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# Centers and Edges: Toward a Dialogic Remedy for the Eroding Missional Footprint of Ecclesial Organizations in America

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

CENTERS AND EDGES:  
TOWARD A DIALOGIC REMEDY FOR  
THE ERODING MISSIONAL FOOTPRINT OF  
ECCLESIAL ORGANIZATIONS IN AMERICA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
JONATHAN ALLEN SPELLMAN

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2017

George Fox Evangelical Seminary  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 23, 2017  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

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Life begins out at the edges of an organization and moves inward from there.

— John Heinz

For edge-dwellers everywhere

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My wife, Tina, one of the most instinctively missional leaders I have had the privilege of seeing in action, has been unwaveringly supportive of my efforts. Not only during the term of this doctoral program, but for 26 years of shared-life she has been a faithful partner to me, exhibiting a Christlike long-suffering in seemingly endless measure. Along with all the edge-dwellers in the Living Way Network, she has provided a treasure-trove of inspiration over the years. Because of her innovations at the edge of our ecclesial tribe, I now live in a daily expression of missional behavior that many only theorize about.

My dad and mom, Gary and Anita Spellman, instilled in me a thirst for knowledge and a love for the church that persists through all imaginable highs and lows. They were innovators long before I began to consider the implications of that word! Their encouragement and tangible support has provided invaluable margin, enabling me to do far more than I ever could on my own. Today, I enjoy wine from vines they planted long before I was born. My second dad and mom, Jimmy and Marie Hendrix, opened their

family to me, offering stability for my otherwise nomadic life. Their acceptance of me over the last 28 years has provided an emotional anchor-point from which confidence to dream big can grow. Most importantly, they gave me Tina.

Rod Koop, Ron Steslow, Aaron Suzuki and Mike Masters. These men are long-term friends to me, co-laboring at the edge of the Foursquare Church for years now. While our individual locations and callings may be different, we hold some important things in common. Perhaps the thing that binds us most closely together is that, while we all have occupied space at the organizational center, we presently co-inhabit the edge. We seem to be much happier here... I am continually inspired by these men's willingness to stay and engage in constructive deviations that could someday, perhaps, be to the benefit of our organization. That remains to be seen. The day is coming soon when we will sit together on the front porch at Redemption<sup>1</sup> and say "it really happened, we were there and it was glorious."

My esteemed cohort, LGP — Mary, Travis, Nick, Dave, Brian, Dawnel and Phil. A more creative, diverse, authentic group of co-learners could never be found! I am convinced that our connection has been God-breathed, not just a result of chance enrollment dates. There have been times over these past 3 years when the sole reason I have pressed through and completed projects was a deep desire to not disappoint these friends. Now nearing the completion of this program, I am grateful for that motivation. I expect that in the years to come, the sum total of our work will make significant

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<sup>1</sup> Redemption is the Koops' cabin on the Kenai Peninsula, across the Cook Inlet from Mt. Redoubt.

differences in the world. Maybe I am simply overcome by sentiment and nostalgia but I really believe this.

Finally, Dr. Caroline Ramsey. It is remarkable to me that someone from the polar opposite end of the opinion spectrum on MOST matters has become such an important person to me. She has demanded that I become a more capable scholar, minimize my own opinions while maximizing the value of inquiry and reconsider many of my philosophical presuppositions. Whether I am able to acceptably complete this doctoral program or not, it has been worth the effort to have her introduced into my life. I hope all who take the time to read this little bit of scholarship will recognize at least an echo of Caroline's voice in my words.

## **Abstract**

There is a self-inflicted erosion to the missional footprint of ecclesial organizations occurring when leaders at organizational edges are disconnected. When disconnection occurs, the potential for creativity and innovation resident with that leader is lost to the organization. Disconnection is not only manifest in administrative departure from the organization.

Dialogue is a unique kind of speech/listening event, necessarily differentiated from other types of speech/listening events, which may offer a remedy to the erosion.

