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### Re-Innergized The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

RE-INNERGIZED

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

STACEY SPENCE-BALDWIN

PROJECT FACULTY:

DR. MINDY SMITH

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023



## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Stacey Spence-Baldwin

has been approved by  
the Evaluation Committee on March 15, 2023  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

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### Dedication

Dedicated is a word I would use to describe my mother, Audrey L. Spence. She has always been my biggest supporter and a never-ending source of strength. I dedicate the words of this work to her because she always saw the potential in me when I could not.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to use this space to acknowledge the “11 Indispensable Relationships”<sup>1</sup> who have made this project possible.

1. My general editor and true friend, Joyce Story, Ph.D. Joyce has been a source of inspiration and strength to me for the last three years. She cheered for me and corrected me as only a friend could. She has given me dignity and focus in a time of stress and abundant workloads. I will forever be grateful for her dedication to my work and purpose.
2. My protege and the one who has covered my back, Rev. Jackie Beard. It has been my pleasure to take him on this ride with me. While he is most competent in his own right, through our relationship, both of us have grown in the understanding of the church and the Holy Spirit. He is a steadfast member of the laity who stands with me back-to-back, letting me know when the arrows are coming.
3. My encourager has been my husband, Mr. Hank Baldwin. Hank always referred to this journey in baseball terms: enrolling in the program for my Ph.D. is hitting a home run; my first year, I was rounding first base; second year, second base; third year, heading home. Every time I wanted to throw in the towel, he would remind me why I enrolled: to share the work of the Holy Spirit with the church I love. Hank has sacrificed time, patience, and travel so I could complete this calling in my life; to him I will be forever grateful.
4. My Yoda's have been Dr. Leonard Sweet, my advisor, Dr. Mindy Smith, and my sisters, Carolyn Spence and Gail Spence Etchegorry. Carolyn has been a source of knowledge in all areas of my life, but especially currently. She has given me straight paths and honest feedback. Come to think of it, I guess you could say she also filled the position of butt kicker. Gail is the one who has encouraged me through laughter. Everyone needs someone to make them laugh. Mindy's expertise in bringing the best out in all of us has been a great source of strength.
5. To all those who have kept me grounded in humbleness in serving you: the poor, the lonely, the rich, the broken, and the prisoners. You are the ones who remind me of Heaven every day.
6. All my children and grandchildren who keep me on my toes learning about the generations to come. They have no idea how much their thoughts and statements influence my work.
7. My VIPs - the ladies (Donna Cox, Julie Schendel, and Laura Holland) who I have journeyed with, the Covid 19 Cohort!!!
8. The barn is the place where my soul is healed. To my counselor, Gabe my horse, and to my co-counselors, my dogs Zippy, Krav, Hemi (who is no longer with me), and Nitro my cat. These members of God's world have carried me and my soul to a deeper love of God and self.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Sweet Ph.D., *11: Indispensable Relationships You Can't Be Without*, First Edition, Reissue, Trade Paper Conversion (Colorado Springs, Colo: David C. Cook, 2012).

### Epigraph

*If [Holy Spirit] doth not now bear witness with thy spirit, that thou art a child of God, O that he might convince thee, thou poor unawakened sinner, by his demonstration and power, that thou art a child of the devil! O that, as I prophesy, there might now be "a noise and a shaking;" and may "the bones come together, bone to his bone!" Then "come from the four winds, O Breath! and breathe on these slain, that they may live!" And do not ye harden your hearts, and resist the Holy Ghost, who even now is come to convince you of sin, "because you believe not on the name of the only begotten Son of God."<sup>2</sup>*

*Rev. John Wesley*

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1, Sermons 1-33, Sermon 3 (Nashville, Tn.: Abingdon Press, 1984). Paragraph 12, pg. 146.

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## Glossary

Re-Innergized - It refers to the Holy Spirit's indwelling in all disciples which sparks the movement of the body of Christ into action.

Dy-no-mite - Definition of explosive leadership needed in a dying or declining church.

Pneumanaught - Disciples who are sailors of the Holy Spirit.

Rooted rural church - A body of Christ located in a rural area with 100 or less members.

### Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called ‘Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts’. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder Workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using ‘just enough’ feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

### Abstract

In this Project Portfolio, I will address the following NPO: *The church is in decline or dying because it lacks connection with the Holy Spirit*. Through the church relying on human reason instead of the will of the Holy Spirit, the church has lost its light. The key finding in my research is that when a church embraces the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it will live again. This finding came from my personal experiences of the Holy Spirit resurrecting three small rural churches which were in decline/death back to life. When congregations allowed the Holy Spirit to prompt their mission work the rural churches, in serious decline, discovered innovative and creative ways in re-energizing the body of Christ. My book project tells the stories of these three churches along with the historical, biblical, and futuristic work of the Holy Spirit in reviving what was once dead. The book contains an introduction and six chapters with the purpose of refocusing the hearts of the congregation towards the Holy Spirit.



## Introduction

I never went to church consistently before 1998. It wasn't until my son, Robert Anderw Robinson, went to church with a friend at five years of age and came home so excited about the free doughnuts and his Sunday School teacher that I was moved to go to this specific church the following Sunday. I walked into the narthex of Cason United Methodist Church, in Delray Beach, Florida, and God spoke to me, "Welcome home." I have been part of a worshipping congregation ever since. Little did I realize that moment was the beginning of this project. Here I sit, 25 years later, in utter amazement that God chose me for this moment.

The pull of the Holy Spirit began to become supremely evident in my call as an Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church when I began to serve small rural congregations. I remember that when I was first appointed to a small rural church, someone said to me, "Who did you make mad?" At the time I was not sure what that comment meant exactly but have since learned that apparently, it's not a good thing to be appointed to a small church because if you are a good preacher, you get appointed to the big church. Not so! As I began to work with the laity of small churches, I saw their commitment to the body of Christ, their commitment to the communities in which they live, and their commitment in working diligently for the Kingdom of God. In other words, I was witness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. I fell deeply in love with the Holy Spirit and the laity of the church, and the community which God has led me to serve. As time moved forward, I could sense a feeling of tiredness, maybe even exhaustion among the church members. They seemed to feel the need to be measured by the same standards the larger churches measured themselves: attendance and financial giving. The wisdom the Holy Spirit has taught me is that money and numbers do not make the church a fulfilled body of Christ. Money and numbers may make the church look successful, but fulfillment comes from the deep love for one another, the Holy Spirit, and the community. I have experienced churches who might be low in number and financial resources but have been loaded with the Holy Spirit. I was the one chosen to take action to help the declining or dying church find its re-energizing in the Holy Spirit, not in its number nor financial accumulation. In other words, helping the churches find provisions for existence in the will of God instead of the will of humanity.

It was not until Rev. Michael Beck introduced me to the work of Dr. Leonard Sweet that I realized I was not the only one who saw deficiencies in the way the church embraced the Holy Spirit and its work. The first book of Dr. Sweet that I read was *Mother's Tongue*, and then I heard Dr. Sweet speak at a clergy meeting. I needed to know him and learn from him. Rev. Beck encouraged me to enter Dr. Sweet's Doctoral program at Portland Seminary, and I did. I knew in my soul that the Holy Spirit was providing signs and signals for revival in the rural church. I knew that the doctoral program would help me interpret those signs and identify how to reveal them to the body of Christ. And I knew that the result would be church renewal.

During the first year of my doctoral work, I took everything I had learned through reading and studying and asked the church to join me in praying for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We would dream about where the Holy Spirit was leading us and how we could get there. We took a year of

prayer to decide what would be our mission to the community. The Holy Spirit led us to open a resource center, in collaboration with the local Episcopal church, which last year (2022) was responsible for the following activity: distribution of over 278,672 lbs. of food; service to 8,373 households, 2,274 disabled persons, 23,138 individuals, and 651 veterans; administering of 364 crisis interventions; and the logging of 8,380 volunteer hours. With the Holy Spirit, this church which was in decline is now a church serving in mission to its community in mighty ways; revival is possible, and death is not the only answer. Soon I received a call to take another church slated for closure. I thought to myself if the Holy Spirit could do this here, why not there. I said yes, and the next Holy Spirit journey began. It was my doctoral project being lived out in real time. My second church was down to 15 worshippers, behind in payments, and just holding on with their fingertips. But the Holy Spirit showed me life in this place. So, we began by praying for the Holy Spirit to re-innergize the church and to show it the way forward. It happened again, and there was new life and a thriving church within three years. My NPO (Need, Problem or Opportunity) confirmed. I received another call to take a third church, and I took it again with the same result: growth not death. It was quantitative proof that if a church in decline called upon the Holy Spirit and did what the Holy Spirit told it to do, it would be re-innergized to life and not bound to death.

### Discovery

The Discovery Workshop was conducted via Zoom in two, two-hour sessions. My stakeholders consisted of seven individuals:

- Full Time Elder in the Baptist Church
- Retired Professional from social sector/congregant
- IT Professional from local university/congregant
- Director of Worship from a local rural church
- Congregant/Friend
- Local Community Teacher and congregant
- Community Member, Congregation Member, PhD., Retired Professional

Prior to our discovery workshop, I delivered a SWOT analysis to be completed by all participants. Once completed, I received them back and compiled all the SWOT's data into one document. This document was the catalyst to determine weakness, strength, opportunity, or threat to the rural church. At the workshop I presented the stakeholders with my NPO (Need, Problem, or Opportunity) and it was originally framed in this way: The rural body of Christ must learn to re-institute itself as a body of living faith ignited by the Holy Spirit in its current culture and focused on the culture to come. I explained to them that this was the statement I was going to confirm through the process of the workshop and additional research. I also used the Empathy Map to determine what a rural church would say, think, do, and feel if the NPO statement were valid. Once that was completed, we then returned to the SWOT Analysis and narrowed the information with the Five Ways exercise in the workshop manual. After synthesizing the SWOT Analysis, the Empathy Map, and the Five Way Exercise to explore the most important area of the rural church to either support, negate, or adjust the NPO Statement, and the online Empathy Map and the Five Ways exercise. The

following Discovery Statement was the result:

***Considering the rural church, we discovered that the rural body of Christ must learn to re-institute itself as a body of living faith ignited by the Holy Spirit in its current context and focused on the culture to come, a situation which is caused by traditions that have become traditionalized. If this need were met, the rural church would be known in the community as witnesses and healers.***

The participants studied the SWOT analysis and identified their top five comments. The top identifiers noted in the weakness category were a lack of leadership and Holy Spirit and a persistence of church conflict. In the threat box, the church was too traditionalized, biased, overlooked and had too many other secular activities vying for its time. In opportunities, we noted that we can explore and be flexible to change, and in strengths, we would be known in the community as a witness and healer. The participants then chose one statement they felt would need to be addressed to fully research the NPO. The participants decided that if rural churches were known in our community as witnesses and healers, then the critical needs of leadership, Holy Spirit, and conflict resolution would be resolved. At the same workshop the stakeholders were given pre-written scenarios and asked to discuss how they saw the Holy Spirit at work. Each senior was given to two people to share. As the stakeholders began to see how the Holy Spirit was working in the stories, they began to talk about their own experiences with the Holy Spirit. The participants began to talk about the difference between what they felt was a movement of the Holy Spirit vs. good choices they had made. Many of the stakeholders shared that they had never been asked to articulate the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and that it was refreshing to be able to share it. This confirmed my hypothesis that the Holy Spirit re-energizes the hearts of believers when we recognize its work in us and in the church. Then I asked everyone to take a few days and reflect on what we had processed. I also asked them to respond to the following questions: "What am I missing?" and "What do I need to study that is not on here?" One of the questions which developed through this process was, "What will it take to transform the leadership and community culture so that tradition does not become the polarizing force of traditionalism?" In addition, it was through the discovery workshop that I learned I would need to narrow down my NPO, yet have it state the same thing.

Following the discovery workshop, I found people began to speak openly with me about the Holy Spirit. One important conversation took place with a colleague. She shared with me that the reason she did not preach about the Holy Spirit was because her congregation was not comfortable with it. This acknowledgement triggered another area of research about when the church began to quiet the Holy Spirit. During the Enlightenment period, churches began to rely on their own abilities and reasoning, not on the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. This situation produced a lack of preaching, prayer, and reliance on the Holy Spirit for the sustainability and growth of the church, and the church structure began to decline.

In addition to the on-line workshop, I also held one-to-one interviews. Interviewees (A, B, C, and D) received the discovery workshop statement and outcomes and were asked to respond to the

following questions: “What am I missing?” and “What do I need to study that is not on here?” **A**, author/retired clergy/professor, noted the importance of focusing on the cause and effect of the hollowing out of the economy by Big Agriculture, traditionalists, social issues experienced in rural communities that are foreign to other parts of society, and social civil religion. **B**, writer, professor/PhD., addressed the importance of what the rural church is already doing well, the need to fix power structures, and the rural church’s resistance to incarnational freeing of the Holy Spirit. **C**, writer, professor, clergyman, identified the need to embrace culture at every level and connect to the digital world. **D**, clergy/District Leadership, noted that lack of leadership causes rural churches to become traditionally, instead of outwardly, focused. These churches tend to focus on freedom-liberty and then on the gospel.

Both the discovery workshop and one-to-one interviews confirmed a parallel thought process, though the workshop indicated a “big picture” narrative, and the one-to-one interviews pin-pointed detailed identifiers in rural church decline. The findings were as follows:

- The presence of the Holy Spirit must be seen in the leadership and the body of Christ,
- The rural church and community will need to address its polarized insight into tradition, politics, and cultural norms,
- Socioeconomic status must be kept in mind when addressing the healing and witness to the community,
- It will take an ability to look beyond the “inerrant” word of God to embrace the story of Jesus, and
- That the rural church does not need to be a big church to be Jesus in its community was a constant reminder.

The next question to be answered was what the best way would be to transmit the findings of this research. This question would ultimately be answered in the project design phase.

## Design

During the project design phase there were three possible ways of transmission of this project; book, podcast, or tent revival. The Design Workshop narrowed the list to two, the book or the podcast. Ultimately, the book was overwhelmingly chosen by the stakeholders as the first mode of transmission. This was because the target audience is the established church, whose congregations are mainly older and prefer the written word. However, stakeholders noted that they wanted a book which would relate to the church and not use theological or academic jargon. Once it was determined that the Most Valuable Prototype (MVP) would be the book, the stakeholders determined the focus areas of the book. These are the questions which were answered:

Will people be interested in learning more about the Holy Spirit?

Will this project speak to all walks of life - age, gender, race...etc.?

What are some things I have missed in your initial reading?

Will this help other churches who are in decline or dying?

I began writing and eventually emailed the first three chapters of the book to over 25 people and requested feedback. I also created a book review Facebook page for additional feedback. Based on that feedback, from the above questions the final adjustments to those chapters were completed.

## Delivery

### Doctoral Project Scope

The scope of the design workshop focused on three main areas, as to which concept (books, podcasts, tent revival, or a combination of all three) will best address the NPO. This will include stories in the work of the Holy Spirit, in churches and in the lives of individuals. The content will also focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in the church, and how it is essential in defining the church's role in the community. The scope for this project includes the need for stories relating to the work of the Holy Spirit, and how it has brought new life to dying or declining churches. The boundaries in the NPO research require strict focus on the work of the Holy Spirit in dying or declining churches.

### Benchmarks

Based upon the key performance indicators, the goals of the Doctoral Delivery Plan were met. These quality benchmarks included the following:

- Ten individuals and three congregations will seek a deeper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Three traditional churches will begin seeking new ways of outreach within the community.
- Three congregations will begin to intentionally focus on church vitality, by entering a time of prayer and discernment.
- There will be 15 interactions regarding the subject matter on the Facebook page created for evaluation purposes. This format will allow for feedback for new and differing opinions, helping the project to grow in its own depth and be renewed in new ways for all readers.

In addition, all but one of the success benchmarks were achieved:

- Ten people will read the sample book and provide feedback.
- Three churches will begin to experience new growth and vitality.
- Two colleagues and one academic institution will use the book as an opportunity to teach about the re-innergizing work of the Holy Spirit.

The third success benchmark, in hindsight, was unrealistic. The book would not be completed nor published within three months. Therefore, the benchmark could never have been reached. Yet, the successes included all twenty of the stakeholders who were asked to participate in reviewing the chapters and did respond to the questions. However, only fifty percent completely followed through. Yet there were people other than the planned stakeholders, who asked if they could read the chapters.

## Feedback

The stakeholders in all the workshops provided feedback through answering a series of questions. They were also encouraged to give their own assessment of what strengths and weaknesses of the NPO or the MVP. The stakeholders were affirmative in the subject matter, interested in reading more about the subject, and recommended that others read the sample book. Yet, stakeholders highlighted the need for clarification on some items within the project. What is being submitted for the post-graduation plan reflects the changes made to the book based on stakeholders' feedback.

## Long-Term Objective

My long-term goals for the book focus on marketing via email and social media. The purpose for this is to obtain additional feedback in areas of strengths and weakness. My intention is to hire a social media expert to create a book launch page to reach other demographics of stakeholders. Additionally, a Rural Revival Tent meeting is being planned with five other churches for October of 2023, with the focus of Holy Spirit re-innergizing. I also plan to use the book as a small group study over the summer to determine if other resources may emerge from the book such as devotionals or bible studies programming. Through marketing I plan to promote the book on other podcasts, speaking engagements, and person to person dissemination. Ultimately, I would like to publish this book so it may reach other churches who think closure is the only answer.

## Evaluation of Experience

The journey of my doctoral process has taught me how to share my NPO findings with the church in a quantitative and qualitative, objective, and data-informed way. However, this experience has not only been about academic growth, but it has also been about God's call to the churches to be re-innergized by the Holy Spirit. This mantle of sharing the Holy Spirit was given to me many years ago and this book is the culmination of the work of the Holy Spirit in me. The experience of taking others along on this journey (covid cohort, my churches, family, and friends) has elicited a full and deep expansion of this book through their feedback. This process has challenged me to stay focused on the NPO yet to be flexible enough to let it grow in its depth and meaning. In addition, the process provided enabled me to take this project step-by-step. The importance of this was that I was able to build upon each step of the work to expand my knowledge, thinking, and feedback for the edification of the church. This experience has been both exhausting and exhilarating. It has also provided an outlet for churches to see the re-innergizing of the Holy Spirit.

## Next Steps

The next step of this project is to address the main constraint in the NPO; what if the movement of the Holy Spirit is leading the church to closure? This is a question I had not originally considered in my research. While it is addressed in Chapter Six of the book, it requires more research and development. I will continue to send the book to others to review and give feedback for future adjustments. Once I have completed that research, I will seek to find a publisher. I will need to prepare a proposal and send it to different publishing houses. As mentioned earlier, seeking

continued feedback from those who engage in the book will be a source of growth and strength in re-evaluating and updating the material.

### Reflection

I was never a great student. Reading comprehension has always been a weak area in my life so to think God would call me to write a book was never on my radar, but here I am. My initial reflection is how my NPO, filtered through all the above research and workshops, now reads: The church is in decline or dying because it lacks the Holy Spirit. I have learned that with the Holy Spirit, the end isn't the end, it is only the beginning of something new. Dr. Leonard Sweet describes the need for the Holy Spirit in the church as follows:

"The church is the body of Christ, but everybody needs breath, air, spirit to be alive. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ, the breath of the body. Where the Spirit is missing, the body dies from lack of breath and its lights go out. No light, no life."<sup>3</sup>

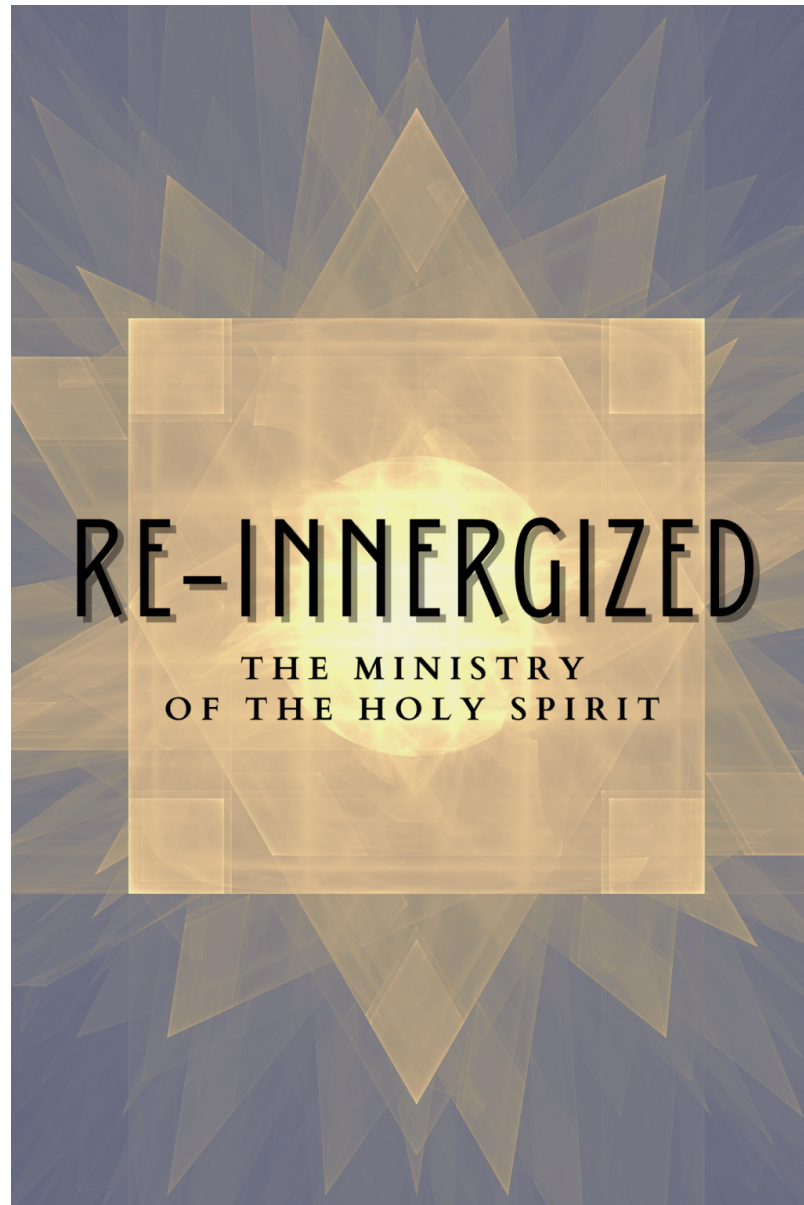
It is my prayer that this work will long outlast my life. Those who read the stories of death to life will believe in the re-innergizing of the Holy Spirit. This awakening will allow all to take on new endeavors which yield fruit of light and life for the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard Sweet, December 28, 2022. Facebook, February 1, 2023.  
<https://www.facebook.com/lensweet/posts/pfbid0GNmwrtj6EH6eog7qu1BVMBj6mwiVKincFjcddVCurjv5A3CircPP3xKxvxb5e8Aul>.

### Doctoral Project

What is before you, in this section, is the book cover, table of contents, Introduction, and Chapters 2, 3, and 5. The page numbers in the table of contents represent the page numbers in the completed project. Chapter 1, 4, and 6 are included in Appendix E of this document.



Robinson, Stacey Spence, and Amanda. 2023. "Re-Innergized Book Cover."

The cover of the book was created through Canva and was edited by Amanda Theodour Robinson, who is the End User Adoption Agent for IT and Customer Service Agent for Michelin. Amanda is also a graphic design artist. Her work within this project consisted of designing the font and the color scheme to enhance the feeling of depth that occurs as one becomes re-innergized within one's soul. This is an online design program. The illustration exemplifies the re-innergizing by the Holy Spirit which must begin with the inner self of the believer. The shards of



glass which look like triangles represent the work of the Trinity with a focus on the Holy Spirit overflowing into the world through the work of the church. The shards also represent the need for the work of the church to point outward into the world.

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*\*Please note these page numbers in this table of contents are formatted to the project in its entirety.*

## RE-INNERGIZED

*The Ministry of the Holy Spirit*

## INTRODUCTION

It was a Tuesday, early summer, in North Central Florida in 2019. I walked into our church's fellowship hall, and instantly, something felt different. The church felt alive, uncharacteristically refreshing. I could not articulate what had changed, but the space felt suddenly more comfortable, the room seemed warmer, the scurry of the volunteers seemed more joyful, and the conversations I heard were about God's work, not about who had coffee in the sanctuary, the color of the carpet, or if the songs sung on Sunday were ones that the congregation knew or not. I stood there, taking it all in. I was surprised that I was entering into this type of atmosphere, because I was not prepared to see it in my church. I felt an infusion of energy, joy, and excited anticipation as to what was coming next. The anomaly caught me off guard, so I just stood at the door, watched, and listened. I froze for a few minutes in shock and disbelief, until congregation members walked by, said hello to me, and asked, "Are you ok Pastor?" I stuttered out my good mornings, hesitantly smiling. Could this be for real? I hoped it was.

I can laugh now at this memory because I can only imagine what my face must have looked like, watching my church in that moment be the church of love and joy. I felt like Buddy, played by Will Ferrell in the movie *Elf*. In the film, when Buddy walks into the department store and is told by his boss that he's at the North Pole, Buddy responds, "No, this is not the North Pole!"<sup>4</sup> He and his boss banter a few times back and forth about whether they are at the North Pole or not. Then his boss announces that Santa will be there the next day. At that, Buddy is overcome with such joy. He cannot contain himself. Buddy jumps and yells, "Santa is coming,

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<sup>4</sup>Carlos' Diner, "Elf the Movie: Santa Announcement." Published May 9, 2020. Video, .08, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jyCfRHuMHU>.

Santa is coming!”<sup>5</sup> That’s how I felt at that moment. I thought perhaps I had been given an incredible gift from God. I wanted to jump up and down, scream, and shout, “Thank you, Jesus!” But I held my composure, and with a smirk of surprised pleasure, headed to my office. As I entered my office and sat down, I felt the power of the moment. It felt like a strange warm feeling flowing through my body, a feeling of joy, happiness, but mostly contentment. Then reality sank in. For this church, this was a one-time moment, and I knew that, a brief interlude that would dissolve by tomorrow into the true state of this church.

This church had been moving toward closure, and I had become used to the daily arguments about church politics, the focus on finances instead of mission, and leaders leading from a point of scarcity instead of a life of abundance. The concerns of the trustees primarily focused on how many keys to the church were never turned in and the fear of what was to become of them next. Yet, in just one year, this church would reestablish itself as a vibrant faith community. Within 12 short months, the joy and service I witnessed that day would become my church’s new reality –a sign of permanent, lasting, dynamic change. How did this happen? How was this new attitude being sustained? This kind of transformational change wasn’t the result of massive studies, complex strategies, or complicated, time-consuming meetings or seminars. The change occurred naturally as a result of engaging with the Holy Spirit’s *dunamis*, “the resurrection power of God’s Spirit that opens new doors of miraculous possibilities in the potential of any and every moment.”<sup>6</sup>

*Dunamis* is the Greek word for resurrection in the New Testament. It is also the root word for dynamite. Throughout this book, when I use the word dynamite, I will use the phonetic

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<sup>5</sup>Carlos’ Diner.

<sup>6</sup>Rosario Picardo and Sue Nilson Kibbey, *Dynamite Prayer: A 28 Day Experiment* (Plano, TX: Invite Press, 2022), xv.

spelling dy-no-mite because it reminds me of my childhood. It takes me back to the T.V. show *Good Times*.<sup>7</sup> *Good Times* is about an African American family living in America with all of the struggles and joys that come from their life experiences. I watched it as a young child because it intrigued me. I remember moments in the show when I had no idea why the characters were having a hard time, but I knew their struggle was real. Regardless of what was happening in the lives of the Walker family on *Good Times*, JJ, one of the sons, always ended with the word “dy-no-mite.” I hear this ending statement much differently now than when I heard it as a young kid. Today, I hear the story of a family focused on the resurrection power to overcome and move beyond. At the beginning of our journey together, I wished the church could do the same. Unlike my childish view of *Good Times*, when I began to observe the church, I knew why it was having a hard time; it was not calling on the dy-no-mite Holy Spirit to resurrect it.

This is the reason for the book. I have experienced personally the dy-no-mite Holy Spirit of Christ bringing life to the dry, dead bones of the rooted church, and I want you to experience it also.

In my context, the rooted church will refer to rural churches whose attendance counts under 100, although the findings in this book can easily translate to any size church within any context. Additionally, the word re-innergized is used intentionally. It refers to the Holy Spirit’s indwelling in all disciples which sparks the movement of the body of Christ into action. This word is a verb, and it means that one is experiencing something within oneself that brings forth a renewed sense of the work of God in the life of the church. This inner movement of the Holy Spirit will be experienced differently in each person and each church. Some refer to this type of experience as a conversion or being saved. Many who have experienced inner renewal can give

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<sup>7</sup> Retro TV Moment: “J.J. Says Dynamite! (Good Times).” Published September 11, 2020, video .21,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9YsYxKkAIM>.

you the date and time when it happened, while others find this type of experience to be a lifelong experience. Either way, the inner renewal of a person is the work of the Holy Spirit, and I call this renewal being re-innergized.

