational,’ and ran the term ‘apostolic’

⁴² MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*, 12.

underneath!”⁴³ It would seem that Wagner is not the only one who has made this shift. Many others have followed the same course. McNeal uses the same term to point pastors in new directions.⁴⁴ But does using the term confuse the issue? Hunter argues against such use: “I cannot support the movement’s implied definition of an apostle as a leader who exercises command authority over one or more churches.”⁴⁵ I would agree with Hunter. Perhaps the argument has come from the confusion over the offices in Ephesians 4:11. After the apostolic age, the use of the office of apostle nearly disappeared from use, replaced by bishop, pastor, and deacon as offices in the church. The apostolic calling to begin new churches in new areas became part of the pastoral function. By the time of Patrick, “apostle to Ireland,” the term “missionary bishop” had replaced apostle in the church’s nomenclature, focusing on the organizational model of the church.⁴⁶

It has been argued that the offices listed in Ephesians 4:11 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher) form a hierarchy of church offices.⁴⁷ Rather than an institutional hierarchy, could one not argue for a chronological hierarchy instead? That is, rather than say the apostle is the most important office, could one not say that the apostle is the first one on the scene in church development? Under this understanding one could trace the development of the early church in a timeline of organic to organizational

⁴³ Hunter III, *Radical Outreach*, 16.

⁴⁴ McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 120.

⁴⁵ Hunter III, *Radical Outreach*, 17.

⁴⁶ George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 15.

⁴⁷ Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church: Context, Growth, Leadership & Worship*, 158.

development, and as such, more a reflection of a naturally occurring movement from chaos to order than a top-down commanded managerial flowchart.⁴⁸ With this understanding of the offices listed, a timeline for development of a mission field could be seen in this way. First, the apostle arrives in the field. Through his or her preaching of the Gospel, a community of believers is gathered. As this community is gathered, a prophetic voice is heard, either through the apostle – in the case of Paul writing to the churches he began – or through other leaders, directing the growing community in the way of life in which they are to participate. While the congregation begins the process of organization, still more are brought in through the work of evangelism. Once a critical mass develops, the congregation is organized establishing the pastoral office in their midst so that the gathered community may continue to grow and be taught generationally. In this way the organization continues to empower the organic nature of the church. From being a part of the organization, individuals and small groups would naturally expand the spread of the Gospel through their open networks. In his commentary on Ephesians, Foulkes implies this chronological appearance of the gifts but concludes that rather than applying this order to the opening of a new mission field or church plant, he sees it as applicable to the first century only.⁴⁹

Looking at this process on a micro-level, my own experience would validate this process. I have been sent into new areas to begin churches (apostolic). As a group gathered, my time would be spent encouraging the new believers (prophetic) and continuing to reach out to more (evangelistic). I helped them organize and call their first

⁴⁸ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berret-Koehler, 1999), 87.

⁴⁹ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 117.

pastor/teacher (in one case me, in other cases, either seminary candidates or a candidate from the field).

I would suggest that viewing the various offices in chronological order could also be applied to a macro-view of the history of the church. By the end of the Apostolic Age, most agree that the Gospel had been proclaimed “to the ends of the earth,” that is, to the limits of the then-known world. Communities were being gathered and the process of organization began with the development of structures unique to each setting and in keeping not only with the culture in which the church found itself, but with the unique marks of the influence of the apostle/planter.⁵⁰ Prophets and evangelists gave way to pastors and teachers with the laity taking on the assignment of sharing the faith within their networks. This approach breaks down when the history is pushed forward in time. After the church is organized, the mission is carried forward by either these same laity relocating to new areas or by the organized body sending trained clergy to develop new fields.⁵¹ I would argue that either of these groups should be recognized for the apostolic role they were fulfilling as the process began in a new area.

A Return to Pastoral Leadership

The proponents of the “apostolic ministry/leadership” movement argue that strong professional leadership is needed for today’s mission field. The problem, however, is that churches/denominations get stuck on the institutional side of the bipolar paradigm

⁵⁰ Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, 29.

⁵¹ Hinson, "Ordinary Saints at First Church," 1.

described by Schwarz.⁵² The institution becomes the end in and of itself rather than the instrument for continuing the mission. A return to apostolic leadership runs the risk of downplaying the importance of a healthy spiritual community. Bandy challenges the reader with these words:

Simon, son of John, do you love me? Do you love me more than control? Do you love me more than denominational polity? . . . Do you love me more than the institutional church and your local church heritage? . . . Do you really, really love me? . . . Do you love me so much that you will accompany me into mission with every micro culture of the community and reorganize your life and your church to do outreach, and only outreach, and nothing but outreach, so help you God? . . . Good for you. Now, follow me, and let's feed my sheep.⁵³

Is the task of the parish pastor to be more concerned with the lost than with the found?

That seems to be what Bandy and others are suggesting. But, I would propose that if the pastor were feeding his flock and leading his flock “beside still waters,” that flock would be doing whatever it could to increase the size of the flock. A healthy, well-fed flock would be a productive flock. This is to say that the church might be better served if our pastors grew more in their people skills, in their relational skills, in their understanding of the psychology of both the individual members and group dynamics. A better-equipped laity might be better suited for outreach than a pastor more skilled in apostolic leadership. Does a congregation need an apostle or a pastor?

At least one current researcher, Thom Rainer, suggests the latter. One of the “surprising insights from the unchurched” from the book of the same name is that pastors

⁵² Schwartz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church*.

⁵³ Bandy, *Fragile Hope: Your Church in 2020*, 165.

and preaching are critical.⁵⁴ One of the missionaries under my supervision, beginning a new congregation in a suburb of Des Moines, discovered this insight as well, through the feedback cards he distributes at the end of the service. He has been working in the field for over three years and began worship in September 2004. He developed a worship team and focused on the quality of the music as what he saw as the outreach tool for this new post-modern start. The comment cards, except in one case, have not mentioned the music. The comments instead have mentioned the importance of the message. Several have expressed an interest in Baptism because of the message and the pastoral care and concern shown to the stranger at the door.

Others have argued for the importance of the pastor being greater than the apostle in the local congregation. Brown makes the point: “Rough vitality and a willingness to fight bare-knuckled for the Gospel were part of what made Paul a great missionary, but such characteristics might have made him a poor residential community supervisor.”⁵⁵ This is not to say that there is not a need for apostles today. The need for church planting is as great as ever. But it is to say that the skill set found in an apostle/church planter is not the same as the skill set needed to lead and feed an established congregation.

While the apostles can be looked to for examples and models for today's church planter, the pastor does not have this kind of modeling available. Perhaps this is why the current literature seeks to use the apostolic model. The word pastor does not appear in the book of Acts, and very rarely implied in the balance of the New Testament. Descriptions

⁵⁴ Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights From The Unchurched* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 51.

⁵⁵ Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, 36.

are given of the duties and responsibilities of the pastor/bishop/presbyter, but a story of one is hard to find.

Attitudes evident in the apostles (missional, risk-taking for the sake of the Gospel, and culturally relevant) can and should be attitudes evident in this pastor as well. But are these “apostolic” attitudes, as suggested by McNeal, or qualities that can/should be found in any follower of Jesus Christ?⁵⁶ McNeal goes on to say, “‘Apostolic leaders’ have at the top of their list of questions: ‘Is anyone being brought into the kingdom?’”⁵⁷ How can this question be limited to or be a mark of “apostolic leadership” only? If this were true, then the Great Commission would be limited to the apostles only as some within my denomination would suggest. If, however, the Great Commission applies to all Christians, that question is one that should be on the lips of all.

Today’s pastors must be like the men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do. (1 Chron. 12:32 NIV) They must understand that the church is both an organism and an organization. They must realize the duality of the church in its inclusive/exclusive nature. While the church must be inclusive in its outreach it cannot give up the exclusive claims of Christ for the sake of getting along, fitting in. In addition, they must know the story of the church and her Lord, how the church began, how the church developed and how each part of the church “joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Eph. 4:16 NIV)

⁵⁶ McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 126.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 127.

Knowing the story and telling the story will mean that the pastor knows that we are living in post-Christian times and, contrary to what some may suggest, this does not mean the same as pre-Christian. While we are living in an increasingly pagan world, this does not mean that the message we have to share has not been heard before, as was the case in the Apostolic Age. As someone has said, those outside of the church are not outside of it because they have not tried the church but because they have. It would seem to me that this is the major difference that must be taken into account in any comparison between the early church and today. Eternal life is not a new concept. A personal God is not a new concept. But a community of faith that is truly devoted to her Lord and truly sincere about incarnational living – warm, loving, naturally sharing that love with all – now, that might be something those outside the church might be drawn to and want to believe.

It has been shown in this chapter that the need for leadership in the church is as great as ever, especially in response to the changes occurring in society. Some maintain that we are returning to a pre-Christian environment and following this line of reasoning argue that leadership should be based on the apostles who functioned in this environment in the first centuries after Christ. While I agree with the need for leadership, the need is for pastors to lead their flock as shepherds in the best sense of the word. A shepherd keeps the flock safe and provides them with everything they need as followers of the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. Thus equipped, the community will thrive in the emerging culture. How and why the community responds is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

KNIT TOGETHER IN LOVE: THE FABRIC OF COMMUNITY

In chapter six we present materials from current research in the natural and social sciences regarding the nature of “bonding agents” in community and social interactions (that is, what holds communities together). While the church is formed by God and based in theology, it is comprised of human beings who, as saints and sinners, respond and react according to various biological and sociological principles. In order to understand fully the dynamics of a congregation, these principles need to be understood.

Scriptural basis

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” (Ps. 139:13 NIV) While modern science has only recently begun to uncover the mysteries of human creation through the discovery of DNA fifty years ago and the mapping of the human genome in the past few years, it is acknowledged that there is much left to learn in these fields. Many of these discoveries, while not intentionally, in several ways support the concepts put forth in the Biblical record. The words of the psalmist above and these words from a yet earlier Biblical author, Job, demonstrate the complexity of the human creation that science is only now beginning to realize: “Didst Thou not pour me out like milk, And curdle me like cheese; Clothe me with skin and flesh, And knit me together with bones and sinews?” (Job 10:10 NIV)

While there are many other passages from Scripture that could have been selected to demonstrate this point, I have chosen these two because of the writers' use of the word "knit," which illustrates the intricacy of the human being. In addition, the word also reflects how humans relate to one another and to their creator which will be the focus of this chapter. In Psalm 139 the Hebrew word is **הִסְכֵּנִי**, while in Job the Hebrew is **הִסְכֵּנִי**: the root in both cases is **סכך**. While many translators render this word "to cover" (or cover with a network) an alternate meaning is "to weave together."¹ The context, focusing on God's work in creating the author, would seem to be better served with the "weaved together" or "knit" interpretation. F. Delitzsch argues this as well: "here the poet praises this coming into being as a marvelous work of the omniscient and omnipresent omnipotence of God . . . not: cover, protect . . . but: to plait, interweave, viz. with bones, sinews, and veins."²

That God is seen as the one who has "knit" together each one of us in our mother's womb is the first step in seeing the creative work of God not only in our individual existence, but in our life together in community as well. The Apostle Paul uses this interpretation of the creative work of God in knitting, interweaving the human being when he uses the illustration of the body as a metaphor for the church in Romans: "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, each one of them, just as he wanted them to be. . . . But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to

¹ Strong, James. *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

² C. F. and Delitzsch Keil, *Volume V Psalms*, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, vol. V (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 348.

the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body.” (1 Cor. 12:18, 24b-25 NIV) The interrelation of the parts within the body, as well as the interdependency of those parts, becomes for Paul not only a metaphor but also a model for the Christian congregation. Paul goes so far as to use a similar word when writing the church at Ephesus: “from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.” (Eph. 4:16 RSV) Underlying “knit together” is *συμβιβάζομενον*, which, as did “sawkak” (Hebrew), has more than one meaning.³ However, in this case, “knit together” is the primary meaning. The secondary meanings are also important. Bromiley includes the concept of “to hold together” as well as “to prove,” “to instruct” or “to learn.”⁴ Lenski takes us even deeper:

The first participle contains our word “harmony” and is amplified by the second, “knit together,” which is used with reference to men who are making a treaty or a contract. We may perhaps say that “framed together” is more figurative and “knit together” is more in line with reality. We prefer to regard both as passive and not as middle; the agent involved is omitted because it is not stressed, yet this agent would be Christ.⁵

The relationship of “knitting together” to learn and contract are vital to an understanding of the development of Christian community. This will be further discussed later. God can be seen, therefore, to be responsible for both “knitting together” each of us and likewise

³Strong, James. *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

⁴Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 1102.

⁵Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, 546.

responsible for “knitting together” a community. It is this fact that will guide our exploration of the discoveries of contemporary science and the conclusion of many that relationships and community have their source in a power outside of human understanding.

Knitting Together Brain Chemistry

If, as the psalmist records, each of us were knit together in our mother’s womb, what kind of knitting was it, and what kind of yarn did He use? In a feat yet replicated by science, the brain is a marvel of electro-chemical biological engineering. The neural pathways are road maps yet to be fully explored or understood by science. This is not to say that science is not trying. In the book, *Why God Won’t Go Away*, Drs. Newberg and D’Aquill, while not proving the existence of God, seek to remove any scientific argument against His existence. Their theory, which they refer to as neurotheology, has at its heart a model “that provides a link between mystical experience and observable brain function. In simplest terms, the brain seems to have a built-in ability to transcend the perception of an individual self.”⁶ Their research demonstrates that this link is the root of what they call the “religious urge.” They conclude, “There is nothing that we have found in science or reason to refute the concept of a higher mystical reality.”⁷

The authors take the reader through their arguments on how the brain forms the mind by examining the responsibility of each part of the brain, detailing how these parts work together to create consciousness. While not arguing from a creationism point of

⁶ Andrew Newberg, Eugene D’Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won’t Go Away* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), 174.

⁷ Ibid., 169.

view and allowing for evolutionary theory, the authors do ask rhetorically, “Could it be that the brain has evolved the ability to transcend material existence, and experience a higher plane of being that actually exists?”⁸ They found that those who have had a mystical experience are convinced that their lives are part of a “plan, that goodness rules the world, and even that death can ultimately be conquered.”⁹

What makes these beliefs more than hollow dreams is the fact that the God that stands behind them has been verified, through a direct mystical encounter, as literal, absolute truth. Any challenge to the authenticity of that truth, therefore, is an attack not only upon ideas about God, but also upon the deeper neurobiologically endorsed assurances that make God real. If God is not real, neither is our most powerful source of hope and redemption. There can be only one absolute truth; it is a matter of existential survival.¹⁰

The conclusion is that there is something in the electricity, chemistry, and biology of the brain that seeks God. While not ruling out evolutionary chance, their conclusion does open the scientific door for a Creator who, in fact, hardwired His creation for a relationship with Himself.