Chapter one is introductory. It provides the reader with an understanding of the author's interest in this subject and presents a clear statement of the ministry problem to be investigated through the dissertation. A progression of thought for the dissertation is also presented in chapter one.

Chapter two provides a treatment of the term "missional footprint" with a rationale for making use of it in present day, leader to leader conversations. A useable definition of the term is offered along with some examples of the kinds of things to be measured within a missional footprint.

Chapter three looks into the historical tendencies in leader to leader relating within the church. It employs the guiding question of "how have we treated the heretic?" to better understand how we arrived at a winner/loser paradigm.

Chapter four investigates leader to leader relating across organizational strata. Where centrifugal conversations are normative in ecclesial organizations, centripetal conversations are what is needed.

Chapter five is an excursus on dialogue. The reader will receive a clear understanding of what dialogue is and is not.

Chapter six provides examples where ecclesial organizations are employing dialogue to engage center and edge located leaders in healthy relationships. These examples render plausible the idea that dialogue can offer a way forward to a possible remedy.

The epilogue highlights a few areas for further research.

## ONE: INTRODUCTION

For the simplicity on this side of complexity, I wouldn't give you a fig. But for the simplicity on the other side of complexity, for that I would give you anything I have.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

### A Little Piece of My Story

#### On the edge

“Wherever you go, you take yourself with you.”<sup>2</sup> The path my life has taken up until now, with all of its twists and turns, joys and defeats, surprises and mundanities, has shaped me. I can no more dislodge myself from my experiences than a tortoise can separate from its shell; they go with me. And so it is for us all. The things that pique our interest, intrigue, perplex and vex us grow out of the joys and pains experienced right up until the present day. This project illustrates that truism well.

My ministry career began with no formal ministry training. The path I traveled to the pastorate was more like the school of hard knocks than the formal academy! In 1992, at the age of 22, I, along with my wife, parents and a handful of others, planted the church where we serve to this day. My father was the senior pastor and I, his associate pastor. Back then, in our denomination (The Foursquare Church), we simply called what we did “pioneering” as the term *church planting* was not yet en vogue in our ecclesial circles. We just located meeting space, opened the doors and began to hold services. It worked, we grew and bought a building.

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<sup>2</sup> While this quote is attributed to British novelist Neil Gaiman in *The Graveyard Book*, the concept is found throughout popular psychology and is subject to various interpretations.

Around four years later we all agreed that I was “ready” to assume the senior leadership role; I was the ripe old age of 26 and still had received no formal ministry training. By the grace of God, the church grew and we were experiencing a measure of success, at least so far as success is measured in American Evangelical circles. A few more years passed and as our little church in the rural suburbs of Atlanta continued to grow (by all the measures important to the denomination), the invitations to serve in various leadership roles at the state and district levels of our denomination began to roll in.

Still younger than 30 years of age, I came to be known as one of the “young” and “emerging” leaders that have always been important within my ecclesial tribe. It was gratifying. Then, around 2002, I was invited to step into a newly created role coinciding with a new denominational model of districting in the United States. The title of that role was *district church multiplication leader*.<sup>3</sup> This was a largely volunteer role but with the new emphasis on strategic (funded) church planting in our organization, it held a certain level of prestige. I was doing very well, my star was rising so to speak.

During this era, our denomination maintained a national church multiplication leader who served to coordinate the church multiplication efforts of seventy-eight districts. Dr. Roderick Koop served that role during those years and he made space for me on his team. Rod did not operate with a typical office staff. Instead, he surveyed the field of district-level leaders doing good work within their respective districts and invited them to be a part of his “*National Missional Team*.” Beginning around 2005 and continuing until late 2009 I had the privilege of serving on that team.

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<sup>3</sup> I am eternally grateful to my friend Scott Reece for inviting me into this role.



This was a truly collaborative environment, one where creativity, disagreement and risk-taking, all were encouraged. Along the way, some deep relationships were forged. To this day, four of my deepest friendships are with men that I served alongside on that team. I will forever be grateful to Dr. Koop for creating that environment, one where my leadership perspectives could be shaped by friends and colleagues.