Re-innergized is derived from the Greek root word *Ἐνέργεια* -*energeia*, which means to give energy, to arouse activity, to supply electricity, or to be in operation to put forth energy.<sup>8</sup> In scripture, *energeia* is used 17 times. The most historical use of this word has to do with something bringing energy to an outside force. Additional words which represent this same activity are, "animate, electrify, empower, excite, invigorate, motivate, reinforce, stimulate, strengthen, trigger, arm, enable, enliven, fortify, goose, innervate, inspirit, to infuse spirit or life into, enliven, prime, quicken, or sustain,"<sup>9</sup> while the word inspirit, to infuse spirit or life into, highlights the premise that energy is infusing spirit or life into something outside of itself. One must be re-innergized within oneself first before offering this infusion of energy into something or someone else. Hence, a new word is needed to describe this experience of being inwardly re-innergized by the Holy Spirit.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to re-innergize the saints, the church will be revived. It will be able to embrace the community and its culture regardless of how different they are. This is a critical link to revival and renewal of the church: loving its surrounding community and its culture. Ultimately, through the re-innergizing of oneself, the work of God not only infuses new life into the church, but this dynamic energy naturally overflows into the community, as well. Through the dynamic, resurrection power of the Holy Spirit, the church becomes re-established as a missional outpost for its community.

In dying or declining churches, the key factor of death is that the body of Christ lacks connection with the Holy Spirit. This lack of connection eliminates the church as the missional

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<sup>8</sup>"Energize," dictionary.com, accessed December 3, 2022, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/energize>.

<sup>9</sup>"Energize."

outpost to its community, hence resulting in its decline or death. There is no doubting the rooted church is in decline or dying; it is statistically proven. In 2021 Mark Chaves, professor of sociology, religious studies, and divinity at Duke University, conducted an analysis known as the "National Congregations Study." This study "suggested that small congregations in rural areas and small towns may be unsustainable. Nearly half of the country's congregations are in rural areas (25%) or small towns (22%)."<sup>10</sup> While Chaves attributes the lack of Americans living in rural areas as a decline measure, his study also confirms my analysis that rural churches are in decline or dying. However, this book asserts the absence of the Holy Spirit as the reason for the decline or closure of the rural church.

The statistics and the physical observation that churches are closing their doors do not mean that decline or closure must be our fate. The rural church can survive if it embraces the re-innergizing work of the Holy Spirit.

David M. Patton, author of *Roland Allen, the Ministry of the Spirit*, indicates that the missionary Roland Allen was "restless about the glaring gap he saw between the church's stated objective and the conflicting means used to reach those objectives."<sup>11</sup> This observation speaks to what we are discussing in this book. This connection is seen in the church of Acts, specifically Acts 2:37-42: "repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ [...]and you will receive the Holy Spirit [...]Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."<sup>12</sup> Church growth is only possible with the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the re-innergizing force for the declining or dying church.

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<sup>10</sup>Yonat Shimron, "Study: Attendance Hemorrhaging at Small and Midsize US Congregations," Religion News Service, October 14, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/10/14/study-attendance-at-small-and-midsize-us-congregations-is-hemorrhaging/>.

<sup>11</sup>Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit: Selected Writings of Roland Allen* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>12</sup>Allen, 6.

To be re-innergized by the Holy Spirit means that the people of God, just as those exemplified throughout scripture, have had, or will have a physical, emotional, and spiritual response to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their inner beings.

The Holy Spirit, by virtue of our Baptism, has been “*poured out* on all flesh, so your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. The Lord’s Spirit will even be poured out upon the male and female slaves” (Joel 2:28-29 NRSV). Therefore, being re-innergized is defined as a state that occurs when the Lord speaks through us not only in words but in actions and deeds, in which one is moved physically, emotionally, or intellectually by a movement of the heart. The calling of the heart brings forth a deeper level of faith, one which physically moves churches and people into the community to meet the Holy Spirit where it is already at work. This call to the community becomes so acute that one cannot help but say yes to God. John Wesley explained this type of movement as “a strange warming of my heart,”<sup>13</sup> confirming him of his salvation. The church needs a strange warming of its heart, so that it can claim new life, growth, and sustainability.

This is not a how-to book, but rather a book that witnesses to the possibility of new life, growth, and sustainability. This book is written for those who remain in dying or declining churches. I am choosing “a plain word for the plain people.”<sup>14</sup> That is to say, I try in this presentation to avoid words that are not easily understood. This is a piece of academic work, but it is presented in a way, so that anyone can grasp the message.

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<sup>13</sup> John Wesley, “On the Holy Spirit,” John Wesley’s Sermons, accessed December 3, 2021, <https://johnwesleysermons.com/sermons/on-the-holy-spirit/>.

<sup>14</sup> John Wesley says in his sermon, “I design plain truth for plain people: Therefore, of set purpose, I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations; from all perplexed and intricate reasonings; and, as far as possible, from even the show of learning, unless in sometimes citing the original Scripture. I labor to avoid all words which are not easy to be understood, all which are not used in common life; and, in particular, those kinds of technical terms that so frequently occur in Bodies of Divinity; those modes of speaking which men of reading are intimately acquainted with, but which to common people are an unknown tongue. Yet I am not assured that I do not sometimes slide into them unawares: It is so extremely natural to imagine that a word which is familiar to ourselves is so to all the world.”



When churches allow God to form individuals in the image of Christ, and the body of Christ follows the Holy Spirit into the communities and serves as a beacon of hope, all things become possible for all people. This book hinges on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, a ministry that provides through our sacred scriptures innovative ways to renew polarizing traditions that currently inhibit the church from relating to its surrounding culture and context. The scriptural framework of Jesus' life, his teachings, and his reliance on the Holy Spirit offer essential ways of living if the rural church is to re-ignite holy living in our current communities and culture. My prayer is that you will find yourself in these words, stories, and examples of where the Holy Spirit is at work. Then, in turn, "may the power of the Holy Spirit be aroused in the hearts of believers, [and] arouse and re-engage the amazing power which lies within us."<sup>15</sup>

To this I must add a caveat that while all churches hope for growth and renewal, we cannot dismiss the theological argument in which the Holy Spirit may also cause death so that new life can be brought forth. I will address this argument in Chapter Six. But for now, what follows are the examples and stories of churches and people who exemplify the primary thesis of this book. These life experiences and examples have moved me in answering God's call to encourage congregations to loosen the Holy Spirit through the body of Christ into the community, thereby re-innergizing the body for the mission that God has called them to. Saint Bede, an English monk (672/3 – 26 May 735), used the word "'effusion' showing the lavishness of the gift of the Holy Spirit, regardless of sex, or state of life, or position."<sup>16</sup> His words identify how re-innergizing works. It is an effusion, an excessive power of the Holy Spirit indwelling within each believer that prepares their hearts for the work of the church.

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<sup>15</sup>Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Forgotten Ways*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>16</sup>Frances Martin, Evan Smith, and Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 28.

Ultimately, this manuscript relays my personal experience in which I have witnessed the breath of the Holy Spirit bring life to dying or declining churches. Three different rural churches that were preparing to close now have full and vibrant ministries and missions. These three healthy and growing churches have now gathered together to help release the Holy Spirit in another community where the church is in decline. The releasing of the Holy Spirit into the community by a re-innergized church is made known when the church becomes innovative in how it shares the good news of the gospel. This means that the church is no longer a self-enclosed fortress but is willing to join the Holy Spirit in ministering to the community. Consequently, the church will begin to choose “passion over pleasure, vision over maintenance, community over isolation,”<sup>17</sup> and the way of Christ over the way of the world. When the church is grounded in the Holy Spirit, it will be led by *dunamis* saints and will experience sustained vitality, church growth, innovative creativity, an outward focus, and spiritual maturity.

The illustration below represents the results in the life of the church when the presence of the Holy Spirit is leading the church’s missional focus. This nautical wheel represents the ways in which I have experienced the re-innergizing ministry of the Holy Spirit within the local church. I chose a nautical wheel to represent the movement of the Holy Spirit because of the pneumanautical (spirit traveling) saints which you will read about in Chapter 3. Each spoke of the wheel represents an area within the life of the church which was renewed when it called upon the Holy Spirit to

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<sup>17</sup>Len Wilson, *Greater Things. The Work of the New Creation* (Plano, TX: Invite Press, 2022), xxvii.

intervene in the church's ministry and mission.

The church's mission begins with the internal focus on the movement of the Holy Spirit, represented by the inner wheel that forms the stability from which everything emanates. The wheel begins to turn when the Holy Spirit has called dy-no-mite focused saints to sail with the Holy Spirit and to encourage others to follow. When the sailing begins the church discovers a new innovative creativity. This discovery allows the church to impact its community passionately and missionally. Within this posture, the church also begins to discover a new sense of spiritual maturity, an outward focus, church growth, and ultimately sustainability. But be careful. Each

Spence, Stacey. 2022. "Pneumanautical Wheel."



church is different, and each component of the wheel looks different. Do not make the mistake of thinking that the process of the nautical wheel will provide the same results for each church. Each church has its own personalized needs to be addressed by the Holy Spirit. Each church will be re-innnergized but in different ways. There is no "one way" for a re-innnergized church to manifest its newfound energy. The movement of the Holy Spirit will renew each church according to its unique personality, gifts, and people.

## Chapter Two

### Holy Spirit or Human Reason?

#### Innovation and Creativity



*"Faith in the Holy Spirit gave way to faith in human reason."*

Rev. Stacey Spence

The church's mission and ministry is to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded" (Matt 28:19 NRSV). How the body of Christ reaches this objective is directly linked with its connection to the Holy Spirit. This is the dilemma within the Body of Christ. We, the people, cannot grow the church. Only the presence of the Holy Spirit is able to, and the church is not calling upon the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who can "arouse and re-engage that amazing power which lies with us." When the Holy Spirit is not being called to lead, guide, and grow the church, the situation resembles this:

Attendance is down, insurance has not been paid in years, apportionments are a year behind. Our bills are paid, but we cannot afford a pastor, and we will need a new roof soon. We have 15 worshippers, and our offerings are about \$200.00 a week.

In a conversation at a church council meeting in 2017, I asked, "What are we doing about mission to the community?" The answer was, "Nothing right now. We can't afford it." "We cannot

afford not to be in mission to this community right now?" I responded. The council's eyes glazed over. At the same church one Sunday, we were singing "What a Mighty God We Serve." It was the saddest God song I had ever heard. I stopped the singing and said, "We serve a mighty God, and we need to sing like we know it." What happened to this body of Christ? Where was its passion for faith, their love of God and one another? Where did the Holy Spirit go?

The Holy Spirit was not missing. It has been here since the beginning of time. The church has learned to rely on human reason instead of learning to reclaim the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as their power and source. Hence the Holy Spirit seems missing from the church; but it is the church who is missing the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The book of Matthew is filled with examples of Jesus' innovative mindset fused with the movement of the Holy Spirit. In Matthew, the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders (Pharisees and Sadducees) came to a crisis point. The religious leaders confronted Jesus "in order to discredit him."<sup>18</sup> Regardless, Jesus's identity and message modeled one mindset, infused by the Holy Spirit, for the world: love. This mindset was confirmed in his commandments handed down in Matthew 22:36-40.

In the story, Jesus is asked a question by the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were trying to establish that Jesus was violating Torah law: "'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' he asked. Jesus responded by saying, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt 22:38-40 NIV). In this sense, "The Law is not about laws. The laws are there to reveal the heart of the Law giver, Yahweh himself. Hence Jesus is the fulfillment of God's law of love, not the contradiction, or countermanding, or overturning of the

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<sup>18</sup>David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word*, vol. 4 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

law. On the contrary, Jesus is the “Completion of the Law, the Living Torah, the Embodied Torah, Torah-in-the-Flesh.”<sup>19</sup> This is the mindset from which Jesus sets forth the commandment of love as the mandorla.

J.R. Briggs, author of the “Sacred Overlap” identifies a mandorla as a place of learning to live faithfully in the space between two opposing thoughts. Jesus was the mandorla, the one who resides in the “sacred overlap.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, he lived faithfully in the space between Old Testament Law and the new kingdom which he had inaugurated. Jesus operates on the edge, in the overlapping gray area, of being highly orthodox and yet a threat to the religious establishment.

Jesus, the mandorla, fosters this mindset of loving God and loving neighbor in his words and actions. This loving mindset is called *agapaō* in the Greek, meaning to love, not just in word but in action also. To perfectly love people is “to welcome, entertain, to be fond of or to love dearly, and for loving things, it means to be well pleased.”<sup>21</sup> In order to love the agape way, the body of Christ shall not become a “stumbling block or a hindrance to one another” (Rom 14:13 NRSV). The church shall not implement religious traditions of human reason which are not from an agape mindset.

In the same way, by using human-made traditions in place of agape love, the religious leaders in the book of Matthew had become a stumbling block to the community. Employing the same human reason, the rural church has also become a stumbling block of exclusiveness for a community seeking faith.

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<sup>19</sup>Leonard Sweet, “Jesus and the Law,” Seminar Notes, February 15, 2021.

<sup>20</sup>J. R. Briggs and Skye Jethani, *The Sacred Overlap: Learning to Live Faithfully in the Space Between* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020).

<sup>21</sup>“Strong’s Greek Lexicon G25 – Agapaō,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed February 13, 2021, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g25/kjv/tr/0-1/>

The rural church in 2021 holds onto human-made religious traditions such as flags in the sanctuary, name plates of people on the stained-glass windows and church pews, a set Sunday morning worship time, pictures of large financial givers hanging where a cross should go, serving communion once a month, and having the same flow of worship for the last sixty years. Many of us can remember the fights over tradition when we wanted to put screens in the sanctuary, when we wanted round tables and chairs in the sanctuary instead of pews, not to mention when we wanted the youth to come to worship in flip flops and shorts. How long has your church had the organ taking up space with no one playing it? The tradition is that we need to keep that organ until someone can play it. These traditions often cause the church to lose its agape mindset. Once the agape love is lost, the church tends to put country first and God second, and this mindset has stifled collaborative mission within the body of Christ. It also fuels the exhibition of idolatry to religious idols and has closed the door to reassigning traditions with innovation and creativity. The use of traditions in these ways is known as traditionalism. Traditionalism “seeks to make the past, not the present or future authoritative.”<sup>22</sup> Dr. Leonard Sweet and Dr. Len Wilson in their book *Telos* write about traditionalism in the story of Annas and Caiaphas. They highlight the role of traditionalism in this time as a *“strategic and political means to manage the tension to uphold tradition as the value by which the people could maintain purity in a corrupt era-not because of a sincere belief in that tradition, but as a means of maintaining power. It was the maintaining of this power hold which cost the people “their great teacher”<sup>23</sup>-Jesus.* When traditions are used to maintain power, the agape love mindset is corrupted and then must be reassigned to proclaim and provide ministry from the love of God as found in the mindset of Jesus. This mindset requires individuals and the church to seek an inward awakening of our “self- image, our image of God,

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<sup>22</sup>Leonard Sweet and Len Wilson, *Telos: The Hope of Heaven Today* (Plano, TX: Invite Press, 2022), 39.

<sup>23</sup>Sweet and Wilson, 39.

and our image of the world."<sup>24</sup> When our souls and our churches are awakened by the Holy Spirit and we view these images in the light of grace, then we will be able to "imitate the agape love of God."<sup>25</sup> In other words, the rural church of today needs to be transformed inwardly.

I want to make the point that not all traditions are negative. When tradition is corrupted for the purposes of power, then it becomes a stumbling block for the church. Sweet and Wilson comment on tradition as follows:

We both are trads. We believe in tradition [...] We believe that tradition is being a good ancestor to the future. We believe tradition is the act and art of passing on the baton to the future. We believe tradition is a verb. We believe each person should tradition the faith every day [...] where you honor your own context and come to a deeper understanding of your own tradition out of conversation with another tradition.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, any teaching of human-made religious traditions which bring harm, exclusion, or alienation are not from the love of God or the mindset of Jesus. Jesus stated, ...

for I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was naked, and you gave me clothing, I was sick, and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me[...] Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Matt 25:35-46 NRSV).

Jesus' mindset took him to the fringes of society where the Holy Spirit was at work, using innovative ideas and creative ways to reach the fringe. Jesus went to the sea to find his disciples,

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<sup>24</sup>Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern*, 137.

<sup>25</sup>Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013), xxv.

<sup>26</sup>Sweet and Wilson, 45.



not the temples. Jesus was a traditionalist. He came to fulfill the law but did not promote traditionalism. Jesus did not seek power as you and I do.

We need a spiritual conversion today, a conversion which will bring forth the church's creativity and the innovation required to reach the fringes of our current community and culture.

Today, the Holy Spirit remains on the fringes of society, and the church remains in the pews. This lackluster approach by the church to mission on the fringes is not in line with the witness of our sacred scripture. There would have been a time in our history when not relying on the Holy Spirit would have been seen as an egregious error of one's faith.

Prior to the Age of Enlightenment, the supernatural actions of the Holy Spirit were welcomed into the life of a believer. However, "thinkers and philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment considered belief in supernatural acts to be primitive and superstitious."<sup>27</sup> These kinds of acts were seen as "vagaries of the imagination."<sup>28</sup> As for the church, it was seen as a way to rationalize the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit away, meaning "rationalism brought about anti-supernaturalism."<sup>29</sup>

Christianity, through a lack of foundational understanding, set aside the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in favor of rational explanations. This thought was and is in direct conflict with the sacred writings of 1 Corinthians 2:14, "Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually" (1 Cor 2:14 NRSV).

The foolishness of humanity began when rational explanations took precedence over the

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<sup>27</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 9.

<sup>28</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 9.

<sup>29</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 9.

unexplainable movement of Christ's Holy Spirit in the world. Walter Hollwinger, a Swiss theologian, goes so far as to state "that people consider the more extraordinary gifts to be supernatural until they experience and practice them; after doing so, they realize that these gifts are simple 'natural gifts.'"<sup>30</sup> This argument falls short; as we read in 1st Corinthians 12, "[...]but it is the same Holy Spirit" who gives"<sup>31</sup> the gifts. While we may have natural gifts, it is the Holy Spirit who provides the supernatural movement of those same gifts.

This is where the church has lost momentum in its ability to use innovation and creativity to adapt to its culture and context. Elizabeth A. Johnson, writer of feminist theology, frames the lost momentum with these questions: For those who grew up in church or who now attend church, did your pastors and Sunday School teachers talk about the Holy Spirit? Did you view the Spirit as playing an important role in your life or in the life of the Church? As these questions reveal, Johnson knows "the Holy Spirit is being left out of the work of the church"<sup>32</sup> and our hearts. I have been in the church for over 28 years, and I have never been asked these questions. This is the heart of the church's dilemma - the absence of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the life breath of the body of Christ. It brings the life-giving Spirit of Jesus the Christ to all of creation. It is here with us now, waiting for the church to join its work, which is already in motion. Why then does the body appear stuck in the building? Has the body truly lost the one who ignites its flame of love and passion? We have "fire insurance [faith] rather than the banquet right now."<sup>33</sup> We practice rather than have a living faith.

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<sup>30</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 9.

<sup>31</sup>Zondervan, *NRSV, Simple Faith Bible*, ed. Jimmy Carter (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020).

<sup>32</sup>Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, anniversary edition (New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2002).

<sup>33</sup>Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern*, 28.

In his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, author Tom S. Rainer articulates what the body of Christ looks and acts like while practicing religion: it begins to “argue about the physical structure of the buildings while spending the least amount to maintain them; this is called idolatry over buildings and the grounds.”<sup>34</sup> Additionally, Rainer asserts, “The past is our hero, the body has apathy, pastors come and go quickly, the church spending what money it has on the body of Christ instead of the community; this is also known as self-preservation.”<sup>35</sup> This behavior erodes the mission of the church in its community, and most importantly, the body of Christ becomes exclusive instead of inclusive. The result is less movement of the Holy Spirit and increased chances of decline and dying. Human-made religious traditions such as not healing on the sabbath, touching the unclean, sexism, and culture barriers have caused both the early church and the current rural church to retreat from the surrounding community instead of engaging it. Consequently, the rural church has become a fortress. In a fortress church, “the finances, the mission, the buildings, leadership, staff, discipleship, and care are all inward focused,”<sup>36</sup> and nothing is going out into the community. In fact, as the church dies, less goes out into the community and more is held for self-preservation. Rainer adds, “Follow the money and you will learn much about the church.”<sup>37</sup> In addition, the rural church is no longer willing to minister to the community’s context and culture. The body of Christ no longer extends the invitation to unchurched friends or relatives, and it does not release funds to do missionary work in the community. While the rural church does desire to be relevant and be in missional outreach, “it just

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<sup>34</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 10 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2014).

<sup>35</sup>Rainer, 35.

<sup>36</sup>Rainer, 35.

<sup>37</sup>Rainer, 35.

wants it to happen without prayer, sacrifice, hard work, and on its own terms, instead of God's terms."<sup>38</sup> The community and the culture around the church has changed, but the rural church lives in a state of fear about what it might lose, instead of what it might gain, through entering the community as a missionary.

It is necessary for the rural church to look back at historical traditions which caused conflict in order to see how these religious traditions continue to damage the mission of the church. As Alan Hirsch, author of *The Forgotten Ways*, indicates, "We simply do not go far enough back, or delve deep enough for the answers."<sup>39</sup> What is needed is courage enough to face the real answers. The church must use the missional focus of engaging the surrounding community without prerequisites, requirements, or judgments. This type of missional change is required to counter human-made religious traditions created to maintain the religious institution. In retrospect, the early church was "pre-institutional rather than non-institutional."<sup>40</sup> Hirsch quotes Neil Cole of Church Multiplication Associates in addressing the pre-institutional context: "structures are needed, but they must be simple, reproducible, and internal rather than external."<sup>41</sup> A change of perspective will only come with a simple and flexible church organization. "The reason the church has become inflexible is due to its traditional organized structure of top-down hierarchy,"<sup>42</sup> which requires strict rules and procedures to maintain the status-quo. Religious man-made traditions are created in order to keep the body of Christ in line with the organization instead of the movement of the Holy Spirit. For unknown reasons, church leadership

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<sup>38</sup>Rainer, 43.

<sup>39</sup>Hirsch, 17.

<sup>40</sup>Hirsch, 185.

<sup>41</sup>Hirsch, 186

<sup>42</sup>Hirsch, 186.

has defected to corporate-based leadership instead of a Holy-Spirit-based leadership in the building and sustaining of the church. The church seeks out corporate-based models to grow churches, deepen financial stability, and provide new types of curricula which focus on the suburban and urban model of discipleship. This corporate-based model can also be seen in how the vitality of the church is evaluated in counting numbers instead of having a missional focus. The rural church should not have its vitality compared with medium or large churches. This type of comparison degrades the value of what rural churches are doing in mission within their own context. Churches are currently evaluated on attendance, baptism, and affirmations of faith. Based on location alone, most rural churches will not have as many baptisms or members joining as larger churches. No church should be considered the same as another; they are not cookie-cutter institutions and should not be evaluated based on the performance of other churches. The rural church has been held to a standard which it cannot achieve, nor was it designed to. This is why the rural church has withdrawn; because it has not been free to be who it is called to be. Today, the rural church holds on to this unsustainable structure, deriving a false sense of security from it. As Hirsch states, "This model of organization is not biblical. Instead it is "fatalistic and self-serving, because the goal is fixed and preserves the institution for as long as possible,"<sup>43</sup> instead of the focus being to follow Jesus onto the mission field for the purpose of fulfilling the great commission."<sup>44</sup> Tex Sample, author of *Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus*, discusses social class structure, which in turn resembles the religious organizational structure that institutes human-made religious traditions. Sample states, "The experience of class can be seen in terms of rituals [traditions] of inequality."<sup>45</sup> He goes on to argue that "the upper class [upper hierarchy of

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<sup>43</sup>Hirsch, 186-187.

<sup>44</sup>Hirsch, 186-187.

<sup>45</sup>Tex Sample, *Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus: Doing Ministry with Working Class Whites* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006). Kindle, loc. 182.

the body of Christ] people give orders and the lower-class [lower hierarchy in the body of Christ] take the orders, then the middle class [middle hierarchy of the body of Christ] give and take orders."<sup>46</sup> *Patheos*, an online publication, published an article, "10 Toxic Traditions That Are Killing the Church," that identifies ways in which both Sample's argument of social class and Hirsch's argument of organizational structure are revealed:

The church is seen as a building and not the people, making church services something endured rather than enjoyed, focused on outward appearances rather than the inward state of hearts, praying ceremonial prayers instead of kingdom prayers, reducing discipleship down to head knowledge [instead of heart and head], preaching merely to teach, prerequisites of being welcomed, viewing missions as location and not lifestyle, reducing Christianity to a voting block or one political party, and choosing to reject culture rather than redeem it.<sup>47</sup>

A church that has released the Holy Spirit will not focus on what color of the carpet is, whether or not there is coffee in the sanctuary, or who sits in which pew. It will be focused on hospitality to its visitors and its community. Stewardship will change focus from having fundraisers to sustain the church building to having food drives and fundraisers to feed the people of the community. The church will find its outreach in providing holistic care. It will no longer fear failure when taking a leap of faith in the name of Jesus, our eternal Christ.

Therefore, the rural church must turn to the mindset of Jesus, which is God's agape love, and the "power of the Holy Spirit to arouse and re-engage"<sup>48</sup> the body of Christ. The rural church must be re-innergized by the power of the Holy Spirit (which already exists within the church) to

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<sup>46</sup>Sample, 182.

<sup>47</sup>Josh Daffern, "10 Toxic Traditions That Are Killing the Church," *New Wineskins* (blog), *Patheos*. June 22, 2017, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/newwineskins/ten-toxic-traditions-that-are-killing-the-church/>.

<sup>48</sup>Hirsch, 17.

forego human-made religious traditions and re-traditionalize them with innovation and creativity.

Most declining or dying churches I have been a part of did not get to this point without help. In my context, our Methodist connection has become disconnected. This disconnect is a symptom of the larger problem, which is the absence of the Holy Spirit. The disconnect, though not an intentional act, is a symptom of the larger problem: the lack of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The disconnect demonstrates the shift of the denominational focus from small churches to medium or large churches. This shift has created a model in programming, educational materials, and projections which do not reflect the realities of the small church. Therefore, the small church has been trying to match its big sister in numbers, baptism, and members, all the while falling short of the set standards. Most of us know what it is like trying to be something we are not; it will not work, and it has not worked. It is important to note this symptom, because when the church does not feel it is matching up to a certain standard, then it loses hope, feels defeated, and begins saying, "Maybe the church is supposed to die, or close." This is incorrect. God lives: "Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive" (Luke 20:27-38 NRSV). It is one thing for a church to close and another for a church to be renewed into another way of being. This other way of being is possible because "the Holy Spirit is known in the church and the community through the hearts and minds of God's followers."<sup>49</sup> Even though the church cannot continue to meet the requirements of the larger denomination, it does not mean that the hearts and minds of the church are not filled with the Holy Spirit. A church may not be dying, but rather it may be experiencing renewal by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is our resurrection story: the Good News of the gospel. When churches feel that they are dying or declining, they need to be reminded of their story, a story which proclaims resurrection by a God who brings life from death through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>49</sup>Wilson, 81.

One of the most profound metaphors used as an example for death to life is the fig tree. A congregation member once gave me a small fig tree after a sermon I had done on the fig tree. The fig tree lies dormant before it produces figs, and at a certain time of the year it sheds leaves and appears to be dead or dying. Many times, people would ask why I kept a dead stick (i.e. the small fig tree) in my yard. I would laugh and tell them that it was my favorite stick and that when it began to grow, they would see it was not dead. There are times in the life of the church when it appears to be dead or dying. The church looks dead and acts dead, but it is only dormant. It lies dormant waiting for the re-innergizing of the Holy Spirit. The fig tree needs the seasons to change, so that it may be fruitful again, and so does the church.