While a major part of the book deals with the individual in relationship with God through the biology of the brain, the authors do deal with the social ramifications of their discoveries through what they see as the bonding agents of story and ritual. As opposed to Maslov’s hierarchy of human needs scale, which holds that self-actualization is a higher need and is not addressed until the lower needs are met, the authors see that the search for meaning and ultimate truth is central to all human existence. Even during the Stone Age examples can be found in the burial rituals of the Neanderthals that

⁸ Ibid., 140.

⁹ Ibid., 164.

¹⁰ Ibid.

demonstrate a metaphysical hope. “As soon as hominids began to behave like human beings, they began to wonder and worry about the deepest mysteries of existence – and found resolutions for those mysteries in the stories we call myths.”¹¹

The difference in the human brain compared to other animals is in the fully developed parietal region. This region contains the center of language and what the authors call the “casual” and “binary” operators. The casual operator finds solutions for survival. The binary operator works through situations where there appears to be a conflict of opposites seeking reconciliation. The ultimate pairing of opposites seems to be life versus death. It is in the working of these two operators that the authors find the source of the biological origins of the urge to make myth or story.¹² Myths, which the authors hold may be true or not, do resolve the tension of opposites for the creator of the myth. Myths “gain their power through neurologically endorsed flashes of insight.”¹³ The individual myth becomes a communal one when others likewise find meaning and power from it. Community is created in this scenario when those who hear the story or myth gain a similar albeit less intense flash of insight through the story.

Ritual, as discussed early, is the story in action and as Newberg and D’Aquili demonstrate, has a biological dimension as well for the individual and for the group. They have found that performance of a ritual causes a reaction and/or response in the brain usually beneficial for the individual and the group in direct correlation to the intent of the ritual. Fast rhythms drive the arousal system into high gear cascading a number of

¹¹ Ibid., 55.

¹² Ibid., 70.

¹³ Ibid., 73.

responses through the system bringing feelings of joy and positive emotions to the participants enhancing the feelings of community. The opposite experience is created when slow ritualistic practices are engaged. Chanting or prayer can lead to a more individualistic experience towards unity with God while even in a group setting.

In addition to the biological responses involved, ritual provides an aid to strengthening memories. Rituals can serve to stockpile emotional and spiritual resources that can guide our thinking and actions even after the memories of the actual events begin to fail. Frequency of repetition is important for this role of ritual as memory reinforcement.¹⁴ In many traditions there is a growing trend towards more frequent celebration of the Eucharist. While some might argue that this trend is a return to Biblical faithfulness and early church tradition, these new understandings from science could as easily be used as arguments for the trend.

This desire for a spiritual experience with God in a group setting can be seen as the motivation behind the recent phenomenon of a return to “vintage” worship. In an article in *Science and Spirit*, the author explores the emergence of this expression of Christian worship. “Vintage services are organic rather than linear; they are about experiential faith rather than logic and intellectual understanding. They emphasize sacred space. . . . crosses, candles, visual art, and draperies be used to create a mood conducive to worship.”¹⁵ Unfortunately, the author sees this as just another sales pitch, missing the point of the need for ritual in religious experience.

¹⁴ Hogue, *Remember the Future Imagining the Past*, 137.

¹⁵ Paul O'Donnell, "Let Us Pray," *Science & Spirit* (Washington, D.C.), September October 2004, 78.

The use of ritual can be seen as a development that enables the brain to receive even more sensory data for processing. That is, since the brain can only “experience” with the senses, a magnification or multiplication of the senses can lead to a greater internalization of the story and spiritual response. The authors see this as the “primary function of religious ritual – to turn spiritual stories into spiritual experiences; to turn something in which you believe into something you can feel.”¹⁶

While the conclusion of the binary operator that we are not in a safe world can be seen as a causative agent behind the development of all religions, it can also be seen as the motivator for human organizations into communities.

They banded into groups, allowing them to hunt cooperatively, share resources, and more efficiently defend themselves from hostile outsiders. They also invented ideas to protect themselves – laws, cultures, religions, and science, which enabled them to adapt more and more to their world. All of the lofty reaches to which human achievement has carried us . . . can be traced to the mind’s need to reduce the intolerable anxiety that is the brain’s way of warning us that we are not safe.¹⁷

There would probably be little argument among scientists regarding the role of brain chemistry in motivating humans toward community. The same might not be said for its role in religious development where some scientists might argue for a less than divine reason for these motivations. David Hogue attempts to maintain the tension between science and theology while acknowledging the differences:

At the same time, one can appreciate the contributions of the brain sciences without an uncritical acceptance of the evolutionary assumptions behind them. Science is never value-neutral. . . . Most if not all of the recent discoveries about the brain can support the celebration of a created universe as well as an evolving one.¹⁸

¹⁶ Newberg, D'Aquili, and Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away*, 91.

¹⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹⁸ Hogue, *Remember the Future Imagining the Past*, 8.

Knitting Together Community

Many of the ideas and concepts addressed above were included in a recent paper “Hardwired to Connect.”¹⁹ This extensive report was developed by the Commission on Children at Risk which was an effort on the part of the YMCA of the USA, Dartmouth Medical School and the Institute for American Values to discover the causes for children becoming “at risk” and, therefore, potentially a liability to the community. The study grew to include not only the factors contributing to children becoming “at risk,” but factors that will mitigate against the negative towards positive child development. The commission expanded its original charter to include all children and the authors hope that the report will “spark a much needed conversation on how we can better help our children grow up healthy, whole, and ready for a productive and happy life.”²⁰

While the report does not detail the religious affiliations of the commission members, it does show that with very few exceptions, the 33 members represented secular institutions.²¹ Given the recent trend towards downplaying the role of the church in society, this fact is important in that the commission sees this negation of the church from the life of the community as one of the main factors contributing to the rise of the number of “at risk” children. The commission calls for a concerted effort of all parts of society, including government, to reinforce and rebuild the infrastructure of “authoritative communities” needed for the sake of the children.

¹⁹ Kathleen Kovner Kline, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (Washington, D.C.: YMCA of the USA, 08/09 2003), 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹ While the YMCA still includes the “C” representing its historic link to Christianity, most would not recognize the organization as a religious institution today.

The term “authoritative communities” is a creation of the commission in response to the fact that social science had “no name for the set of institutions that play this nurturing role. This namelessness is highly significant: These institutions have no name because social science hasn’t recognized the critical importance of their role.”²² It is exactly the importance of these “authoritative communities” that is the conclusion of the report. The key findings of the report leading to this conclusion are:

- Human beings are hardwired to form relationships.
- Early nurture powerfully affects brain development.
- Nurture can neutralize genetic vulnerabilities.
- The biologically-based need for nurture continues through adolescence.
- Human beings are biologically primed to seek moral and spiritual meaning, and nurturing relationships are a central foundation for positive moral and spiritual development.
- Nurturing relationships and a spiritual connection to the transcendent significantly improve physical and emotional health.²³

The commission defines “authoritative communities” as

groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life. Essentially, they are groups that live out the types of connectedness that our children increasingly lack. The family is (or at least should be) the most important authoritative community. Other core authoritative communities include youth organizations such as YMCAs, other community groups involved with children, religious organizations, and schools.²⁴

Following a great deal of research, the commission was able to identify ten key characteristics of authoritative communities.

1. Authoritative communities include children and youth.
2. They treat children as ends in themselves.

²² Kline, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*, 17.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

3. They are warm and caring.
4. They establish clear limits and expectations.
5. The core of their work is performed largely by nonspecialists.
6. They are multigenerational.
7. They have a long-term focus.
8. They encourage spiritual and religious development.
9. They reflect and transmit a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person.
10. They are philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all people and to the principle of love of neighbor.

Thus, modern science and a secular commission have combined to provide support for the Scriptural passages laid out at the beginning of this chapter, that is, that humans are created by God to be in relationship with their Creator and with their fellow creatures. It would be hard to imagine a better definition of the church than what the report gives for its authoritative community. It would only take one or two additional lines, such as, created by God, empowered by God, and for God to round out the picture. It is also hard to imagine another institution better equipped for the task than the church. Many times the report demonstrates the need for spiritual connectedness for children to thrive. It would appear that there is no other organization in the list that can do that.

Three subpoints from the report reinforce this conclusion:

1. Growing evidence indicates that we are biologically primed to seek moral meaning and a spiritual connection to the transcendent.
2. Evidence points to a powerful interaction between the brain and the environment.
3. Nurture (or lack of nurture) plays a central role in shaping the substance of the child's moral and spiritual beliefs.²⁵

Obviously, the family is the key or the first step in this development. The child's relationship with his/her parents is the most formative one in spiritual development. The child sees God through the parents and if that influence is lacking the child may develop

²⁵ Kline, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*, 12.

a religious life as a way of making up for what was lacking in the way he or she was parented. On the other hand, the report goes on, the child may turn away from traditional religious communities and seek the spiritual in other ways. As the child grows, a larger group is needed to demonstrate to the child both religious and social elements of life together in community. The larger community becomes increasingly important as the child grows. If positive role models and communities are unavailable or unwilling to fulfill this responsibility in nurturing the next generation, there is no shortage of negative groups and individuals that will fulfill this role.

The commission concluded that “while America has historically been blessed with an exceptionally strong web of authoritative communities, a range of social forces has seriously weakened those communities in recent decades.”²⁶ These forces include, the rise of single-parent households and family fragmentation, the weakening of civil society, and the lack of support for institutions that help in both of these areas. The recommendations of the commission are to reverse these trends. They hope to spur a return to the values that support authoritative communities. They want to increase membership and attendance of these communities. Finally, they want to influence policy-makers at all levels to support these goals. For all of the complaints about the ineffectiveness of the church in the era of Constantinian Christendom, it would seem that the commission is seeking to bring some of its influence back.

Thus far we have demonstrated that human beings are designed by their Creator to be in relationship, first and foremost with God, and as an extension of this relationship, with one another. In these two relationships – with God and with a community –

²⁶ Ibid., 19.

theology, psychology, and sociology all see the benefit for the development of the human mind and spirit. The fabric of these relationships becomes the next issue to address.

The Fabric of Community

Community, as defined earlier, can be made up of many fabrics. They can be based on location, on history, on purpose, or on genetics. It was demonstrated in chapters one and two that the fabric of the Christian community should be centered in Christ. But, as the fabric grows out from that center, what should it look like? For the answer to that question we turn to the work of futurists Joel Barker and George Land. In a 1995 lecture Joel Barker using Land's transformational theory expanded the fabric for businesses and organizations which can also be applied to a Christian community.²⁷

Land's transformational theory proposed in 1973 in his book *Grow or Die* attempts to provide a unified principle for organizational growth through natural processes that integrates principles of creativity, growth, and change. The theory says that there are three stages every organism and/or organization goes through with what are called "breakpoints" as the organism/organization moves between the stages. Joel Barker builds on the work of Land in the lecture noted above. The first stage of development is called "accretion." The beginning of any entity is characterized by selfishness, that is, it pulls resources to itself that it must have to be viable, to live. An example of this would be a baby grabbing for food or for love. Selfishness is seen as a powerful and useful role at the beginning. At this beginning stage, like looks for like, for sameness. In his lecture, Barker used examples from natural science, such as a hydrogen atom clustering with other hydrogen atoms. Not moving beyond this stage, nothing will develop. Another

²⁷ Joel Barker, "Wealth, Innovation and Diversity" (Saint Paul, MN, 11/12 1995).

example is a kindergartener. In the schoolyard, the boys stay with the boys and the girls with the girls because of the similarity, the desire to be with others who are the same. As with other examples, if the accretion stage does not change, little development will occur.

The breakthrough occurs when the system moves to the next stage, “replication.” Here, the single entity gets beyond itself. It must have something to react to or relate to. While the differences are slight, male/female for example, the advantages become obvious. The potential for leverage exists when you have multiples. An awareness of your selfness is heightened in others. More can happen at this level as well as a safety in numbers advantage.

The next breakthrough may or may not occur because of the risk involved. This next stage is “mutualism,” which is characterized by a respect for diversity. It involves a search for individuals different from you. At this level, the organism or organization gains the ability to create an almost infinite number of combinations through these interactions. At each of these stages, the boundaries of relationships change and many will not take the risk. Risk is the threat to the strength of the lower levels. At the level of self-similarity, one’s identity is reinforced through others like him/herself. Because of the similarities, getting along and communications are easy as well as predicting the result of interactions. Decisions can be made more easily; there are fewer options and fewer dissenting voices to be considered. Conflict is reduced at this level while bonds are strengthened.

However, if someone or an organism or organization is willing to make the move to the next level, the benefits of mutualism or diversity will become apparent. Complex systems seem to be able to rebound from systemic trauma much faster than simple

systems. Interacting with unlike entities enables the possibility for the creation of the broadest range of responses or recombinations to find a way to deal with a problem.

Barker concludes that the strength of any organism, organization, or even a nation can only come from a willingness to embrace diversity. Diversity gives robustness, a greater ability to solve problems and create new paradigms to deal with change.

Remaining at the first level, accretion, seeks to fix things by all becoming the same. The replication level is the easiest level for leaders. It generates a high level of trust but it limits creativity and stifles maturity. It is a mistake to believe we can solve problems by becoming more similar. Diversity is the natural direction of the universe, according to Barker.

In strictly organization terms, Land charts out this theory as three phases: phase one – forming, phase two – norming, and phase three – fulfilling.²⁸ In phase one of an organization's development the key adjectives are entrepreneurial, divergent, inventive, creative and exploratory. At phase two the keys become management, duplication, modification, improvement, commonality and likeness. New words describe phase three: shared leadership, divergence and innovation, sharing and integrating differences, partnering and vision.

From Barker and Land we see that all organizations pass through growth stages if they are to become what was intended for them at their outset. In my experience planting eight churches and working with over 50 congregations in Iowa District West of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, I have seen all three of the phases outlined by Land at work. It is the rare congregation, however, that successfully moves into the third phase

²⁸ George and Jarman Land, Beth, *Breakpoint and Beyond: Mastering the Future Today*, (New York: HarperBusiness, 1992), 40.

and fully develops a diverse community. The phase two key phrases mentioned above (management, duplication, modification, improvement, commonality and likeness) describe the condition of most of the older congregations with which I have worked. The challenge for the consultant working with such congregations is to understand these phases and the dynamics at work preventing the congregation from moving forward.

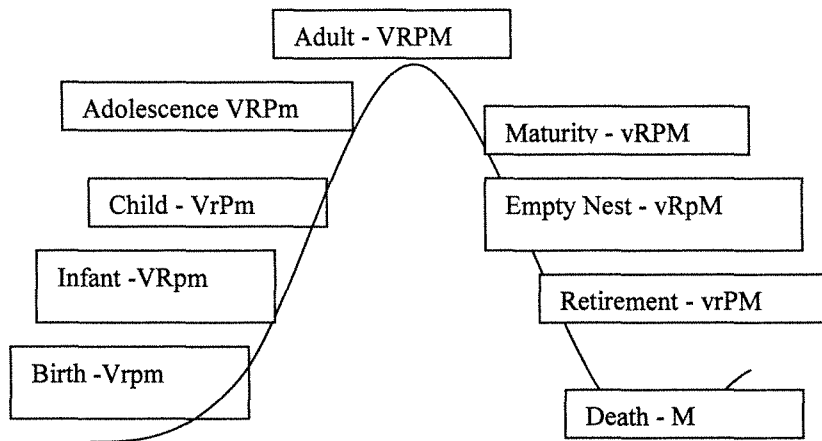
Small groups with little diversity can develop what one psychologist refers to as “group think.”²⁹ Homogeneous groups become cohesive more easily than diverse groups. As they do, they become more dependent on the group for decision making, more isolated from outside opinions, and more confident that the group’s opinion is always right and that dissent is neither needed nor appreciated. This “group think” leads to a “gather the wagons in a circle” mentality that prevents the group from growing through diversity.