We were blazing new paths, sharing learning with organizations outside of our own while co-creating a framework to support Foursquare church multiplication in a wide variety of demographic contexts. To my local friends and colleagues, we were the denominational equivalent of rock stars, edgy and (just a little bit) arrogant, leading workshops, writing white-papers and giving talks on the church multiplication imperative.

This was a unique set of circumstances in that, for those of us on this national leadership team, our primary sources of income and support continued to be our local churches and businesses. We were not dependent upon the institution for our subsistence. This is an important detail. We were free to offer opinions and engage in fierce conversations without fear of experiencing personal loss should our words offend someone up the organizational food-chain. It was a unique set of circumstances not often experienced in ecclesial organizations, almost completely devoid of politics. This was a collection of edge-located<sup>4</sup> leaders forging adaptive innovations and creating for the good of the organization at large. All was well... for a season.

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<sup>4</sup> Here and throughout this project variations of the terms “*edge*” and “*center*” will be used extensively. The term “center” denotes, generally speaking, the locus of power and decision-making capacity within an organization. Actions taken at the center have a direct and substantial effect on the rest of the organization. “Edge” indicates leadership taking place at a distance from the center, generally without daily oversight from center-located leaders.

## **To the center**

In 2009, the district model that had been embraced seven years prior was determined to be unsustainable and a new<sup>5</sup> national model for districting was embraced. At first it seemed like a good idea, at least for me, because I was offered a full-time job with salary and benefits to fill the role of “District Missional Leader” for the Southeast District of the Foursquare Church. My status continued to climb as now I had a budget and everybody loves the guy with a budget!

However, along with that title, salary and budget came a much more pronounced connection to the organizational center. Where I had been on the edge of the organization, forging new innovations, it seemed that overnight the minutia of local church crises (including pastoral malfeasance, financial misbehavior and general politicizing) landed on my desk. It was not unusual to begin my day at 7:00 am and conclude at 6:00 pm with a virtual flood of emails to answer, phone calls to take and edicts to hand down as the layers of organizational dysfunction in our new district began to be peeled back.<sup>6</sup>

My migration to the center of the organization happened very quickly. Where at one time, in the not-too-distant past, innovation had been my primary aim, I soon found that preservation and protectionism prevailed; where risk-taking was once the norm, risk-aversion rose up in its place. My role was both influential and authoritative; it was

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<sup>5</sup> To say “new” is not entirely accurate. The new model of districting looked very similar to the one that had been embraced for decades prior to 2002 with some modifications in district lines.

<sup>6</sup> It is not my intention here to be critical. Every organization works through seasons of dysfunction as a matter of course. Ours is well documented and it is largely agreed upon throughout the Foursquare Church that from the early 2000s until the present day, we continue to make our way forward toward organizational health.

alarming how quickly I gravitated to it. I liked it very much. Then, a few years into the new normal, the district office relocated and my job, budget, status, significance and value to the organization relocated with it. My personal crisis of identity followed along quickly.

### **Back to the edge**

If my star had risen like a rocket, it fell to Earth like a meteor. After only 3 1/2 years in the power center of organizational leadership, my benefits, fifteen percent of my salary and a large chunk of my prestige was gone. Then, after ten more months, my salary was reduced to less than half of what it had been; eight more months and it was gone completely along with any vestige of organizational authority. My journey back to the organizational edge was rapid and complete except, this time, I was not there of my own choosing. I was simply pressed out to the margins with no authority, little influence, far fewer friends and a lot of bruised ego. At the time of this writing, I have no discernible voice in the overall direction of the denomination to which I have given most of my adult life.

Why is this little piece of my life story important? Because honesty compels me to acknowledge where I am positioned in life and how the journey to this place has influenced my interest in this present topic. Wherever I go, I take myself with me, *all of me*. This is unavoidable. During this journey, from the edge to the center and back to the edge, I have observed leadership behaviors across organizational strata and have become very interested in some of the things observed along the way.