## Chapter Three

### Pneumanauts

#### Dunamis Saints with an Outward Focus



He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Master God, only you know that." He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones: 'Dry bones, listen to the Message of God!'" God, the Master, told the dry bones, **"Watch this: I'm bringing the breath of life to you, and you'll come to life."**

Ezekiel 37:3-6, *The Message*

*"When we let God's Spirit fill our Spirits, we become empowered as priests of God."*

Dr. Len Wilson, *Greater Things*

*"Oh how swift is the speech of wisdom!...no interpretation is needed in order to understand, no practice is needed in order to use it. No time is needed to study, but with the 'Spirit' of truth 'blowing wherever it pleases, the particular voices of each distinct person become familiar in the mouth of the church."*

Pope Leo I (c. 400 – 10 November 461)

Do you remember the actor Tim Allen in the movie *Santa Claus*? If you have not seen it, I highly encourage you to watch it, especially the part in which Santa (Tim Allen) has been put in jail, and the military police of the Elf world come from the South Pole to break Santa out. When the elves arrive at the police station, there is an officer at the desk eating a donut. Not able to see the elves, because they are unable to reach the top of the counter, the officer leans over and says, "Who are you?" The elves respond, "We're your worst nightmare; we are elves, elves with

attitude.”<sup>50</sup> The elves with attitude then spin the officer and his donut around and around in his chair, tying him with unbreakable tinsel. Elves with attitude are the same as Pneumanauts sailing with the Holy Spirit. They are disciples with attitudes, the attitudes of the Holy Spirit. These attitudes, the fruits of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, will lead them to the leading edge of ministry. The church will always need Holy-Spirit-filled-saints who push all the saints to the leading edge of ministry and mission. A Holy-Spirit-led pastor or lay person will ask the congregation to follow to where the Holy Spirit is already at work no matter where it leads them. Dr. Leonard Sweet uses the metaphor of pneumanauts to express Holy-Spirit-filled leadership.<sup>51</sup>

Jesus was a pneumanautical leader. Jesus, “as the eternal Christ, is the pioneer, and perfecter of our faith, modeling the human journey rather perfectly.”<sup>52</sup> The rural church must see its mission through the eyes of Jesus’ love. If not, it will not recognize the homeless, the stranger, the drug addicted, the lost, and the prisoner, as Jesus. Without the Jesus lens of the cross, which is true love, the rural church and the universal church as well will only see through the glass dimly and will operate outside of Jesus’ love.

Religion, bathed in Jesus’ love, should function to radically re-connect (“re-ligio = to re-ligament or reconnect”<sup>53</sup>) all of creation. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a French Jesuit priest, said, “Love is the very physical structure of the Universe.”<sup>54</sup> This is the love from which God sends Jesus with a new covenant of redemption to re-align humanity and its relationship to sin.

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<sup>50</sup> Carlos’ Diner, “Elves with Attitude.”

<sup>51</sup> Leonard Sweet, “Weekly Zoom Meetings” (Portland Seminary, Digital Zoom, 2020-2021).

<sup>52</sup> Richard Rohr and Brian D. McLaren, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*, Reprint edition (Colorado Springs, CO: Convergent Books, 2021), 27.

<sup>53</sup> Rohr and McLaren, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Rohr and McLaren, 69.

Richard Rohr points to love as the essential connection for the entire body of Christ when he states, "From Jesus 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 4:6 NIV). The body of Christ, the supporting ligaments, is fueled by the Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus that brings new possibilities of connection, "even in the most hopeless situations when nothing else can."<sup>55</sup>

Failing to be motivated from a Jesus mindset of love, the rural church lacks the heart love necessary to be relevant in its community, and it becomes a dead sect. Wayne Tisdale, author of "A Monk in the World: Cultivating a Spiritual Life," identifies the way in which a lack of Jesus' mindset can be overcome. As he states, "The real revolution to come is the spiritual awakening of humankind, and out of that awakening of humankind will be born a civilization of the love mindset of Jesus, a universal society with an engaged heart."<sup>56</sup> Jesus was infused with the Holy Spirit of God giving him insight into the culture and community of his time. This insight is seen in Jesus' ability to read the signs of the cultural context and adapt his teaching based on his audience. In every context there is a language, "every culture has its own language and learning to read those languages is semiotics."<sup>57</sup> Jesus was a semiotician. One of the most profound examples of crossing culture and religious boundaries is the story of the Samaritan woman.

The first example occurs when a Jew spoke while in the presence of a Samaritan, and even more egregious, a Samaritan woman. Jesus approached the woman and asked for a drink of water. Her response was, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" Here in this moment, Jesus broke many more of the cultural norms of interacting with others outside of

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<sup>55</sup>Rohr and McLaren, 71.

<sup>56</sup>Wayne Teasdale and Ken Wilber, *A Monk in the World: Cultivating a Spiritual Life* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2003), xxxiii.

<sup>57</sup>Michael Adam Beck and Leonard Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence* (Oviedo, FL: HigherLife Publishing, 2021), 50.

Jewish culture: he broke with cultural norms of gender, uncleanness, and sin. What were at one time barriers put in place by religious cultural traditions have now been put in their place with the new flow of the “living water” (John 4:10 NRSV).

Jesus was able to read between the lines in the story of the woman and weave it into the truth that we read in the gospel. At this moment, Jesus gave the most precious gift to the Samaritan woman, that of hope. This woman represents the need for all people to receive the living water of Jesus in their immediate context. This method of reading the signs in the culture will require the rural church, according to Leonard Sweet, to “reread the story of Jesus from a new vantage point, not so we can stockpile and be selfish, but so we can reach out to others in healing, kindness, and service.”<sup>58</sup>

The prophet Ezekiel was a pneumanautical leader. The prophet literally sailed in his vision through the air to another place and spoke the breath of the Holy Spirit into dry, dead bones, and those same bones lived again. Let me say that again. The dry, dead bones lived again because the Spirit of Lord was breathed into them. Yes, that is correct! Picture yourself as Ezekiel for a moment. You are Ezekiel, and you are watching the resurrection of the dry, dead Israelites. You have been preaching to Israel for some time about its faith crisis, prophesying “impending judgment with the anticipated restoration for Jerusalem.”<sup>59</sup> Their lives have been forever changed because of disobedience and lack of faith. You (Ezekiel) now speak to Israel in the aftermath, in the valley of dry, dead bones with the power of the Holy Spirit to bring new life. We have just born witness to the “visionary anticipation of restoration”<sup>60</sup> upon which the rural church must rely.

YHWH has promised with a divine oracle, “I am going to open your graves, and bring you

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<sup>58</sup>Beck and Sweet, 24.

<sup>59</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 192.

<sup>60</sup>Brueggemann, 197.

up from them..., and you will know I am the Lord" (Ezek 37:12 LEA). The Lord stated, "I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land" (Ezek 37:14 LEA). YHWH's ultimate promise for Israel is to give the body of Israel, and their adopted sons and daughters, YHWH's divine gift of the Spirit (*rûah*).

It is upon the whole house of Israel that "YHWH will put his spirit in Israel and give it a new spirit."<sup>61</sup> In other words, the whole community (nation) will be resurrected. YHWH'S power "actually breaks into history and gives it a new direction,"<sup>62</sup> and the same power is still breaking through today.

Israel's (and our) propensity for self-destruction is nothing compared to the will of YHWH to give new life and to make YHWH known to all the world. As Walter Brueggemann states, "The news of the book of Ezekiel is that YHWH wills life and has the power to grant it."<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, the Israelites (and we) seem to be what Richard Rohr calls "ignorant perfection."<sup>64</sup> These are people who Rohr sees as "at one time being unbuilt, stripped down to the core, and [who] learn how to live from that clear humbled point."<sup>65</sup>

The story of Ezekiel speaks to the rural church, as a body of Christ in the middle of nowhere, looking for life. This text leads the way from the past into the future with the promise of God's faithfulness through the Holy Spirit. It is the breath of YHWH which will provide the way "to bring the dead bones to life."<sup>66</sup> As a result the rural church may then enter the current community and culture without reservation.

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<sup>61</sup>Buttrick, 266.

<sup>62</sup>Buttrick, 267.

<sup>63</sup>Brueggemann, 197.

<sup>64</sup>Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern*, 99.

<sup>65</sup>Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern*, 99.

<sup>66</sup>Buttrick, 267.

This means, the Holy Spirit will have deconstructed, stripped down, and taught the rural church how to live from a clear, humbled point.

This is the breadth and depth of the Holy Spirit in which the circuit riders of early Methodism were co-dependent. In leadership, co-dependence on the Holy Spirit is also known as spiritual dy-no-mite. The early circuit riders were pneumanautical leaders. They invited and made room for spiritual dy-no-mite to make innovative and creative ways where there seemed to be no way. This type of power was confirmed in the words of Paul to the Corinthian church when he stated, "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2:4-5 NRSV). Consequently, the circuit riders proclaimed the same power which Paul claimed in the sacred texts. The circuit riders claimed the Holy Spirit as the seal of their divine work and were known to be "filled with Holy Spirit."<sup>67</sup>

John Wesley believed that the only ones who could comprehend the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit were those "who were aided by the Holy Spirit."<sup>68</sup> In other words, it took a movement of the Holy Spirit within a person's heart and soul to understand the work of the Holy Spirit outwardly. Ultimately, the circuit riders "public and private lives were co-dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit."<sup>69</sup>

Today, some leaders of the church do not display a life and faith co-dependent on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Today, some leaders display a life and faith which is codependent on the way of the world instead of the way of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if the leader lacks the ability to surrender to the will of the Holy Spirit, the church will also. Thus, John Wesley's fear is fulfilled:

Wesley knew that the people called Methodists were themselves liable to

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<sup>67</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 16.

<sup>68</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 16.

<sup>69</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 22.

spiritual slumber. In "Thoughts Upon Methodism," he wrote: "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power."<sup>70</sup> Today, we have many church leaders with religion but no power of the Holy Spirit.

When Apollo 13 astronauts Jim Lovell and John Swigert uttered their prophetic words, "Houston, we've had a problem, did they know that the mission's troubles were just beginning."<sup>71</sup> Church, we've had a problem, and we still do: the problem is leadership absent of the Holy Spirit. How does the church reclaim its tradition of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in leadership for its growth and vitality?

Pneumanautical leader Rev. Dr. Michael Beck shared the following story with me lending insight into this type of leadership.

I once served a congregation that was in massive decline for over two decades. They were on the closure list and were considering if their death might be inevitable. As challenging as our situation was, it also provided us with what we call in the recovery community the "gift of desperation," which is also an acronym for G.O.D. by the way! We had to come to terms with the starkness of our reality, but there we found a breath of fresh air. Just like those first disciples were gathered in a little room with the doors barred and the windows locked in John 20, Jesus came among us in our little sanctuary and breathed the Holy Spirit into us. We began to ask the question, what is the holy spirit already up to

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<sup>70</sup>David Watson, "Wesley Would Call Modern Methodists to Return to Their Roots," UM News, July 2, 2019, <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/wesley-would-call-modern-methodists-to-return-to-their-roots>.

<sup>71</sup>Marco Margaritoff, "'Houston, We Have A Problem': The True Story Behind One Of History's Most Famous Misquotes," All That's Interesting (ATI), last modified April 18, 2020, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/houston-we-have-a-problem>.

in our community? How can we join what God is doing there? With those questions as our guide, we began to go out and listen to our community, make connections with the people who lived there, build relationships with them over time, and explore new ways to be church with them where they did life. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we began to form new Christian communities in tattoo parlors, dog parks, the Martin Luther King Jr. community center, a yoga studio, and a burrito joint. Later we would begin to follow the Holy Spirit into digital space and create community in Facebook groups and VR environments. Today that church is in a completely different space, and it's all because of the Holy Spirit!<sup>72</sup>

Pneumanautical leaders, by virtue of Baptism by water and the Spirit, are called to "new life and new power."<sup>73</sup> This new life and new power are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, these types of leaders do not allow God to be bookended. This means that God not only works within scripture, but also works in new ways of illumination through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor 2:12). In other words, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (Is 43:19 NRSV). Holy-Spirit-led-leaders do not shy away from the unknown, they embrace it. Dr. Leonard Sweet states this perfectly when he writes, "When the end and beginning meet, either nothing has happened or everything is happening."<sup>74</sup> When the dry, dead bones of religion meet the pneumanautical leadership of the Holy Spirit, everything happens. Church vitality is sustainable, numbers are added to the church, innovation through creativity will take place, spiritual maturity

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<sup>72</sup>Michael Beck, Interview with author, Ocala, FL, July 22, 2016.

<sup>73</sup>Allen, 31.

<sup>74</sup>Leonard Sweet, *The Greatest Story Never Told: Revive Us Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), xxi.



will grow, the church will have an outward focus, and the dynamic saints will be freed and released. To be freed and released in the Holy Spirit is a gift from God. This gift assists pneumanautical leaders with wisdom and truth when they encounter resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit.

This resistance comes from a posture of fear. The Holy Spirit asks us to leave our comfort zones, give financially in our scarcity, serve those who are not like us, be in relationship with those who do not live or believe like us, and go into the places and locations where most of us would never go. When pneumanautical leaders allow the Holy Spirit to lead the church, some of the disciples will be in fear. But fear not! Keep moving forward to the new thing the Holy Spirit is doing. Can you not see it? However, there will be times when “elves with attitude” will need to continually nudge the church gently outward toward the Holy Spirit. In the words of Rev. Dr. Michael Beck, “Do not blow up the dock before you park the boat.”<sup>75</sup>

Remember, pneumanautical leaders bring others along with them. We do not do it alone. Our converts must come along. Roland Allen (1868-1942), the English missionary sent to China by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, focuses on the importance of the converts stating that “without faith of the Holy Ghost in our converts, we can do nothing.”<sup>76</sup> He continued, “If we have no faith in the power of the Holy Spirit within ourselves, then we cannot trust them [converts], and they cannot be worthy of trust...which is essential for any success...”<sup>77</sup> Faith in the Holy Spirit, not faith in our natural abilities, will reignite conversion of the rural church as the bridge between it and the community it serves. As Richard Rohr argues, the rural church “looks for something

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<sup>75</sup>Michael Beck, interview with author.

<sup>76</sup>Roland Allen, *The Compulsion of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Forward Movement Publications, 1983), 11.

<sup>77</sup>Allen, *Compulsion*, 11.

behavioral and external to do rather than undergo a radical transformation of its very mind and heart."<sup>78</sup> The rural church's heart has not had a radical transformation.

The rural church must reclaim the innovative and creative call of the Holy Spirit to be transformed and take itself as a serious transformer within the community. Transformation will require the rural church to re-think (through innovation and creativity) the way in which western culture influences the teachings of the church. Currently, the rural church exhibits a theology of busyness: the busier it is, the more effective it is in ministry. The church may have many ministries happening, but no real transformation. Our calendars are full of doing things, but doing things that are not making a difference to the community. Additionally, the rural church operates as an island unto itself instead of a bridge to the community. Thomas Merton (1915-1968), a Trappist monk, states, "The real revolution to come is the spiritual awakening of humankind, and out of that awakening will be born a civilization of love, a universal society with an engaged heart."<sup>79</sup> The revolution to come requires that we find our way back to the Holy Spirit. In addition, it requires that the rural church's "boundless self-confidence and attitude of superiority"<sup>80</sup> must be given over to the Holy Spirit. This posture of self-confidence and superiority is seen in the rural church in its self-reliance, impatience, "elaborate systems of church organization, code of morality,"<sup>81</sup> and political party affiliations, all of which have created idleness instead of innovation and creativity.

The rural church is alive in the Holy Spirit when it chooses to establish itself as an innovator and uses its creativity to reach the community. Then the church will be "flexible [to culture] and permanent [in the community], able to live and grow in faith and patience, able to work out its

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<sup>78</sup>Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*, 103.

<sup>79</sup>Teasdale and Wilber, xxxiii.

<sup>80</sup>Allen, *Compulsion*, 6.

<sup>81</sup>Allen, *Compulsion*, 6.

own problems and overcome all dangers and hindrances both from within and without.”<sup>82</sup>

The innovation of the Holy Spirit will bring forth “new truths which emerge daily, new revelations constantly accumulating, screaming surprises jumping out at us from every corner of Spirit’s astonishing creativity.”<sup>83</sup> This activity of the Holy Spirit brings the breath of life to the church. It is the movement that nudges the rural church to be a bridge of creativity for the community and culture. God’s creativity, lived out in the rural church through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, is the only cure for the church being in the world instead of being of the world.

The rural church needs a re-awakening of the Holy Spirit. It is a re-awakening not because love and the Holy Spirit are missing from the church, but because the church has been led by the love and power of humanity. Humanity on its own will always fall short because it cannot thrive without the love, humility, and mercy of God found in the Holy Spirit and mindset of Jesus. A spiritual conversion is necessary to awaken the rural church into the realization that it has put its love in the wrong place. The church's love has been misguided and has “served created things rather than the Creator.”<sup>84</sup> The following story shared with me by the Rev. Kelly Everling about dinner church illustrates how serving the Creator is held higher than serving human-created things.

Sometimes we see the Holy Spirit in roaring tongues of fire. Sometimes we see her presence in the devotion put forward from the hands and feet of the Body of Christ and the ways the community is served.

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<sup>82</sup>Allen, *Compulsion*, 7.

<sup>83</sup>Teasdale and Wilber, xvii.

<sup>84</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*, 1450.

We saw the movement of the Holy Spirit in our church a few weeks ago during a drive-thru dinner church. Once a month we get our cooks together to distribute meals throughout the community- many come through for a meal and short conversation, some by delivery to shut-ins, widows, and the folks working in local shops.

We were visited by several families this month- varying from a man bringing food home to his ill mother, the family living across the street we had been trying to reach for some time, and groups of missionaries who work in the surrounding area. What struck me though was the number of people who decided to come inside rather than drive by. We were able to hear stories from a mom of six small children who worked at the nearby dollar store who had received a meal while on shift before, as well as a group of young men who were busy serving all day and were grateful to be served themselves. "Just remember, we do this every month, so feel free to come see us!"

After stressful months of being unsure if what we were doing was worth the time and energy we were putting forth, the Spirit came through and reminded us just why we were here. We are called in this ministry to show the love of Christ to everyone within our scope, and if it takes a few bold souls dancing by the street with signs to expedite that process, then so be it. Praying many blessings over the future of this ministry may it be fruitful and multiply.

What should we fear as church leaders? The absence of the innovative and creative Holy Spirit!

## Chapter Five

### Oh, the Possibilities

### Church Growth



### Real Life Examples

The following chapter applies the model of the pneumanautical wheel to Sparr UMC, Hawthorne UMC, Pine UMC, and Lochloosa UMC. We will see in this chapter that revival is different in each church. The differences reflect what Rev. Dr. Michael Beck and Rev. Dr. Leonard Sweet refer to as “placefulness.”<sup>85</sup> As they state in their book *Contextual Intelligence*, “Places are not just merely physical space holders; they are living, breathing ecosystems. Places have a distinct web of relationships [...] and when human beings are part of those ecosystems, the ecosystems include webs of customs, languages, cultures and meaning systems.”<sup>86</sup>

Each church has its own ecosystem, and only one, the Holy Spirit, can navigate and re-innergize those individual systems. Therefore, one of the most important tools for re-innergizing is a spiritual leader who recognizes the need to seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and apply it to the culture of the church and the context of the community.

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<sup>85</sup>Beck and Sweet, 47.

<sup>86</sup>Beck and Sweet, 47.

## SPARR UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



When I met with the church council and walked the grounds of Sparr, I felt the Holy Breath of God blow over and around me. I instantly knew God was not done with this Body of Christ. Through the discerning power of the Holy Spirit, I saw life in what others see as dry, dead bones. I prayed for leaders who would join me in the re-innergizing work of the Holy Spirit. It would take two months for me to meet Rev. Jackie Beard. I heard him play and sing at a church event, and I knew he was key to the renewal of Sparr. So, I went up to him, introduced myself, and said, "The Lord has called you to help revive this [Sparr] church." To my delight, he came to visit the church the following week. He is an integral part of the mission and ministry in this church. He was the first of the Holy Spirit leaders the Lord brought forward.

However, when a church is in decline and the power of the Holy Spirit blows through it, those in the church can be offended. Sometimes, it is the natural inclination of the declining church to withhold its gifts and graces instead of using the last of them for the community. But Sparr UMC thought differently, it began a dinner church in collaboration with two other rural churches. The church began to look outward into the community even though it was facing its own scarcity. Sparr's change in its focus came because it had courageous, pneumanautical leaders moving the church to what could be instead of what it might be.

Pneumanauts are gifted leaders who use their gifts for the edification of the church and community. It is imperative that the gifts meet the mission. In other words, do not put a round peg in a square hole. If the church does not have the pneumanauts with the proper gifts for the mission, then the church may need to rethink its mission. The wisdom to know the difference between the round peg and the square hole is important, because if we keep trying at something we are not gifted for, failure is not a learning tool, it is just a punishment. Then we give up and lose hope.



Instead of losing hope, Sparr sought through prayer to determine what their mission would be in the community. Sparr decided to meet the Holy Spirit at Lakes and Meadows dinner church. This dinner church was not planted to grow the rooted church, to fill its pews, or to increase its budget. It was birthed to love others in the name of Jesus the Christ. The inward focus of Sparr continued to change by entering into the community and supporting the schools and local community initiatives and by inviting other churches to community through worship and events. It began a fall fiesta with a trunk-or-treat in order to share love with the community. The Sparr church had always had a small food pantry, but with the start of dinner church, the decision was made that it would be better to use the food from the pantry to distribute at dinner church. As a result, Sparr leveraged its resources and had a greater impact in Lakes and Meadows. Every year this church provides names of local children for the church's Angel Tree. The gathering of the names is accomplished in connection with the local schools to make sure the church is lifting up its community. This outward movement has led this church to help other churches that are declining or dying. Sparr has helped other churches financially, holding special community events, and praying for struggling churches and their communities. This is the picture of a church that cares more about its community than it cares about itself. This is pneumanautical leading.



Sparr has a monthly horse show. Yes, a horse show. Sparr is situated in what is called "horse country," and much of the area's recreational activity revolves around riding horses. Therefore, it is not such a crazy idea. It is innovative and creative. This horse show has taken place at the church for the last 40 years. However, when I began to pastor this church, the focus of the horse show was more about making money to sustain the status quo than reaching the community. It would take a year of prayer before the Holy Spirit would move in this ministry. First,

The Table of Blessing was created by the Men of Purpose (our men's ministry). This was the table to which all would be invited to come and eat. It is a donation-only meal, and you come whether you have money to pay or not. The change of focus has led us to being better hosts to the community through inviting conversation and getting to know the rider, parents, judges, and trainers. The change of focus has opened the horse show to be grafted into the established church by the fresh new wind of the Holy Spirit. This change took work. Some people left the church because of it, and others stopped volunteering. This is what happens sometimes when the Holy Spirit is present. People leave, and we must remember that this is ok. There are some who are not ready for a deeper level of faith when the presence of the Holy Spirit leads and guides. Pneumanautical leaders keep moving forward with those who are ready, while always remaining present for those who are not. Our work is to wait on the breath of the Holy Spirit to move forward.



When the breath of the Holy Spirit re-innergizes you, you will naturally move to a deeper level of spirituality. You will seek to know more about God and your story within God's story. Sparr church wants to experience the Holy Spirit in deeper and more meaningful ways. Instead of hunkering down with its resources, the focus now is on where we are going next and how we can use what we have. The church takes our worship seriously on Sunday mornings. We are now open to new songs and a blended style of worship, and we have a multi-racial congregation. Discipleship has a stronger focus of equipping the saints for ministry. Equipping the saints means that all people are encouraged to find and use their Holy-Spirit-given gifts for the church, first. Equipping the saints to follow the Holy Spirit is the fuel from which all missions and ministry are born, regardless of the cost.

Sparr church takes risks and is not afraid to fail. There are times when new ministries do not succeed. This is ok, because we have learned what will not work, and we are one step closer



to what will work. Spiritual maturity for Sparr UMC means that we are not afraid to take the leap of faith in the name of Jesus. Living without fear has allowed Sparr to go from descending to ascending.



I was appointed to Sparr UMC in 2017. There were about 15 worshippers on a Sunday morning and a Bible study on Wednesday nights. There was approximately \$2,000 in operating funds and \$7,000 in the credit union account. The horse show account, which was separate, had about \$5,000. The church had not paid its apportionments or its insurances in three years. This meant the church was in debt of approximately \$10,000.00. We were in trouble with little help from receiving enough donations or offerings to keep the doors open. There was infighting about whether the horse show funds should be set as a designated fund account, among many other futile arguments over the upkeep of the church premises. Certainly, to the average person this project seemed like a waste of time. But, with God and the presence of the Holy Spirit, anything is possible. One day, a member of the church came in and needed help with a personal electric bill. The amount needed was \$200. This was all the church had available in the account to give. So, I told the financial secretary to send a check to the electric company. Later that day when I came back to the church for a meeting, in a white envelope on the secretary's desk were two one-hundred-dollar bills. I was told that shortly after I had left, a gentleman came by the church and wanted to give the church an offering. He was not from the area. He just felt the need to stop his car and give financially to Sparr. It was the first of many Holy Spirit moments which would re-innergize this church to claim the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Claiming the prompting of the Holy Spirit has re-innergized Sparr.



Five years later, we have over 40 worshippers in our little sanctuary. We receive enough in the offering to pay operating expenses and have \$34,000 in designated funds which are for community mission. Our insurance and apportionments are paid up to date. Maintaining facilities is a priority. The horse show and the Table of Blessings are thriving. We are now focused on building community, not a bigger bank balance. We have built a team of saints who draw from the Holy Spirit through prayer, and all ministries are laity led. When saints draw from the Holy Spirit, it enables the pastor to focus on building up the saints and sending them forth with permission and support.

Ultimately, sustainability only comes from the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. The church must have its ear inclined to its message and then answer its call. When the focus of the church is the re-innergizing of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ will live out their vows of being present in the church and community, giving of their gifts, offering their prayers, being in service to the church and community, and sharing their witness of what God has done in their lives.

### **HAWTHORNE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**



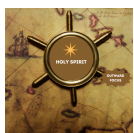
Hawthorne was my first senior pastor appointment. I had mentioned earlier in the book when I finished my first Sunday, I cried, because I could not imagine putting another sermon together for the following Sunday, all the while managing the church. The gift I was given at Hawthorne were saints who were and are mature in faith. But, like most small churches, they were tired of trying to live up to unrealistic expectations set by the denomination.

I had come from a large church setting where everything was big and grand. Now, I was in a rural church setting where everything was hands-on. In other words, there was no money to pay

staff to do the work. Where there is a lack of staff, the pastor is solely responsible to equip the laity for mission and ministry, until laity step forward to help. Relying on the prompting of the Holy Spirit in the work of equipping saints is critical. I needed to prayerfully begin to lead and equip others through the discernment of the Holy Spirit. Nothing was more important.

The Holy Spirit began to move in me by opening my eyes to the ministry of this church. Our membership was at about 40 (the rolls said 107), and I could easily identify ninety percent of the congregation who were on mission in the community. In my experience, I have not heard one large church who can say they have ninety percent of their congregation in mission. The thought of ninety percent of the church in mission caused an awakening of my heart. I felt nothing less than gratitude and thankfulness for the small churches, who have clung to hope and faith to carry on even during decline.

I knew that if I were to influence systemic change within the denomination regarding small churches, we needed to awaken the denomination to the incredible mission and ministry already being done by small churches in decline. I began to invite other denominational leaders to experience the work being done in these small churches. It was a wonderful moment when our Bishop, Rev. Ken Carter, came to Hawthorne to preach and to anoint the Hawthorne Area Resource Center (HARC) for the work that the Holy Spirit had already begun. Over the next months and years, the church district began to find space for small churches. A group of Holy-Spirit-driven pastors began the Rural Church Network whose mission was to connect rural churches with other small churches, to collaborate in ministry in new ways, and to go into the community cultivating new ministry. Hawthorne has been on the forefront of the Rural Ministry Network providing space for the Holy Spirit to move the ministry, but to move in new and fresh ways through the blended ecology of the church.



Hawthorne has always been a church in the community. Its members serve in

many governmental functions within the city and are active in the schools. This church decided to take a leap of faith with the Hawthorne Area Resource Center (HARC). Today, this church continues to be at work in the local schools, HARC, The Women's club, the Thrift store, Community Garden, and through the NOMADS. The NOMADS come to this church because its focus is work in the community. All of this ministry is sustained with forty people. I am reminded of the words of Paul in Colossians, "For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me" (Col 1:29 NRSV).



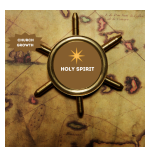
Hawthorne, while active in the community, is a church who enjoys working with other organizations. This means, our strength lies in not re-creating the wheel. Over the last seven years, Hawthorne has had many of its members pass away. Like everyone else, we have gone through Covid, some members have left and gone to other churches, and our numbers have dwindled. So, right now Hawthorne is in a season of transition, and sometimes it can be difficult to be innovative and creative when things are changing. Though many would see this as the end, the Holy Spirit uses dwindled attendance as a new beginning for innovation and creativity. Innovation and creativity are springing up in places and in people who have not stepped forward until now. During the pandemic, our tech team spent hours figuring out how, on a tight budget, to begin to stream services. We managed to preach from the porch of the HARC house. The congregation could sit in their cars at the church and see and hear, or they could pull a chair out and enjoy the weather. Thanks to the creativity of the tech team (composed of two people) we now have over 200 viewers of our online service. Additionally, Hawthorne, with its limited resources, has come alongside another small church in danger of closure to help with paying for their pastor, operational expenses, and facilities upkeep. Hawthorne sees this as an innovative way to express our connection as churches. What we have learned is that with the Holy Spirit, a time of transition

does not mean a time of drought. It means full reliance on the movement of the Holy Spirit.