It is this failure to move to phase three of development that limits a congregation’s potential not only for growth but for effective lifespan as well. According to Dr. Robert Scudieri of LCMS World Missions, the lifespan of a congregation is about 80 years.³⁰ The charts and graphs used to illustrate this lifespan by Dr. Scudieri and others including Southern Baptist congregational consultant George Bullard, all speak of a congregation as an organic being, subject to natural laws of birth, growth, maturity and death, as if each were an inevitable fact for a congregation. Bullard outlines congregational life stages with V: Vision/Leadership/Mission/Purpose/Core Values; R: Relationships/Experience/Discipleship; P: Programs/Events/Ministries/Services and M:

²⁹ James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (Random House Audio, 2004).

³⁰ Robert Scudieri, "Joy in Christ's Victory," in *Iowa District West Convention* (Milford, IA, 23/06 2003).

Management/Accountability/Systems, with a different letter(s) capitalized symbolizing the stage of congregational life. For Bullard, a congregational life cycle would look like this



If we were to align the adjectives of the Land model with the descriptors of the Bullard model, it could be shown that the congregation in Bullard's model never made the shift to the third phase. Not making the shift shortens its potential for growth and life. It leaves the congregation content with self similarity and unwilling to give up the comfort of the known for the possibilities of the future.

Of course, both the Land model and the Bullard model fail to take into account the supernatural aspect of the church. Either model can and does apply to any secular organization. Perhaps it is the fact that there are so many similarities between the church and other secular organizations that cause many churches to seek solutions in the secular marketplace rather than returning to the source of their being as discussed in chapter two. There exists the possibility as well that, as seen in chapter three and chapter five, congregations tend to move away from the horizontal bonding in Christ towards a

dependence on bloodlines over time. These possibilities will be discussed further in chapter eight.

The fabric of God's creation is color and diversity, textures, sights, sounds, all knit together in His glorious creation of planet earth for people. One cannot help but envision a similar fabric of community existing not only in the here and now, but throughout time, expressing itself in ever-evolving patterns and varieties. To explore further this aspect we will now explore the theory of generations.

The Fabric of Community in Time

The list of qualities of an authoritative community in the report "Hardwired to Connect" include three that directly relate to the issue of time in a community: 1. Authoritative communities include children and youth; 2. They are multigenerational; and 3. They have a long-term focus. How these generations relate is the subject of the book *Generations*.³¹ Strauss and Howe see a four-generational pattern emerge through American history dating from 1584 into the future. That their theory is beginning to be verified can be seen in a prediction made in their book *The Fourth Turning*. "Sometime around the year 2005, perhaps a few years before or after, America will enter the Fourth Turning." They outline several possible scenarios including: "A global terrorist group blows up an aircraft and announces it possesses portable nuclear weapons. The United

³¹ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1589-2069* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 463.

States and its allies launch a preemptive strike. The terrorists threaten to retaliate against an American city. Congress declares war . . .”³²

The four generational types they propose have become, since the book’s publication in 1991, part of our vernacular in discussing generational differences. They are G.I., Silent, Boomer, Buster (13th). Underlying each of these is a type that repeats though history. These are Civic, Adaptive, Idealist, and Reactive. These types are seen as responses occurring at intersections with what are called “social moments.” The authors say that there are two types: “SECULAR CRISIS, when society focuses on reordering the outer world of institutions and public behavior; and SPIRITUAL AWAKENINGS, when society focuses on changing the inner world of values and private behaviors.” These intersections occur approximately forty to forty-five years apart and alternate between secular and spiritual.³³ The types, then, are tied to times and events and are defined by the authors with this in mind:

1. A dominant, inner-fixated IDEALIST GENERATION grows up as increasingly indulged youths after a secular crisis; comes of age inspiring a spiritual awakening; fragments into narcissistic rising adults; cultivates principle as moralistic midlifers; and emerges as visionary elders guiding the next secular crisis.
2. A recessive REACTIVE GENERATION grows up as underprotected and criticized youths during a spiritual awakening; matures into risk-taking, alienated rising adults; mellows into pragmatic midlife leaders during a secular crisis; and maintains respect (but less influence) as reclusive elders.
3. A dominate, outer-fixated CIVIC GENERATION grows up as increasingly protected youths after a spiritual awakening; comes of age overcoming a secular crisis; unites into a heroic and achieving cadre of rising adults; sustains that image while building institutions as powerful midlifers; and emerges as busy elders attacked by the next spiritual awakening.

³² William & Howe Strauss, Neil, *The Fourth Turning*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 273.

³³ Strauss and Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future*, 71.

4. A recessive ADAPTIVE GENERATION grows up as overprotected and suffocated youths during a secular crisis; matures into risk-averse, conformist rising adults; produces indecisive midlife arbitrator-leaders during a spiritual awakening; and maintains influence (but less respect) as sensitive elders.³⁴

This fabric of generations needs to be understood in any attempt to work with congregations. In older congregations all four or more will be evident in the membership and will not only need to be identified, but examined as to how they relate to one another and in the time frame of history. If this generational theory holds true, we are entering a secular crisis period. We have been in what Strauss and Howe call an “unraveling period” – a time in which social institutions begin to fall apart following a spiritual awakening and before a secular crisis. During this time as we wait for what is emerging, Strauss and Howe offer guidance for both organizations and individuals, strikingly similar to what was called for in the report above on at-risk children and the theoretical framework proposed by Land and others. They call on America to:

- Prepare values: Forge the consensus and uplift the culture, but don’t expect any near-term results.
- Prepare institutions: Clear the debris and find out what works, but don’t try building anything big.
- Prepare politics: Define challenges bluntly and stress duties over rights, but don’t attempt reforms that can’t now be accomplished.
- Prepare society: Require community teamwork to solve local problems, but don’t try this on a national scale.
- Prepare youth: Treat children as the nation’s highest priority, but don’t do their work for them.
- Prepare elders: Tell future elders they will need to be more self-sufficient, but don’t attempt deep cuts in benefits to current elders.³⁵

On the individual side, Strauss and Howe give this advice:

- Rectify: Return to the classic values.

³⁴ Ibid., 74.

³⁵ Strauss, *The Fourth Turning*, 316.

- Converge: Heed emerging community norms.
- Bond: Build personal relationships of all kinds.
- Gather: Prepare yourself (and your children) for teamwork.
- Root: Look to your family for support.
- Brace: Gird for the weakening or collapse of public support mechanisms.
- Hedge: Diversify everything you do.³⁶

Again, as was demonstrated in the discussion of “Hardwired to Connect,” it seems that the secular world is calling on the church to lead the way into the future. Both on the individual and social levels, there is a need to return to values and relationships as the keys to weathering whatever the future holds. The Church, as God’s instrument for His will and work in the world, is uniquely poised to be the fabric of community needed not just to make a difference, but to make the world different.

Thus Far

In this chapter we have seen that humans are biologically “wired” for relationships and community. The type of community will have an impact on the development of the person as will the generational cohort with which the person is aligned. The life stage of the community will likewise impact the individual development and the future of the individual and community. Combining these factors we begin to see the fabric of a community, knit together by a loving Creator.

The Knots Holding the Fabric Together

Having demonstrated that people are genetically predisposed for community, in this section we will explore the inborn needs that are met by a community. One of the older categorization of needs comes through the work of Abraham Maslow, known as

³⁶ Ibid., 319.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.³⁷ Maslow's theory outlines five areas of need beginning from the lowest: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. It is called a "hierarchy" in that, according to Maslow, the higher needs need not/cannot be met until the lower needs are achieved. But, as we have seen above, a hierarchical ordering is not necessarily the case. Be that as it may, many have used Maslow's scale as a motivation for human care ministries, assuming that until the lower needs are met, a message appealing to the higher ones will not be heard. In other words, will one be interested in heaven if she or he is hungry? This is not to say that human care ministries are not needed, but it is to say that even a hungry person has relational and spiritual needs that are concurrent with what Maslow would call the more basic needs.

Others in other fields have built on this foundational work to develop needs scales appropriate to their field. In the area of business and management, Anthony Robbins developed a non-hierarchical list: love and connection, significance, certainty, uncertainty/variety, growth, and contribution.³⁸ Robbins' list is similar to the short list of Steven Covey of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* fame who finds four needs: live, love, learn, and leave a legacy.³⁹ Theological thinking has also been brought to bear in this area. At a conference in South Africa, Dr. Ignatius Swart proposed the following list, not in a hierarchical listing, but as the spokes of a wheel, with the hub being the person

³⁷ C. George Boeree, *Personality Theories: Abraham Maslow*. 1998, Shippensburg University, <http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/maslow.html> (accessed July 9, 2004)

³⁸ Steve Davis, *Teambuilding and the Six Human Needs*. 09/12 2003, MasterFacilitatorJournal.Com <http://www.masterfacilitatorjournal.com/archives/skill130.html> (accessed July 9, 2004)

³⁹ Ernst W. Kiesling, "Improving Leadership Effectiveness" (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech Research Foundation, 20/05 1991).

and the rim the intersection with the community. He sees the spokes as subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity and freedom.⁴⁰

These lists are quite similar to current thinking in the field of psychology where the “attachment theory” of John Bowlby is finding acceptance. This theory stresses the importance of emotional bonds in human development even, and most importantly, at the earliest stages of development. Johnson comments:

Bowlby's belief [is] that we are social beings who have an absolute requirement for emotional bonds with a few, precious others. It became clear that Attachment Theory offered an understanding not just of the bond between parent and child but of the needs and passions of adult lovers. Bowlby himself believed that emotional bonds with attachment figures were a central part of people's lives "from the cradle to the grave."⁴¹

If these needs are not met at some level, even the lowest need on Maslow's scale, that is, for basic sustenance goes for naught. Research has shown that babies can die, even with food available, for lack of bonding.

It is at this point that the “hand-of-God-made fabric” becomes quite apparent. As God created human life, He created that human life to be in community. Nearly all other animals in creation can, perhaps with some prompting, care for themselves, at least with the most basic needs, food and the like. Whether one were to credit evolution or creation, the human baby has to be born because of the physiology of mother before it can meet even the most basic of needs. The child has to be brought to the mother for feeding. The

⁴⁰ Ignatius Swart, "Fundamental Human Needs and Holistic Community Ministry," 30/10 2002, 07/09/2004.

⁴¹ Susan Johnson, *Attachment: A Perspective for Couple and Family Therapy*. 2000, American Family Therapy Academy, <http://www.afta.org/newsletter/79/page24.html> (Accessed on 07/09/2004)

child cannot seek out the source of food without the care and concern of the mother. It is in this act of helping the baby find the breast that the adventure in human community begins. Without the desire to bond with the baby, the baby would soon die for lack of food if not for lack of love.

The expression of love between mother and child most approximates the love that God has for His creation. “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” (1 John 4:16 NIV) The key for the Christian community is the recognition of that fact as revealed in Jesus Christ. While love on the human level can meet many of those needs, as we have seen from the discussions above, human love cannot meet the transcendent needs that are part of the human psyche. One could summarize the lists of needs (Maslov, Robbins, Covey, Swart, and Bowlby) down to the one word, love. Christian Schwartz has done this indirectly in his book *The 3 Colors of Love* on a theological level.⁴² He argues that Galatians 5:22-23 – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (NIV) – could be read as a single verb followed by eight expressions or descriptions of how love is demonstrated. Joy, peace, patience, etc. can be seen as flowing from love. While not to delay here too long, the same demonstration could be made for the human needs showing how each is an expression or need flowing from the one overarching need for love. As God is love, He has created us with a need for Him, a need for His love that can be found in the ultimate expression of His love, Jesus Christ. It is in the Gospel, proclaimed through the community of the church that God’s fabric, a coat of many colors, rich in texture and hue, created by a loving Father for His children, can be most clearly seen.

⁴² Christian A. Schwartz, *The 3 Colors of Love* (Saint Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2004), 56.

However, as we know, the church is not always seen this way. The colors are not always that diverse. The coat is often threadbare, worn thin, and even dirty. How do we reclaim God's plan and purpose for the fabric of His community?

This chapter began with the theological rationale behind the need for community among humans. Evidence from the field of biology and brain chemistry seems to support this approach. Current research in sociology also points to the basic human need to connect to others and to connect to something greater as well. From history we have seen that these connections form into communities which have life-cycles or stages. Theorists hold this to be true both on the macro level, that is, for societies in general, and the micro, congregational, level. Finally, the field of psychology offers insight into the needs that are met through these communal groups. As an outside consultant begins to address the task of working with a congregation with the goal of renewal or revitalization, he or she needs to appreciate the dynamics shown above which intersect to form the fabric of the particular congregation. Each congregation is a unique creation of God. Each is unique, not only in the reason for being at a particular time and place, but unique in its reasons for being and continued existence. The consultant, as does the pastor coming from outside, knows that each congregation has a its own DNA which must be decoded and explored to assist it in fulfilling its God-given mission of sharing God's love within and without its doors.

CHAPTER 7

CONGREGATIONAL CONSULTATION TODAY

Since my thesis is that through a consultation process existing congregations can be revitalized, it is important to examine the work of others in this field. In this chapter materials from current research and thought on congregational renewal and revitalization will be explored. This chapter will consist of two sections. In the first section I will review current thinking by six authors in the field. The second section will explore four approaches to congregational consultation and revitalization being used in Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod congregations today. I will conclude with a brief overview of my current practice in consultation, which will be referred to as the *VVM* process (Values, Vision, Mission).

Section 1

Church Growth – Church Health Literature Overview

As one traces the Generational Theory of Strauss and Howe outlined in chapter six, it can be demonstrated that each of the generational cycles (consisting of four generations) began with a “spiritual awakening” phase.¹ Each of these awakenings, from the Puritan of the early 1600s to the Missionary of the late 1800s, had a direct connection with the religious community. With the last awakening, however, we find a marked difference. This last one, referred to as the “Boom Awakening,” (1960s +/-)² takes place

¹ Strauss and Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future*, 351.

² Ibid.

outside of any connection with organized religion. Not only is this “spiritual” awakening disconnected from the church, but also it might be said that it takes place as a response or reaction to one of the greatest periods of growth in the church in America in recent history.