Occupying leadership space at both the organizational edge and center, I began to take notice of some common trends in leader to leader relating. One such trend is that

oftentimes leaders at the aforementioned organizational strata (center and edge) find themselves at odds with each other, drawing thick, dark lines of separation between themselves where affirmation and care would be more biblically appropriate. I have encountered a sizable collection of leaders who have similar experiences, both in my denomination and others. Deep calls out to deep and when I began to realize that I am not alone, my interest was piqued. This present work is the result of that interest.

While I can say with a clear conscience that I no longer hold ill-will toward those leaders whose decisions had a negative influence on my family and I, it would be less than truthful to claim that the results of those decisions do not bias the way I interpret other case-studies. I tentatively admit that if the truth is told, had I not been forced to the organizational edge I would likely have remained comfortably in the center, blind to many of the observations I have made over these recent years.

Tammy Dunahoo, current vice-president and General Supervisor of the Foursquare Church in America, incisively inquires, “how do people get to the edge? The conversation changes depending on why they are there.”<sup>7</sup> This question forces me to acknowledge that just because a person occupies space at the edge of an organization does not mean that individual is necessarily an innovator or creative genius. It could be that he/she is simply a wounded soul or, perhaps, legitimately a rabble-rouser with little of value to offer.

The circumstances surrounding my recent arrival at the edge of the Foursquare Church undoubtedly tints how I view leader to leader relating in this organization. Stated simply, *I am not an unbiased researcher*. I am as much a subject of research as any of the

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<sup>7</sup> Tammy Dunahoo, interview with the author, September 18, 2016.

other case studies I will present through the course of this dissertation. As flawed as the rest, I am just trying to make sense of some of the complexity I have encountered. This project is the product of the sense-making and is my present, best effort at a contribution to the ecclesial leadership literature.

## **Two More Case Studies**

### **Francine**

Instead of moving straight into an assertion of an identified ministry problem, I will briefly share two more case-studies. Francine<sup>8</sup> is a respected member of the ordained clergy of a mid-sized, mostly rural/suburban, Evangelical denomination. For more than two decades, she and her husband served faithfully, stewarding the ministry of a local congregation in a major metropolitan area of the American Northeast. During her tenure within the local church, she additionally worked within the denominational church advancement department, at both regional and national levels, *in a voluntary capacity*. Along the way, Francine became known by her peers as a collaborator, facilitator, coach and all-around team player.

Her good reputation eventually opened the door for a job offer which, if she were to accept the position, would require that she and Joe (her husband) leave the congregation they had nurtured, along with its corresponding security and comfort, to move across the country and assume an executive leadership role in a newly formed

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout the dissertation, case studies will be cited which will include, in some cases, extended narrative. As with some of the case studies throughout, in this opening narrative, “Francine” is not this subject’s real name. For the sake of confidentiality, the name of the subject along with minor details of her/his story have been changed. Where details are altered, the substance of the story has not been compromised in any way. The research subject has read and affirmed my account to assure accuracy. This process is repeated in a few other instances throughout the dissertation.

regional office of her denomination. I know first-hand the deliberation and prayer undertaken by Francine as she agonized over the decision. After all, in several personal conversations, Tina and I strongly encouraged her to take the job. She finally accepted the position. For seven years Francine and Joe gave their best effort to providing, by all accounts, excellent leadership to the startup of dozens of new churches and congregations across a broad ethnic spectrum.

In addition to her direct impact on those to whom she provided oversight, Francine collaborated with other regional and national leaders in a learning community of peers co-creating ideas that helped to elevate the entire national organization. With a lean budget and ever-present pressure from the denominational center to produce new congregations, she developed innovative ways to support new churches, relationally enfolding leaders from divergent cultures into the denomination's congregational development pipeline.<sup>9</sup> As the person tasked with selecting, preparing and deploying leaders for new congregations and communities of faith, Francine labored faithfully at the edge of her ecclesial organization, expanding its missional footprint<sup>10</sup> in new and innovative ways. Then, as quickly as it began, it came to an end.