Hawthorne has always had a deep commitment to maintaining spiritual maturity. It is an important part of the church's faith walk. However, with such a focus on mission to the community and the pandemic, we have backslid in our discipleship. There are times when a church can be so innovative and creative in the community that it can misplace service/mission as inward growth. In other words, we are so focused on others that we forget to focus on ourselves. Today, the church is back to a weekly Bible study called Slice of Heaven. The women are meeting in a unit group, a group meets for the Wired Word on Sunday mornings, and we continue to establish personal devotion and study time. We have begun to plan for youth activities and now have children's moments in worship. Our recovery is a work in progress, not an end. We rely on the words which come from the Apostle Paul, "[...] he told me, My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness [...] I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness [...] I just let Christ take over! And so, the weaker I get, the stronger I become" (1 Cor 12:10 The Message).

There are times when the church is in realignment. This condition is not a handicap but a gift, because in its weakness God will make the church strong again.



When the church is in decline, it is difficult to be forward thinking, especially when six air conditioning units and three roofs need replacing. Yet, Hawthorne has done just that. It has focused on stewardship of its buildings and its grounds during this time. This type of decision making only comes with the leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is preparing this place for that is rising. It is not seeking to close its doors.



Ultimately, sustainability only comes from the renewing work of the Holy Spirit and the church must have its ear inclined to its message and then answer its call. When the focus of the church is the re-innergizing of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ will live out their vows of being present in the church and community, giving of their gifts, offering their prayers, being in service to the church and community, and sharing their witness of what God has done in their lives. This is a recurring theme for a re-innergized church.

### **PINE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Pine was the third church placed on my circuit. Already 140 years old, Pine is one of the oldest churches in our area. It has been moved, closed, and reopened over the years. Pine was the same type of appointment as Sparr. I was to go in to see if there was life within the church. I began at Pine in July of 2021, a few months after Covid hit. Like all other churches during the Covid pandemic, the ministry was not clicking on all cylinders. Attendance was low, money was tight, and the mission was almost nonexistent. Moreover, the congregation was mourning the loss of its long-term pastor. The interim pastor had left quickly, and another new pastor had been appointed. All this to say, they were in an uncertain place and time.



When we are in an uncertain place and time, we need resurrection, a resurrection which is "not a dumpster but a recycling bin."<sup>87</sup> Resurrection begins when we can empty ourselves, like Jesus, "taking on the position of vulnerability,"<sup>88</sup> for our community. We must ask

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<sup>87</sup>Beck and Sweet, 55.

<sup>88</sup>Beck and Sweet, 55.

ourselves, “Do we cry for our zip code, and do you love your people enough to pray for them while they hang you on the cross?”<sup>89</sup> Pine answered “yes” to these questions. Pine has Holy-Spirit-filled leaders. Yet sometimes, because of fear of failure, it is hard for those leaders to step out in faith. Pine needed a pneumanaut who would give them permission to fail and then move on. Failure can be good because it means we have tried. A Holy-Spirit-filled leader will move the church to try all things for the sharing of the gospel. Pine also needed a pastor who could speak truth to their circumstances. I needed to have hard, Holy-Spirit-driven conversations regarding conflict, money, and mission all of which were stifling the growth of the church. These conversations led to the development of dy-no-mite laity leaders, individuals who had decided they wanted to be the change needed for the church. It is upon the foundations of these kinds of conversations that the church continues to be re-innnergized.



Conversations with the community have helped Pine begin its dive into discerning new ways of innovation and creativity. These new ways take time to develop and adjust from the way we have always done things to the new way we are going to do them. We have learned that we cannot rely on our own time. During innovation and creation, it is on the Holy Spirit's time. The first step in creativity for this church was to look at their yearly rummage sale as a way to build relationships with the community and not as an income producer to pay the bills. This shift of focus was fully embraced and had a profound impact on the congregation and the community. Instead of a cost for a certain item, it became a matter of donation only. You are welcome to shop even if you have no money. In addition, conversations began to focus on one another rather than on the items in the rummage sale. During the first year of this shift in thought, the church doubled its financial intake, and in the second year, the church tripled it. When the

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<sup>89</sup>Beck and Sweet, 55.

church provides activities for relationship building, God blesses the relationship. Pine has begun to be creative in new ways as it collaborates with other churches in Bible studies, dinner church, and worship events. It is currently being re-innergized in cultivating new ways it can reach the community through Lakes and Meadows Dinner Church.



Once Covid restrictions were lifted, Pine decided it wanted to help with dinner church at the Lakes and Meadows. Lakes and Meadows is a community which reflects differing social statuses. It is a community which has many needs, but the most important need it desires is to be loved. It is what is called a sore community, a community with many needs which are not being met. A few members from Pine began to bake dessert for the dinner church and take it over once a month. Within a couple of months Pine began to give more of their personal time to this mission. Today, two years later, this church has participants monthly in this ministry. They now provide dinner, dessert, and fellowship to the people of this community. Ironically, Lakes and Meadows is in the same community where Pine is located. One of our members told me they had no idea Lakes and Meadows existed. Sometimes the Holy Spirit awakens our eyes to what is already before us. This is re-innergizing. Additionally, Pine has joined in the mission work with Sparr regarding Samaritan's Purse Shoeboxes. The church is part of the community wide choir and fifth Sunday "sings," those who gather for worship and praise in all surrounding areas of the community. This church is also involved in providing basic hygiene supplies for children who live in the area called the Forest. Pine now looks for ways it can meet the Holy Spirit where it is already at work. Pine church is a spiritually mature church, a church with a sense of humor, and a church which loves its community. All it needed was someone to show them where they could go to serve.





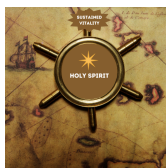
A spiritually mature church is a church with a sense of humor. In other words, it's a laughing church. Pine loves to laugh. This is where I, as the new pastor, began to build relationships with the Pine congregation. There are times when the Holy Spirit must bring laughter before the church can experience the joy in the work of mission and ministry. Pine finds its spiritual maturity in its relationship with each other and its community. They are a loving congregation who enjoy spending time with one another. Even though some of our congregation live part-time in Florida, they are never separated from the love of their Florida church. Pine still needs to carve out time for discipleship of their own, through a focused Bible study and other ways of pursuing sanctified grace. I am confident that the Holy Spirit will lead and guide us in this path as well. However, right now laughter and joy need to come before being ready for a deeper faith life. Pine congregants are spiritually mature in their ability to invite and welcome others, and they are gifted in hospitality and humor. It is upon this gift that the church and its community will be re-energized.



In less than two years, Pine's attendance went from 15-20 to 30-35. This may seem like a small increase to most churches, but for Pine it is significant, given its previous situation. During my first two months a review of the budget and bank account confirmed that the church had enough operating capital for three months. I recall the meeting when we announced to the church our financial condition and where I told them we needed to find a mission in the community, now. I also asked, "Do we want to close the doors just to pay bills or to do ministry?" This is when we began helping with Lakes and Meadows dinner church.

Since Pine has many members who live in two states, I wrote a letter to all the church

members and visitors. The leadership of the church was honest about the condition of the finances and encouraged them to give. During another meeting, one of the leaders told me that “my letter was a bit forward,” and I replied that “the letter matches the state of the church.” I reflect on these interactions, because it is important to know we are meeting the Holy Spirit where it is at work. We do not just sit and watch, but we are active participants in the Holy Spirit’s work. We are the hands, feet, and head of Jesus in the world, and this mission requires hard work on our part. Within those three months, giving increased, and our mission work continued to increase. Today, we have over \$30,000 in the bank and have paid \$26,000 for a new roof. We are currently praying about where we will use this money in ministry to the community. The value of what Pine has does not lie in the money in the bank or the butts in the pews. It lies in the re-innergizing of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of its people.



Ultimately, sustainability only comes from the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, and the church must have its ear inclined to its message and then answer its call. When the focus of the church is the re-innergizing by the Holy Spirit of the body of Christ, it will live out its vow of being present in the church and community, giving of gifts, offering of prayers, being in service to the church and community, and sharing witness of what God has done in the lives of their people.

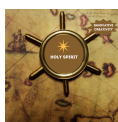
### **LOCHLOOSA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Lochloosa is the oldest rural church in our district. Over the last twelve years it has seen a steady decline in attendance, leadership, and giving. This church worships six people and giving was about \$250 a month. The facilities are in need of maintenance and upgrades. With the approval of the church, we are using the model of the nautical wheel as a guide to re-innergize

the church and its community. This process began in January of 2022 and was fully put in place by July 1, 2022. Today, as I write this, it is December 7th, 2022. The following is an explanation of how the Holy Spirit is moving.



As always, the first step in this process is to find a pastor who is led by the Holy Spirit and has a love for the small church. The district found a potential good fit for this church, and the pastoral transition was made. This pastor has begun to build relationships with the current congregational members and the surrounding community. During this time, the pastor has written letters to the current and prior members encouraging them to come and see. Meanwhile, the pastor is encouraging the six congregants to invite, invite, and invite.



At this point, the church is open to try to reach the community in any way possible. Lochloosa decided they would like to start a dinner church. The creative and innovative nature of this came because Lochloosa did not have the money, the volunteers, or the ability to do this on their own. They decided to ask Hawthorne, Pine, and Sparr to help them. All three of these churches gathered to help Lochloosa get their dinner church up and running. Today, Lochloosa is self-sufficient in their ability to provide dinner at church. They are currently listening to the community in seeking new ways in which they can work within that community.



Through dinner church, five community children found their way to the church. As a result, the mission of this church is now focused on the children of the community. A church with six members has been given six children to feed, teach, and care for. This is the re-innergizing work of the Holy Spirit. Acting through the community, the Holy Spirit gives the church

what it needs to be revived. It is important to highlight that the work of the Holy Spirit is cyclical in nature. Church revival is not always about the church reviving the community. The church needs the community for its own revival. Knowing and acknowledging the church's need for the community is a factor of spiritual maturity.



The spiritual maturity of a church which has been able to keep its doors open for years with six people, is a church with a deep sense of God's provisions. This church can teach most of us what it means to be spiritually mature. They have Bible study each week with prayer focusing on the church being able to do the work of the Holy Spirit. The congregation has begun to partner with other churches for events and gatherings, so they do not feel so alone. The connection and collaboration of multiple churches is stemming renewal.



Lochloosa now worships with 10-12 people each week (including kids). Its bank account is no longer in the negative, and there is enough to pay the bills and have a little extra. Other people from other churches have caught the flame of renewal for this church, and they tithe (financially support) to Lochloosa even though they attend other churches. Lochloosa is in the early stages of renewal. Again, this process takes time, and everyone must remain in prayer and faithful to the work of the Holy Spirit, even when it seems impossible. The Apostle Luke reminds us that, "[...] 'What is impossible for mortals is possible for God'" (Luke 18:27-29 NRSV).



Ultimately, sustainability only comes from the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, and the church must have its ear inclined to its message and then answer its call. When the

focus of the church is the re-innergizing of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ will live out their vows of being present in the church and community, giving of their gifts, offering their prayers, being in service to the church and community, and sharing their witness of what God has done in their lives.

Writing the stories of these churches brings both good and bad memories. Participating in the work of the Holy Spirit is difficult, and when I think of those who have left for other churches, I want to stop remembering. On the other hand, when I think of the innovation and creativity that has brought new people to Christ, I rejoice. We can never lose sight of the fact that the church has been called to reveal the Kingdom of God, which is here and now. Answering this call requires a new way of thinking about the culture and the context in which the church now resides. The church "will hamstring the Holy Spirit [if] we only look for and listen to its stirrings of old systems and structures."<sup>90</sup> This is because the the Holy Spirit "often speaks through new voices, visions, and ventures"<sup>91</sup> to sustain the relevance and growth of the church.

The chapter which follows focuses on the ways in which the Holy Spirit sustains the church through prayers, the blended ecology of the church, and the church's cultural intelligence. While these subjects have been addressed prior, we will take an in-depth analysis of how prayer, blended ecology, and cultural intelligence is critical for the church now and the church to come.

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<sup>90</sup>Beck and Sweet, 61.

<sup>91</sup>Beck and Sweet, 61.

## Project Launch Plan

### DOCTORAL PROJECT DESCRIPTION

What follows is a Doctoral Project Launch Plan and its Description which is a requirement for the fulfillment of DLGP/DM951. The objective of this report is to offer an update on the progress of my project and provide the plan for this project post-graduation.

### NPO STATEMENT

The church is dying or in decline because it lacks connection with the Holy Spirit.

### DOCTORAL PROJECT

The doctoral post-graduation plan will address the NPO stated above. The continued post-graduation plan is to complete and publish the book proposal focused on the biblical, historical, and current work of the Holy Spirit in reviving churches which are declining or dying. The evidence provided in the book (i.e. personal stories, witnesses to the new life the Holy Spirit brings, and support of theological and biblical foundations) articulates and develops a deeper level of understanding of the NPO. The book connects with the established rooted church, but also provides a way for the emerging generations to be exposed to the work of the Holy Spirit. This project can be tailored to each context and culture for greater transmission. In addition, this project can be disseminated in different forms (via digital and print), allowing for greater flexibility and flow of information, as well as continual feedback.

The book will consist of six chapters and are highlighted in the table below:

Chapter Title	Chapter Topic
Introduction	Why the need for this book and how my personal experience led me to develop this project.
Chapter 1: The Historical Work of the Holy Spirit	Identifies the biblical and historical reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit to further grow and develop the church
Chapter 2: Holy Spirit or Human Reason; Innovation and Creativity	Focuses on the difference in the mission of God expressed through human reason compared to the guidance of the Holy Spirit
Chapter 3: Pneumanauts; Dunamis Saints with an Outward Focus	Concentrates on the importance of the Holy Spirit led leadership in the church.
Chapter 4: The People's Witnesses; Spiritual Maturity	Highlights the stories of God's people who have witnessed the re-innergizing work of the Holy Spirit.
Chapter 5: Church Growth; It's not In the Number	Calling attention to the dying and declining church which only measures growth in numbers. Arguing that growth comes from the reliance on the will of the Holy Spirit in a deeper and more mature faith.
Chapter 6: Sustained Vitality; The Gift of Prayer, Blended Ecology, and Cultural Intelligence	Sustained vitality comes by the Holy Spirit leading and guiding, focused prayer, encouraging innovation and deep connection within a church community.

The purpose of this book is to serve as a foundation in which the church will claim the re-innergizing of the Holy Spirit which will lead to new life. The need for this type of book is to remind the church where its ability to thrive and be alive comes, regardless of the condition of the church today. The church's hope is in the Holy Spirit.

The book illuminates the work of the Holy Spirit in scripture, in the traditions of the church, and in my personal ministerial work. The project contains stories, personal witnesses, and evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in the declining or dying church. This project will help the church define the reason for its decline and or death and move towards resurrection.

In 2021 Mark Chaves, professor of sociology, religious studies, and divinity at Duke

University, conducted an analysis known as the National Congregations Study. "It also suggested that small congregations in rural areas and small towns may be unsustainable. Nearly half of the country's congregations are in rural areas (25%) or small towns (22%)."<sup>92</sup> While Chaves attributes the lack of Americans living in rural areas as a decline measure, his study also confirms my analysis that rural churches are in decline or dying. However, my project's reason for the decline is vastly different.

The church was never intended to be measured or assessed by professional business models. The growth, health, and sustainability of the church comes from one place: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Since the beginning of time when God spoke, creativity was brought forth. For example, in the creation story when God spoke, the light and dark were separated, mountains and land were created, all the sea and land animals were created.<sup>93</sup> In other words, when God speaks, life is abundant. The Lord spoke to Moses, and the captives were freed and when the Lord speaks, the breath (*ruach*- breath of God) of God is released to do the work of the Holy Spirit. In Judges, then the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and "he inflicted a massive defeat"<sup>94</sup> against the Ammonites. The Prophet Ezekiel experienced the work of the Holy Spirit when the Lord came to him in a vision and told him to speak to the dry, dead bones. The Lord said to Ezekiel, "Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live."<sup>95</sup> The work of the Holy Spirit continues into the New Testament, sent by Christ, after the resurrection to fully lead, guide, grow, and comfort the Bride of Christ (the church.) The writings of Rev. Roland Allen (1868-1947) states, the book of "Acts is the record of events which followed the gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>96</sup> He goes on to write, "From that record we are to seek a revelation of the nature of the Holy Spirit."<sup>97</sup> It is the revelation of the Holy Spirit that increases our numbers.<sup>98</sup>

When the church refers to its traditions and reviews church growth, it has been a movement of the Holy Spirit which has fanned the flame of life. Rimi Xhemajli, Author of *The Supernatural and the Circuit Riders*, connects the work of the Holy Spirit as a supernatural movement to "miracles and wonders."<sup>99</sup> The latter are expressed by the life and ministry of Jesus

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<sup>92</sup>Yonat Shimron, "Study: Attendance Hemorrhaging at Small and Midsize US Congregations," Religion News Service, October 14, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/10/14/study-attendance-at-small-and-midsize-us-congregations-is-hemorrhaging/>.

<sup>93</sup> Zondervan, *NRSV, Simple Faith Bible*, ed. Jimmy Carter (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020). Genesis 1

<sup>94</sup> William Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 832, Logos Bible Software

<sup>95</sup> Zondervan, 1032.

<sup>96</sup>Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit: Selected Writings of Roland Allen* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2006), 13

<sup>97</sup>Allen.

<sup>98</sup>Allen. 16.

<sup>99</sup>Rimi Xhemajli and Allan H. Anderson, *The Supernatural and the Circuit Riders: The Rise of*



the Christ. The reading of the gospels provides evidence for miracles such as healings of the blind, sick, lame, and dead, the feeding of the five thousand, and exorcisms. Through his life, Jesus also gives his "future followers [us] the authority and his Holy Spirit to perform these same supernatural phenomena,"<sup>100</sup> which are miracles and wonders.

Ultimately, it is personal experience in which I have witnessed the breath of the Holy Spirit bring life to dying or declining churches. Three different rural churches which were preparing to close now have full and vibrant ministries and missions. These three healthy and growing churches have now gathered to help release the Holy Spirit in another community where the church is in decline. The releasing of the Holy Spirit into the community by a re-innergized church is made known when the church becomes innovative in how it shares the good news of the gospel to the people of the community. In other words, the church is no longer a fortress, self-enclosed, but is willing to work with the Holy Spirit in the community. As a result, the means the church will begin to choose "passion over pleasure, vision over maintenance, community over isolation,"<sup>101</sup> and the way of Christ over the way of the world. As attested by the above research and personal experience, the hope for the dying or declining church relates to the Holy Spirit.

#### AUDIENCE

The post-graduation plan for this project will continue to involve the public, laity, and clergy as stakeholders. The first classification, the public group, refers to people who would be considered the "nones and dones," who are described in the citation below.

"The unchurched and the dechurched, the "nones and dones" are people of all different backgrounds and spiritual experiences. They may never have attended church or tried it and given up on it."<sup>102</sup> Their feedback is critical to see whether the use of "plain language"<sup>103</sup> is digestible and understood to all types of spiritual journeys. The second group of people listed, the laity, are long time (10 to 50 years) church members. In the United Methodist Church all church members are referred to as laity. They are the lay driven ministry from which all missions flow. This group is identified as stakeholders because they are the potential readers of the book and are the target audience. Since they originated from three different congregations and three different locations they are ecumenically, ethnically, and geographically diverse.

The third group targeted clergy, academic leaders, and other non-profit professionals. This group, while ecumenically, ethnically, and geographically diverse, gave academic feedback

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*Early American Methodism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 13.

<sup>100</sup> Xhemajli and Anderson.

<sup>101</sup> Len Wilson, *Greater Things. The Work of the New Creation* (Invite Press, 2021). XXVII

<sup>102</sup> "FLUMC - Collective Is Firing up the 'nones' and 'Dones,'" accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.flumc.org/newsdetail/collective-is-firing-up-the-nones-and-dones-4698551>.

<sup>103</sup> "John Wesley: Sermons on Several Occasions - Christian Classics Ethereal Library," accessed November 29, 2022, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/sermons.iv.html>.

to the flow of the wording, context, structure, and areas which needed to be expanded.

#### DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The feedback plan for the post-graduation plan will be the same as the project planned development. It will involve monitoring, measuring, and documenting feedback. In addition, obtaining a comprehensive list of readers from diverse environments associated with the church, having them provide their own feedback without prompting questions from the author, and creating a Facebook page, a book launch page, to invite readers to respond to the content, illustrations, and stories of the re-innegering movement of the Holy Spirit in their churches.

As stated previously in the project plan development, during the months of August through November of 2022, samples of three chapters plus an introduction, along with three response questions, were sent via email to twenty individuals, all fitting within the three categories above. Out of the twenty emails sent, nine responded to the email and answered the questions as listed below:

- 1) Were the illustrations in the chapters effective for catching attention?
- 2) What resonated with you the most about the subject?
- 3) What is missing, or what needs to be changed?

Based upon the key performance indicators, the goals of the Doctoral Delivery Plan were met. These quality benchmarks included the following:

- Ten individuals and three congregations will seek a deeper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Three traditional churches will begin seeking new ways of outreach within the community.
- Three congregations will begin to intentionally focus on church vitality, by entering a time of prayer and discernment.
- There will be 15 interactions regarding the subject matter on the Facebook page created for evaluation purposes. This format will allow for feedback for new and differing opinions, helping the project to grow in its own depth and be renewed in new ways for all readers.

In addition, all but one of the success benchmarks were achieved:

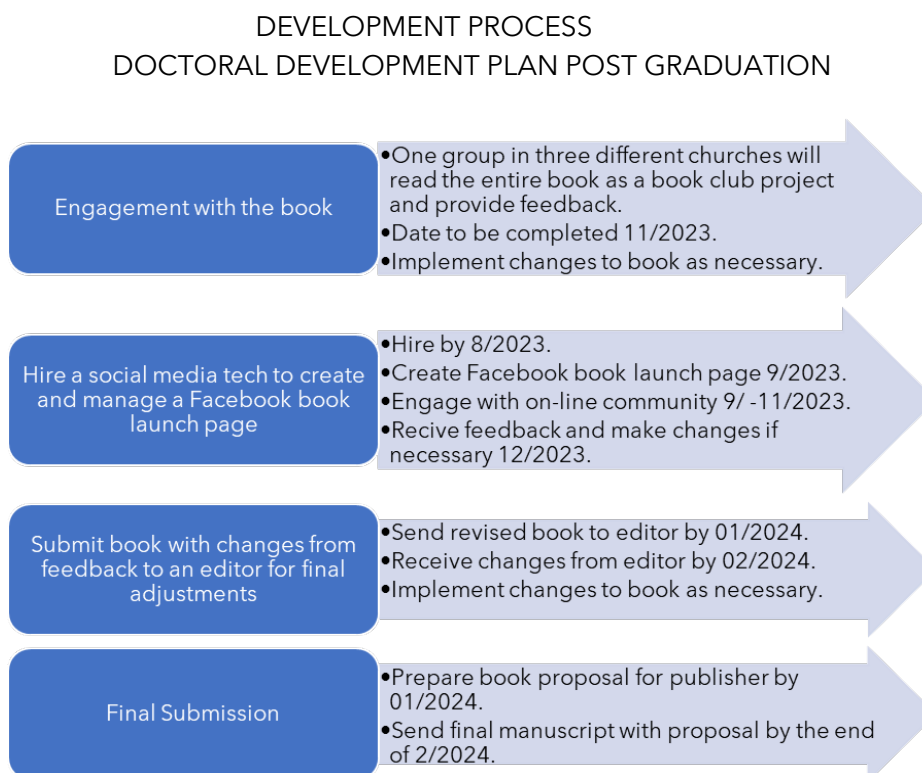
- Ten people will read the sample book and provide feedback.
- Three churches will begin to experience new growth and vitality.
- Two colleagues and one academic institution will use the book as an opportunity to teach about the re-innegering work of the Holy Spirit.

The third success benchmark, in hindsight, was unrealistic. The book would not be completed nor published within three months. Therefore, the benchmark could never have been reached. However, this benchmark will move forward as a goal of this book.

Yet, the successes included all twenty of the stakeholders who were asked to participate in reviewing the chapters and did respond to the questions. However, only fifty percent completely followed through. Yet there were people other than the planned stakeholders, who asked if they

could read the chapters.

The stakeholders were affirmative in the subject matter, interested in reading more about the subject and recommended that others read the sample book. Yet, stakeholders highlighted the need for clarification on some items within the project. What is being submitted for the post-graduation plan reflects the changes made to the book based on stakeholders' feedback.



In addition, there is also a need to be prepared for the financial costs associated with publishing the book. The cost of the editor and technical support may range from \$1,000 - \$3,000. To be able to meet this need I have set aside the necessary funds in a savings account.

The table below represents the continuing hourly work needed to complete the project as of February 1, 2023.

DATE	RESEARCH ITEM	HOURS
Fall of 2022		185

January of 2023	Revision of chapters 1-3	15 hours
	Writing and editing's chapters 4-6	45 hours
	Grammar edits, additional time with editor, writing and illustration design	35 hours
February 1, 2023	Total Project hours	280

Appendix A–  
Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

### **PERSONAL RESEARCH MANIFESTO**

I am committed to researching my NPO with the humility to be wrong and the ability to see new thoughts and ideas.

### **NPO STATEMENT**

The rural body of Christ must learn to re-institute itself as a body of living faith ignited by the Holy Spirit in its current culture and focused on the culture to come.

### **NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS**

By the end of this doctoral program, a book will exist to help navigate the call of the rural church to claim its identity in tradition and yet not be encumbered by traditionalized traits. At this point in the research and development process, the exact scope and cost associated with the final book is difficult to estimate; however, I can say that a large amount of time will be expended in research and writing. The financial implications will continue to be evaluated as the process unfolds.

### **NPO CONTEXT**

The NPO context includes rural churches, regardless of their denominational affiliation. These churches are primarily located in Central Florida. These rural church communities consist of a diversity of race, age, size and ethnic background. Therefore, there will be a wide range of insight into the scope of the NPO.

### **ROOT CAUSES**

A significant cause for my NPO is the traditionalized church culture. This type of culture has polarized the rural church with historical practices wrapped in civil religion. For the church to be relevant to the current and future cultures, however, it must embrace the tradition of its past, a Christ theology enlightened with the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Rural churches seem to lack confidence because of their unfavorable comparison to the large and mega churches. This comparison is one reason the rural church entrenches itself in the past and rejects the future. The dichotomy between the two churches is seen in the rural church death rate and the lack of relevance within the community where they reside.

### **DISCOVERY WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS**

The stakeholders in my discovery workshop consisted of pastors, PhDs., business professionals, local community leaders and members. In order to elicit a diverse group, the stakeholders were a mix of males and females and were varied in age.

### **ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS**

My one-on-one interviews included multiple authors who are also pastors and teachers.

### **3-5 BIBLICAL TEXTS**

Biblically, I will explore the traditions in Jesus' faith as a follower of Judaism and how his reassignment of Jewish tradition is reflected in the faith of Christianity. Specifically, I will study how the reassignment of old law and traditions brought forth the church of Acts, which focused on future culture and context.

### **ACADEMIC RESOURCES**

Within my field of research there is a lack of primary voices, but some of those who have studied and written about this field include the following: Tex Sample, (PhD), a specialist in church and society, a storyteller, author, and Professor Emeritus of Church and Society at the St. Paul School of Theology; Johnathon LaMaster Smith (PhD) and UMC Deacon; Rev. Allen Stanton, Executive Director of the Turner Center at Martin Methodist College, Elder in the United Methodist Church, Rural Church Fellow at the Institute for Emerging Issues, the public policy think-tank at NC State University, and author; and Dr. Rev. Leonard Sweet, theologian, semiotician, church historian, pastor, and author. Other areas of research will include the importance of the Jewish culture, story, leadership, navigating social and political issues, and current church culture.