This period of growth for my denomination saw the church body move away from grass-roots efforts through the local congregation to a more centralized approach through the regional offices for new church development. A corporate mindset, reflected in a growing influence on the culture, due to the growing power of corporate America and the growing power of mass marketing and standardization, began to influence the church as well in the 1950s.³ Prior to this period, the local congregation provided the impetus for new home mission work. After World War II in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, the district and national offices began to play a stronger role in setting the agenda for mission work and in providing the programming for the local church. The “boom awakening” occurred outside of the church, it could be concluded, because the church, growing as it was and successful as it seemed, had become too similar to the culture.

The response of the church to this awakening can be seen in the slowly developing head of steam that has been building in church literature. Rather than including a detailed literature review, which was developed earlier in this doctoral program, an overview follows. Using the resources of both Google.com and Amazon.com we find over 1,430 references to books on the subjects of church growth or

³ Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 44.

church health. This is in contrast to the available resources in 1996 where one author states, “Well over 100 major books, studies and works analyze this serious situation.”⁴

Similarly, a search for those responding to the needs of the church in a changing society finds over 736,000 internet pages available according to Google from a search on the term “church consultant.” While many of these pages are directing the inquirer to church consultants on architecture or building furnishings, most of the first several hundred scanned offer services or resources to assist the church in the changing world. One such organization is The Alban Institute, founded in 1974, to support “congregations through consulting services, research, book publishing, and educational seminars.”⁵ Alban lists over 280 books for sale, the majority of which are designed to assist congregations in a time of transition, either within the congregation or in the culture. In addition, Alban offers over two seminars per month at locations across the nation on topics related to congregation health and growth.

Prominent Authors in the Field

I have chosen six authors in the field to explore a little more deeply. Five were chosen because they are recognized by most within American Protestant Christianity as authorities and one because he is well known within my denomination. Together these six have written over 250 books in this field.

⁴ Alan C. Klaas, *In Search of the Unchurched* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1996), 129. On October 1, 2004 Google returned over 2.9 million pages on the subject of church growth alone. That this is a recent phenomenon can be demonstrated through a simple sort. Books found using the key search words “church growth” or “church health” published before 1970 total eight; before 1980 total 32; before 1990, 205, with the balance being published after that date.

⁵ *The Alban Institute*. 01/10 2004, The Alban Institute, <http://www.alban.org/AboutUs.asp> (accessed January 10, 2004)

Lyle E. Schaller

The first author to be considered is Lyle E. Schaller, probably the most best known author in the field of church consulting and research. Schaller held this author spellbound on more than one occasion, including one three-day workshop while I was serving in Texas. Schaller, dressed in an old flannel shirt and worn blue jeans, hopped up on a typical church table and proceeded to lecture and discuss the changes needed in the church without a note to be seen for the entire three days of the meeting. Schaller, now a United Methodist since the merger with the United Brethren, exhibits a deep love of the church and his denomination through his writings. He is the author of or contributor to more than 125 books. Schaller's importance and influence in this area can be seen in the following:

A survey that William McKinney and I recently conducted invited 1,500 conservative and mainline Protestant denominational leaders to choose from a list of 63 contemporary religious leaders and authors the ten who have had "the greatest impact on your thinking about the church's life and mission today." Among the choices were Peter Berger, William Sloane Coffin, Jr., Charles Colson, Harvey Cox, Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Jesse Jackson, Martin E. Marty, C. Peter Wagner and James M. Wall. While these names were, checked by many respondents, none was checked more frequently than that of Lyle Schaller (checked by 43 percent).⁶

His books, by and large, ask penetrating questions, helping congregations to explore the issues through these questions. Many of his more recent books have included "44 questions . . ." as part of the title, but his earlier books include this catechetical format as well. He is one of only two authors reviewed whose work goes back to the earliest publication dates mentioned above. One of his earlier books, *Looking in the*

⁶ David V. A. Olson, "Learning from Lyle Schaller: Social Aspects of Congregations," *The Christian Century* 110, no. 3 (27/Jan 1993): 3.

Mirror, (1984)⁷ was my first reading of Schaller. In this book he helps congregations understand the unique qualities of the local parish based on size and other factors. Schaller dissects the congregation from many different angles including theological stance. However, in light of chapter two of this dissertation, he fails to explore the God-caused relational aspects of the congregation. While Schaller may have an understanding of this relational aspect; he does not include a discussion of it, focusing more on the human institutional side of congregational organization.

This lack of emphasis or even concern on the relational aspects of congregational life is also apparent among a number of authors in this field who, for the most part, reflect their generational bias and approach to the church. While Schaller's work or the work of the others is important or critical for understanding church dynamics, there is work left to be done in the area of relational dynamics. For example, in one of the newest publications from The Alban Institute, Israel Galindo builds on Schaller's understanding of congregational size as a factor to be considered, but moves the discussion into a systemic approach using systems theory and the complexity of relationships that expand as a congregation crosses certain size thresholds.⁸

⁷ Lyle E. Schaller, *Looking in the Mirror* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 200.

⁸ Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Dynamics* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 77ff.

Kennon L. Callahan

The second author is Kennon Callahan, like Schaller, a United Methodist, and also like Schaller, one who represents a modern⁹ approach to church consultation. Drawing on twenty years of consulting experience, Callahan wrote *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*¹⁰ in 1983, which has served as the basis for much of his work since that time. Callahan develops the twelve keys as principles or practices that members need to do to be effective. To an extent, the focus on these twelve keys leaves God out of the loop, focusing instead on practical matters and human effort to be what God empowers the church to be. Callahan many times provides direction that should take the members back to God. These include his stress on community over committees and on people over programs as means towards effectiveness. In the chapter on worship he asks, “Do the people in the church give evidence that they are the body of Christ in community one with another?”¹¹ then proceeds to outline what the members need to do to appear to be such, that is, have warm and friendly greeters, have a joyous parking supervisor, etc.

I am not questioning in any way Callahan’s faith or his relationship with Jesus Christ, but I used the examples above only to demonstrate how strongly modernism and the post-World War II corporate mindset have influenced the church. Much of the literature in the field seems to draw on corporate business practices, while much of the

⁹ For the purposes of discussion here, “modern” refers to the post-reformation, enlightenment-influenced culture which seems to be currently in decline. Attributes of modern would include a more technical, systematic rather than systemic approach to resolution of difficulties in the church and culture.

¹⁰ Kennon L. Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1987), xxi.

¹¹ Ibid., 25.

new literature in the field of business practices seems now to be drawing, if not directly from Biblical sources, at least from faith traditions and spiritual and relational awareness. Kouzes and Posner, authors of *The Leadership Challenge*, have drawn much of their thinking from this realm in their newest book *Encouraging The Heart*.¹² The title alone sounds as if it belongs in the spiritual section at Borders rather than on the business leadership shelves. They write: “There’s no bravery or boldness without heart. There’s no spirit or support without heart. Nothing great ever gets done without heart. . . . And at the heart of leadership is caring. Without caring, leadership has no purpose.”¹³ They conclude that leadership is all about caring and relationships.

Aubrey Malphurs

Another example of this crossover between the religious and business literature can be seen in two books published just one year apart. In 1995 *Values-Based Leadership* appeared in the business section. In the introduction, the authors write:

Not so long ago, religion, schools, communities and families created universal values and norms that carried over into organizations. Now, these institutions are relatively weak and our values have eroded and changed. This values erosion has occurred in our work lives as well. While corporate America is chock full of rules, policies, and procedures, it is running on empty in terms of norms and values that can provide employees with a reason to believe in their work. . . . A war needs to be waged. A war for values and norms.¹⁴

¹² James M. and Posner Kouzes, Barry Z., *Encouraging the Heart: A Leader's Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 224.

¹³ Ibid., xi.

¹⁴ Susan Smith Kuczmariski and Thomas D. Kuczmariski, *Values-Based Leadership* (New York: Prentice Hall Trade, 1995), v.

They suggest a return to what could be called traditional values of respect and caring, or basically the values that flow from Scripture, albeit with God excised. The book provides surveys, studies, and exercises for the corporate leadership to implement their recommendations.

On exactly this same line, within a year of *Values-Based Leadership*, *Values-Driven Leadership* was published by Aubrey Malphurs.¹⁵ Malphurs argues not that we have lost our values, but that they have become conflicted and unclear. They have become conflicted in the church because of the growing diversity in the nation and unclear because we have not taken the time to clearly identify them as such and organize the congregation around them. As do Kuczmarski and Kuczmarski in *Values-Based Leadership*, Malphurs discusses personal versus corporate values along with strategies to bring these into alignment. He does provide “audits”¹⁶ for determining congregational core values. However, he does not provide a similar audit for personal values.

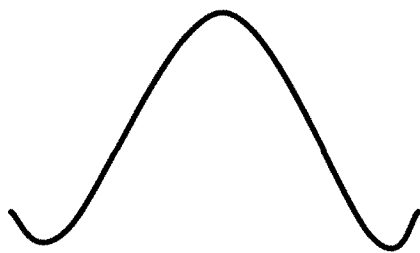
Malphurs’ approach is still in the modern mode. *Advanced Strategic Planning*¹⁷ is used by the Mission Planters’ Institute of the LCMS as a text for planning in a new congregation. While there is much to commend it, it is still somewhat mechanistic in addressing the needs of a congregation, again drawing on business organizational models for its theoretical basis.

¹⁵ Aubrey Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 161.

¹⁶ Ibid., 185.

¹⁷ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 213.

The use of business models in his discussion of congregational lifecycle reflects a corporate mindset. His approach, as with other consultants, is to use a bell curve to describe the life of an organization. It begins on the lower left as an infant, progresses up the left side through childhood and adolescence to maturity at the peak. Then decline sets



in on the right side to the eventual death.¹⁸ The problem

I have with using this approach is that the future

decline of the congregation seems inevitable as if the

congregation were a biological organism or strictly a

human organization. Others have gone further with this approach. According to Galindo:

“Growth and decline progress from stage to stage. In other words, a congregation cannot

‘skip’ a stage. . . . once a congregation is in the decline phase . . . it cannot go back to an

‘earlier’ stage.”¹⁹ The thought that this bell curve is an absolute is a depressing one for

someone who works with congregations in the decline on a regular basis. It seems that

neither Galindo nor Malphus allow for divine intervention in their schemas. The use of

the bell curve can be helpful for a congregation to understand where it is in its lifecycle,

but to imply that the congregation is a biological system that must follow the rules of

plant or animal fails to account for the possibilities that God has for His Church. My

experience is that congregations do have choices that can be made that can hasten the

decline or renew the life of the organization.

¹⁸ Ibid., 65.

¹⁹ Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Dynamics*, 58.

Another point of disagreement with Malphurs is in the area of values. Malphurs maintains that there are actual values and aspirational values.²⁰ Actual values are those owned and acted on daily. Aspiration values, on the other hand, are beliefs that the person or organization does not currently own. Following Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed in his *Small Catechism* – "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, [*including my values*])"²¹ – I would argue that values are hardwired and/or experientially developed in a person and cannot be imported. Likewise, congregational core values flow from the unique gifts, qualities, and values in the individuals brought together by God. To say that a congregation should seek after values they do not have is to deny that God has given them everything they need as a congregation (1 Cor. 12:24) at the least and a violation of the tenth commandment at the most.

For example: Approximately 85 percent of the congregations of the LCMS brought into membership one or fewer new members in the past year. At the same time, each congregation would agree that evangelism is an important value in that congregation. Malphurs would argue that evangelism is an aspirational value; while I would maintain that at some point in the history of the congregation evangelism was important but has been displaced and moved down the list in priority because of other considerations. My approach, therefore, is to help the congregation resurrect this value and make it a high priority if the members want to reach the lost. Malphurs would advise

²⁰ Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 52.

²¹ Luther, Martin. *Luther's Small Catechism With Explanation*. Electronic ed. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997, c1986.

the pastor to lead the church to adopt a new set of Biblical values, being aware this is a “very difficult and painful process.”²² If the values are not native to the congregation, I would agree with Malphurs; however, if the congregation can be shown that they once held the neglected values to a higher standard, in my experience, the work is less intense.

C. Peter Wagner

The fourth author has been writing on the topic of church growth for over thirty years, nearly as long as Schaller. C. Peter Wagner, an early disciple of Donald McGavran, continues as a proponent of church growth principles. Theologically it seems that he has moved more towards the holiness/Pentecostal edge with his claims of apostolic giftedness.²³ However, as one reviews his early work, it almost sounds prophetic. With the first edition in 1976, *Your Church Can Grow*²⁴ carried the subtitle *Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church*. Except for the section on the homogeneous unit principle (discussed in chapter two of this dissertation), the book could be reissued today with the subtitle as the title and find a large audience. What he was articulating in 1976 has become standard fare with the move from church growth to church health. Liberating the laity, long-term pastorates, and making disciples not just members are themes that resonate in the field today.

One particular notion is coming full circle. In chapter seven, Wagner spells out the need for celebration (large group worship activities/events), congregation (between

²² Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 53.

²³ Wagner, "Golden Harvest Ministries."

²⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 201.

30 and 80) and cell groups.²⁵ The concept of congregation was discarded in recent years in favor of a stronger emphasis on cell group ministry. Joe Myers in his book *The Search to Belong* returns the thinking to the need for a variety of group-size opportunities in a church.²⁶ Rather than postulating a framework as does Wagner, Myers presents evidence of sociological needs for community that are met through the different-size groups that can and should be present in a congregation. Myers finds that among the most successful cell ministry churches only about one-third of the members are involved in cell groups.

Even though generationally Wagner could be seen as a modern, his emphases on relationships and the power of the Spirit cast him as a precursor to the emerging church. He does not offer an organizational model but does address the issues in a way that could lead in that direction. At least one consultant, Carl George, developed Wagner's thoughts on small groups into a complete system, the Meta-Church.²⁷ My denomination was involved in this model as it developed, having hired Carl George as a consultant. The results, unfortunately, were not very long lasting because it was seen as a program or organizational structure rather than a process to develop intimacy as, I believe, envisioned by Wagner.

Leonard I. Sweet

The last of the general audience authors I have selected is Dr. Sweet, not only because he is the reason I am in the Doctor of Ministry program, but also because his

²⁵ Ibid., 111.

²⁶ Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 154.

²⁷ Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 224.

approach seems to be in tune with the direction the culture is heading. I first became aware of Dr. Sweet in 1997 when I was part of a focus group at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. It was a gathering of district mission executives and seminary professors brought together to discuss the role of the seminary in training missionaries. The facilitator was from Minneapolis. Since I had driven to Saint Louis from Des Moines I had a car and offered to take the man to the airport following the meeting. It was on this trip that we began talking about where the church was headed and he asked if I had read anything written by Dr. Sweet. I answered that I had not and he recommended *Quantum Spirituality*. I read it and began to watch for other books by Dr. Sweet. *SoulTsunami*²⁸ was the next book by Sweet that I read and the hook was set.