Leaders at the denominational headquarters (center) made the decision that the seven-year old region, upon the retirement of its iconic bishop, was no longer viable and within a few months it was merged into an adjoining region where leadership systems were already intact. There was little invitation for her voice in the decision-making

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<sup>9</sup> Nigerian, Brazilian, Hispanic, African-American, Albanian, are a few of the ethnicities reported.

<sup>10</sup> The notion of a *missional footprint* is finding its way into the lexicon of ecclesial practitioners more and more of late. A portion of this dissertation is devoted to the development of the concept further along but for now, the term is held to mean *the full breadth and depth of mission-advancing activity*.

process and little attention given to how she suggested to provide ongoing care for the pastors and leaders to which she and Joe had given attention over the preceding years. Francine reports that she came to realize that she was simply an “expendable role-filler”<sup>11</sup> rather than a vital organizational leader.

Left with no job and little support with which to transition comfortably into the next season of life, they made their way back East to their previous hometown. Only at this point, there was no congregation to which they could return and no regular source of income awaiting them. They received little more than a pat on the back and a hearty “thank you” from the organizational center for the work they had done.

A story like this gives rise to some questions for me. What is it about the present condition of leader to leader relating in her organization that created this environment? How is it acceptable for a leader, who by all accounts is vital to the organization and has made significant investments into the lives of other leaders, to so quickly disappear? Perhaps my level of interest is elevated because of how similar her story is to mine. As mentioned previously in this introduction, I have virtually no remaining influence on the Foursquare Church and my progression from influencer to marginalized was startlingly abrupt, very much like Francine. Truthfully, I suspect these questions rise in my thinking as much about my situation as Francine’s.

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<sup>11</sup> “Francine,” interview by author, Atlanta, April 20, 2016.

## John

In addition to planting his church eighteen years ago, John<sup>12</sup> presently occupies an elder role in his denomination. Around six years ago, he began the process of transitioning his local church toward a model of ministry that differs substantially from the majority of other pastors across his denomination. The methods presently embraced are well beyond the organizational norms within his ecclesial body. After a few years of transitional hiccups, they are evidencing signs of fruitfulness in this new model..

When John began to lead his congregation toward their present methodology, he was met with what he calls “cautious permission” but not encouragement to innovate.

While I’m thankful they didn’t forbid us from making the shift, I have felt the need to stay under the radar, just out of the view of regional and national level leaders. I can’t always answer the “*church growth*” questions they ask from the perspective of the institution and that’s frustrating for me. I am just not interested in measuring quantity... for me quality disciples are the most important outcome. For us the plan right now is to go one step at a time as God directs. My hope is [denomination] leadership will someday celebrate what we’re doing as one possible method that holds equal standing with traditional models. Sometimes it feels like we’re tolerated rather than celebrated. I don’t expect every church to do what we’ve done, but some probably should and maybe us taking the steps we have will encourage others down the line to think creatively about how they do church. We continue to hear that there will be adjustments in terms of what [the denomination] defines as success. However, the scorecard seems to stay the same as far as what we celebrate and support financially as a movement.<sup>13</sup>

It is apparent to John that, even while his church is breaking new ground within his denomination by networking house-based, missional congregations in locations across the United States, his story will have little to no formative impact on how his

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<sup>12</sup> John is not the respondent’s real name.

<sup>13</sup> “John,” interview by author, April 1, 2015.



denomination pursues church multiplication and leadership development. He feels as though his contributions are of no real value to the collective.

Beyond the anecdotal heartaches I experience when listening to stories like Francine and John's,<sup>14</sup> they bring to the surface an underlying, more substantial matter which is worthy of examination. I began to question whether there are observable organizational dysfunctions when it comes to leader to leader relating that may be a part of ecclesial leaders' common experience? If so, is there something that can bring a measure of remedy? These two stories, along with many others, suggest a kind of marginalization occurring among leaders at the edges of their organizations. The frustration in their voices as they recount their experiences is palpable. Is this the way it must be? Is there a better way?