## APPENDIX A DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

My discovery workshop was held on October 11 and October 15th of 2020. The workshop was conducted via Zoom in two, two-hour sessions. The following were in attendance via zoom:

- Full Time Elder in the Baptist Church
- Retired Professional from social sector/Congregant
- IT Professional from local university/Congregant
- Director of Worship from a local rural church
- Congregant/Friend
- Local Community Teacher and Congregant
- Community Member, Congregation Member, PhD., Retired Professional

The format of the workshop followed the predetermined guidelines given in our DMIN 750 syllabus but was modified for a Zoom meeting. Prior to our discovery workshop, I delivered a SWOT analysis to be completed by all participants. Once completed, I received them back and compiled all the SWOT's data into one document. This document was the catalyst to determine weakness, strength, opportunity, or threat to the rural church. I also used the Empathy Map to determine what a rural church would say, think, do and feel if the NPO statement were valid. Once that was completed, we then returned to the SWOT Analysis and narrowed the information with the Five Ways exercise in the workshop manual.

### DISCOVERY STATEMENT

After everyone had logged on, I opened with prayer, and then the participants introduced themselves. I explained that we would be synthesizing the SWOT Analysis to explore the most important area of the rural church to either support, negate, or adjust the NPO Statement. During our second meeting, via Zoom, we did an online Empathy Map and the Five Ways exercise. The following Discovery Statement was the result:

***Considering the rural church, we discovered that the rural body of Christ must learn to re-institute itself as a body of living faith ignited by the Holy Spirit in its current context and focused on the culture to come, a situation which is caused by traditions that have become traditionalized. If this need were met, the rural church would be known in the community as witnesses and healers.***

After the second on-line workshop, I asked everyone to take a few days and reflect on what we had processed. I also asked them to respond to the following questions: "What am I missing?" and "What do I need to study that is not on here?"

The question that is before me now is, "What will it take to transform the leadership and community culture so that tradition does not become the polarizing force of traditionalism?"

## **CRITICAL INSIGHTS FROM DISCOVERY WORKSHOP**

The participants studied the SWOT analysis and identified their top five comments. Then, we completed the Empathy Map. Once we processed that information, we returned to the SWOT analysis. The top identifiers noted in the weakness category were a lack of leadership and Holy Spirit and a persistence of church conflict. In the threat box, the church was too traditionalized, biased, overlooked and had too many other secular activities vying for its time. In opportunities, we noted that we have the ability to explore and be flexible to change, and in strengths, we would be known in the community as a witness and healer. The participants then chose one statement they felt would need to be addressed in order to fully research the NPO. The participants decided that if rural churches were known in our community as witnesses and healers, then the critical needs of leadership, Holy Spirit and conflict resolution would be resolved.

## **ONE-TO-ONE-INTERVIEWS**

Interviewees received the discovery workshop statement and outcomes and were asked to respond to the following questions: "What am I missing?" and "What do I need to study that is not on here?" **A**, author/retired clergy/professor, noted the importance of focusing on the cause and effect of the hollowing out of the economy by Big Agriculture, traditionalists, social issues experienced in rural communities that are foreign to other parts of society, and social civil religion. **B**, writer, professor/PhD., addressed the importance of what the rural church is already doing well, the need to fix power structures, and the rural church's resistance to incarnational freeing of the Holy Spirit. **C**, writer, professor, clergyman, identified the need to embrace culture at every level and connect to the digital world. **D**, clergy/District Leadership, noted that lack of leadership causes rural churches to become traditionally, instead of outwardly, focused. These churches tend to focus on freedom-liberty and then on the gospel.

## **SYNTHESIS**

Both the discovery workshop and one-to-one interviews confirmed a parallel thought process, though the workshop indicated a "big picture" narrative, and the one-to-one interviews pin-pointed detailed identifiers in rural church decline. The findings were as follows:

- The presence of the Holy Spirit in leadership and community is foundational for any type of incarnational renewal.
- The traditionalism of worship, mission, and order in the rural church polarizes the ability for the rural church to be a central place of healing and witness to its community.
- The rural church's inability to meet the culture outside the church dilutes the church's validity to itself and its community.

At times, rural churches struggle to maintain church and community, due to lack of effective leadership. To re-institute the rural church as a healing and witnessing entity, qualified



leadership is essential.

Additionally, rural congregations need to be encouraged. In other words, the church should focus on what is effective ministry instead of developing a pathology of wrongness. The rural church needs to embrace its uniqueness and its ability to experiment with new ways of doing ministry, to allow failure, and to develop innovative ways of serving. However, this all requires a strong, faith-filled leader who will guide and equip the saints for this new time.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Further areas of research include exploring worship in the rural churches at a deeper level to determine how Sunday worship is incarnational. In addition, meeting with conference leaders can determine how they view the rural church and how we can begin to work together to reconnect the rural church and value its integral place in our denomination. In turn, this research should foster the development of materials and references for rural churches that relate to rural churches within the larger context of church community. In other words, rural churches do not have the same culture and context of "big" churches, and have their own values of mission, leadership, and cultural relevance.

### **WORKSHOP DISCOVERY DOCUMENTATION**

On October 11 and October 15th of 2020, I met with seven individuals via Zoom to delve into the statement:

*The rural body of Christ must learn to re-institute itself as a body of living faith ignited by the Holy Spirit in its current culture, while focusing on the culture to come.*

This is the initial statement of my Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO) for my DMin project at Portland Seminary. During our session we processed what the rural churches would need to do, say, think, and feel in order to become this type of rural body of Christ. Through a series of exercises, we focused on the most important information from the SWOT Analysis, Empathy Map and Five Way exercise. These findings, and those of the recorded one-on-one interviews, are as follows:

- The presence of the Holy Spirit must be seen in the leadership and the body of Christ,
- The rural church and community will need to address its polarized insight into tradition, politics, and cultural norms,
- Socioeconomic status must be kept in mind when addressing the healing and witness to the community,
- It will take an ability to look beyond the "inerrant" word of God to embrace the story of Jesus, and
- That the rural church does not need to be a big church in order to be Jesus in its community was a constant reminder.

Again, based on all the information processes the NPO statement was confirmed without change.

**ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP TO STAKEHOLDERS**

Dear Stakeholders:

Thank you for your participation in the Discovery Workshop which took place in October and to those who participated in the one-to-one interviews. During this time, we confirmed the NPO Statement as follows:

*The rural body of Christ must learn to re-institute itself as a body of living faith, ignited by the Holy Spirit in its current culture while focusing on the culture to come.*

In our processing of the Empathy Map, we noted that for the NPO to be true, the rural church would need to be a place of witness and healing within the community. Once the church is seen as this, then we would know the church had re-instituted itself as a body of living faith, ignited by the Holy Spirit, finding relevance in the culture, and looking for relevance in the culture to come.

As you are aware, this will continue to be my focus for the next two years so that I can develop a better understanding of the rural church and its needs. At this time, I would like to ask for any additional feedback, comments, or questions you may have regarding the work that is about to begin or the NPO statement itself.

Once again, thank you for your time, energy, and excitement about being on this journey.

I have one special request, that you keep me in your prayers and ask God to guide my steps for the glory of the Kingdom.

Sincerely,  
Rev. Stacey Spence

## ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW DOCUMENTATION

Interviewee A-author/retired clergy/Professor

- Agrees with socioeconomic struggles.
- Traditionalized culture.
- Hollowing out of the rural economy from Big Ag and Corporations.
- Lack of understanding the culture and no desire to understand.
- The outside world does not understand rural culture.
- Suggested books and articles:
  - *Working Class Rage*; Tex Sample
  - *Resistance and the Politics of Jesus*, Tex Sample
  - Corby Kummer, New York Times, *Bad Crop*

Interviewee B-writer, professor/PhD.

- Agrees there is a lack of appreciation for rural church.
- Rural churches are not 2nd class citizens-the world lacks understanding of rural communities.
- Identify power structures that do not work and re-align.
- The need to free the Holy Spirit by the indigenous community.
- Start with a strength approach.
- Reimagine worship (bring new ways instead of entrenched traditionalized practices)
- Recommend book, James C. Scott *Weapons of the Weak, Study of Peasants*

Interviewee C-writer, professor, clergy, PhD.

- Confirmed the need to listen to the community and its needs.
- Highlighted the pouring out of the Holy Spirit
- Cultural relevance is imperative.
- Focused on learning to do church differently to reach future generations.
- Encourage what is working well and focus on that to begin.
- Book recommendation: Dr. Rev. Michael Beck and Dr. Rev. Leonard Sweet, *Cultural Intelligence*.

Interviewee D- clergy/District Leadership

- Agreed with the issue of poverty, addition, and lack of healthcare in the rural community.
- Identified with overall poor pastoral leadership.
- Nationalism ahead of God  
Freedom, Liberty and then the Gospel
- Tradition of self and family over focus on other in the community
- Agrees with the issue of small church trying to identify with big church.
- Interpersonal family dynamics
- Suggested information from the Turner Center at Martin Methodist College, Allen Stanton

Appendix B–  
Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

## INTRODUCTION

In America, the rural church is designed by God to care for the communities and offer sanctuaries in Jesus Christ. These rural churches represent a grassroots movement which is the primary tributary of sharing the gospel. Grassroots is understood as a rural church which is grown from within the community, not planted from the outside. Rural churches encounter the community in intimate ways, and it is imperative that rural churches, (which are in significant decline), re-institute themselves as a body of living faith ignited by the Holy Spirit.

This paper explores ways in which the rural church may institute formational practices characterized by the following aspects: focus on a theological framework; regard for the polarizing human traditions of the church; a consistent mind-set of love; and a methodology of identifying the cultural context of the community it serves. These formational practices were modeled by Jesus throughout scripture and continued to be used post-resurrection through the Holy Spirit.

## SECTION 1: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The above-mentioned framework will identify passages for connecting the rural church with its culture and context. This analysis demonstrates the ultimate paradigm of following the scriptural framework of Jesus's life, his teachings, and reliance on the Holy Spirit as essential ways of living in order for the rural church to re-ignite holy living in the current culture and context.

### **The Church of Acts and Colossians**

#### **Traditional Polarization in First Century Christianity**

Early man-made religious traditions such as: healing on the sabbath, touching the unclean, sexism, and culture barriers, were challenged by Jesus through Scripture. In the Incarnation the Old Testament law had been fulfilled, and in turn, outward examples of our inward faith, (other than Baptism and Holy Communion) are no longer necessary for the forgiveness of sins and salvation.

These traditions come into conflict when Jesus ate with sinners, healed on the sabbath, and when the disciples ate bread with unwashed hands (Mark 2-7). When questioned by the religious authorities regarding religious traditions, Jesus responded, "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the human tradition...on your own traditions...thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down."<sup>104</sup> These human traditions "were pious customs of human origin passed down to support the living out of the law."<sup>105</sup> At some point, the Pharisees were unable to separate the law from "its human support system."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*. 1299.

<sup>105</sup>"Does Jesus Condemn Tradition?," Catholic Exchange, August 30, 2012, <https://catholicexchange.com/does-jesus-condemn-tradition>.

<sup>106</sup>"Does Jesus Condemn Tradition?"

They also used religious customs as a way to navigate the requirements of the Torah.

One sees how religious customs continued to navigate requirements of the Torah in the book of Acts. In Acts, followers of Jesus continued to be persecuted because healing took place on sabbath, conversions of Gentiles into the Jewish community, and defiling oneself with unclean people or food. Peter (Acts 11) had a vision from God. In this vision, God tells Peter, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."<sup>107</sup> It is evident God has made all of creation clean through Jesus the Christ by the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Holding on to human tradition (*paradosis*, which means the act of giving up or to giving over), over Jesus' commandments to love God and neighbor is annihilating the rural church. The church is warned in Mark 7:8, "You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition," and Galatians 4:3, "So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world,"<sup>108</sup> how human tradition will hold the rural church idle.

This impotence comes when the human tradition of Colossae made room for man-made religion to "harmonize Christianity with the prevailing religious outlook of the pagan culture, which modeled their own thinking [...] attempting the synthesis of Christian and pagan ideas, destroying the unique and liberating power of new faith in Christ."<sup>109</sup>

Considering all these reasons, Jesus was uniquely aware of the dangers in human traditions masking both false teachings and true religious law. Therefore, he states, "I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you."<sup>110</sup> Jesus leaves the model to evaluate human tradition, the model of the liberating power of new faith in Christ, and that is the framework in which the rural church can find relevance, i.e., through reassigning old traditions to meet the current and future culture and context as will be identified in the gospel of Matthew.

## **Matthew 22:36-40**

### **Mindset of Jesus**

Within the context of Matthew, the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders (Pharisees and Sadducees) came to a crisis point. The religious leaders confronted Jesus "in order to discredit him."<sup>111</sup>

J.R. Briggs, author of the Sacred Overlap, identifies a mandorla as a place of learning to live faithfully in the space between two opposing thoughts. Jesus is the mandorla, the one who resides in the "sacred overlap,"<sup>112</sup> which means he lived faithfully in the space between Old

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<sup>107</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*, Lea edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011).. 1410.

<sup>108</sup>Zondervan. 1504.

<sup>109</sup>Buttrick et al., *The Interpreter's Bible - A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. 190.

<sup>110</sup>Zondervan, *NRSV, Simple Faith Bible*, ed. Jimmy Carter (Zondervan, 2020). 1403.

<sup>111</sup>David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word, Complete 12-Volume Set*, Paperback edition, vol. 4, A (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

<sup>112</sup>J. R. Briggs and Skye Jethani, *The Sacred Overlap: Learning to Live Faithfully in the Space*

Testament Law and the new kingdom which has come. In other words, Jesus is on the edge, in the overlap, of being highly orthodox and yet a threat to the religious establishment.

Jesus's identity and message modeled one mindset for the world: love. This mindset is confirmed in his commandments handed down in Matthew 22:36-40. In this story, Jesus is asked a question by the Pharisees and Sadducces, who were trying to establish that Jesus was violating Torah law. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus responds by saying, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."<sup>113</sup> In this sense, "The Law is not about laws. The laws are there to reveal the heart of the Lawgiver, Yahweh himself. Hence Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, not the contradiction, or countermanding, or overturning of the Law. On the contrary, Jesus is the "Completion of the Law, the Living Torah, the Embodied Torah, Torah-in-the-Flesh."<sup>114</sup> This is the mindset from which Jesus sets forth the commandment of love.

Jesus fosters this mindset, of loving God and loving neighbor, in his words and actions. This loving mindset is called *agapaō* in the Greek, meaning to love, just not in word but in action. To perfectly love people is "to welcome, entertain, to be fond of or to love dearly, and for loving things, it means to be well pleased."<sup>115</sup> In order to love the agape way the body of Christ shall not become a "stumbling block or a hindrance to one another."<sup>116</sup> Implementing traditions of human origin which are not from an agape mindset have rendered the rural church lifeless. For example, the rural church lacks the vitality to enter into a community it does not understand. The continued potluck dinners cater to those who already attend church. Many rural churches believe that yard sales are their mission. While yard sales could be used as a mission tool, it would take intentionality to assure raising money is less important than welcoming the community. Additionally, the rural church has been a survival mode for many years, it has tended to have poor leadership appointed, and it has been evaluated against the large and mega churches. Ultimately, the state of the rural church comes from a lack of Holy Spirit driven leadership, in the pulpit and at the larger conference level. This has left the rural church unsupported, alone, and tending to itself.

In the same way, the religious leaders (in Matthew) had become a stumbling block to the community, by using man-made traditions in place of agape love, the rural church has also become a stumbling block of inclusiveness for the community seeking faith.

The rural church in 2021 holds traditions which place the country first and God second.

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*Between* (Zondervan, 2020).

<sup>113</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*. 1277.

<sup>114</sup>Sweet, Leonard, "Jesus and the Law," February 15, 2021.

<sup>115</sup>"G25 - Agapaō - Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed February 13, 2021, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/1/1/s\\_1001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/1/1/s_1001).

<sup>116</sup>Joel B. Green and William H. Willimon, eds., *NRSV Wesley Study Bible*, Box Lea edition (Nashville, Tn.: Abingdon Press, 2017). Romans 14:13, 1383.

These traditions have stifled collaborative mission within the body of Christ, idolatry to religious icons, and ways of worship have stifled new ways of being open to the current culture. Ultimately, holding on to man-made religious traditions have made the established rural church "lukewarm"<sup>117</sup> unable to reach the current or next generation for Jesus.

In order to remove the stumbling block, the loving mindset of Jesus requires individuals and the community to seek inward awakening. These images of inward awakening are: "self-image, our image of God, and our image of the world."<sup>118</sup> When our souls and our churches are awakened, by the Holy Spirit, to view these images in the light of grace, then we will be able to "imitate the love of God"<sup>119</sup> in the life of Jesus. In other words, the rural church of today needs a spiritual conversion of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, Jesus's mindset of love models the way God loves all of creation. Therefore, any teaching of man-made religious traditions that brought harm, exclusion or alienation were not from the love of God or the mindset of Jesus. This kind of love mindset states, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me... 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"<sup>120</sup> Man-made traditions that alienate or corrupt the agape love mindset must be reassigned to proclaim, and provide, ministry from the love of God in the mindset of Jesus. Reigniting the rural church requires inward transformation of individuals and the institution, and this transformation will only be brought about by inviting the Holy Spirit to resurrect the rural church.

## **Methodology**

### **Ezekiel 37**

#### **Prompting the Holy Spirit**

Resurrection of the old dead sect of Isrealites is profoundly addressed in Ezekial. Israel's faith crisis is bracketed with the Ezekiel prophecy of the "impending judgment with the anticipated restoration for Jerusalem."<sup>121</sup> At this moment Israel is hearing the words of its impending siege by the Babylonians. Their lives will be forever changed because of their lack of faith and disobedience. While Ezekiel has continually prophesied the coming destruction, he also speaks a word of hope. Ezekiel speaks of the valley of dry bones and the power of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>117</sup>Green and Willimon, *NRSV Wesley Study Bible*, 1588.

<sup>118</sup>Richard Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder*, Illustrated edition (Franciscan Media, 2020). 137.

<sup>119</sup>Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*, n.d. xxv.

<sup>120</sup>Green and Willimon, *NRSV Wesley Study Bible*. Matthew 25:35-46, 1198.

<sup>121</sup>Brueggemann, Walter, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*,(Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003). 192.



to bring new life. It is this “visionary anticipation of restoration”<sup>122</sup> upon which the rural church must rely. YHWH has promised with a divine oracle, “I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from them..., and you will know I am the Lord.”<sup>123</sup> In verse 17 the Lord states, “I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land.”<sup>124</sup> YHWH’s ultimate promise for Israel is to give the body of Israel YHWH’s divine gift of the Spirit (*rûaḥ*). It is upon the whole house of Israel that “YHWH will put his spirit in Israel and give it a new spirit,”<sup>125</sup> In other words, the whole community (nation) will be resurrected. YHWH’S power “actually breaks into history and gives it a new direction.”<sup>126</sup>

Israel’s propensity for self-destruction is nothing against the will of YHWH to give new life and to make YHWH known to all the world. As Walter Brueggemann states, “The news of the book of Ezekiel is that YHWH wills life and has the power to grant it.”<sup>127</sup> Ultimately, the Israelites seem to be what Richard Rohr calls “ignorant perfection.”<sup>128</sup> These are people who Rohr sees as “at one time being unbuilt, stripped down to the core, and [who] learn how to live from that clear humbled point.”<sup>129</sup>

Ezekiel speaks to the rural church, as a body of Christ in the middle of nowhere, looking for life. This text leads the way from the past into the future with the promise of God’s faithfulness through the Holy Spirit. It is the breath of YHWH which will provide the way, “to bring the dead bones to life,”<sup>130</sup> so the rural church may enter into the current context and culture without reservation.

## **John 4:7-42**

### **Cultural Context**

YHWH will also provide insight into the culture and context for the rural church. This is seen in Jesus’s ability to read the signs of the cultural context, and adapt his teaching based on his audience as the model for accepting people as they are. One of the most profound examples of crossing culture and religious boundaries is the story of the Samaritan woman.

The first occurs when a Jew would speak or be in the presence of a Samaritan; even more egregious, a Samaritan woman. Jesus approaches the woman and asks for a drink of water. Her response, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” Here in this moment, Jesus breaks many more of the cultural norms of interacting with others outside of Jewish culture: he breaks with cultural norms of gender, uncleanness, and sin. What were at one time barriers

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<sup>122</sup>Brueggemann, 197.

<sup>123</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*, Lea edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2011). Ezekiel, 1122.

<sup>124</sup>Zondervan.

<sup>125</sup>Buttrick et al., *The Interpreter’s Bible - A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Ezekiel, 266.

<sup>126</sup>Buttrick et al. 267

<sup>127</sup>Brueggemann, 197.

<sup>128</sup>Rohr, Richard Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern*. 99.

<sup>129</sup>O.F.M. 99.

<sup>130</sup>Buttrick et al., *The Interpreter’s Bible - A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. 267.

put in place by religious cultural traditions, have now been put in their place with the new flow of the "living water."<sup>131</sup>

Jesus was able to read between the lines in the story of the woman and weave it into the truth of the gospel. At this moment, Jesus gave the most precious gift to the Samaritan woman, hope. This woman represents the need for all people to receive the living water of Jesus in their immediate context. This method of reading the signs in the culture will require the rural church, according to Leonard Sweet, to "reread the story of Jesus from a new vantage point, not so we can stockpile and be selfish, but so we can reach out to others in healing, kindness, and service."<sup>132</sup>

### **Synthesis of Themes, Values, and Commitments**

There is no doubt, the rural church must seek to follow the ultimate paradigm of the scriptural framework of Jesus's life, his teachings, and reliance on the Holy Spirit as essential ways of living in order for the rural church to re-ignite holy living in the current culture and context. Without this framework the rural church cannot move past man-made religious traditions.

Man-made religious traditions have done irreparable harm to the church since its inception. The difference between the church of Acts and the rural church of western culture is it lacks the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is clear from stories in scripture, when the Holy Spirit is visible in the body of Christ; wonders, signs, miracles, and healing take place.

God uses the framework in Jesus, with the Holy Spirit to remove polarizing traditions of the church and set in place an embodiment of the mind set of love. This holy love is the foundation the rural church must claim. Upon claiming holy love, the rural church will set aside man-made religious traditions that harm others, stop using excuses as to why the church cannot reach the community and context, and it will finally be able to apply Jesus' method of accepting people and cultures as they are, not what the rural church thinks they should be. These practices, anointed by the Holy Spirit, will refocus the rural church in reigniting the mission of Jesus in the lives of all people in its community.

With a focus on the Holy Spirit and Jesus' commandment to love God and love neighbor, resurrection will begin to take place in the rural church. The intentional action of the rural church (in order to reignite wonders, signs, miracles and healings, as seen in Jesus' ministry) is to pray for an anointing of the Holy Spirit, to find new life in the teachings and model of Jesus the Christ. This new anointing will also allow the rural church to be open to new revelations and new ways of being Jesus in the community. If not, then the rural church will continue to remain what John

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<sup>131</sup>Green and Willimon, *NRSV Wesley Study Bible*. John 4:10, 1291.

<sup>132</sup>Michael Adam Beck and Leonard Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence* (HigherLife Publishing, 2021).

Wesley, the founder of Methodism feared, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power."<sup>133</sup> In other words, a church without the Holy Spirit is living in hospice, just waiting for the doors to close.

## SECTION 2: TOPIC HISTORY AND KEY VOICES

### TRADITION

Man-made religious traditions, such as healing on the sabbath, touching the unclean, sexism, and culture barriers, have caused both the early church and the current rural church to retreat from the surrounding community, instead of engaging it. These types of traditions have caused the church to lack socialization with the local community. Consequently, the rural church has become a fortress. In a fortress church, "the finances, the mission, the buildings, leadership, staff, discipleship and care are all inward focused,"<sup>134</sup> and nothing is going out into the community. In fact, as the church dies, less goes out into the community and more is held for self-preservation. Author Thomas Rainer, writes, "follow the money and you will learn much about the church."<sup>135</sup> In addition, the rural church is no longer willing to minister to the community's context and culture. The body of Christ no longer extends the invitation to unchurched friends or relatives, and it does not release funds to do missionary work in the community. While the rural church does desire to be relevant and be in missional outreach, "it just wants it to happen without prayer, sacrifice, hard work, and on its own terms, instead of God's terms."<sup>136</sup> The community and the culture around the church has changed, but the rural church lives in a state of fear about what it might lose, instead of what it might gain, through entering the community and context as a missionary.

It is necessary for the rural church to look back at historical traditions which caused conflict, in order to see how these religious traditions, continue to damage the mission of the church. As Alan Hirsch, author of *The Forgotten Ways*, indicates, "we simply do not go far enough back, or delve deep enough for the answers."<sup>137</sup> What is needed is courage enough to face the real answers. The church must use the missional focus of engaging the surrounding community without prerequisites, requirements, or judgments. This type of missional change is required to counter man-made religious traditions created to maintain the religious institution. In retrospect, the early church was "pre-institutional rather than non-institutional."<sup>138</sup> Hirsch quotes Neil Cole of Church Multiplication Associates in addressing the pre-institutional context: "structures are

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<sup>133</sup> John Wesley, "Works of John Wesley - Vol. 13," n.d., 639.

<sup>134</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church : 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive; 2014 Edition* (Thom S. Rainer, 1672). 35.

<sup>135</sup> Rainer. 35.

<sup>136</sup> Rainer, et al. 43.

<sup>137</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Forgotten Ways*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2006). 17.

<sup>138</sup> Hirsch, et al. 185.

needed, but they must be simple, reproducible, and internal rather than external.”<sup>139</sup> A change of perspective will only come with a simple and flexible church organization. “The reason the church has become inflexible is due to its traditional organized structure of top-down hierarchy, which require strict rules and procedures to maintain the status-quo. [Religious man-made traditions] are created in order to keep the body of Christ in line with the organization instead with the movement of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>140</sup> For unknown reasons, church leadership has defected to corporate based leadership, instead of a Holy Spirit based leadership, in the building and sustaining of the church. The church seeks out corporate-based models to grow churches, deepen financial stability, and provide new types of curricula which focus on the suburban and urban model of discipleship. This corporate-based model can also be seen in how the vitality of the church is evaluated in counting numbers instead of a missional focus. The rural church should not have its vitality compared with medium or large churches. This type of comparison degrades the value of what rural churches are doing in mission within their own context. Currently, churches are evaluated on the number of attendances, baptism, affirmations of faith. Based on location alone, most rural churches will not have as many baptisms or members joining. No church should be considered the same, they are not cookie-cutter institutions, and should not be evaluated based on the performance of other churches. The rural churches have been held to a standard which it cannot achieve, nor was it designed to achieve. This is why the rural church has withdrawn because it has not been freed to be who it is called to be. Today, it holds on to this unsustainable structure which has given a false sense of security. As Hirsch states, “this model of organization is not biblical. Instead, it is fatalistic and self-serving because the goal is fixed and preserves the institution for as long as possible. Instead of the focus being to follow Jesus onto the mission field for the purpose of fulfilling the great commission.”<sup>141</sup> Tex Sample, author of Blue-Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus, discusses the social class structure, which in turn resembles the religious organizational structure, which institutes man-made religious traditions. Sample states, “the experience of class can be seen in terms of rituals [traditions] of inequality.”<sup>142</sup> He goes on to argue, “the upper class [upper hierarchy of the body of Christ] people give orders and the lower-class [lower hierarchy in the body of Christ] take the orders, then the middle class [middle hierarchy of the body of Christ] give and take orders.”<sup>143</sup> Patheos, an one-line publication, published an article, 10 Toxic Traditions That Are Killing the Church, identifying ways in which both Sample’s argument of social class and Hirsch’s argument of organizational structure are exposed, such as: “the church is seen as a building and not the people, making church services something endured rather than enjoyed, focused on outward appearances rather than the inward state of hearts, praying ceremonial prayers instead of kingdom prayers, reducing discipleship down to head knowledge [instead of heart and head], preaching merely to teach, prerequisites of

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<sup>139</sup>Hirsch, et al. 186.

<sup>140</sup>Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit: Selected Writings of Roland Allen* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2006). Chapter 2, Application, pgs. 10-17.

<sup>141</sup>Hirsch. et al. 186-187.

<sup>142</sup>Tex Sample, *Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus: Doing Ministry with Working Class Whites* (Abingdon Press, 2006).

<sup>143</sup>Sample, et al.

being welcomed, viewing missions as location and not lifestyle, reducing Christianity to a voting block or one political party, and choosing to reject culture rather than redeem it.”<sup>144</sup> Therefore, the rural church must turn to the mind-set of Jesus, which is love, and the “power of the Holy Spirit to arouse and re-engage”<sup>145</sup>. The rural church must have the love mindset of Jesus and reignite the amazing power of the Holy Spirit (which already exists within the church) to forego man-made religious traditions in light of new life.

A church who has released the Holy Spirit, will not focus on the color of the carpet, whether there is coffee in the sanctuary, or who sits in which pew, it will be focused on hospitality to its visitors and its community. Stewardship will change focus from having fundraisers to sustain the church building, to having food drives and fundraisers to feed the people of the community. The church will find its outreach in providing holistic care. It will no longer fear failure when taking a leap of faith in the name of Jesus, our eternal Christ.