As mentioned above regarding Lyle Schaller, Sweet is asking the right questions. He is hopeful and optimistic about the future of the church. The difference comes that Sweet is asking them in light of the emerging culture rather than reflecting on the church culture of the past. His books move between advice and commentary for the organizational church (*AquaChurch*) and for the individual Christian (*SoulSalsa*). Regardless of audience, Sweet is directing the Christian to the future and his observations on what it will take for both the individual Christian and the church to thrive in the emerging culture. In the summary of chapter nine of *AquaChurch*, Sweet comes the closest to addressing the issue I presented in chapter two of this dissertation. Under the heading of “The Relationship-Driven Church” Sweet stresses that in the postmodern

²⁸ Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 433.

modern world “meaning is relationships.”²⁹ In his latest book (as of October 2004), *Out of the Question . . . Into the Mystery*, he continues this discussion on the importance of relationships not only for the emerging culture, but for each Christian, postmodern or not. However, while he comes close, I believe that he, as with most of the other writers mentioned above, skirts the issue of God’s role and action in creating these relationships in the church. That is to say, that the power of the God inherent in the Word to affect change in relationships both between God and people and between individuals as well is given less than top billing as the cause of and continuing power behind relationships and community.

It could be argued that the tendency to overlook the power of God active in the Word by the authors noted above could be attributed to a basic difference in understanding or worldview regarding how God acts between Lutheran and other Reformation faith traditions. None of the five authors thus far discussed reflects the Lutheran tradition. The Lutheran understanding is that God is active in the Word and the Sacraments. That is to say, that Baptism and Holy Communion are not human actions alone but are actions commanded by God through which God brings about salvation and forgiveness and creates His body, the Church.³⁰

Waldo J. Werning

That being said, the last author that will be discussed in this section is Dr. Waldo J. Werning, former professor at Concordia Theological Seminary (LCMS), Fort Wayne,

²⁹ Ibid., 195.

³⁰ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Christian Dogmatics, vol. III (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 186.

Indiana, and author of over fifteen books on church growth and health. Werning has long been an advocate of church growth in the LCMS. As such, he has been regarded as suspect among many in the LCMS who see church growth as a non-Lutheran intrusion into this church body. In response, his writing often turns polemic and harsh against his critics. However, his books do bring the Lutheran theological perspective to the subject. Unfortunately, his Lutheran bias, while unabashed, may reduce the potential readership for his work, since his use of Lutheran phraseology and jargon may be unfamiliar to the non-Lutheran. One example of this is his use of “Luther’s explanation of the Third Article.”³¹ While writing for a general popular Christian audience, he fails to take into account the fact that many outside of Lutheran circles will not know what the Third Article is or why Luther needs to explain it.

Werning’s latest book, *12 Pillars of a Healthy Church*, is an example of his efforts to “Lutheranize” church growth/health principles for use in Lutheran congregations. He begins with an overview of the eight characteristics of a healthy church developed by Christian Schwartz as part of the Natural Church Development process discussed in chapter five of this dissertation. Werning provides a Scriptural defense of each from a Lutheran perspective and then moves on to add four more indicators drawn from Lutheran theology and his own focus on stewardship as a vital part of congregational life.

³¹ Waldo J. Werning, *12 Pillars of a Healthy Church*, (Saint Charles, IL: ChurchSmart, 2001), 85.

The only indicator he adds that is a Lutheran distinctive is “Leading Indicator #1/Pillar #9 Centrality of God’s Word/Gospel/Grace.”³² He does well in emphasizing the importance of seeing God’s Word in action in the Sacraments and the importance of forgiveness in transforming the individual through grace in Christ. As soon as he adds this distinctive he returns to a reliance on business practices and/or non-Lutheran approaches to the subject. Outlining the second indicator, Mission and Vision-Driven, he states “The Holy Spirit is the creator of vision.” He goes on to say on the next page, “A vision statement paints the picture of your church to show what you want God to accomplish through its leaders and members” and then quotes Rick Warren, “Let the size of your God determine the size of your goals.”³³ If the Holy Spirit creates the vision, how can a vision statement be what you want God to accomplish?

Section 1 Summary

While not all of the authors discussed also serve as congregational consultants, their work does influence those who do function in this role. Since the purpose of this dissertation is to explore and develop new models of assisting congregations in times of change, it is important to understand how others are approaching this task through their books before turning to actual programs used in consultation, which will be the focus of the next section.

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the authors were selected because of their influence in the area of church consultation and change. All of them became adults in what was predominately a church culture. They represent what generational theorists

³² Ibid., 55.

³³ Werning, *12 Pillars of a Healthy Church*, 59.

would call the silent and boomer generations. As far as their liner notes or web-site biographies show, each either was raised in the church or has been a long-time member of their respective denomination. Because of these factors, while their approaches vary, they all approach the church in many ways as a human institution or organization. While this is true to an extent, it seems that not enough attention is paid to the supernatural aspects of a local congregation, especially in the area of relationships and community.

However, a change in this direction towards relationships and community can be seen coming in recent publications, both among the newer authors and among those less prolific. Joseph Myers in *The Search to Belong* takes on the current emphasis on cell ministry. He demonstrates the need for community in four spaces.³⁴ William Willimon, in an all too brief chapter in *The Pastor's Guide to Growing a Christlike Church*, points out that “churches decline when they forget it’s all about God.”³⁵ Unfortunately, the rest of the book does not live up to the promise of this first chapter, returning to doing rather than being, seeing Jesus as a example of how to do it right, rather than how to be in relationship. Perhaps my disappointment can be found in the title of this book. Luther calls us to be “little Christs,” incarnating Christ, to one another and to those outside the community of faith. This book is only calling us to be “Christlike” without an emphasis on the power of the indwelling Christ in the life of the believer and the Church.

One other recent book from The Alban Institute held promise as it seemed to be moving in this God-caused relationship/community direction. In *The Practicing*

³⁴ Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*, 52.

³⁵ George Hunter III et. al., *The Pastor's Guide to Growing a Christlike Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2004), 8.

Community, Diana Butler Bass gives examples of mainline congregations that have experienced renewal through a return to older practices. “The fundamental changes at Epiphany [congregation] were not primarily systemic or managerial. Epiphany has been changed *theologically and spiritually* – undergoing a transformation in content, practice, and worldview.”³⁶ Bass, however, credits the practices rather than the power of God inherent in those practices for the change from just a church to a spiritual community of faith.

In the area of books on congregational growth or health, the emphasis is changing from the modern organizational/machine view of a church to a more organic communal one. In the next section of this chapter we will explore if this change is apparent in congregational consultation as well.

Section 2

Congregational Consultation

In this section five methods for working with congregations that are in use with Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod congregations will be explored. The first method to be examined has been developed by an architect within the LCMS: “Strategic Ministry Planning” offered by the Lutheran Church Extension Fund of the LCMS. The next three methods which will be discussed are ones in which I have been trained and were developed by consultants in other denominations: “Refocus” by Terry Walling, “Natural Church Development” coaching by Bob Logan and Christian Schwartz, and “Leading Turnaround Churches” by Gene Woods. The fifth method that will be discussed is my current process called *VVM*.

³⁶ Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 13.

Strategic Ministry Planning

Strategic Ministry Planning (SMP) grew out of the experiences of architect Rich Blumfield assisting LCMS congregations in California and Arizona in developing expansion plans.³⁷ Working as a volunteer, Blumfield found that congregations needed guidance not only in building plans for expanding their facilities, but in developing a clear vision of their calling and place in their communities as well. Realizing that the task was greater than could be served by one architect on a part-time basis, Blumfield began training others in his process of congregational planning which became part of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund in 2002. Nationally sixty congregations have completed the first stages of the process.

SMP is a three-year program consisting of three initial weekends during the first few months of the process followed up with periodic visitations to the end of the contract. Each weekend addresses a different aspect of the congregation's reason for being, that is, its purpose and values, its vision, and the methodology or strategic plan for moving towards the vision. The process is prefaced with a month of preparation in which members are called on, through sermons, bulletins, and newsletters to seek God's revelation of His calling for the congregation.³⁸ The consultant from SMP visits the community before the first weekend to conduct a number of "secret shopper" interviews, discovering the community's impression of the congregation. The results of this work are shared with the congregation at the first meeting.

³⁷ Lutheran Church Extension Fund, *Strategic Planning is a 'Leap of Faith.'* 2004, Lutheran Church Extension Fund, <http://www.lcef.org/news/interview.cfm> (accessed April 11, 2004)

³⁸ Pilgrim Lutheran Church, *Strategic Ministry Planning.* 2004, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, http://www.pilgrimbethesda.org/our_cong/smp/ (accessed April 11, 2004)

The first meeting begins with a meal and an overview of the process including an exploration of the congregational values, using the Malphurs' model discussed above. At the close of the evening, the attendees (congregational leaders) write out what they think the values of the congregation are (historic and actual) and what they would like to see them be (aspirational). While Brumfield insists that his process brings "no preconceptions for what the congregation should look like,"³⁹ it is obvious from the results that there are at least some desired outcomes on the part of the consultant. The three congregations that have done SMP and have published the results show a marked similarity in what they see as their values and vision for the future.⁴⁰

That the congregations are guided in a similar direction can be seen from the choice of Scripture verses used at the opening of the session focusing on the Great Commission of Matthew 28. Since the participants are then asked to write down the values a short time later, it seems natural that they would follow the lead of the presenter in choosing values that reflect the theme of the presentation. The fast pace of the process seems to deny the attendees the opportunity to struggle together with these issues. Likewise, the simple tabulation of the results and the declaration that these are the values of the congregation reveals methodology from Brumfield's background in the business world. The communal nature of the church seems not to be taken into account.

³⁹ Lutheran Church Extension Fund, "*Strategic Planning is a 'Leap of Faith'.*"

⁴⁰ St. Paul's Lutheran Church, *Our Best Understanding of God's Calling for Our Congregation*. 2004, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, <http://www.splco.org/Strategic%20Ministry%20Planning/SMP%20Event%201%20Outcome.htm> (accessed April 11, 2004); Pilgrim Lutheran Church, "*Strategic Ministry Planning*"; Richard Brumfield, "*Strategic Ministry Planning*," in *Event1-SoVWDMIA-XFR.Ppt* (2003).

The second session, a month later, does allow for more discussion among the participants. In searching for a vision, the participants are divided into small groups. The assignment is to list in three-word statements what God is calling the congregation to do in the next twenty years. They are asked to work as quickly as possible so the consultant can begin tabulating the results. The vision is then presented to the attendees as a finished product of group think.⁴¹ It has been my experience that recasting values and vision into a congregation takes time and has to percolate into the system through relationships rather than through a top-down decree, which seems to be more the approach of SMP.

The third weekend trains the attendees in goal setting and strategic planning as would be typical in any business application. As part of the planning, the consultant develops a timetable and checklist for his future involvement and oversight.

SMP began in the LCMS with great promise and flourish. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, sixty congregations are at some stage in the process. However, the expansion and use of the process has not met expectations and recently the cost of the consulting has been reduced over thirty percent.⁴² There are a number of parallels in SMP to my current process: the focus on values as the first step, the importance of vision based on values, and the value of strategic planning for moving a congregation forward. The key difference is in the timing of the workshops. It seems that the process is rushed and because of that may seem forced on the congregation. Since the point of congregational

⁴¹ Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*.

⁴² From over \$9,000 plus expenses to approximately \$6,000 plus expenses. One congregation in Iowa District West was researching SMP and was calling other district offices of the LCMS and congregations which have used the process. He called anonymously and was told on more than one occasion that Iowa District West had a better process at less cost.

consultation is to assist the congregation in addressing the issues of change, to rush the process is to frustrate the members who are already upset about the pace of change going on around them.

Two issues should be addressed before moving on to the next approach. These issues are costs and personal relationships. Training either for the consultant or the congregation can be expensive. As shown in the footnote, the SMP process can be prohibitive for a smaller congregation. Likewise, for the approaches yet to be discussed the costs involved for a congregation to contract directly with the author or consultant for consultation, rather than using someone trained in that particular method, would lead many congregations away from using such an outside resource. However, the impact of the perceived value needs to be considered. Will the congregation pay attention better if they have to pay more? I have had congregations that I have worked with using my approach (which costs nothing for a congregation in my district) discontinue it after a short time only to secure the services of an outside consultant later at great cost. In some cases the congregation did not make the changes suggested by the new consultant in spite of what they paid him. In others, there was some change, but nothing on the scale that the expenses would have suggested.

I believe there is something else that needs to be considered in discovering the reason that some methods lead to change and others do not: the role of personal relationships in consulting. The next two approaches rely heavily on the role of the coach in the consulting process. Both present extensive training in coaching as the means to insure change. The coach and his or her ability in coaching are seen as key to the process, and so, both of these processes stress coach training. One must ask, however, is it the

technique of the coach that is the determining factor or the relationship between the consultant and the pastor and congregation? In my experience, simply the fact that someone comes alongside to help is as important as the skill he or she brings to the effort. The Scriptural analogy to this can be seen in Jesus' response (John 14:16 ff NIV) to the disciples' concern that they will be left alone. His promise to send the paraclete, the one to walk alongside, demonstrates this concept on the supernatural level. It is no less important on the human level in working with older congregations.

Re-Focusing Network System

The Re-Focusing System was developed in the early 1990s by Terry Walling and J. Robert Clinton.⁴³ I was trained in the system in 1996 at about the same time I received the call to my current position. At the time, few in the LCMS had heard of the system but it has grown in influence since the demise of the Developing Leaders for Ministry (DLM) small group-mentoring system developed for the LCMS by Carl George mentioned above under the heading of C. Peter Wagner. The DLM system became far too complex and unwieldy for use by any but those highly committed to the system.

Re-Focus, on the other hand, provides much of the same approach and content as did DLM without the burden of reports and long-term obligation to an additional organizational structure. The approach is small group and the content is leadership training. Re-Focus is a three-step approach, somewhat hierarchical in nature. The consultant/coach trains the pastor and a small group of congregational leaders or staff in leadership. This group then begins groups of their own throughout the congregation. The

⁴³ Terry Walling, *Focusing Leaders* (Anaheim, CA: Church Resource Ministries, 1995), 200.

third step is for ministry teams in the congregation to be formed into small groups and trained in leadership as well. The hoped-for outcome is that the entire congregation would be involved in this small group network, encouraging one another in leadership.

As opposed to the SMP process, Re-Focus is a very long-term approach. The training for each group can be eight months or longer. The process could take two years or longer to see change in a congregation although evidences of the effect of the process would come much sooner. Given today's lifestyles and time commitments, it seems rather optimistic to assume a large number of the members would ever become fully engaged. As noted above, Myers points out that even in the most successful small group churches only about one-third of the members participate in small groups.⁴⁴ While the ideal might not be achieved, the congregation using this approach could move forward for no other reason than a renewed commitment to relationships as a central focus for many in the congregation.

According to Walling, the leadership training component of Re-Focus is based on the work of J. Robert Clinton of Fuller Seminary.⁴⁵ I was trained in a similar process using Steven Covey's *Seven Habits* material⁴⁶ and find the similarities striking including phrases such as "Five Habits of Effectiveness."⁴⁷ The major difference between the two is

⁴⁴ Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*.

⁴⁵ Walling, *Focusing Leaders*, 14.