In both John and Francine's stated opinions, there is no substantial, regular context for helpful leader to leader relating where meaningful dialogue occurs. They have no noticeable influence upon the decisions made by power-holders in their respective organizations. After engaging in many conversations with edge-located leaders,<sup>15</sup> it is my observation that these experiences are not anomalous. While cross-strata communication does happen, it is generally not of the helpful, dialogic variety.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Stories like these are abundant where leader to leader relating between the power-centers and the edges is either strained or non-existent. These two merely serve as examples.

<sup>15</sup> As the executive director of the Atlanta Church Planting Alliance, I am in regular contact with edge-located leaders from across a wide spectrum of Evangelicalism. I acknowledge that this fosters an unavoidable bias in my way of seeing ecclesial organizations.

<sup>16</sup> In most cases, cross-strata communication comes in the form of directives issued to the edge from the center or perhaps reports back to the center from the edge; they are mono-directional. When person-to-person communication does happen, it is usually in the form of discussion or diatribe, maybe the occasional debate, but rarely is dialogue engaged in as an intentional act.

## The Problem

These stories are a sampling of cases where ecclesial organizations run the risk of losing their edge-located leaders, either by leader departure or by functional absence due to emotional disconnect. One tragic (but avoidable) outcome is that, as these leaders disappear, their creative innovations go with them, lost to the rest of the organization. In all three cases (mine, John's and Francine's), a noticeable gap is left at the edge of the organization, a frayed place if you will, where these leaders are supposed to occupy space. Ultimately, it is not not only the leader suffering the pain of disconnect, the organization as a whole misses out on a wealth of potential. I have witnessed this repeatedly.

The problem to which I am giving attention in this dissertation occurs when leaders become disconnected from their God-ordained ecclesial organizations. I call this problem *the erosion of the missional footprint among American ecclesial organizations*. I have taken to using this phraseology because it employs vivid imagery to describe the challenge at hand. I believe it to be increasingly important for Evangelical ecclesial organizations to confront this challenge as we seek to be faithful to our mission while navigating the nuances of liquid modernity.<sup>17</sup>

It is additionally important to note that this problem is not only manifest in administrative departure from the organization. A more subtle, perhaps even more damaging, kind of disconnect happens when a leader remains administratively connected

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<sup>17</sup> "Liquid modernity," articulated by social theorist Zygmunt Bauman, offers vivid imagery when describing the socio-cultural landscape in which the church must now exist. Liquid modernity demands ecclesial adaptability. See *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007); and *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011).

(“on paper” so to speak) to an organization while functionally disconnected; “checked out” is one commonly heard description. The importance of this nuance cannot be overstated. For when a leader remains administratively connected (by ordination or appointment to a ministry post for example), his/her functional disconnect from the organization may go overlooked for extended periods of time whereas when administrative disconnection happens, alarms may be triggered in the power-center. Sometimes those alarms can lead to action which will preserve the relationship.

In geological terms, the word *erosion* simply describes the action that happens when something is destroyed (or degenerated) by slow disintegration<sup>18</sup> resultant from a wide range of factors. While some factors of disintegration are unavoidable, others could be avoided if identified and attended to. Harkening back to Francine’s case, she has been removed from the organization. As a result, that erosion is complete. The ecclesial body to which she had been called now has a gap where she once occupied leadership space.

The three case-studies above (myself, Francine and John) are all examples of erosion occurring at the edges of our organizations’ missional footprints. In Francine’s case, an abrupt and troubling absence was created by her swift departure. It is important to note that this was not a case where misbehavior or malpractice on Francine’s part resulted in her being removed for disciplinary reasons. On the contrary, she and Joe received words of affirmation and accolades privately accompanied by “atta-girl” and public thanks while, at the same time, being immediately marginalized. Her organization spun her off into obscurity and simply moved on while her innovative missional activity was lost to the denominational collective. The fact that she was so well respected makes

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<sup>18</sup> Definition courtesy of [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com).

the reality of her abrupt departure all the more disconcerting for pastors and leaders remaining who are left to answer “what happened to Francine?”