### **MIND-SET OF JESUS**

Jesus, “as the eternal Christ, is the pioneer, and perfecter of our faith, modeling the human journey rather perfectly.”<sup>146</sup> The rural church must see its mission through the eyes of Jesus’ love. If not, then it will not recognize the homeless, the stranger, the drug addicted, the lost, and the prisoner, as Jesus. Without the Jesus lens of the cross (which is true love), not only the rural church, but the universal church will only see through the glass dimly and operate outside of Jesus’ love.

Religion, bathed in Jesus’ love, should function to radically re-connect (“re-ligio = to re-ligament or reconnect”<sup>147</sup>) all of creation. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a French Jesuit priest, said, “love is the very physical structure of the Universe.”<sup>148</sup> This is the love from which God sends Jesus with a new covenant of redemption to re-align humanity and its relationship to sin. Richard Rohr points to love as the essential connection for the entire body of Christ, when he states, “from Jesus the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”<sup>149</sup> The body of Christ is the support ligaments, fueled by the Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus, which brings new possibilities of connection, “even in the most hopeless situations when nothing else can.”<sup>150</sup>

Failing to be motivated from a Jesus mind-set of love, the rural church lacks the heart love

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<sup>144</sup>New Wineskins, “10 Toxic Traditions That Are Killing the Church,” *New Wineskins* (blog), June 22, 2017, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/newwineskins/ten-toxic-traditions-that-are-killing-the-church/>.

<sup>145</sup>Hirsch, et al. 17.

<sup>146</sup>Richard Rohr and Brian D. McLaren, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*, Reprint edition (Convergent Books, 2021). 27.

<sup>147</sup>Rohr, et al, 7.

<sup>148</sup>Rohr, et al. 69.

<sup>149</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*. Eph. 4:16

<sup>150</sup>Rohr, et al. 71.

necessary to be relevant in its community and becomes a dead sect. Wayne Tisdale, author of A Monk in the World: Cultivating a Spiritual Life, identifies the way in which a lack of Jesus' mind-set can be overcome. He states, "the real revolution to come is the spiritual awakening of humankind, and out of that awakening of humankind, will be born a civilization of the love mind-set of Jesus, a universal society with an engaged heart."<sup>151</sup>

The rural church needs a re-awakening of the Holy Spirit. It is a re-awakening not because love and the Holy Spirit are missing from the church, it is because the church has been led by the love and power of humanity. Humanity, on its own, will always fall short because it requires the love, humility, and mercy of God through the mind-set of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The conversion is necessary to awaken the rural church into the realization that it has put its love in the wrong place. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church's love has been misguided and has "served created things rather than the Creator."<sup>152</sup>

### HOLY SPIRIT

Roland Allen (1868-1942), an English missionary to China sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, stated, "without faith of the Holy Ghost in our converts, we can do nothing."<sup>153</sup> He continued, "if we have no faith in the power of the Holy Spirit within themselves (converts), then we cannot trust them, and they cannot be worthy of trust...which is essential for any success..."<sup>154</sup> Faith in the Holy Spirit, not faith in our natural abilities, will re-ignite conversion of the rural church as the bridge between it and the community it serves. As Richard Rohr argues, the rural church "looks for something behavioral and external to do rather than undergo a radical transformation of its very mind and heart."<sup>155</sup> The rural church's heart has not had a radical transformation.

The rural church must reclaim the call to the Holy Spirit to be transformed, and to take itself as a serious transformer within the community. Transformation will require the rural church to re-think the way in which western culture influences the teachings of the church. Currently, the rural church exhibits a theology of busyness: the busier it is the more effective it is in ministry. Additionally, the rural church operates as an island unto itself instead of a bridge to the community. Thomas Merton (1915-1968), a trappist monk, identifies the root cause of relying on self: "If, instead of trusting God, I trust only in my own intelligence, my own strength, and my own prudence, the means that God has given me the Holy Spirit will lead me to find my way to God will fail."<sup>156</sup> Additionally, the rural church's "boundless self-confidence and attitude of

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<sup>151</sup>Wayne Tisdale and Ken Wilber, *A Monk in the World: Cultivating a Spiritual Life*, n.d. xxxiii.

<sup>152</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*. 1450.

<sup>153</sup>Roland Allen, *The Compulsion of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Cincinnati, Ohio: Forward Movement Publications, 1983). 11.

<sup>154</sup>Allen.

<sup>155</sup>Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*. 103.

<sup>156</sup>Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*, First edition (Mariner Books, 2002).16

superiority"<sup>157</sup> must be given over to the Holy Spirit. This posture of self-confidence and superiority is seen, in the rural churches, in its' self-reliance, impatience, "elaborate systems of church organization, code of morality,"<sup>158</sup> and political party affiliation, which have created an operating machine instead of the body of Christ, operated by the Holy Spirit.

The rural church is alive in the Holy Spirit when it chooses to establish itself as "flexible [to culture] and permanent [in the community], able to live and grow in faith and patience, work out its own problems and overcome all dangers and hindrances both from within and without."<sup>159</sup>

In the Holy Spirit, "new truths emerge daily, new revelations constantly accumulating, screaming surprises jumping out at us from every corner of Spirit's astonishing creativity."<sup>160</sup> This movement nudges the rural church to be a bridge of creativity for the community and culture. God's creativity, lived out in the rural church, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, is the only cure for the church being in the world instead of the church being of the world. Once the rural church aligns itself with the Holy Spirit, it will be able to be the bridge which connects the church with community and context.

### **Culture and Context**

The rural church has failed to be the bridge connecting Jesus to the community because it lacks socialization with its community. The church does not relate to the people, nor has it embraced the culture as it is. The rural church would rather the culture change to meet the church's requirement, instead of the church embracing the culture and letting God both transform the culture and the church together. As Tom Rainer, in his book Autopsy of A Deceased Church, shares, "the church refused to look like its community. The church needed the 'good old days' back when it was booming as the community flocked to the church."<sup>161</sup> However, while the parents and grandparents flocked to the church, the children and the grandchildren did not. This is where the rural churches began to implode instead of exploding into a community, which no longer felt welcomed in the church. The church began to be more concerned about "protecting the way it did church than reaching the residents of the community."<sup>162</sup>

Leonard Sweet, author of Nudge, identifies what the church and individuals should be: missionaries in a new community or context. Sweet states, "our quest is to be so filled with the Spirit of God, and to be wearing interpretive Jesus goggles, that we not only notice the context, but we are able to interpret it and respond to it."<sup>163</sup> Jesus' interpretive goggles are what Hirsch calls contextual intelligence.<sup>164</sup> Contextual intelligence gathers all resources available to listen and read the culture. This "structure supports strategic partnerships, shared leadership, and the

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<sup>157</sup>Allen, et al. 6

<sup>158</sup>Allen, et al.

<sup>159</sup>Allen, et al 7.

<sup>160</sup>Teasdale, et al. xvii.

<sup>161</sup>Rainer, *Thom S. Rainer*. 25.

<sup>162</sup>Rainer, et al. 27.

<sup>163</sup>Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There*, n.d. 50.

<sup>164</sup>Hirsch, et al. 121.

pooling, allying and linking”<sup>165</sup> of all resources to learn the culture and context of a community. The contextual intelligence of the rural church is severely lacking. It has failed to realize that what works in one community will not always work in another. Michael Beck calls this type of thinking “having a false assumption”<sup>166</sup> of knowing the truth about what will engage each community.

Jesus’ story is the invitation for the church to be in the community. As Teasdale states, “Jesus’ message of love radiating through truth and light is how he attempts to dwell in this society on this tiny planet we call our home.”<sup>167</sup> The world is our parish, and if the rural church fails to embrace the world in all forms and contexts, “the great commission, to go and make disciples, becomes the great omission.”<sup>168</sup> **The rural church must begin to build an authentic Christian community where Jesus is Lord and “all who come will experience love, acceptance and forgiveness,”<sup>169</sup> regardless of what the context is and where the community resides.**

### Synthesis and Conclusion

The foundation of (re)viving the rural church begins with formational practices modeled by Jesus in scripture. These practices focus on addressing, polarizing human traditions of the church, having a consistent mind-set of love, and a methodology of identifying the cultural context of the community it serves.

Jesus speaks directly to the improper use of tradition as a model of religious holiness: “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the human tradition...on your own traditions... nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.”<sup>170</sup> The church is warned, in Mark 7:8, “You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition,” in Galatians 4:3, “So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world,”<sup>171</sup> how humanized religious tradition holds the rural church impotent. Tom Rainer, former President, and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources, speaks to a traditionalized church as being a fortress, where everything is held inside the walls and nothing goes out into the community.<sup>172</sup> Allen Hirsch, author, argues we do not delve deeply enough to honestly answer the questions [to reignite old traditions in new and fresh ways.] Ultimately, synthesizing human religious traditions “destroys the unique and liberating power of new faith in Christ.”<sup>173</sup>

Jesus speaks to the mind-set of love in Matthew 22:36-40; “You shall love your God with

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<sup>165</sup>Beck and Sweet, et al. 12.

<sup>166</sup>Beck and Sweet, et al. 5.

<sup>167</sup>Teasdale, et al. xxxi.

<sup>168</sup>Rainer, et al. 41

<sup>169</sup>Hirsch, et al. 31.

<sup>170</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*. 1299.

<sup>171</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*. 1504.

<sup>172</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive; 2014 Edition*. Pg. 35.

<sup>173</sup>Buttrick, George Arthur Buttrick et al., eds., *The Interpreter’s Bible - A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Abingdon Press, 1982). Colossians 190.



all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind...and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>174</sup> Richard Rohr, author, indicates this type of love mindset only comes from an inward awakening through the Holy Spirit.<sup>175</sup> The Book of Ezekiel speaks of the valley of dry bones and the power of the Holy Spirit to bring new life.<sup>176</sup> As Walter Brueggemann states, "The news of the book of Ezekiel is that YHWH wills life and has the power to grant it."<sup>177</sup> It is this "visionary anticipation of restoration"<sup>178</sup> upon which the rural church must rely. Rohr highlights this vision when he states we are awakened to our "self-image, our image of God, and our image of the world."<sup>179</sup> However, as people of "ignorant perfection,"<sup>180</sup> it will require "a time of being unbuilt, stripped down to the core, and learning how to live from that clear humbled point"<sup>181</sup> of God's grace. When spiritual awakening is experienced, the church will see through agape love, not human religious traditions, and see the grace of God which lives in each cultural context.

Jesus provides new ways of reading the signs of culture in the story of the Samaritan woman, realigning the meaning of gender, uncleanness, and sin. Leonard Sweet and Michael Beck, authors, state the church needs to "reread the story of Jesus from a new vantage point, not so we can stockpile and be selfish, but so we can reach out to others in healing, kindness, and service."<sup>182</sup>

Concurrently, there will need to be further research to assess the imposition of institutional structures (the machine of religion), rejecting culture, political agendas, and hierarchy in rural church leadership. Allen Hirsch, quoting Neil Cole, states, "Structures are needed, but they must be simple, reproducible, and internal rather than external."<sup>183</sup> Hirsch continues by highlighting a fatalistic structure which is the existence of corporate leadership styles instead of Holy Spirit driven leadership within the church. He also argues this structure will not hold because the **goal is to preserve the institution instead of releasing the Holy Spirit**. Tex Sample, pastor, and author, has determined, social class structure can negatively affect the religious organizational structure, by instituting man-made religious traditions. Sample states, "the experience of class can be seen in terms of rituals [traditions] of inequality."<sup>184</sup> One Patheos Online article, [10 Toxic Traditions That Are Killing the Church](https://www.patheos.com/blogs/newwineskins/ten-toxic-traditions-that-are-killing-the-church/), includes "reducing Christianity to a voting block for one political party and choosing to reject culture instead of redeem it."<sup>185</sup> Additionally, there is a

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<sup>174</sup>Zondervan, *NIV Study Bible*. 1277.

<sup>175</sup>Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern*. 99.

<sup>176</sup>Green and Willimon, *NRSV Wesley Study Bible*. 1122.

<sup>177</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*, (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003). 197.

<sup>178</sup>Brueggemann. 197.

<sup>179</sup>Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern*. 99

<sup>180</sup>O.F.M. 99.

<sup>181</sup>O.F.M. 99.

<sup>182</sup>Beck and Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence*. 24.

<sup>183</sup>Hirsch, et al. 186

<sup>184</sup>Sample, *Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus*. Kindle, loc. 182.

<sup>185</sup>New Wineskins, "10 Toxic Traditions That Are Killing the Church," *New Wineskins* (blog), June 22, 2017, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/newwineskins/ten-toxic-traditions-that-are-killing-the-church/>.

difficulty in finding academic writings addressing these issues. There is a good possibility that other competing traditions or values are waiting to emerge which have not been noted here.

Ultimately, Richard Rohr offers a base from which all competing traditions or values may be measured: "Religion, bathed in Jesus' love, should function to radically re-connect (re-ligio = to re-ligament or reconnect"<sup>186</sup>) all of creation. God's love is the body of Christs' supporting ligament, fueled by the Holy Spirit and the Way of Jesus, which brings new possibilities of connection "even in the most hopeless situations when nothing else can."<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup>Rohr, et al, 7.

<sup>187</sup>Rohr, et al. 71.

## Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

### INTRODUCTION

This design worship report is being submitted as a requirement for the fulfillment of Doctor of Ministry course 850. This report will include all findings with respect to the NPO, its root causes, three “big” ideas, three concept pitches, overview of stakeholders, and one on one interviews.

### NPO STATEMENT

Churches are in serious decline or closing due to the lack of connection with the Holy Spirit.

### NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

The scope of the design workshop focused on three main areas, as to which concept (books, podcasts, tent revival, or a combination of all three) will best address the NPO. A metaphor chosen for this NPO is the “birthing room.” This will include birth stories in the work of the Holy Spirit; in churches and in the lives of individuals. The content will also focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in the church, and how it is essential in defining the church’s role in the community. The non-negotiables in the NPO are the need for stories relating to the work of the Holy Spirit, and how it has brought new life to dying or declining churches. The boundaries in the NPO research require strict focus on the work of the Holy Spirit in dying or declining churches. The costs associated with this NPO are minimal.

The main constraint in the NPO; what if the movement of the Holy Spirit is leading the church to closure? This is a question I had not considered in my research. Therefore, this question will need to be answered through additional research.

### NPO CONTEXT

The ministry setting for the NPO is focused on United Methodist rural churches in North Central Florida (small town USA). This area includes large farming with a mix of new companies relocating to the area. The culture setting is diverse racially, ethnically, and generationally. There is a strong sense of political identification (civil religion) which overshadows the work of the Holy Spirit. There is also a high poverty level mixed with wealthy retirees, which requires different approaches to being the church. In addition, the community has a surplus of churches, mostly with empty pews. There is a church on every corner, sometimes two.

### ROOT CAUSES

The dominant root cause, which came from the design workshop, is a lack of Holy Spirit

formed leadership. Without the Holy Spirit forming the pastoral and laity the body of Christ may become inward focused, unable to recognize their Holy Spirit given gifts for mission, and in turn allows “isms and schisms to create division among the body of Christ”<sup>188</sup> and in the culture. In churches, which lack the leadership of the Holy Spirit, there is a sense of exaltedness, fear, and division, an establishment grounded in ego, and negativity regarding the community where the church has been placed. These types of churches actively participate in gossip, and claim church buildings as fortresses to be protected, instead of missional outposts. This behavior has led the church to become irrelevant in the current context. Therefore, the church is dying or in decline, especially in western culture. Secondary causes illuminated are a lack of mission focus, humans ministering to humans instead of the Holy Spirit ministering to a people in need, and lack of knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the community.

### DEFINITION OF DONE

The ultimate goal of addressing the NPO is to have individuals re-ignited by the Holy Spirit in their own lives, and in the Body of Christ. This in turn, will ignite revival of the church, mission to the community, and create connection between the church and culture. This will be seen in the church's behavior through excellent stewardship of all resources, being united in the mind of Christ not unified by personal beliefs and operating out of love for God and community. The church will begin to see new life because of people telling their stories in the life of worship. New life which will inspire the Body of Christ into action, fostering Holy Spirit led leadership in which all disciples will be equipped for ministry. The done ness of this project will be the Holy Spirit experienced in the life of the church and community.

### THREE BIG IDEAS

Three big ideas which came from one-on-one interviews and the design workshop were:

1. Write a book.
2. Create a Podcast.
3. Plan and execute yearly tent revivals while having a website to promote stories.

### THREE CONCEPT PITCHES

The first concept derived from the design workshop is to write a book containing stories about how the Holy Spirit has been birthed in people’s lives, and how the birthing process has filtered through the church, and into the community. Also, through the design workshop, it was determined a book would be attractional to those who are already in the church body. In other words, many congregants do not listen to podcasts, but they do read. The book would meet the need of learning how to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals as well as the Body of Christ. This need is the essential benefit required for the rebirthing of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>188</sup>Rev. Mary Mitchell, “Discovery Workshop,” November 8, 2021.

in the lives of all believers and non-believers. My approach to meeting this need would initially seek to architect the basis for the book, by seeking stories focused on how the Holy Spirit has been birthed in the lives of people, the church and the community. In addition, sharing and inviting stories to be told through all means, including social media components in order to reach the "TGIF (Twitter, Google, Insta-gram, Facebook)"<sup>189</sup> population.

The risks in this project are individuals having a fear of sharing their Holy Spirit story. This fear is noted in the one-on-one interviews, in which people do not openly speak about the Holy Spirit. In fact, some pastors will not preach the Holy Spirit because their congregations are not comfortable with it.

The second concept is to produce a podcast based on people telling their stories of how the Holy Spirit has been rebirthed in their lives. The risk in this concept is it would address the younger population, but largely eliminate those in the church today. Because of the split in generational approaches, there was also a pitch to combine the book and podcast. Thereby, using both these modes of communication to reach those in church and those in the communities. The third pitch is developing and planning a yearly tent revival. This would include all things Holy Spirit: stories, preaching, and teaching. A tent revival would provide leaders with examples of how to preach the Holy Spirit, how the Holy Spirit is rebirthed through stories of mission and outreach and provide opportunities for conversations regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ.

These concepts will test how the Holy Spirit is recognized in everyday life, and how it moves the church into the community and culture, reviving the declining dying church. In addition, fostering the Holy Spirit led leadership within the church, which will assist in identifying ways the Holy Spirit is calling the Body of Christ to mission and outreach.

The area of measuring success for this NPO is subjective. Trying to calculate Holy Spirit led leaders and churches cannot be quantified like other goals or objectives. It is qualitative research of how the Holy Spirit is being re-birthed in individual lives, the church, and community. How does one measure a Holy Spirit filled ministry?

Benchmarks of success in addressing the NPO will be specifically sought through feedback (conversations, surveys, emails, etc.) of those who read the book. In other words, how has this book affected ones' recognition of the Holy Spirit's movement? It will be measured by Holy Spirit stories being told which has led to action and inspiration in the lives of believers to reach their communities. Other benchmarks will be leadership, feeling more comfortable preaching and teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit. Although numbers could be a benchmark for the Podcast, books purchased, and the attendance of a revival; the mystery of the Holy Spirit's work is seen through action not numbers.

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<sup>189</sup>*Preach The Story*, Vlog, 2020, <https://preachthestory.com/>.

There is a possibility that the outcome or measurable goals of stories are not enough to move people to rebirth the Holy Spirit. Therefore, a book may not carry the igniting spark of the Holy Spirit needed to address the NPO. It may mean a Podcast or a revival will be needed. Additionally, individuals may not connect with the birthing room metaphor and thereby fail to connect the lack of the Holy Spirit in their own stories, and the story of the church. These are questions which will need to be further excised as the research continues.

Other approaches to the NPO, in my research, are not as specific. Other researchers have focused on the Holy Spirit being absent from specific areas of the church. This research has not focused on the bottom-line narrative, which is, churches are in serious decline or closing due to the lack of connection with the Holy Spirit. In other words, it does not matter if a church is attractional and has five thousand members, if it is not re-birthed by the Holy Spirit, it will eventually decline or close. Churches with large bank accounts, large youth groups, professional praise bands, are not sustainable and will eventually go into decline or closure unless the Holy Spirit is being re-birthed in every member.

#### DESIGN WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

Each stakeholder who attended the design workshop provided information contained in a SWOT analysis, prior to the meeting, which addressed the NPO. The stakeholders were given items to discuss illuminating their experience of the Holy Spirit and how it formed their lives. They worked in teams and discussed scenarios and shared their thoughts about the workings of the Holy Spirit working in each section. This conversation unexpectedly turned into the stakeholders telling their personal stories of how the Holy Spirit had worked in their lives. This was a moment of confirmation in the research; people have stories of the Holy Spirit working, they just did not realize it was the Holy Spirit at work. Additionally, they had never been asked to share their story.

The one-on-one interviews were done with professional clergy. These interviews focused on how the Holy Spirit is re-birthed in their churches. A profound confirmation for the NPO came as clergy shared they do not speak about the movement of the Holy Spirit, because their congregations are not comfortable with it. The clergy did highlight worship (music and atmosphere) as the one place they do focus on releasing the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, all interviewees agreed if the church had Holy Spirit filled leadership, conflicts and negativity would cease to exist. Thereby, fostering a foundation of peace for growth instead of decline.

#### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

##### References

Sweet, Leonard I. *11 Indispensable Relationships You Can't Be Without*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: David C. Cook, 2012.

Relationships are indispensable. Dr. Leonard Sweet focuses on the most important

relationships in life. Specifically, relationships which create friends for the journey. He provides a scriptural nature to naming friends, and the importance of crossing the finish line of one's work, hand and hand. Sweet shares personal examples of relationships which have significantly impacted his life and work. This book will help me to begin to foster the necessary relationships in tackling the work of architecting different areas of transmission for my NPO. As well as, forming and maintaining the necessary relationships which foster growth and development.

Volf, Miroslav. *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*. Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock, 2001.

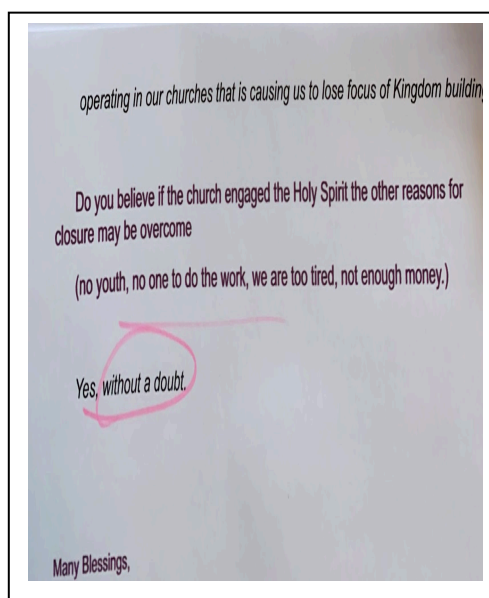
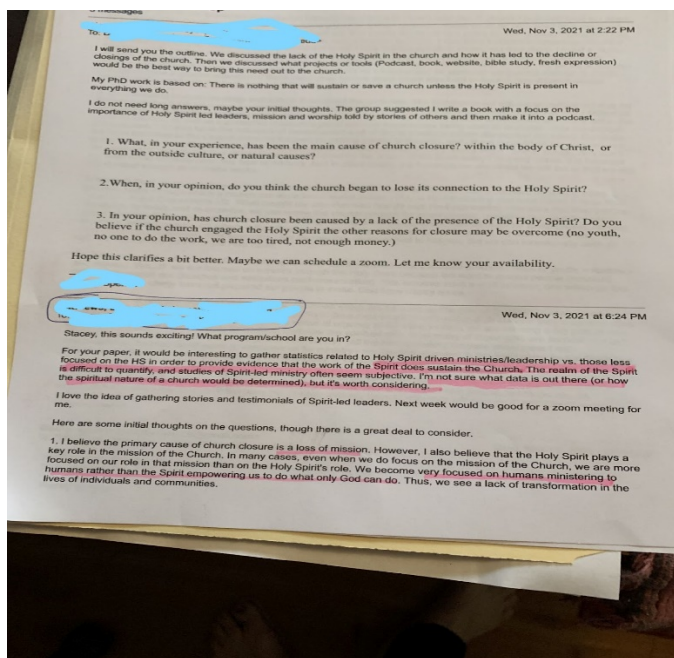
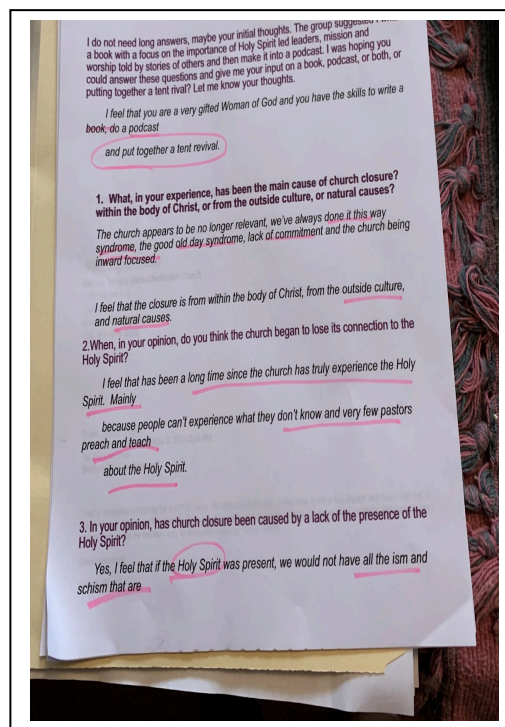
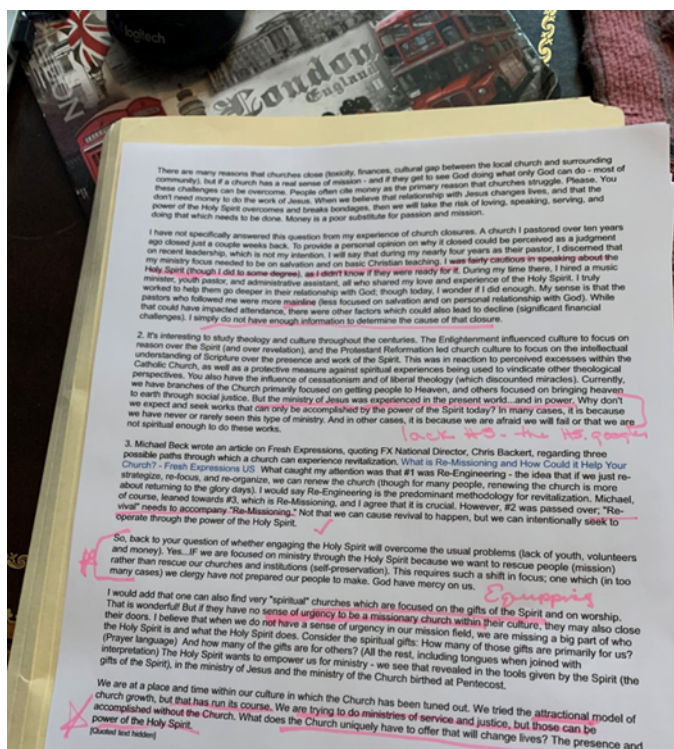
This book focuses on the Christians work in the Holy Spirit. Miroslav Volf draws from the teachings and writing of Karl Marx, Dr. Jurgen Moltmann, Romans 8:4, and Galatians 5:16. He has taught from the substance of this material at Fuller University, while a professor in the 1990's. Volf suggests there is a pneumatological theology of work based on the concept of charisma. The main purpose of this book is to enlighten the reader about the theological vision of human work in the Holy Spirit. This book highlights the importance of the work, Spirit and the new creation which is directly related to my NPO.

Wilson, Len. *Greater Things. The Work of the New Creation*. Plano, Texas: Invite Press, 2021.

The focus of this book is innovation. Specifically, Christian innovation which comes from the work of the Holy Spirit. Len Wilson focuses on the future as a possibility for new creation. Storytelling is one of the ways of Christian innovation which will lead to new creation. Storytelling is a specific link to addressing the NPO. Wilson's book highlights Jesus' promise that we will do greater things than him because the Holy Spirit guides current and future Christian innovation, which moves the church to new creation.