⁴⁶ Steven Covey, "7 Habits," in *Pastoral Lecture Series* (Des Moines, IA: Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, 17/May 1994).

⁴⁷ Because of the acknowledged similarities, I did not have to attend the first day of the training which included the development of a personal mission statement. In 1988 I attended a *7 Habits* leadership training workshop.

that in the Re-Focus material a greater stress is placed on the role of God in the process of leadership formation. An entire module is devoted to “The Spiritual Battle.” In this module, the coach is encouraged to develop spiritual disciplines with a suggested plan of action in this regard. The module outlines procedures for accountability along with a checklist for measurement. How to develop an intercessory prayer team is also included in this section.

While Re-Focus does move away from a strictly business model such as Covey’s *7 Habits*, it does retain a similar “feel” in that it outlines a linear series of steps that can be followed to improve life for the individuals and the congregation. Its value as a system comes from the acknowledgement of God’s involvement in the process and its focus on small group development and relationships. After my initial training in Re-Focus I offered it to congregations in my area with little response. The time commitment and the focus on leadership seemed to be the issues behind this apparent lack of desire to participate in this type of congregational revitalization.

It has been my experience that the amount of time required to engage in congregational revitalization seems to be a stumbling block to congregations beginning such a process. As in many other areas of contemporary life, people are looking for a quick fix, a simple solution to the problems today’s congregations face. It has also been my experience that congregational leaders do not see the need for their personal growth in leadership as an integral part of recognizing change and leading the congregation through it. Reflecting the modern bureaucratic understanding of leadership as one of authority because of position, many see their position of leadership as one of filling a role

or accepting a position required by the congregation's constitution, not as one of spiritual leadership. Without a great deal of education on the role of spiritual leadership and the willingness of a congregation to commit the time and energy to Re-Focus, using this approach in older, rural congregations does not seem to be an encouraging prospect.

Natural Church Development

The next approach to congregational consultation offers potential for many of the congregations I work with because, on the surface, it works from a position that resolves the two issues mentioned above, time and the focus on leadership. Natural Church Development, the result of research by Christian Schwartz, provides the consultant with a scientifically validated survey instrument that measures what Schwartz sees as eight areas of congregational health. According to Schwartz, as outlined in chapter five of this dissertation, Natural Church Development (NCD) explores eight areas of organized congregational life, which may be blocks to the "natural" development of the congregation. There has been good response to NCD because of the short time required to begin work towards change in a congregation.

The NCD process begins with a short introduction on the research behind it. The pastor or other leaders identifying thirty qualified participants for the survey follow this introduction. The participants are assembled and the survey questionnaire is distributed and completed within a one-hour period. The results are tabulated using the software provided by NCD and within two weeks, the report is given to the leadership or members of the congregation charged with implementing the process. The implementation team then reads through the accompanying "implementation guide" for suggestions in each area for removing the perceived roadblock to congregational health.

NCD seems to be the simple solution that many congregations are looking for. However, if there is no openness to change in the congregation, NCD becomes one more document that ends up gathering dust in the church office. While it appears to be a simple solution, it is more simplistic than simple because of the assumptions underlying the process. It assumes that there are only eight internal factors to congregational health. This was Schwartz's thesis as he began the research and development of the process. It is as if he laid out these eight areas and then developed an instrument to prove his thesis. Local demographics and local culture are not taken into account. History and theology are also left out of the considerations of congregational health.⁴⁸

While I believe that Schwartz is correct in delineating between the organic and organizational natures of the church, he fails to fully define the organic nature. As posited in the first chapter of this dissertation, a congregation does have an organic nature but it may not be the one intended by its Creator. At a workshop I conducted during the writing of this section,⁴⁹ I asked the participants why they were members of this particular congregation. Without exception, the answers reflected the bloodlines of the participants. "I am a member because my parents were," "I am a member because my husband is Lutheran," or some such declaration was the typical response. Even though all of the participants had been instructed in Luther's Small Catechism, the words of Luther's

⁴⁸ Hunter III and et. al., *The Pastor's Guide to Growing a Christlike Church*, 105 ff.

⁴⁹ On November 6, 2004 I asked this question while conducting the Mission section of my VVM process at Trinity Lutheran Church, Jefferson, Iowa.

explanation of the Third Article apparently were not fully understood.⁵⁰ Likewise, Schwartz falsely assumes that the faith community is one built only on the work of the Holy Spirit. The NCD process seeks to free the congregation from the restrictions of institutionalization and it will become what God intended.

While NCD is a quick process to begin to identify the issues, the resolution of the issues and the implementation of the changes needed to move to church health can be lengthy. The process in which I was trained is an adaptation of the NCD process developed by Bob Logan, which introduces a coaching component. Logan, another noted church consultant, was associated with Terry Walling in Church Resource Ministries before developing his own ministry, CoachNet.org. Logan has adapted the Re-Focus coaching model for use with NCD. While not focusing on the importance of small groups, he does stress the need to be in coaching relationships. Utilizing the internet, Logan builds a coaching structure on-line complete with asynchronous meetings and virtual prayer.

I have known Bob Logan since 1988 when I attended my first church planting seminar at which he was the featured presenter. I invited him to be a presenter at the 1990 Church Planters Workshop of the LCMS. I have always appreciated his insights in church planting and church growth. At the same time, I have found his approach to be that of a technician. It seems that he has continued this approach with NCD. His CoachNet and the associated bookstore ChurchSmart are the exclusive distributors for the NCD material in the United States. One does not have to participate in Logan's approach to NCD to use

⁵⁰ "In the same way He [the Holy Spirit] calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

the material; however, the implication is there that to fully realize the benefits of NCD, the coaching model needs to be incorporated. I do not believe this to be the case. In fact, one could become more involved with the work of the coaching model than with the implementation of the NCD findings.

In spite of the push towards the coaching model and the problems discussed above regarding NCD, I would agree with George Hunter that NCD provides a foot in the door for change within congregations.⁵¹ For my purposes, NCD will continue to be a part of my work once a congregation is ready to explore areas that need attention in the congregation's ministry. Currently, I introduce NCD once the congregational leadership team has worked through the issues of values and vision. It has been my experience that the base has to be established before change can be implemented. As part of a larger effort, NCD has a place in helping congregations make the next steps towards effective ministry in the 21st century.

Leading Turnaround Churches

Early in 2003 I was invited to take part in a training workshop at the Center for U. S. Missions (LCMS) led by Gene Wood. The topic was "Leading Turnaround Churches."⁵² Wood, a Baptist pastor with over 25 years of experience in leading churches from decline to growth, developed this process partially in response to George Barna's

⁵¹ Hunter III and et. al., *The Pastor's Guide to Growing a Christlike Church*, 114.

⁵² Gene Wood, "Leading Turnaround Churches," paper presented at the Executive Training for Certified LTC Trainers (Concordia University, Irvine, CA: Center for U.S. Missions LCMS, July 2003).

research and subsequent book *Turnaround Churches*.⁵³ Barna demonstrates that it is very hard to turn around churches once decline has set in. He finds that it takes a unique combination of a very skilled pastor, an openness to God's leading, and a strong desire on the part of the people to reverse a long-term pattern of decline. Barna states that "pastoring a turnaround church takes such a personal toll that successful leaders seldom revive more than one or two churches during a career."⁵⁴ This contention by Barna led Wood to develop his process. He feels that with the right skill set and techniques, the process is repeatable. After meeting Dr. Wood and experiencing his approach to revitalizing declining congregations, I would tend to agree with Barna's point that it takes a very special person to turn around churches and Wood is such a person. He may very well be equipped to turn around more than one congregation but it is as much by strength of character and personality as anything else. While his approach may work well in his denominational tradition, a Lutheran pastor attempting such a feat would probably not be as well received.

I have included this model as an example of a thoroughly modern approach to consulting. Wood's view of a congregation is quite organizational and leader-dominated. He includes sample documents (constitution, bylaws, and position descriptions) that he feels will facilitate change in a congregation. He has a very narrow view of the purpose of a congregation as that of outreach only and has a very low tolerance for those of a differing opinion. One example is the suggestion to practice "tough love" on

⁵³ George Barna, *Turnaround Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 116.

⁵⁴ Barna, *Turnaround Churches*, 108.

congregational members including writing out a speech that can be pulled out when needed on the person causing you the most grief.

Wood's assumption is that declining congregations do not want to change and the consultant/trainer needs to equip the pastor to go on the offensive (Scripture references in hand) to bring the change that must happen. The process must begin with the leader and the leader, in Wood's view, is the pastor who is responsible for beginning the process. A surprising comment in regards to the role of the pastor is that leading a turnaround church is not about spiritual formation. I was surprised, because even in saying that, Wood is implying that the spiritual condition of a congregation is not part of the problem.

It is not often that I have gone to a conference or a workshop that I have not come away with at least one positive learning that I can incorporate into my work. This approach to consultation is the exception that proves the rule. Even though I am now a "Certified LTC Trainer," the only things I took away from this training were negative examples of what not to do.

VVM – Connecting the Values to the Vision is the Mission

The *VVM* process is my current approach to congregational consultation.⁵⁵ It consists of three one-day workshops spaced about three to six months apart for a total development phase of about one year. The first workshop explores congregational history, utilizing the congregational lifespan curve shown above. This approach allows the congregation to reflect and appreciate its own history and the circumstances and events that brought them to where they are today. The major topic of discussion for the day is values. Following the discussion on church history, we begin an exploration of

⁵⁵ More will be said on the development of *VVM* in the next chapter.

individual values and how these intersect and coalesce to form the congregation's core values. As opposed to Malphurs, all congregational values are assumed to be valid if it can be demonstrated that they had been held at some point in the past, hence the importance of reflecting on the history. The individual and congregational values are discovered through an in-depth "game" modified from one used by Scott, Jaffe and Tobe.⁵⁶ Using a small group discussion model, the participants⁵⁷ discover their individual values and then work together to develop a set of from six to nine core values for the church that are reflective of the congregational culture.

The homework assignment is to formalize the values statement through a committee crafting a final draft. Concurrent with this, the assignment is to begin to talk about the values and share them throughout the congregation. It is suggested that the pastor preach a sermon series based on them or develop a series of Bible studies showing the basis of the values, as well as begin to post them around the congregation, including them in congregational publications. The length of time between the first (values) workshop and second (vision) workshop varies depending on the amount of effort put into involving the rest of the congregation in the process. The suggested timeline is between three and six months. We have found that ownership in the values is not widely

⁵⁶ Cynthia D. Scott, Dennis T. Jaffe, and Glenn R. Tobe, *Organizational Vision, Values, and Mission* (Lanham, MD: Crisp Publishing, 1993).

⁵⁷ The suggested make-up of a VVM working group is elected leaders, potential leaders and "real" leaders (that is, influencers in the congregation who may not hold an official position). In our work with over sixty congregations we have found that thirty to forty seems to be an optimum size for the process. Fewer extends the time that is needed for the results to permeate the congregation. More than forty does not allow for complete discussion.

shared in less than three months. Once the process lengthens to over six months, zeal for the process begins to wane.

The second one-day workshop focuses on vision. I use the Joel Barker “Power of Vision” video to introduce the concept. Lecture and discussion ensues on the role and power of vision in the congregation. Again, the history of the congregation is used to demonstrate the power of vision in the founding of the congregation. The participants are challenged to look around the community for how God is already working and leading them into the neighborhood. Through small-group discussion a vision usually emerges from the key question: If you were to live out the values, what would the congregation look like in fifteen to twenty years? I ask the participants to sketch out what they foresee for the future. The day ends with a list of what the participants envision for the future. A committee is assigned the task of drafting a working document from the responses.⁵⁸

Another three to six months is needed to circulate the vision and begin to enlist support and ownership in it. Once the participants feel that a consensus is forming, the last day is planned. This is the mission section. This day is spent on strategic planning. The participants learn how to develop a strategic plan on several of the subsections or pieces of the vision. They learn how to timeline the vision. In other words, if this is to be achieved in ten years, what needs to be done next year towards that end? I use Joel Barker’s “Strategy Matrix,” an Excel spreadsheet-based approach to strategic exploration. Using this tool, again in a small group discussion format, the participants order the strategies they have developed to move into the future.

⁵⁸ The most imaginative vision statement came in the form of an eight-page newsletter dated fifteen years in the future. Through this format the committee addressed all of the potentialities the workshop had explored and brought to the surface. This format provided a great discussion piece for sharing the vision in the congregation.

The *VVM* process can be easily summarized as discovering why the congregation exists, visioning where it is going, and being equipped to get there. Given that, it has much in common with the other processes discussed above. It is very much influenced by the authors listed above and by the business and management authors included in the bibliography of this dissertation. The crossover nature of the *VVM* process can be seen in the fact that several times participants have asked if they could use the process at their place of employment.

The *VVM* process has been shared with other mission and ministry facilitators in the LCMS. It is now in use in six other districts (there are thirty-five districts in the LCMS). The number of congregations now using *VVM* is in the hundreds. However, as with most of the approaches to consultation outlined in this chapter, *VVM* is not strong enough in the appreciation of the theology at work in a congregation or in the dynamics of community that are foundational to congregational life and health. These shortcomings will be addressed in the next chapter.

Section 2 Summary

While the discussion above is by no means an exhaustive list of the current practices in congregational consultation, it does demonstrate the variety of approaches in this field. It would seem that any of the approaches hold out possibilities of hope to the congregation that is serious about its future and willing to make the changes necessary to move into that future. Strategic Ministry Planning and Values, Vision, Mission most closely follow business models with the inherent risk of the congregation seeing itself strictly in organizational terms. Re-Focus and Logan's adaptation of NCD both see the issue in terms of coaching and technique. Wood sees the issue as one of lack of vision

and determination, which can be solved through strong pastoral leadership. However, for the most part, all of these approaches are coming from a modern understanding of the church and world. That is to say, if we just turn the right lever, apply the right technique, all will be well. These approaches may allow existing congregations to continue into the future, but will any of them equip the congregations to adapt to the sea change that will assault them in the new century? The challenges faced by existing congregations are different from those experienced by new or first-generation congregations.

For that reason, I have not included any of the approaches offered by practitioners serving in or working with first-generation congregations. The dynamics of community and the basis for the formation of relationships is completely different from those in long-established churches. Some have suggested that we return to first century models for congregations. As I argued in chapter two, the issue is not first century versus twenty-first century, but first-generation versus fifth-, sixth-, or seventh-generation congregations. The reality of this difference was demonstrated by Bill Easum at a conference in 1995.⁵⁹ He went through a list of the “top ten” congregations in 1970 in terms of membership or Sunday school attendance as found in books with titles indicating top ten statistics published in the 1970s. Easum researched these congregations in 1990 and found that none would be included on a list at the time of the conference in 1995. The conclusion I would draw is that as a congregation ages, other factors begin to influence it away from its original intent. It is that original intent that needs to be recovered in the new century with and for a new generation. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

⁵⁹ Bill Easum, "Factors of Church Growth," in *Growing Churches Conference* (Chicago, IL: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 15/Jan 1995).