John’s circumstances are somewhat different in that he is still present within his denominational leadership structures but his methodology is persistently downplayed, simply not talked about, let alone affirmed and celebrated. The organization he is serving is not gaining any benefit from the innovations being advanced by his church. This exemplifies a loss to the potential missional footprint of his denomination. Similarly, while I still carry ordination with the Foursquare Church and have lifelong connections with individual ministers within the organization, my current work in ministry is undertaken almost entirely outside of the interests of denominational leadership.

While church leaders engage in collective hand-wringing over what they perceive to be crises in the American Church such as competition for attendees, apathy among members, reduction in donors and a scarcity of volunteers (just to name a few), this erosion of the missional footprint poses a far more serious, and, at the same time, repairable problem. I wonder how many perceived crises would self-correct if attention were given to these deeper, systemic matters of leader to leader relating across organizational strata? What innovations might emerge that could counter the commonly prioritized crises?

### **A Remedy**

It has often been said that just because something is simple does not make it easy. I have an inkling that this is the case when it comes to my proposed remedy. Simply stated, I believe that if ecclesial leaders (both center and edge-located leaders) would commit to the formation of *a dialogic ethos* then a shift in the organizational norms could

develop.<sup>19</sup> Where an adversarial posture is presently the norm, affirmation could take its place.

While to the casual reader this may, at first blush, seem simplistic, even a little bit Pollyannaish — “can’t we all just get along and talk to each other?” — a deeper look demonstrates how our collective church history, human tendencies and, in some cases, just the simple tainting of sin all militate against it. I intend to offer that deeper look. Even still, I am concerned that we might fall short of grasping how important this is; it is likely that much will be left for further research and conversation. Even so, having witnessed far too many innovative leaders lost due to structural and emotional disconnect, I believe this to be an important enough matter to give it a worthy effort.

### **Progression of Thought**

Moving through this work, the reader should notice an ebb and flow, a fluid movement between academic and colloquial verbiage. To begin, following this introduction, chapter two invites consideration of the notion of the *missional footprint*. This frames up a body of thought related to the measurement of the missional footprint along with a useful definition of the term. Some exemplars of activity within the edges of a missional footprint are highlighted. A recurring reference to the erosion that occurs when leaders are disconnected from an organization begins in this chapter.

In chapter three, a general arc from the Jerusalem Council through two additional eras in the history of the church is traced. This provides a “bird’s-eye view” of some over-arching trends in leader to leader relating. The question of how we arrived at our

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<sup>19</sup> An important distinction should be drawn between a dialogic ethos and dialogue as a facilitated activity.

present orientation toward a *winner/loser* paradigm is at the forefront. This portion delves into some of the complexity previously mentioned. It seems that certain tendencies are woven deep into the collective spiritual DNA of the church and militate against the embrace of a dialogic ethos. I will offer a consideration of the impact of those tendencies on present-day leader to leader relating in ecclesial organizations

It is here important to make a quick note of what I will *not* be attempting. I will not be offering argumentation for or against historically understood heresies. I am not tendering a work of theology here, nor presenting a scholarly look at Church History. My argument is not anchored in Church History, but rather, in reflections upon personal experiences and a plethora of stories of others like myself. When a thorough examination of these experiences is undertaken, however, there are interesting trends from Church History to be highlighted. Because of this, I will brush lightly up against two famous heretics as evidence that there has existed in the church (from her earliest days) a tendency toward a winner/loser paradigm that impinges upon leader to leader relating right up through today.