## Design Workshop

## One on One Interview Documentation





**Threats**

- Envy/Jealousy
- Fear/Division
- Establishment

Devil

Negative Spirit

**Weakness**

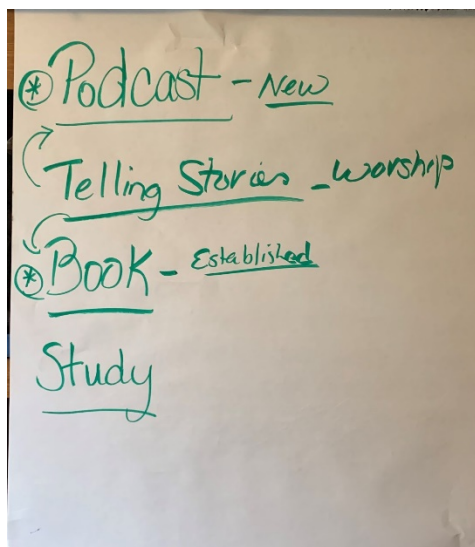
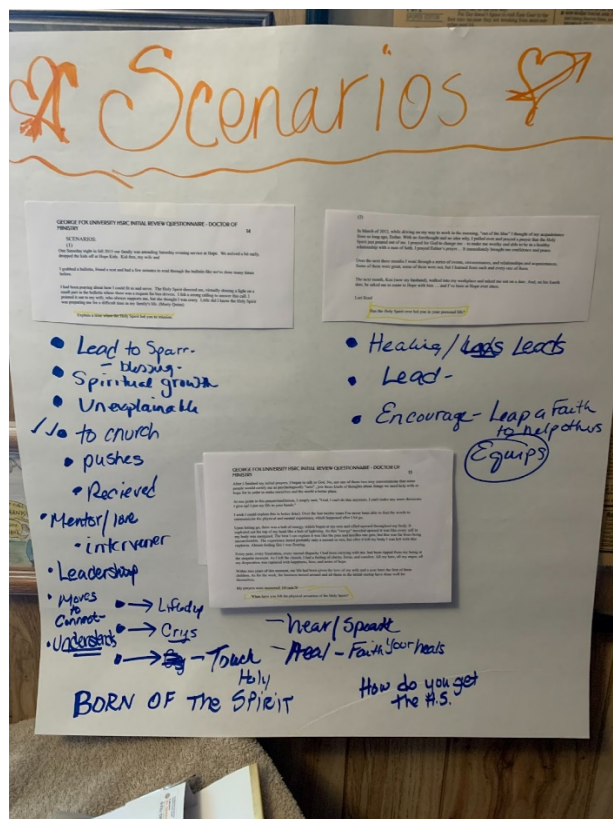
- No Recognition
- Gossip
- Ego's out of control
- Fear
- Lack of Faith & Doubt
- Envy
- Love

**Strengths**

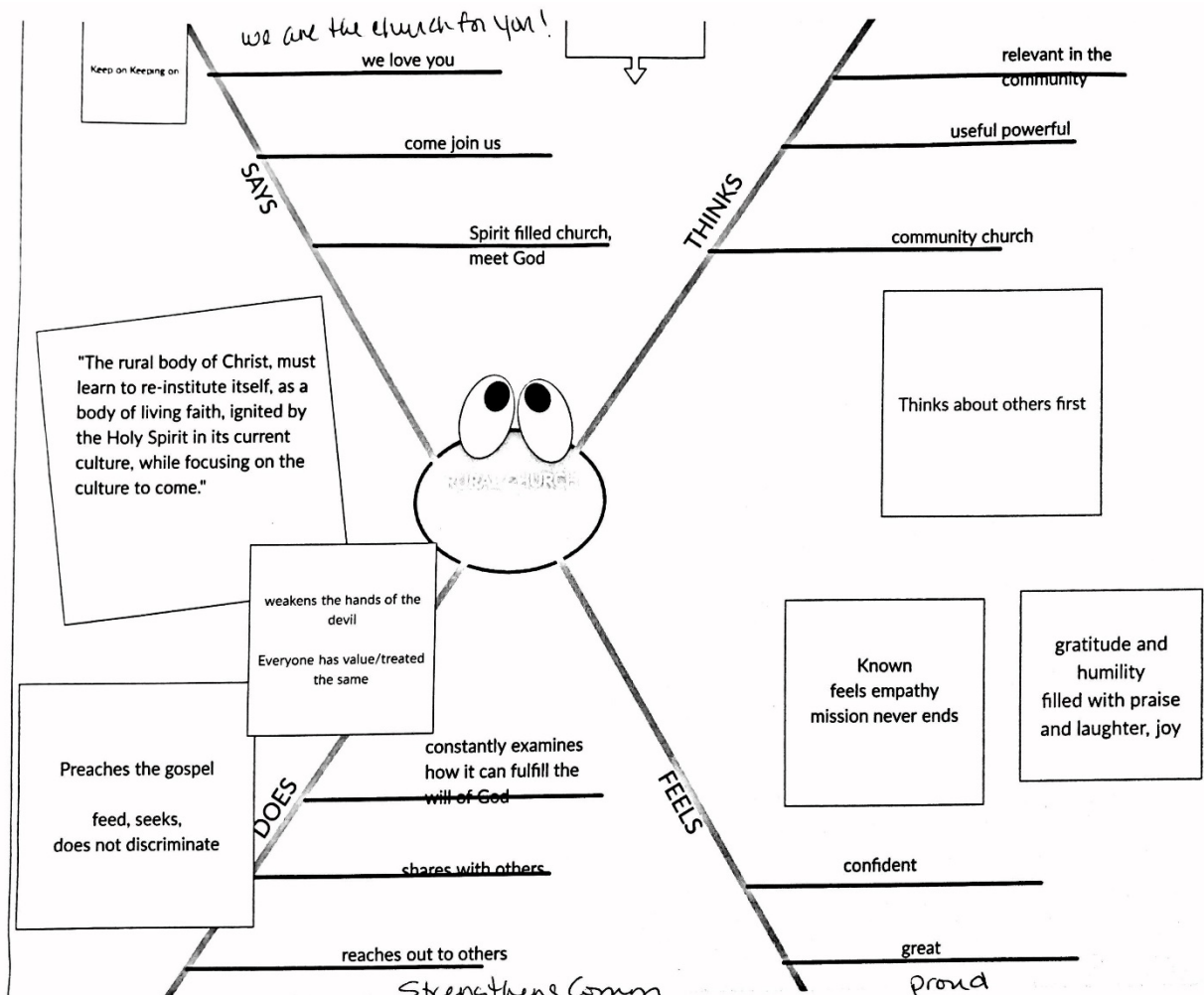
- Excellent Stewardship
- United <sup>to</sup> not unified
- LOVE

**Opportunities**

- Obedience <sup>Mind</sup> ✓
- Love the unlovable
- Share abundance
- Limitless



## DISCOVERY WORKSHOP EMPATHY MAP



## Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report

### INTRODUCTION

This is the Design Research Report required for the fulfillment of the course DMIN/DLGP851. This report reflects the prototype summary and findings gathered in the research process. This process determined which prototype connected with its culture and context, conveying the importance of the presence of the Holy Spirit in declining or dying churches.

### PROTOTYPE SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

#### PROTOTYPE DESCRIPTION

The two prototypes presented were a sample book and a three-week, short-term podcast on a Facebook Group called “Living Room Church.” The sample book titled RE-INNERGIZED contained titled chapters with narrative and ideas salted throughout. This prototype was presented digitally to multiple demographics of individuals, to read, and respond to the following questions:

- Based on this prototype, would you like to read more about this subject?
- Do you believe this could speak to all walks of life - ages, gender, race...etc?
- What are some things you think I have missed in your initial reading?
- Do you think this might help other churches who are in decline or dying?

The sample book contains stories told by people who have experienced the Holy Spirit in and through the church. These stories come directly from the prototype design workshop. It is an attempt to provide a way for others to see how the Holy Spirit works through the church by re-innergizing the Holy Spirit in each one of us. By re-innergizing, it is meant that each person must find the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in themselves, so the body of Christ may be effective in all situations, cultures, and events. The body of Christ must see the world through its Holy Spirit lenses, or it fails to be relevant. Therefore, it dies, confirming my NPO.

The podcast, which took place once a week for three weeks, was a conversation between clergy and laity about the presence of the Holy Spirit. Each week there were special guest speakers talking about how the presence of the Holy Spirit is near, and what the body of Christ looks and acts like when it has been re-innergized by the Holy Spirit.

### NPO STATEMENT

The church is dying or in decline because it lacks connection with the Holy Spirit.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION

Will people be interested in learning more about the Holy Spirit?

Will this project speak to all walks of life - ages, gender, race...etc?

What are some things I have missed in your initial reading?

Will this help other churches who are in decline or dying?

#### ASSESSMENT BENCHMARKS

The prototype book was sent to seven people throughout three churches in the local area. Each person was given a set of questions to respond to the reading. All seven read and returned their responses (Appendix A).

The podcast averaged 92.6 viewers each week, 3.5 shares, 13 comments, 15.6 hearts, likes, and reactions noted each week of the podcast. (Appendix B). The validity of the podcast is measured by the return rate which is exhibited above. Again, in the podcast, the NPO was the focus of the discussions: The church is dying or in decline because it lacks connection with the Holy Spirit. Much of the on-line discussion which took place and can be viewed at [LivingRoom Church | Facebook](#). Additionally, through the process of people watching and sharing, the podcast was shared to other social media sites such as YouTube, Twitch, and etc.

#### PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION

The book prototype was sent to clergy, congregants, professionals, educators, and others who have no church affiliation. The participants ranged in age from 23-78 years of age, varying ethnic groups, genders, and professions. Ultimately, the podcast reached anyone who was listening.

#### LEARNING SUMMARY

The response to the book and the questions provided confirmed the NPO. However, one participant was not interested in reading more about the subject. This participant felt he already knew enough about the subject. Yet, the participants fully supported the project and agreed with the importance of the subject matter, and that it is not discussed enough in church. Ninety percent of the participants conveyed the same theme which ran through all responses; I wanted to read more.

With the podcast, due to the wide range of exposure, extended conversations took place with people who were interested in hearing more about the subject. Michael Moynagh, author, and pioneer of Fresh Expression in England, gave insight into making sure one knows it is the Holy Spirit leading. This insight led me to add a chapter to the book titled, "How do you know it's the Holy Spirit?" Other conversations led to questions such as, "Can this book speak to different religious contexts?" and, "Will this book engage deeper with the emerging context of the mixed ecology church?" These questions will need to be researched further to identify the full relevance to the NPO.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT DISCOVERY

The most consistent finding with the book and the podcast confirmed the Holy Spirit is neglected in the body of Christ.

## BACKGROUND RESEARCH ESSAY AND EMERGING SOLUTION

Feminist theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson, poses these questions: "For those who grew up in church or who now attend church, did your pastors and Sunday School teachers talk about the Holy Spirit? Did you view the Spirit as playing an important role in your life or in the life of the Church?" She uses an observation from Heribert Muhlen on how the Holy Spirit is the forgotten God in your community.

*"The Holy Spirit never comes immediately to mind; rather, the Spirit seems like an edifying appendage to the doctrine of God...The Spirit is 'faceless,' as Walter Kasper phrases it; something 'shadowy,' in John Macquarrie's words; even 'ghostly,' a vague something or other according to Georgia Harkness. Of three divine persons the Spirit is the most 'anonymous,' in Norman Pittenger's view, indeed the 'poor relation' in the Trinity. Many have written of Spirit as the 'unknown' or at least the 'half known' God, as Yves Congar has pointed out. In Joseph Ratzinger's analysis, doctrine about the Holy Spirit has gone 'homeless' in the West; when it does appear, Wolfhart Pannenberg notes, it seems curiously 'watered down' from its biblical fullness. G.J. Sirks even calls the doctrine of the Spirit the 'Cinderella' of Theology"<sup>190</sup>*

This is where the church finds itself today, lacking the presence of the Holy Spirit. Even more telling is the Holy Spirit has lost its place as the third person of the Trinity. This finding is in direct connection with the determination of identifying the difference of life and death in a church connected to the Holy Spirit, and a church not connected to the Holy Spirit. In other words, confirming a church without the leadership of the Holy Spirit does not sustain growth, discipleship, or mission to the community, as stated in the Design Research Plan.

Also, according to the Design Research Plan, the prototype plans met the requirements of multi ethnic and culture dissemination. As well as, viewing through stories and conversations, the lack of connection between the church and the Holy Spirit. The prototypes also unearthed areas

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<sup>190</sup>Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, Anniversary edition (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002).



which need further research. These areas are the purposefulness of the Holy Spirit in bringing death to an unfruitful ministry or mission, the ability to reach those who feel they already know enough about the Holy Spirit, and bringing the historical work written about the Holy Spirit into a new contemporary light. In addition to the theologians mentioned by Elizabeth Johnson, the work of Roland Allen, in the book The Ministry of the Spirit, and Dr. Leonard Sweet's book The Greatest Story Never Told, Revive Us Again will assist in bringing the work and guidance of the Holy Spirit into contemporary culture. While Roland Allen, a missionary, speaks from an African Missionary point of view, he focuses on the missionary aspects of the book of Acts to facilitate the necessity of the Holy Spirit. He states, "Acts is the record of the events which followed the gift of the Holy Spirit and from that record we are to seek a revelation of the nature of the Holy Spirit."<sup>191</sup> It is through this lens the church is able to be on a mission with cultures and customs other than the ones the church currently knows and accepts. Dr. Leonard Sweet's book "puts a question mark over the gloomiest, exclamation point predictions of the physical decline and spiritual depletion, which is that the church is in the middle of an exodus and not the biblical kind."<sup>192</sup> Sweet also states, "Methodism needs to be introduced to its true self."<sup>193</sup> This message is for the church today. The church needs to be re-introduced to its true self. Its identity within the work of the Holy Spirit at the forefront of what the church is being and doing. The common thread which is emphasized through the historical writings is that without the presence of the Holy Spirit, the work of God cannot be accomplished. The Holy Spirit is the one who grows, connects, and establishes the fruitfulness of the ministry of the church, and it is the Holy Spirit who calls and anoints the body of Christ for mission. In other words, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the prescription needed for the dying or declining church regardless of the surrounding time, culture, or context it resides in.

Although it is true that there are other factors which facilitate church closure, such as sociological factors, inward focus, failure to have effective programs, music, mission, and leadership. In addition, rural church leaders and authors such as Text Sample, Allen Stanton, and Johnathan McMaster speak to the sociological and agricultural issues which surround rural communities (churches) and their abilities to survive in a corporate focus of the industrialized/techno society. Lastly, Henry L. Novello, "Death as Transformation," who asserts the Holy Spirit guides and leads death as a way of transforming. Through prototyping the book and podcast, it is obvious the Holy Spirit has been removed, or put aside, for human intervention, programs, and human discernment when it comes to church mission and ministry. Novello's book captured the people's need to know more about how the Holy Spirit works, leads and guides in the life of the body of Christ. The podcast opened the conversation about the Holy Spirit to a younger demographic who has heard nothing about the work of the Holy Spirit. In addition, pastors whose congregations request them not to preach or teach about the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>191</sup> Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit*.

<sup>192</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Greatest Story Never Told: Revive Us Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012).

<sup>193</sup> Sweet.

Therefore, it is the objective of this research to re-innergize the need of reclaiming the role of the Holy Spirit, in the church, as the heart of the church, the flowing blood of existence, illuminator, perfecter, grower, planter, guide, power, and sustainer. Ultimately, the One who can re-innergize the body of Christ in dying and dead churches to full abundant life.

### Most Viable Prototype (MVP)

In consideration of the research and lessons learned during prototyping, the MVP's are both the book and the podcast. Both prototypes elicited information which articulates and develops a deeper level of understanding of the NPO. The book connects with the established rooted church, and the podcast connects with the emerging generations. Both projects can be tailored to their context and culture for greater transmission. In addition, the projects can learn from one another, allowing for a greater flexibility and flow of information when seeking to re-innergize the church in the community.

Since the NPO focuses on the established rooted church in rural communities, it will be necessary to begin with the book first and add the podcast at a later date. There is a call for time sensitivity when it comes to those churches who are currently in decline or about to close. Therefore, the book should be the first project completed.

The viability of writing, marketing, and printing a book is attainable within the time frame for the completed project. The use of scheduled time for writing and research will be required, marketing and dissemination will need to be researched with the help of others, a team will need to be built for feedback and editing, and financial support for added resources needed. Consequently, resources to complete this project are in place. Through the cohorts, connections for professional authors, marketers, and project editors, connections and team building are already in the process. Therefore, the book project already has a foundation from which it can continue to grow, be completed, and sent forth with the Holy Spirit to help churches which are in decline or dying.



Stacey Spence, 2022b. "Re-Innergized." FaceBook. September 30, 2022.  
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086151921749>.



Living Room Church is the place where we highlighted my project with a live interaction on the topic of the Holy Spirit and the church for four weeks, once a week.

The picture below represents the responses, views and participation for the podcast which took place on a Facebook page called Living Room Church. Here is the link to the actual broadcast: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100043995742550>

DATE	LIKE, REACTIONS HEARTS	SHARES	VIEWS	COMMENTS
02/22/2022	16		72	13
03/01/2022	7	6	139	10
03/15/202	24	7	67	16
Average	15.6	3.25	92.6	13

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/livingroomchurch>.



Beck, Rev Michael. 2021. "Facebook." Facebook.com. 2021.  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/livingroomchurch>.



## Appendix E—Project Appendix Documentation

### Chapter One

#### The Historical Ministry of the Holy Spirit



*"The traditions in the work (ministry) of the Holy Spirit "is the energy which not only links us with the powerful impulses of the original church, but also gives us wings to fly."*  
 Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church.*"

*"Oh, to experience the church with wings, to fly wherever the Holy Spirit is calling, what a gift that would be!"*  
 Rev. Stacey Spence (daydreaming)

The wings, growth, health, and sustainability of the church come from one place: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In the story of creation, it is the witnessed work of the Holy Spirit which transformed and empowered God's people.

God spoke, and the light and dark were separated, mountains and land were created, and all the sea and land animals were created. God's creativity designed the universe through the breath of speech (Genesis 1 NRSV). The "Hebrew word רוח (*ruach*) can mean "wind" and "breath;" it can also refer to the life principle of persons or animals."<sup>194</sup> The *ruach* of God creates abundant life that is continually renewed to meet our current cultures and contexts.

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<sup>194</sup>Arndt, William, et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Logos Bible Software.

When the “I AM’s” *ruach* was released, the ministry of the Holy Spirit was ignited, and Moses set the captives free. Throughout God’s story the Holy Spirit creates, protects, guides, leads, and empowers the people. The Holy Spirit is our “refuge, our shelter, and our shade” (Is. 25:4 NIV). It transformed and empowered the people of God as they witnessed to the effects of the Holy Spirit on the natural world and the universal world, such as the trembling of the Earth, splitting of rocks, and life brought forth again in the Saints who had fallen asleep.<sup>195</sup> In Judges, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he caused the defeat of the Ammonites. The Prophet Ezekiel experienced the work of the Holy Spirit when the Lord came to him in a vision and told him to speak to dry, dead bones. The Lord said to Ezekiel, “Tell the dry bones hear the word of the Lord!..., ‘I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life’” (Ezekiel 37, NRSV). This is much like the vision given to the people by Isaiah: “the spirit from on high is poured out on us” (Is. 32:15 NRSV).

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit, known in the Greek as the *pneúma* (πνεῦμα, ατος, τό), continues in the New Testament with the baptism of Jesus and then is sent by Christ after the resurrection to fully lead, guide, grow, and comfort the Bride of Christ (the church). The Gospel of John states that “Jesus did many [miraculous] things. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (John 21:25 NIV). Then Jesus himself said to the disciples during the ascension, “But you will receive power [*dunamis*] when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NRSV). Jesus clarifies what he meant by these words in John 14:12, in which he says, “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father” (John 14:12 NLT). In other words, when Jesus goes to the

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<sup>195</sup>See Martin, Smith, and Oden, 29.

Father, Christ's Spirit will be sent to dwell within those who believe. In turn, those who receive the Holy Spirit through the baptism and Lordship of Christ will do greater things than Jesus. Since we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, not even the Gates of Hades will tear the church down! If this message is not enough to get your heart bursting with excitement, then read Peter's message to the people of Judea.

Peter addressed the people of Judea and said, "God declares that I [God] will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18 NRSV). Throughout historical writings of missionaries and circuit writers the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was critical in the expansion of the church.

Historically, in "AD 100 the church had less than 25,000; in AD 310 it had up to 20,002,000."<sup>196</sup> How did a motley crew of believers manage to revolutionize religion into faith? They were an "illegal religion, they had no church buildings, they did not have written scriptures, nor did they have an institutional church to guide and lead them."<sup>197</sup> They did not have programs, youth groups, or family nights out, and they made it difficult to become part of the church. What we discover is that they did not need a worldly attraction, because what they needed, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, was already inside of them. Early Christians knew that "God performed supernatural manifestations, by the Holy Spirit, through God's people as an act of love and as a way of exhibiting God's compassion for a broken"<sup>198</sup> creation. In fact, the work of the Holy Spirit was known to have happened by God's authority as an "authentic message of the

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<sup>196</sup>Hirsch, 18-19.

<sup>197</sup>Hirsch, 18-19.

<sup>198</sup>Rimi Xhemajli and Allan H. Anderson, *The Supernatural and the Circuit Riders: The Rise of Early American Methodism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 15.

gospel and validated those called which led to conversions.”<sup>199</sup> It was the work of the Holy Spirit which spread the gospel across a new time and culture.

Rev. Roland Allen (1868-1947), an English missionary, notes the book of Acts “is the record of events which followed the gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>200</sup> He wrote, “from that we are to seek a revelation of the nature of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>201</sup> It is from the revelation of the Holy Spirit which will add to our numbers “day by day those who were being saved.”<sup>202</sup> Today, we need full reliance on the Holy Spirit for the growth of the church and the discernment of church traditions. When the church refers to its traditions and reviews church growth, it will find that it has been a movement of the Holy Spirit which fanned the flame of multiplication. It will not find polarizing traditions which stifle church expansion and sustainability. Human-made religious traditions such as not healing on the sabbath, touching the unclean, eating with the unclean, sexism, and culture barriers were challenged by Jesus through Scripture. In the Incarnation the Old Testament law had been fulfilled, and in turn, outward examples of our inward faith such as circumcision, kosher foods, or not eating with sinners are no longer necessary for the forgiveness of sins and salvation.

These types of human-made religious traditions came into conflict when Jesus ate with sinners and healed on the sabbath and when the disciples ate bread with unwashed hands (Mark 2-7). Questioned by the religious authorities regarding these religious traditions, Jesus responded, “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the human tradition...on your own traditions...thus you are nullifying the word of God by your tradition that

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<sup>199</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 15.

<sup>200</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 9.

<sup>201</sup>Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit: Selected Writings of Roland Allen* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2006), 13.

<sup>202</sup>Allen, 16.

you have handed down" (Mark 7:8-13 NIV).<sup>203</sup> These human-made religious traditions "were pious customs of human origin passed down to support the living out of the law."<sup>204</sup> At some point, the Pharisees were unable to separate the law of Moses from "its human support system"<sup>205</sup> [religious traditions which were not of God] which enabled the use of human-made religious customs as a way to navigate the requirements of the Torah. This practice enabled personal bias and belief systems to alter the meaning of God's law.

One sees how religious customs continued to navigate requirements of the Torah in the book of Acts. In Acts, followers of Jesus continued to be persecuted because of healings on the sabbath, conversions of Gentiles into the Jewish community, and defiling oneself with unclean people or food. The Apostle Peter had a vision from God. In this vision, God tells Peter, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 11 NIV). It is evident God has made all of creation clean through Jesus the Christ by the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Holding onto human-made traditions over *paradosis* (the act of giving up or to giving over) has made the church idle. In other words, the church has chosen not to emulate the model of Jesus by reassigning the old religious traditions to embrace Jesus' commandments to love God and neighbor. The church is warned in Mark 7:8, about abandoning the greatest of all commandments, "You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human (made) tradition," and in Galatians 4:3, "So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits

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<sup>203</sup>Mark 7:8-13: "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions." **9** And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe[a] your own traditions! **10** For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,'[b] and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' **11** But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— **12** then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. **13** Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

<sup>204</sup>Marcellino D'Ambrosio, "Does Jesus Condemn Tradition?" Catholic Exchange, August 30, 2012, <https://catholicexchange.com/does-jesus-condemn-tradition>.

<sup>205</sup>D'Ambrosio.

of the world.” The elemental spirit of the world can be human-made religious traditions which have encased the church in its building.

The early church's idleness came into sharper focus when the tradition of Colossae made room for human-made religion to “harmonize Christianity with the prevailing religious outlook of the pagan culture, which modeled their own thinking [...] attempting the synthesize Christian and pagan ideas, destroying the unique and liberating power of new faith in Christ.”<sup>206</sup> In other words, idleness caused the church to follow false teachings.

Considering all these reasons, Jesus was uniquely aware of the dangers in human religious traditions masking both false teachings and true religious law. Therefore, he states, “I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as Jesus passed them on to you” (1 Corin. 11:2 NRSV). Jesus leaves the model to evaluate human-made tradition, the model of the liberating power of new faith in Christ, and that is the framework in which the rural church can find relevance, i.e., through reassigning old traditions to meet the current and future culture context. The Triune God has prepared the church since its inception for any culture or context in which it finds itself. Therefore, the church should be able to hold traditions which are not grounded in the Holy Spirit at bay in the life of the church. However, this has not happened, and the continued potluck dinners cater to those who already attend church, and many rural churches believe that yard sales are their mission. While yard sales could be used as a mission tool, it would take intentionality to assure raising money is less important than welcoming the community. Therefore, the focus of these events has been about raising money to pay the bills because the offerings of the body of Christ are not enough to pay the operating expenses of the church. The focus on raising money creates the illusion, for the church, that the church is sustainable. The reality, however, is that the church is sustained off the backs of the

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<sup>206</sup>George Arthur Buttrick, Walter Russell Bowie, Paul Scherer, John Know, and Samuel Terrien, eds., *The Interpreter's Bible - A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 190.



community, instead of the community being sustained by the church. The work of the Holy Spirit will transform this type of thinking by the church when the church is ready to take a truthful and in-depth look at itself. The church will need to ask the questions, "Why are we doing this and are we doing this as 'a holy duty for God?'"<sup>207</sup> Richard Rohr, in his book *The Wisdom Pattern, Order, Disorder, and Reorder* highlights the need for the church to go through a time of disorder or chaos to reorient itself to the culture and time. As the church navigates the disorder with the Holy Spirit, it will reorder itself through transformation. Then the church can be re-energized; it will then see growth and sustainability in the hands of the body of Christ, not from the community through yard sales. This type of transformation does not happen overnight. The church must take the time to discern its mission in the community. Its mission is not about keeping the doors to the church open, it's about opening the doors into the community and walking through them. Richard Rohr tells us, "Our inner myths determine what we do and don't notice, what we consider significant and what we ignore."<sup>208</sup> There are times when the church is self-focused instead of other-focused. It is in our other-focused state of being that the revelations of the Holy Spirit come to pass. This is the time when the church will become relevant and sustainable. The circuit riders of early Methodism are the model for the current church's other-focused state.

One of the great examples of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit or the reliance of the Holy Spirit with regards to church growth and vitality was in circuit riders of early methodism. Rimi Xhemajli, Author of *The Supernatural and the Circuit Riders*, connects the work of the Holy Spirit as a supernatural movement which "creates miracles and wonders."<sup>209</sup> In fact, one could state that early Methodism itself was a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit on the Anglican church. In order for

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<sup>207</sup>Richard Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder*, illustrated edition (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2020), 29.

<sup>208</sup>Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern*, 49.

<sup>209</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 13.

the church to spread within the frontier lands of the 18th and 19th centuries, "the Holy Spirit would be the source of this new experiential religion, one exceptionally suited to the ravages and hardship of people eking out an existence on the frontier."<sup>210</sup> The tradition of methodism stressed the importance of what Xhemajli calls the "supernatural element" of faith. This supernatural element was how the Methodist movement offered "religious power and autonomy to marginalized women, to African American slaves, the poor, and the distressed."<sup>211</sup> Today's church must call on the supernatural element of the Holy Spirit to live out this important tradition set forth from our faithful ancestors. Our faithful ancestors demonstrated the need for the Holy Spirit in the movement and expansion of the faith. All acts of faith; "conversion, baptism, holy communion, callings, strategies, and hardships were governed by the supernatural movement"<sup>212</sup> of the Holy Spirit. These acts of faith were not human driven but Holy driven, and without The Holy nothing was being driven.

Francis Asbury, leader of the American Methodist Movement knew how essential the governing of the Holy Spirit was in faith. The circuit riders who rode under Francis Asbury held that the supernatural movement of the Holy Spirit "validated the calling of the circuit riders and led to conviction, conversation, and was used as an evangelistic tool."<sup>213</sup> This holy tool "displayed God's love for humanity" and exemplified the need to live a holy lifestyle.