CHAPTER 8

WWW.CHURCH

In this chapter an ongoing approach to recovering and reinstituting the Biblical precepts underlying the nature and purpose of the church will be presented. This approach includes creating a vision for a positive future in the local congregation. As part of the process tools will be provided to move the congregation into the future. This approach will include the learnings gained through this program while incorporating major sections from my current process. The result will be a process to assist pastor and people to understand the interrelated dynamics of common values, vision and mission that make up the character, the “DNA,” or the soul of the congregation.

Background

Before presenting my proposal, a narrative of my journey to this point is in order because of the perspective I bring to my current calling and work with congregations. With the impending birth of my first daughter in 1973, my wife and I began to explore involvement in a church. Both of us, having been raised in the church, had recollections of infant baptism as part of our religious heritage. Her employer at the time was an elder at a local Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod congregation and invited us to a home Bible study. Neither of us knew anything about the LCMS, its teachings or traditions. The home Bible studies led to attending worship services. The congregation was in need of youth sponsors and, since we were young, willing, and available, we accepted the task. We were welcomed into membership with extremely brief instruction in the faith and put to work.

Changes in employment led to relocation and another search for a church. We attended several different congregations over the next few years, including Plymouth Brethren, Southern Baptist, and Assembly of God, eventually returning again to an LCMS congregation where we completed a full adult confirmation class. This was a mission congregation and, to an extent, the beginning of my interest in serving full-time in the church generally and in church planting in particular. Relocating once again, we began attending an older congregation (mentioned in chapter two). This experience in what became a quite dysfunctional congregation led me to seminary in the hope that I might be used to begin congregations that do not end up in this condition. I was able to follow this dream through my studies. During my time at seminary and since then I have been privileged to be a part of beginning eight congregations.

At the time, that is, the 1980s, having a “mission statement” was seen as the cure-all to problems in the church. I began each of my starts with the development of a mission statement. Each of the churches grew and at the time I credited not only God but the mission statement for this success. I did not realize the power of new relationships based on Christ in the first generation church (chapters two and three). The last three congregations I began in Iowa were all the result of the mission statement emphasis in church planting and all are doing well. So, as I began my current calling as a district executive assigned to work with existing congregations, I assumed that what was needed was an inspirational mission statement and all would be well.

Needless to say, this approach failed. As Professor Hill said about Iowa in *The Music Man*, “You have to know the territory.” Coming from outside the denomination and a Californian, my assumptions about the church and about the importance of mission

statements were both wrong. It was failure that led to the development of *VVM: Values, Vision, Mission*, which is my current process to assist congregations in responding to the changing culture.

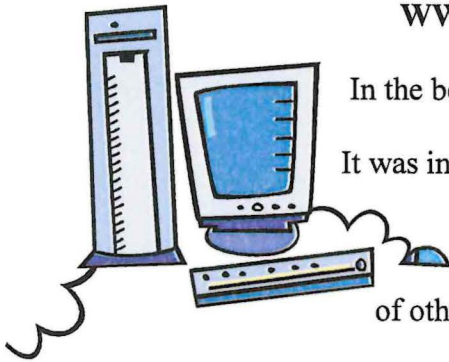
While *VVM* has been a noticeable improvement on the mission-statement-only method, I have been uncomfortable with its heavy reliance on business models (as discussed in chapter seven). The process has brought change to a number of congregations, but many of the congregations that have begun the process have not followed through and have returned to former practices. The pastor of one such congregation called me as I am writing this in October 2004. I began work with the congregation over three years ago. They did not complete the three workshops involved in the process. He reported that they are finally beginning to move in the direction of the vision about thirty months after the fact. Others have not made even that much progress. The *VVM* process has been in place for a long enough time now for some statistical analysis. The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod website offers a database of self-reported congregational statistics. Approximately fifty percent of the congregations that began *VVM* over four years ago show growth in the categories of worship attendance, new members, and offerings. While this is a very small sampling, it does seem that this approach to church consulting is bearing fruit.

Without extremely detailed analysis beyond my ability, at this point it would be impossible to discern if the results are due to my process compared to other approaches or are the result of someone coming alongside in the role of a *Paraclete* assisting the congregation or something else? That is to say, would the change have occurred simply because of the fact that someone cared about them and their future and took the time to

work with them? Whichever the case, congregations can and do change and the outside church consultant can be an effective assistant in the process.

Because a very high percentage of LCMS congregations (as well as those in other denominations) are into the third and succeeding generations, the problems faced in these congregations, in my opinion, have more to do with the underlying relationship issues addressed in chapter two rather than problems with programming or property as many of the authors and approaches reviewed in the last chapter address. The need, therefore, is to go deeper into what makes a congregation a unique faith community and not just a group of people meeting on Sunday mornings. To move down to the level of relationships and community, I propose a metaphor: the church as a personal computer.

WWW.CHURCH: Reboot, Remember, Restore



In the beginning (1981 to be exact) there was the personal computer.

It was introduced by IBM at a gala event at the MGM Grand Hotel in

Las Vegas, Nevada. I attended that event and with hundreds

of others I was wowed when the lights went down, the switch

thrown, the PC began to whirl and hum, and the monochrome screen began to flicker to

life. The base model came with 16K¹ of memory (compared to today's models with

265Mg or more), two 5.25" floppy drives (obsolete today as nearly are their successor,

the 3.5" floppy) and a 4.77 megahertz speed processor. All of this for a base price of

¹ A "K" refers to 1000 bytes of information. "M" or Mg" refers to 1 million and "G" or "Gig" refers to 1 billion. Based on a binary code of 0's and 1's, 0's representing an off position of a switch and 1 meaning on, the basic unit for computing is the bit, which is either 1 or 0, on or off. From this comes the byte which is 8 bits. It is on the byte, that is, 8 bits, that the computer processes information, hence the multiples of 8 seen as a basic part of computer language and terminology.

\$3,000. Upgrades were available. The systems could be expanded to 640K of memory and a 10Mg hard drive. The presenters assured the audience that a 10Mg hard drive could accommodate all of the data that anyone could ever generate. The complete package totaled over \$10,000.00. Today's computers begin with at least a 1 gigahertz processor and a 20G hard drive for around \$500.00.

Before 1981, the personal computer was known as a home computer. Kits were available from specialty manufacturers such as Altair. Complete primitive computers could be purchased from Radio Shack or other similar retailers. However, there was no standardization among these predecessors to the IBM PC. Neither parts nor programs were interchangeable and the market was limited to early adopters and what today would be called "techies." In the space of about 30 years, the personal computer has gone from a novelty to an appliance. The dream of the early pioneers in personal computing of a computer in every home is nearly realized in the United States.

The history of the church can be seen in this metaphor. The first-century churches were much like the home computer, each one unique and built by amateurs from the basic kit of the Gospel message. Standardization came in as the church grew to encompass the Roman Empire. Professionals developed the programs that the majority of the church would use uniformly and interchangeably for over 1,000 years. In much the same way, in many denominations in the United States, the church has become – as has the PC – an appliance.

The metaphor continues. The first thing those presenters had to do in Las Vegas was flip the switch, turn on the power. No computer can exist without power. When troubleshooting a problem computer, the first thing one does is check the cord. Is the

power connected? The alternating current flows from the wall into the computer.

However, since the computer relies on on/off electrical switches, the current cannot alternate, turning the switches off and on with the flow of the current. Direct current is needed at a much lower voltage than the 110 that come from the wall plug. Before going into the computer, the power has to go through the transformer where it is changed into a form that the computer can understand and use.

The comparison to the congregation is obvious. The church is a God-thing, founded on Pentecost with the power of the Spirit. But, as Moses discovered, directly plugging into the power of God is too much for created beings; the power needs to be transformed, incarnated in Christ, to be effective.

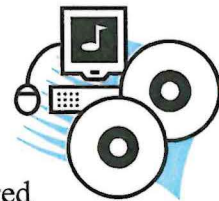
Before the power is applied, the computer is just a box full of wires and electronics, the screen is blank and the keyboard is useless. Unfortunately in the church today, there are signs that it, too, has become unplugged. Results from the NCD (Natural Church Development) survey conducted in a number of churches in the Midwest show that a high percentage of congregations score very low in the category of passionate spirituality. One congregation I have worked with scored 1 on a scale of 1 to 100 in this measurement of church health. This congregation, over 100 years old, has for much of its recent history been racked with turmoil and infighting. Over the past ten years, it has declined by over twenty percent in membership and worship attendance. Using the statistics provided by the LCMS website, there has been no conversion growth over the past ten years.

But, the computer needs more than power, even power transformed, to perform the way its designer intended. Every computer – regardless of manufacturer or type (Mac

or PC) – needs an operating system. An operating system is the set of electronic instructions through which the power flows telling the various components how to relate to one another. Without the operating system, the fans will hum and the drives will whirl, but nothing else will happen. Those who have been using computers for more than five years will remember the notorious “blue screen of death” that occurred when the program or set of programs did something that violated the rules of the operating system, leaving the operator with no option other than to power down the computer and reboot, losing whatever data was being worked on in the process. Improvements in the operating systems over the years have led to a decrease in the number of “blue screens.” However, the principle remains: the role of the operating system is to move the electrons around the computer, connecting “the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (NASB)

WWW.CHURCH: Word, Water, Wine

Rather than OS X, Windows XP, or Linux, the operating system for the church is WWW: Word, Water, Wine.² Articles V and VII of the Augsburg Confession describe how God provides the power that creates and sustains the Church through the Word and the Sacraments. Word, Water, and Wine is the operating system that creates faith in the individual heart to respond to the Gospel message. Through this same operating system, the individual is gathered into the community of the Church. It is the power of God in Christ, which is at work



² I am including “bread” with the term “wine” primarily to break out of the use of “Word and Sacraments” as a cliché.

through the operating system that creates and gathers the Christian community that we call the local congregation.

While most of the congregations I work with understand the power of the operating system to create faith in the individual, that same understanding does not carry over into seeing the power of the Spirit at work in the creation and preservation of the faith community. It is as if the operating system for the community has been replaced with something else. While this may seem to be the case, the reality is probably closer to what happens in a computer over time. If one were to put two computers side by side in a test, this reality could be demonstrated. The first computer would be brand-new, right out of the box. The second would be an older computer, with the same specifications but full of programs and software. Turn them on simultaneously and the new one would start faster, bring the screen to life sooner, and in all ways seem better than the older one, even though they have the same processor, memory and hard drive. The difference is in the fact that the older one has all those programs and history. It is not that those programs are loading into the memory of the computer that slows it down, but just the fact they are there. Pressing the ctrl-alt-del keys together brings up the task manager in a Windows computer. The task manager shows not only what programs are running but also what processes are running in the background. In a new computer, this will be a very short list, while in the older computer the processes list will be crowded with many ongoing processes that are completely foreign to all but the most savvy computer geeks. In a congregation, likewise, there are many ongoing processes at work that neither a new pastor nor a church consultant will understand at first. Another area that can be explored to find the reasons for the differences between the two computers is the registry in a PC

or the directory in a Mac. Here one will find literally thousands of entries that document the history of the computer, programs loaded and uninstalled, documents opened and discarded. Each time the computer is powered on, the operating system sifts through the registry before bringing up the start screen.

In the case of the computer, most will not take the time to explore these issues, preferring rather to watch for a sale and go out and buy the latest and greatest replacement. It is not so different in the church. Rather than taking the time to sort and sift through the registry and clean out what is no longer needed, many leave the church disappointed that it is not running at the speed promised. Or they will add memory, an additional hard drive or new programs promising improvement. The metaphor continues as we look at what is done to get a PC back on track.

WWW.CHURCH: Reboot

Often it requires no more than a “reboot” to put things right again. A reboot clears out the active memory, closes down all programs, turns off the flow of power to the computer and then brings it all back on line. In the reboot, the power is allowed to restart the operating system and reload only those processes needed. A reboot will not clean out the registry or clean up the hard drive. In some of the congregations I have worked with, simply stopping to regroup or reset is enough. Using the *VVM* process or the NCD survey, congregations have gotten back to basics, refocused on what is most important, and returned to a reliance on the power of the Spirit as the source of their being. One such congregation had just called a new seminary graduate after a 35-year pastorate. The new pastor called me in to initiate the *VVM* process. The participants took hold of the process and are continuing to thrive under new leadership.

WWW.CHURCH: Remember

In some cases, as with computers, more is needed. Most know or have heard that the hard drive should be periodically “defragged,” although many have no idea what this means. In WWW.CHURCH, I am using “remember” in place of “defrag” because it more accurately describes what is happening in defragmenting a hard drive and what needs to be done in a congregation. Defrag means to remove the fragments and put the pieces back together which is similar to remember, that is, to put the members back together. The illustration I use in talking about remembering is a file cabinet, which is what a hard drive is, an electronic file cabinet. When a document is stored, the computer fills spaces on the hard drive according to space available, breaking the document into pieces as needed to file it away. It would be as if one were to open the drawers on a four-drawer file cabinet and just start sticking pages from a document in whatever folder and whatever drawer were available. Unfortunately, our memory is not as good as a computer’s when it comes to finding the document again and even the computer has to take some time to find all the pieces and deliver it to our screen.

When one defrags a hard drive, the computer analyzes every bit of information and remembers or puts back together every file or document so that it is stored in one place allowing for easy access. It is as if one were to dump out all the drawers in a file cabinet on the floor and then sort them all out putting them in their proper location. Not only does this speed up the computer but it also often frees up additional space on the hard drive. This approach is necessary in some congregations as well. As congregations age, patterns of programming and behavior become set and the original purpose is lost. One example is Vacation Bible School, originally developed as an outreach tool for the

local church to the community. It provided an opportunity for congregations to open their doors to the neighborhood, as well as an opportunity for children to invite other children to invite their friends to an activity at their church. In many congregations in my area, this has degenerated into a summer event for their children only. I have heard complaints from some that non-member parents just bring their children for free babysitting during the summer. Time to remember. As part of this process, each activity, each event on the congregational calendar needs to be analyzed not only for how well the activity connects to the purpose of the congregation, but for its potential as an outreach possibility as well. While remembering will not address the registry issues, it will assist the congregation in recovering its purpose.

WWW.CHURCH: Restore

There are two methods of addressing the registry problem in a computer. The more difficult in terms of time and energy is to perform a full edit of the registry. There are programs available for this with varying degrees of success. The quicker and easier method is “restore.” Restoring a computer means saving whatever documents are worth saving and then reinstalling the operating system on a reformatted hard drive. While this is extreme, it will bring the computer back to its original condition and maximum performance. Restore for the congregation can happen in several ways. One example would be a fire. While this is extreme, it can achieve the desired result, a rebirth of the congregation relying on the operating system of Word, Water, Wine. Another method is relocation. With both of these methods, the congregational clock is reset and the calendar becomes before or after the new building or the move. A third drastic restore would be in what is becoming known as legacy congregations. These are congregations in changing

neighborhoods where the ethnicity of the congregation is different from the ethnicity of the neighborhood. These congregations are willing to turn their facilities over to a missionary who will reach out to the new community while providing care for the remaining members of the former congregation. This is meeting with some success in urban areas. In Iowa, however, the potential for this approach is minimal.

I would hope that the extremes mentioned above can be avoided through a willingness to take the time for a registry edit as has been provided through the *VVM* process. The revisions to this process will focus on getting to this deeper level of relationship and community focusing on the power of the Spirit in creating both.

WWW.CHURCH: Waiting, Watching, Working

As mentioned in the last chapter, the *VVM* process consists of three one-day workshops with “homework” assigned between each of the workshops. The sessions are conducted approximately three to six months apart. Unless contacted by the congregation during the time between the workshops, my role in the interim has been limited to those three days. Also limited was the amount of directed work on the part of the congregation. Those who met for the workshop were left with assignments with little involvement on the part of the congregation at large. More than likely, through benign neglect the majority of those in the pew knew little of what was going on with the *VVM* process unless the pastor used the workshops as ideas for sermon series.³

³ This is one of the assignments in the process. Following the first workshop on values, the pastor was to preach a series of sermons on each of the values identified as key for the future of the congregation. Likewise, following the vision session, the pastor was to preach on the various areas discussed for the future of the congregation.

WWW.CHURCH, however, will be a more proactive approach to consultation and revitalization. Following the initial contact by the congregation, a visit is made to the congregation and a meeting with the leadership is arranged. The purpose of this meeting will be to provide an overview of WWW.CHURCH and begin to gauge the current condition of the congregation. If I am not sure of the current situation, I will recommend that the congregation participate in the NCD survey before the first workshop. Additional information will be gathered about the congregation. A survey will be conducted regarding not only the age of the congregation and the age of the members, but the length of time each of the members has been a Christian and the length of time each has been a member of this congregation.

If the leadership is willing to commit to the process, booklets will be provided for distribution within the congregation. The booklets will include the *Church as PC* metaphor outlined above as well as the initial set of Bible studies described below. It will also include the informational section of the first workshop on values so that more time can be devoted to interaction and discussion at the first Saturday session. The dates for all three workshops will be set at this meeting or soon thereafter. I have found that allowing a congregation to proceed at its own pace has tended to give permission to extend the timetable, thereby allowing enthusiasm for the process to wane.

WWW.CHURCH: Waiting

In an effort to involve a greater number of members of the congregation in the process and to begin to connect the process more deliberately to the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God, I propose three series of Bible studies for congregational use based on the first set of www's (waiting, watching, working). These

studies will form the Scriptural backbone of this revised process. Each of these studies will be comprised of at least six lessons. The first will focus on “waiting.” “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope” (Ps. 130:5 NIV) would be an example of one of the texts that would be used in the first of these series. The intent would be to focus the participants⁴ and the congregation on God as the source and power behind their life as a congregation. Integrated into these studies would be Luther’s explanations of the three parts of the Apostles’ Creed as found in *Luther’s Small Catechism*.

In his explanation of the First Article, Luther stresses the role of God in creating, providing and protecting His children. This would include bringing His children together in the church (this will be more fully explored in the second set of studies that will focus on the Third Article of the Creed, which focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit). In this series, the members would begin to explore how God has instilled in them a sense of what is important. This discovery will provide a base from which their values can be explored, which will remain the core of the first workshop.

⁴ The reference to participants here is to those who will be attending the workshops. I will continue the grouping used in *VVM*, that being those who are elected leaders, potential leaders, and those who are leaders because of their place in the community. The workshops are announced as public meetings, allowing others who do not fall into one of these three categories to participate. This has proved beneficial in the past and has raised up formally unknown leadership potential in the congregation. I have found a good grouping to be in the thirty to forty participants range. Fewer than that tends to delay the process as it takes longer for information and ideas to be dispersed through the congregation. More than forty tends to extend the discussion during the workshop without increasing the quality of the conversation or the results.

WWW.CHURCH: Watching

The second set of studies, to be used before the second workshop on vision, will focus on “watching”: What is the Lord already doing in the mission field that is the neighborhood of the congregation? This set will use the second set of www’s, world wide web, in exploring how each congregation is unique and yet a part of the Church and how each congregation, regardless of denomination, has a role in the community in bringing the Gospel to those who do not know Christ as Savior. The studies will include some research on how others are serving in the community and the purpose God has for this congregation in this mission field.

An important part of this second series will be Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the Creed regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in creating the community of faith. While Luther explains well the power of the Holy Spirit in creating faith and how that same power is at work in creating the whole church on earth, his explanation of this article fails to detail the role of the Spirit in the local faith community. This leap from the individual to the worldwide church was acceptable to the modern mind. However, today the focus is on the individual in community. As has been demonstrated in chapters two and six, in the emerging culture there is a return to an emphasis on the importance of the local community. The importance of this shift and need on the part of those searching for community cannot be overlooked by the congregation, nor the Spirit’s power at work in creating the kind of community that people are looking for – one that combines the immanent and the transcendent in a meaningful way.

WWW.CHURCH: Working

The third set of studies to be used before the third workshop on the mission of the congregation will focus on the Second Article of the Creed which is Christ. The emphasis here will be on how the members and the congregation as a whole incarnate Jesus in the world around them.

Using Jesus as the example, the studies in this section will focus on how the members can show Christ to their family and friends as well as the stranger in their midst. In the *VVM* process, this was called the mission section, that is, what is the mission of the congregation, based on its values that will lead it to fulfill the vision. In this set of studies, rather than the mission of the congregation, the mission of the individual member will be center stage. By this time, the understanding of the power of the Spirit in creating relationships should be well introduced. Here we will see how that power is at work in each life in calling others to follow Jesus.

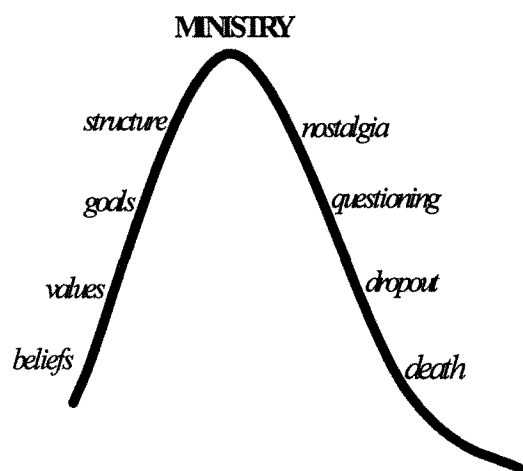
WWW.CHURCH: *Workshops*

Workshop 1: Waiting - Values

The first of the three workshops of *VVM* focused on congregational values as foundational to the process. Little attention was given to the theology underlying the foundation, that is, the bedrock of Jesus and the power of the Spirit.

Given that *VVM* was designed for use in Lutheran congregations, the belief structure was assumed. In nearly every congregation, the phrase “Word and Sacraments” appeared near or at the top of every attempt to develop a list of core values. This happened so often that I excluded the phrase from the “values game” played during the first workshop. I explained that “Word and Sacraments” was understood and more a part

of the core beliefs of the congregation from which flow the core values. I had also discovered that “Word and Sacraments” has become little more than a cliché for most members. I would often ask, when the phrase was suggested as one of the core values, what was meant by it? The answers given did not reflect the true meaning of the words. Members knew that that was what they were supposed to say but could not articulate what was meant by the phrase.



While they gave “Word and Sacraments” as the right answer, they were at a loss as to why it was the right answer. This is why in WWW.CHURCH, I will start with an exploration of the beliefs before getting into the values.

I will continue to use the graph shown here to demonstrate the life-span of a

congregation. For the average congregation this is eighty years.⁵ The first forty years I refer to as the mission side and the last forty years as the maintenance side. It is easy to see this generationally as well. In the first and into the second generation, there is energy and power in a congregation because of the goal of getting to that place of ministry that the vision of a new church inspires. What I missed until beginning this program was the power of the Spirit at work in creating this new community, attributing the power instead to the very American ideals of growth and success.

⁵ Scudieri, "Joy in Christ's Victory."

It could be explained that once the vision is achieved, the congregation, without another vision, begins the downhill slide to the right. On one level, this is correct and using the *VVM* process, congregations have set new visions and experienced new life. However, as I have shown in previous chapters, this is only a part of the problem. Reaching the vision of ministry occurs at the same time the congregation is beginning to age and begin the third and succeeding generations of its life. These are the children and grandchildren of the founding members. Their relationships are no longer built on being drawn together by the Spirit in creating a new faith community, but now naturally develop through kinship ties.

Once the faith base is reviewed, the balance of the day will follow the outline used in *VVM*. The next activity will be the individual values game. This is an adaptation of a process used by Scott, Jaffe and Tobe⁶ for an individual to discover his or her values. The modification comes in the categories used and the way the game is played. Once a member develops his or her list, which is the end of the game for Scott *et. al.*, the next assignment is to share that list with others in the room, looking for common values and priorities. In many cases, while they have been fellow members for years, many of the participants really do not know one another. This begins to break down some of the resistance in the group as they find their commonalities.

Following a break, a second game is played. This second version is played much the same way – packets of cards, each with a value named, are distributed to teams of two. Their assignment is to boil the 64 value cards down to a prioritized list of six to which they both agree should be the guiding values of the congregation. Once the team

⁶ Scott, Jaffe, and Tobe, *Organizational Vision, Values, and Mission*.

has their list, they are placed with another team and working from each list of six, the foursome develops a new list of six to which all agree. This process continues until there are but two large groups, each with a list of six. Then I assemble the group to develop a single list of six prioritized values for the congregation.

This is the end of the first workshop. Under *VVM*, the goal was to end the first day with this list. With *WWW.CHURCH*, the goal is expanded to include an understanding of the power of God at work in Word, Water, and Wine (I am deliberately using this in place of Word and Sacraments to help the participants see the power rather than the cliché). The homework will be the same as in *VVM*. A committee is formed at the end of the day to develop the six values into a statement. The statement may be reinforced with Scripture; it could be a bulleted list or a series of sentences. The style is not as important as having a document that reflects the culture of the congregation. This document will be circulated in the congregation and support for it among the members developed. At the same time, the pastor is to develop a sermon series based on the values, to bring the congregation into the process. The congregation will begin to use the second set of Bible studies to continue the process and prepare for the second workshop on vision.

Workshop 2: Watching - Vision

The second workshop in *VVM* began with a review of the first and a question: “If you live out these values, what will the congregation look like in the future?” This will be the starting place in *WWW.CHURCH*. An addition here will be a section on what God is already doing in the mission field that surrounds the congregation. This change should help shift the discussion from complaints about what other churches are doing to an understanding of how God works through them as well.

As in *VVM*, I will use the Joel Barker video on the power of vision.⁷ This one-half hour video sets the stage for a discussion on vision and its role in moving the congregation into the future. The discussion continues with the question above. Knowing that God has a future for the congregation and that He can be seen at work in the community leads to a brainstorming session in small groups on the various areas of congregational life.

Unlike a mission statement or a values statement, the vision statement is a large document exploring the future from many perspectives and including as many possibilities as fit with the purpose and values of the congregation. As with the values, only an outline is created in this workshop. A committee is appointed to develop the document more fully before the final workshop. The form of this document is left to the creativity of the participants. Some of the congregations I have worked with have sketched out a timeline to the future, indicating what will be happening at various points in the future. The most creative vision document I have yet seen was one written as a congregational newsletter dated in the year 2013. In all ways it looked like the regular newsletter albeit cast in the future. Each page detailed what was happening in each area of congregational life. As with the values, the homework for this workshop is to disperse the vision throughout the congregation. This congregation did this by introducing pieces from the future newsletter in the bulletin through the Lenten season. Each week another article was printed in the bulletin with the full newsletter distributed on Easter Sunday. Needless to say, this congregation was ready to move to the last workshop confident that the congregation was involved.

⁷ Joel Barker, *The Power of Vision* (Minneapolis, MN: StarThrower, 1996).

Workshop 3: Working - Mission

As either name implies, this workshop is less brainstorming or dreaming and more about the hard work of bringing dreams to reality. This day is spent on teaching methods of strategic planning and goal setting and ways of organizing the congregation in light of the vision.

Returning to the metaphor of Church as PC, this is the workshop that will address which programs should be loaded now that the computer has been rebooted, remembered, or restored. With a clean hard drive and the operating system in order, what programs are needed to move the congregation from where it is to where God wants it to be? While the focus here will be on technique and methodology, this workshop will need to include time to explore the options. Rather than working with assumptions, the reasons behind them will need to be considered in light of the first two workshops and the studies over the past six months to one year.

This workshop will probably remain much as it is in *VVM*. The dynamics will change due to the changes explored above, but the basic goal will remain. The goal is that the participants will have the tools needed to develop programming and processes needed to move forward. They will learn to

1. set “smart” goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed)
2. prioritize these goals, that is, which will help us move to the vision more effectively than the others.
3. develop a task force approach to ministry rather than rely on the familiar boards and committee structures that are a carryover from the modern church.
4. budget based on where they are going rather than where they have been.
5. explore the congregation’s monthly calendar for opportunities for mission rather than as a calendar for members only.

An additional piece that needs to be included in this section is one on the individual’s mission. While this could be a completely separate workshop, the mission of

the individual Christian and its intersection with the congregation's mission should be explored. In the waiting/values section, the individual's relationship is addressed. It would seem that this is a theme worth carrying through at this point. Without the passionate, Spirit-driven support of the members, the future of the congregation will remain in doubt.

Conclusion

The following appeared in a recent publication regarding an event at the LCMS National Youth Gathering in 2004:

“Alright, I’m sure you can relate when I say that often at big gatherings or even small retreats everyone seems to be on fire for God. However, when you return home it becomes harder to keep it going. Well this time has been completely different. Every day of my life, Satan tries to push me in the opposite direction God wants me to go. But more and more, I’m saying, ‘Get away, Satan,’ I can tell that my faith has taken on a new meaning to me, it’s finally become MY FAITH and not my parents. Everyone in the youth group has changed for the better and it’s not a normal change. It’s a Jesus change! This has been so exciting to experience over the past month, and I just had to share it with you!”⁸

As I was coming to the end of the research for this paper the publication with the above crossed my desk. This quote demonstrates clearly the issue before any consultant working with older congregations. The challenge for older congregations is really about helping members say “it’s finally become MY FAITH.”

What I hope to achieve with the revisions to *VVM* is reconnect the participants to one another and to their Savior through the Word, Water, and Wine so they can say along with the girl quoted above, this is MY CHURCH. This is where God wants me to be at this time and in this place. This is where God has connected me by the power of His

⁸ LCMS District and Congregational Services, *DCS News*, Vol. 3, Newsletter no. 2, ed. LeRoy Wilke (Saint Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2004), 7

Spirit to my brothers and sisters in Him. If this can take place through WWW.CHURCH it will make the time spent with the congregation more than worth the investment. If they discover or discover again the joy of being in love with Jesus, I have no doubt they will share that love throughout their church, their community, and their world.

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