The Rev. Alfred T. Day III, former GCAH General Secretary states, "Jesus brought a message that God's holy love can be experienced by everyone and that once it's experienced by everyone the Holy Spirit takes up residence in one's life and makes a difference."<sup>214</sup> John Wesley,

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<sup>210</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, xv.

<sup>211</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, xv.

<sup>212</sup>Xhemajli and. Anderson, xiii.

<sup>213</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, xiii.

<sup>214</sup>"Francis Asbury: A Flame Spirit," The United Methodist Church, accessed September 30,

founder of the Methodist movement, in 1738 after attending a service found his heart strangely warmed. His personal experience of the Holy Spirit confirmed, to him, he was indeed assured of his salvation. This is the re-energizing movement of the Holy Spirit, which should be physically experienced by every believer. The Apostle Paul gives us a glimpse into what the church resembles when the church has experienced the Holy Spirit. He stated, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephes. 4:2-6 NIV).

There is only one place the church will find its call, mission, its innovation and creativity, growth, sustainability, spiritual maturity, its outward focus, dy-no-mite saints, and unity with each other: through calling on the Holy Spirit to come and be poured out into all believers.

The example of a Holy Spirit filled life is found in the mission and ministry of Jesus the Christ. When Jesus was baptized, "heaven was opened, and John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Jesus" (Matt. 3:16-17 NIV). Jesus' ministry began with the anointing of the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and his mission and ministry continued with the same anointing. In addition, the gospels provide evidence for the indwelling and re-innergizing of the Holy Spirit with the healings of the blind, sick, lame, and dead, feeding of the five thousand, and exorcisms. One of the most important re-innergizing moments in scripture is Jesus' crucifixion, when Jesus releases his final breath back to God so that Christ's Spirit may be returned to the church. This return of the Holy Spirit is how the church can continue to provide the mission and ministry of Jesus to the world. Through the life of Jesus, "Future followers [us] are given the authority through the indwelling of Christ's Holy Spirit to perform these same supernatural phenomena [*miracles*]." <sup>215</sup>

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2022, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/francis-asbury-a-flame-spirit>.

<sup>215</sup>Xhemajli and Anderson, 13.

If it is true that the disciples of Christ have the ability to perform miracles, then why do we seek to find renewal and revival from the public sector?

It has been my experience that the one place the faith community should NOT turn when discerning the will of God is the public sector. I make this claim through my personal experience of working with experts on church growth. The experts I have worked with are from secular marketing companies; they tell us how to market our church and what we need to make people want to come to church. Here is an example of what I mean.

At one time in my ministry, I served a large church. During my seven years there we had several stewardship campaigns and raised large amounts of money. The church consulted a firm to come in and evaluate the church campus and give suggestions on how we could make it more attractive to the community. The cost for the evaluation alone was exorbitant, and the suggestions given to the church, in my opinion, appeared to be a plan for a new theme park. I remember sitting around the table, and when the marketing expert told us the plan for a two-story slide from the second story to the ground and noted how excited the kids would be to have that, my chin dropped. How in the name of the Lord will a two-story slide provide transformation in the life of the church? And the cost for that slide! While the architect's intentions were good and knowledgeable, it is critical for the church to lean into the Holy Spirit and the way of Jesus when deciding what is best for the church.

While we should always be in the world, our decisions should not be made through a world view, but through the lens of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will guide and lead the church in how to present the gospel to the world in fresh and new ways. There is no secular program or way of doing church which will trump the movement of the Holy Spirit. In churches we often spend an exorbitant amount of money and time for secular "experts" to tell the church how and what people will like, so they will attend church. This way of being church is not the model the sacred scriptures handed down. What has been handed down to the current culture and context

is to rely on and release the Holy Spirit, the one who can make the church relevant again through the work of the saints.

The Holy Spirit has empowered believers throughout history, providing endurance, discernment, and growth in congregations who are proclaiming abundant life in the name of Jesus the Christ.

It's time for the church to reclaim the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, become re-innergized, and run (not walk) into the community where it is planted for the sake of Christ.

## Chapter Four

### The People's Witnesses

### Spiritual Maturity



*"Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth."*

Ephesians 4:14

The Holy Spirit is *"that which animates or gives life to the body, breath, (life-)spirit"*<sup>216</sup>

*"God can breathe life into any dead situation, and it shall live. Through new life, the new creation will bring a deeper level of witness, stewardship, healing, and miracles. Who can ask for anything better than that?"*

Rev. Jackie Beard

I remember my first clergy appointment. I preached on Sunday and then cried because I needed another sermon for the following Sunday. How was I going to be a pastor and do all the work it entails? This foreboding feeling would soon wane as I began to serve this church, Hawthorne United Methodist Church in North Central Florida, and saw how dedicated this church is to their community. In serving this church, I began to see the value of a small church and its community. I was witnessing a church which had survived mostly by the giving of a handful of

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<sup>216</sup>William Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 832, Logos Bible Software.

people and through service which had been done by a handful of people with little help or assistance from the denomination. The forbidding feeling waned, but I was tired for my people. I could only imagine how tired they had become holding the church and its community on their shoulders.

My flock needed encouragement, a leader who said “yes” to new ways of doing ministry and also a leader who allowed them to fabulously fail and then pressed them to then try again. I became my congregation’s cheerleader. One of the first steps for this congregation was to look and see what they had accomplished in the name of Jesus the Christ. Once we began unwrapping the mission which had already been nurtured, the body of Christ began to become re-energized. The church began to ask the question, “What does God have next for us to do in mission in this community?”

In the meantime, I began visiting other small community churches, visiting with their pastors, and asking questions. Many of the answers were the same. We are tired, and we have been holding on with our fingertips for a long time! It was at this point that the Holy Spirit filled me with the love of a small church community and the desire to see life in what others saw as a valley of dry, dead bones.

After months of prayer, I began to ask the Holy Spirit for the way forward in this specific church. The Holy Spirit revealed through prayer that I needed the entire body of the leadership to be praying with me. So, at each council meeting we began discerning, through praying, God’s will to be brought forth in our work. Yet, for me, something was missing in our discernment process. I felt the nudge to seek out the Holy Spirit in a deeper relationship. Seeking the movement of the Holy Spirit for this church was important, but God was doing something greater in me also: deepening my faith to fully rely on the Holy Spirit. So, over the following six months, on my own, I would pray that the Holy Spirit would rest upon our hearts and show us the way forward. God was

leading me to a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit, or maybe it was the nudging of the Holy Spirit. What began to happen during this time is that the more I sought out the Holy Spirit, the more I saw life in what others saw as dead. The sacred writings of John began to come to life for me: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63 NRSV). Once the church united and began seeking the Holy Spirit, this is what happened.

In the fall of 2016, in a joint venture with a local Episcopal church, the church opened an outreach center named Hawthorne Area Resource Center, in a small house. Within the first two years, this mission supplied 6,358 people with 238,113 pounds of food, as well as offering social services and 586 personal interventions. All of this was accomplished with a budget under \$20,000. In other words, it all took place through the gifts of others and the will of God. In addition, this church began a prison ministry writing group, while continuing with their thrift store, which also supports foster families with clothing, shoes, and games for children who have been displaced. Our church has opened our buildings to local community events, expecting nothing in return. The more we gave of what we were blessed with, the more the Holy Spirit moved in our missions. As the church leaned into the community where the Holy Spirit was already at work, we began to see new ways of fostering relationships to bring the love of Christ to others. Through the discernment of the Holy Spirit, this church has learned to give out of its scarcity, knowing fully that reliance on the Holy Spirit brings life and not death. The Holy Spirit has moved this church to metaphorically experience the following pronouncement of God:

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows" (Malachi 3:10 NIV).

The church tested God in its scarcity, and the blessings have been overflowing ever since.



I was hooked on the Holy Spirit! I knew re-innergizing of the church was real and possible. Then the Holy Spirit began to press me into deeper conversations about other declining or closing rural churches. Eventually, this conversation would lead me to take a second appointment at another declining rural church, Sparr United Methodist Church (Sparr). I asked for a three-year commitment to keeping the church open to see what God would do with this church. My District Superintendent said, "OK." I hung up the phone, looked to the sky and said, "Lord, what have I done?" This time there were no tears! I knew this was the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit would lead and guide. All I needed to do was hold the line and get out of the way. I also knew that if we could re-innergize another small congregation, then revival would happen.

Rev. Jackie Beard gives us a look inside his experience with the re-innergizing Holy Spirit at Sparr when he states:

As a servant, I have witnessed and experienced the Holy Spirit move in a church and cause that church to grow spiritually and naturally. This means church growth in discipleship and in numbers. Whenever a church grows spiritually and naturally it can impact the community by showing the community that the church cares about both the body of Christ and the people of the community.

However, when a church is not guided by the Holy Spirit, it will not and cannot make a difference within the congregation or the community. The Holy Spirit is the key foundation to following a powerful community inside and outside the walls of the church. I have personally witnessed the Holy Spirit move in a church when others thought the church was dead or dying. Not only did God's breath move, but it took the church to a deeper level of mature faith.<sup>217</sup>

Rev. Beard is correct that the rural church needs a mature faith to re-establish it as the

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<sup>217</sup>Jackie Beard, interview with pastor, Sparr, Florida, January 12, 2022.

bridge connecting Jesus to the community. Unfortunately, there are times when the church would rather that the culture change to meet the church's requirements. Consequently, the church should be embracing the culture and letting God both transform the culture and the church together. As Tom Rainer in his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* shares, "The [immature] church refused to look like its community. The church needed the 'good old days' back when it was booming as the community flocked to the church."<sup>218</sup> However, while the parents and grandparents flocked to the church, the children and the grandchildren did not. This is where the rural churches began to implode instead of explode into a community, which no longer felt welcomed in the church. The church began to be more concerned about "protecting the way it did church than reaching the residents of the community."<sup>219</sup>

Leonard Sweet, author of *Nudge*, identifies what the mature church and spiritually mature individuals should be: missionaries in a new community or context. Sweet states, "Our quest is to be so filled with the Spirit of God, and to be wearing interpretive Jesus goggles, that we not only notice the context, but we are able to interpret it and respond to it."<sup>220</sup> Jesus' interpretive goggles are what Hirsch calls contextual intelligence.<sup>221</sup> Contextual intelligence gathers all resources available to listen and read the culture. This "structure supports strategic partnerships, shared leadership, and the pooling, allying and linking"<sup>222</sup> of all resources to learn the culture and context of a community. The contextual intelligence of the rural church is severely lacking. It has failed to realize what works in one community will not always work in another. Michael Beck calls this type

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<sup>218</sup>Rainer, 25.

<sup>219</sup>Rainer, 27.

<sup>220</sup>Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 50.

<sup>221</sup>Hirsch, 121.

<sup>222</sup>Beck and Sweet, 12.

of thinking “having a false assumption”<sup>223</sup> of knowing the truth about what will engage each community.

Jesus’ story is one of contextual intelligence, and it consisted of innovation and creativity. As Teasdale states, “Jesus’ message of love radiating through truth and light is how he attempts to dwell in this society on this tiny planet we call our home.”<sup>224</sup> The world is our parish, and if the rural church fails to embrace the world in all forms and contexts, “the great commission, to go and make disciples, becomes the great omission.”<sup>225</sup> The rural church must begin to build an authentic Christian community where Jesus is Lord and “all who come will experience love, acceptance and forgiveness,”<sup>226</sup> regardless of what the context is and where the community resides. The following true-life example written by Rev. Sharon Surrency illustrates how the Holy Spirit overflows into the community with the careers of the disciples.

### **Child in Care Story**

*Peter said, “I don’t have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!”*

*Acts 3:6-8*

In the child welfare program where I am appointed to serve as a deacon in the UMC, I have gained a new appreciation of how I can ask the Holy Spirit to go before a child who is experiencing the trauma of abuse and place the right people in their path that will make their treatment more bearable and hopefully lead to healing.

I have a child who is 7 who has been sexually and physically abused as well as has

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<sup>223</sup>Beck and Sweet, 5.

<sup>224</sup>Teasdale, xxxi.

<sup>225</sup>Rainer, 41.

<sup>226</sup>Hirsch, 31.

experienced emotional and mental abuse and trauma because of her experiences. She came to us after a Baker Act where she tried to kill herself by hanging. The clinical team I am on put services in place for her, and she was placed in a loving, caring home. I spoke with the caregiver who is not a relative, and she asked for prayer so that they would know how to minister to this child. We prayed for the Holy Spirit to go before her in all her treatment and therapies and prayed specifically for the comfort of the Holy Spirit to help this child overcome her nightmares. The foster mom reported that after that, they saw the psychiatrist who wanted to prescribe another psychotropic medication to help alleviate the nightmares and the bed wetting. The foster mom asked him to wait and see how she did until the next month's medication management appointment. I placed this child on our prayer chain at my local church and continued to reach out to the foster mom to see how the child was doing.

After about a week, the foster mom called and reported to me very excitedly that the child has not had nightmares in a week although has had some occasional bed wetting, and the child reported the "strangest thing." She told the foster mom that she "likes the nice man that talks to her when she tries to get to sleep." This child does not have a recording device or a TV in her room, so we were perplexed at the statement. When queried further the child said that the "nice man" tells her not to be afraid and how much she is loved and how special she is to God.

As I listened to her, we were both having Holy Spirit chills as we both affirmed that this was the work of the great comforter, the Spirit of God.

This child may not ever know that this was requested on their behalf, but I have seen so many situations where things that seemed impossible to arrange just fell into place. This one fell

into place quickly and was at the right time.<sup>227</sup>

When we match mature faith with the nudging of the Holy Spirit in work, play, and faith, re-innergizing positively affects everyone around us. This combination of movement is what Rev. Michael Beck refers to as the “blended ecology”<sup>228</sup> of the church, using the metaphor of a tree's ecosystem to explain a blended ecology. The ecosystem is about “cultivating the existing tree, and planting the seeds of the tree to come, as well as grafting them together in one greater vine-like organism.”<sup>229</sup> In the story above, it was the rooted church that cultivated the disciple into mature faith, the disciple who planted the seeds of faith in her work, and the Holy Spirit grafted the church and the community together for the benefit of those in need. This is what re-innergizing looks like.

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<sup>227</sup>At this time, the child has been adopted by her foster mom, is doing great in school, and is active in her church's youth group.

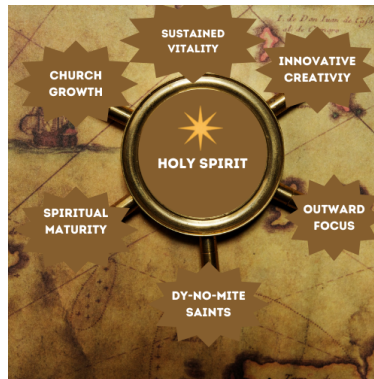
<sup>228</sup>Beck, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2019), 59.

<sup>229</sup>Beck, 59. See Luke 13:6-9, Matthew 13: 1-9, John 15:1-6.

## Chapter 6

### Sustained Vitality

#### The Gift of Prayer, the Blended Ecology, and Cultural Intelligence.



*If Thou the Spirit give by which I pray:  
 My unassisted heart is barren clay,  
 That of its nature self can nothing feed;  
 Of good and pious works Thou art the seed,  
 That quickens only when Thou say'st it may;  
 Unless Thou show to us Thine own true way*

*No man can find it: Father! Thou must lead.*

*The prayers I make will then be sweet indeed.*

Michelangelo

One question presented to me at the beginning of my Ph.D. work was, "What if the Holy Spirit intentionally brings death to the church?" This question required thought, research, and prayer. If the answer was yes, then my Ph.D. work was null and void. If the answer was no, however, then my work had just begun. What I discovered was that the answer is both yes and no.

The Holy Spirit is present as we see in the time of Jesus' crucifixion, but the Holy Spirit is also the driving force of Jesus' resurrection. What makes life come from death is the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if the people in a dying church pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit and do what it

tells them to do, the dying church will experience life. The new life given may present itself in a different way (i.e., resurrection), but it will be life. Another death-to-resurrection story is told by Pastor Jim Cymbala in his book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Hearts of His People*. He tells the story of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir and its origins. I will not retell the entire story, but I highly suggest reading his book. What I will share is his reliance on prayer and the Holy Spirit brought resurrection to his church.

Cymbala was placed in a church which was on the verge of collapse in Brooklyn N.Y. He had little experience as a pastor, no money to pay the bills, and about 10 people who attended church. After several disappointing nights of worship and what one might call a tiny breakdown, Cymbala stated, "We *had* to have a visitation of the Holy Spirit, or bust."<sup>230</sup> So, they began Sunday night times of prayer. Through this time of prayer, they discerned that their growth would not come from "transfer growth," people leaving one church and going to another. The growth would need to come from the Holy Spirit's power "to transform the desperate lives of the people all around [them]."<sup>231</sup> Cymbala's church also realized that "all the modern trends and new ideas about church growth were now irrelevant."<sup>232</sup> Ultimately, Cymbala and his church prayerfully claimed the Holy Spirit would result in the birth of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. If you do not know them, go to YouTube and listen to the life that the Holy Spirit can bring from death. What made this transformation possible was that Cymbala and his church embraced the "divine trends"<sup>233</sup> of growth and renewal brought forth by the Holy Spirit through prayer.

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<sup>230</sup> Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire and Fresh Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 25.

<sup>231</sup> Cymbala, 22.

<sup>232</sup> Cymbala, 26.

<sup>233</sup> Cymbala, 189.

The act of prayer is mentioned over 850 times in our sacred scriptures. In Ephesians 8:18 we are told, "Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints." Then in Galatians 5:25, we are told, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit." Because we pray, "You know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you" (John 14:17). With active prayer "The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words"<sup>234</sup> (Rom. 8:26). We are the vehicles of the Spirit's work which is carried on within us, through the faith that comes from life in the Holy Spirit. Author J. Oswald Sanders in his article "Praying in the Spirit," highlights the South African writer, teacher, and pastor Andrew Murray and his statement on the divine work of prayer:

Just as wonderful and real is the divine work of God on the throne graciously hearing, and by His mighty power answering prayer. Just as divine as is the work of the Son, interceding and securing and transmitting the answer from above, is the work of the Holy Spirit in us in the prayer that awaits and obtains the answer. The intercession within is as divine as the intercession above."<sup>235</sup>

In his article, Sanders continues by discussing the "weakness and inadequacy in the art of prayer,"<sup>236</sup> and how God "gave the Holy Spirit to instruct, inspire, and illuminate our hearts and minds. Unaided by Him, we would be likely to pray for things not only contrary to God's will but injurious to ourselves."<sup>237</sup> In other words, "The Holy Spirit was to be "the Place" of the prayer in the sense of being the surrounding, penetrating, transforming atmosphere of the spirit of the praying

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<sup>234</sup>Oswald J. Sanders, "Praying in the Spirit," *C.S. Lewis Institute*, September 3, 2004, <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/praying-in-the-spirit/>.

<sup>235</sup>Sanders.

<sup>236</sup>Sanders.

<sup>237</sup>Sanders.



Christian.”<sup>238</sup> Author E. Stanley Jones reminds us that prayer does not bend the will of God, but it bends our wills towards God’s will for us. When God’s will is our will, we are ready for the work God has for us. The Holy Spirit holds the place for us to pray to God in order to receive God’s will. This is how I began to answer the second question asked of me in this project development.

A second question was asked of me by Michael Moynagh, author and planter of Fresh Expressions in the United Kingdom. He asked me, “How do you know it’s really the Holy Spirit guiding the church?” Again, this question had implications for my Ph.D. work. How do I know it’s the Holy Spirit? This seems like a question I should have asked myself, but now I need to know how to prove it is the Holy Spirit at work. How does one prove it’s the Holy Spirit when you cannot see the Holy Spirit? My initial response to this question was that if the Holy Spirit is present in the work, then we will be guided by our Holy Spirit gifts (1st Corinthians 12) and we will find the fruits of the Spirit activated in the work (Galatians 5:22-23). While my response is valid, I learned the answer to this question goes much deeper.

The answer to this question is about bringing light to the darkness that is in the entire world. Since this is an answer for the entire cosmos, it means that the work of the Holy Spirit acknowledges that “I belong to you, you to me, and we to each other[...] We have been brought together by the goodness of God for reasons beyond our choosing and for the purposes of God.”<sup>239</sup> When the Holy Spirit is present, we are all working together for the glory of God, and we embark on a journey into a deep spiritual relationship with Christ and one another. When the Holy Spirit is present, we see other humans as “living signs and all of life as the continuing

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<sup>238</sup>Sanders.

<sup>239</sup>Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015), xxv.

manifestation of God's love."<sup>240</sup> When the church can begin to see its relationship with the community and one another as a gift from God, the Holy Spirit is present. Our relationships, the gift from God, "help mold and shape us, reminding us of the inner quality of God's own love."<sup>241</sup> The presence of the Holy Spirit enables the church to blend with the community to have conversations about transformation through the power of God's love.

The blending of the church into the community is what Rev. Dr. Michael Beck calls a "blended ecology."<sup>242</sup> In the life of the "inherited church"<sup>243</sup> there are people who are being nudged by the Holy Spirit to do something different to reach the world for Jesus. Beck categorizes these disciples into three groups; "pioneers, supporters, and permission-givers."<sup>244</sup> Pioneers are the ones who have had a special calling to go and seed the grounds outside of the church. They are the ones who begin new expressions of church. For example, I have a fresh expression of ministry which gathers at a local barn. We ride horses and share the gospel. There are fresh expressions of church in tattoo parlors, bowling alleys, and bars, and there is kayaking church and ax throwing church. These unusual expressions of church exist because it is where the community outside the church gathers. So, the church goes where the people gather and blends in to share the gospel. The supporters of the pioneers are the ones who help provide the place for this new expression of ministry. Often the supporters are called the persons of peace. They are the ones who encourage and support sending forth the pioneers. The permission-givers are usually linked directly to the inherited church and use its resources to help the pioneers launch

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<sup>240</sup>Nouwen, *Discernment*, 69.

<sup>241</sup>Nouwen, *Discernment*, 69.

<sup>242</sup>Beck 59.

<sup>243</sup>Beck, 59.

<sup>244</sup>Beck, 74.

their fresh expressions of ministry. The permission-givers often will stand between the inherited church and the fresh expression explaining the difference between church, as we know it today and the church of tomorrow. In the new expressions of church “communities are beginning to form around work, play, hobbies, and passions.”<sup>245</sup> Within the interactions of these formed communities, the inherited church is also experiencing a fresh wind of the Holy Spirit. It hears and sees how the contributions of the stable rooted church have fostered new paths of spiritual growth.

The new paths of spiritual growth have required that the inherited church and the pioneers of fresh expressions intentionally develop their contextual intelligence. The one rule drilled into my head as a preacher is know your context. There is a difference when you preach on Sunday morning and when you preach at a youth rally. It is the same for the church when entering into the community: know your context and know your culture. In other words, the church needs to look for ways to be in the community, listening to and hearing the people around them. This engagement with the community requires in the words of Beck and Sweet, “peace and hard work.”<sup>246</sup> Beck and Sweet also connect the ability to identify the signs of the times and to know what to do with them with the Tribe of Issachar. As they explain, “Each of the twelve tribes of Israel has a special gift, a special mission, a special symbol.”<sup>247</sup> The Issachars had a high level of contextual intelligence and could interpret scripture in light of the times. Other tribes would turn to the intelligence and common sense of the Issacharians when times were troubled and there were uncertain transitions ahead. It seems appropriate that the Issacharians’ special symbol was the donkey. This is because the Issacharians could “bear the weight of showing how to move

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<sup>245</sup>Beck, 75.

<sup>246</sup>Beck and Sweet, 7.

<sup>247</sup>Beck and Sweet, 8.

forward into the future.”<sup>248</sup> The church needs donkeys that know what to do and bear the burden of moving forward. We need donkeys to be invested and interested in the culture outside the church. These are the people who will be able to put their biases aside and meet the community on the community's terms. Jesus upholds this movement through his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus creates an earthquake which moves the community from the “age of the law to the age of faith”<sup>249</sup> (Romans 10:4).

The age of faith is the time when Gentiles were grafted into the people of God. We still live in the age of faith where other oppressed groups are waiting to be grafted into the body of Christ. This is the work of the church today: grafting the community into the Vine. This grafting includes even the ones in the community who represent a different political party, a different gender identity, LGBTIQ, and every other type of differing identity. When the church is able to expand the age of faith to everyone, then the church will be fully engaged and committed to the community God has called it to. This is the commitment of a re-innergized church.

The world continues to change at a pace beyond our ability to immediately absorb it. There is a new upgrade every day in technology, and the upgrades change how we communicate with each other and the world. The church will always face the need to embrace newly forming communities, even if the latter are different from what the church believes to be acceptable. The changes bring new cultural dynamics, subcultures, and different contexts which the gospel will need to be translated into. In order for the church to be relevant for every category we put people in, it must re-evaluate how it communicates the good news in a way the culture can understand. Our traditionalism must be put into new wine skins, and our biases must take second place to the mission of God. The church must not be afraid that entering into the community and its culture

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<sup>248</sup>Beck and Sweet, 13.

<sup>249</sup>Beck and Sweet, 17.

will result in the watering down of the gospel message. The church must remember that the Holy Spirit leads and guides us into all the futures that the church will experience. The Holy Spirit takes us to the unknown territories of God's work. It is through constantly being brought into the unknown that the church is re-innergized, thereby leaning into every culture and context and knowing what to do.

My final words come from Rev. Dr. Leonard Sweet:

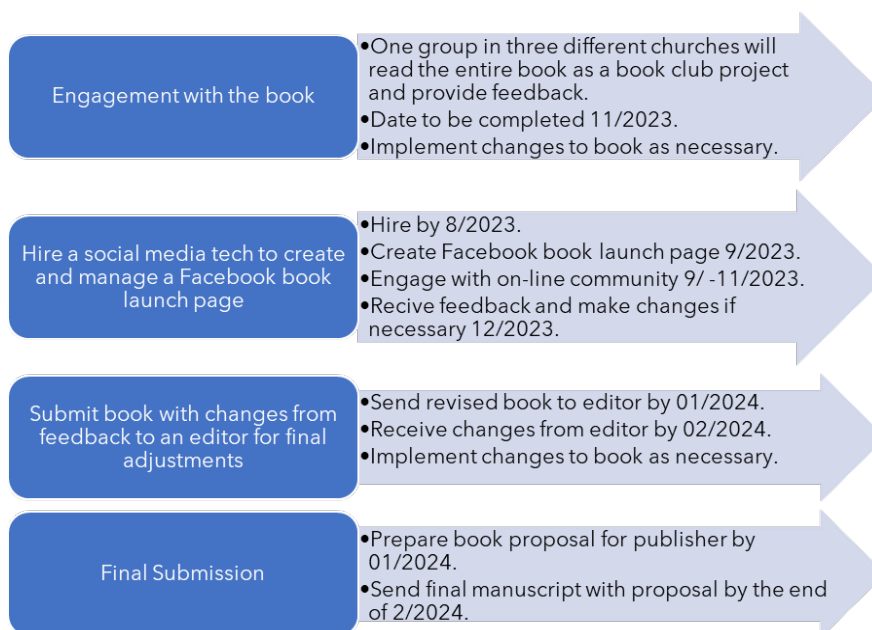
The church is the body of Christ, but everybody needs breath, air, [and] spirit to be alive. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ, the breath of the body. Where the Spirit is missing, the body dies from lack of breath and its lights go out. No light, no life.<sup>250</sup>

My prayer is that the words of this book will help you breathe the Holy Spirit and let your light shine.

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<sup>250</sup>Sweet, Leonard December 28, 2022. Facebook, February 1, 2023.  
<https://www.facebook.com/lensweet/posts/pfbid0GNmwrtj6EH6eog7qu1BVMBj6mwiVKincFjcddVCurjv5A3CircPP3xKxvxb5e8Aul>.

## Appendix F—Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation



Spence, Stacey, 2023. Post-Graduation Plan

Additional stakeholder evaluations of the book as a whole. This feedback will also help continue the post-graduate development plan. A screen shot of the book review page, and a table which articulates the amount of time accumulated in the work of the project post December of 2022.

"The book gives me a future of hope to reconnect with the holy spirit through the rural churches. The churches in the book, Hawthorne, Sparr, Pine demonstrate relationships in the church are paramount not only on Sunday service but expanding that relationship by taking it out to the community. The book shows in the rural church you don't lose your identity, instead you bring your uniqueness, abilities and spiritual gifts. Just another example of the Holy Spirit's amazing grace."

*Henry L. Baldwin*

"The Reverend Stacey Spence issues a powerful call to the church to regain missional relevancy by reclaiming the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Her inspirational arguments and findings open a vital and providential path for the church to follow. Though addressed to the small rural church facing decline and closure, the book will be welcomed by all churches seeking to reaffirm their call in the face of today's decline in the affirmation of faith and in church membership."

*Joyce Story, Ph.D.*

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