Chapter four encourages consideration of how the historical tendencies noted in chapter three impact both center and edge-located leaders today, nudging them toward centrifugal conversations and away from centripetal. This is a largely remediable factor in the aforementioned erosion. If leader to leader communications could make the turn from centrifugal to centripetal, a hopeful path forward may be envisioned. My research suggests that dialogue events, within a dialogic ethos, invite the kind of centripetal conversations that could result in a counter-nudge of sorts.

Continuing along this progression of thought, chapter five explores, at a granular level, the nuances of dialogue and how it is situated in a nomological network of speech/listening events.<sup>20</sup> This is, in essence, an excursus on dialogue. If dialogue offers a way forward then the importance of understanding what dialogue *is* and what it *is not* must not be overlooked. Far too many times, misappropriation of words leads to confusion and frustration easily remedied by the simple introduction of understanding. Knowledge is power!

Chapter six concludes this work with some insights into how dialogue may alter the ways of relating between ecclesial leaders at centers and edges. Through this dissertation, I want to demonstrate that there is indeed a way forward! There are examples where intentional, cross-strata dialogue is being pursued with promising results. If this kind of dialogic ethos were to become the norm across American ecclesial organizations, it is plausible that the present erosion due to the loss of edge-located leaders could be markedly reduced. Further, if these edge-located leaders are retained, ecclesial organizations will be much more well-suited to adapt and thrive among the shifting societal-sands of liquid modernity. Their missional footprints, the evidence of their presence in the world, will be extended. With this in mind, I invite you to read on!

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<sup>20</sup> The inspiration to use the term in this context came from an important article by Bella L. Galperin. In this article the terms Constructive deviance, Organizational citizenship behavior, Whistle-blowing, Voice and Role innovation were said to be situated in a “nomological network,” identifying similarities to each other while also highlighting important distinctions. The nomological network of dialogue will include: discourse in a general sense, discussion and debate. The commonalities and distinctions will be highlighted as we examine the network. See Bella Galperin, “Exploring the Nomological Network of Workplace Deviance: Developing and Validating a Measure of Constructive Deviance,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 42 no. 12 (2012): 2988-3025.

## **TWO: THE MISSIONAL FOOTPRINT**

“Missional is about following Jesus into the nooks and crannies of a zip code. Missional is about discipleship, relationships, and incarnating Jesus in one’s own context.”

—Brandon Hempel

### **What Is It?**

#### **Crisis**

“The major new survey of more than 35,000 Americans finds that the percentage of adults who describe themselves as Christians has dropped by nearly eight percentage points in just seven years.”<sup>21</sup> This, from a recent Pew Research Center survey of the religious landscape of America, and other similar statistics from organizations such as LifeWay Research and the Barna Group have ecclesial leaders in America engaging in another round of Monday morning hand-wringing. “How are we ever going to slow the steady stream of people exiting the church?” That is what we should be concerned with, faithfulness to the programs of church, right?

Even those who consider themselves to be regular church attenders, church members in fact, are finding their way into the doors of the sanctuary with less frequency. So perhaps one approach is to simply reframe what it means to be faithful. American missiologist Thom Rainer observes that “[t]hree decades ago, a very active church member attended three times a week. Today we call those who attend three times a month

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<sup>21</sup> “New Pew Research Center Study Examines America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, Religion and Public Life, May 12, 2015, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/new-pew-research-center-study-examines-americas-changing-religious-landscape>.



an active church member.”<sup>22</sup> Rainer offers this insight as a bit of polemic against the argument that the church overall is on the decline. His progression of thought goes something like this: It is not the case that fewer people are attending church, the same people are attending, they just are attending *less often*. Pew Research likely would not agree with that way of looking at this phenomenon.

Another finding from the aforementioned Pew Research project suggests that it is not only attendance and the Christian share of the population on the decline, actual raw numbers of people claiming to be Christian are down. According to Pew, we “have lost ground not only in [our] relative share of the U.S. population but also in absolute numbers... a net decline of about five million.” And further, “religiously unaffiliated are on the rise... Religious intermarriage is on the rise.”<sup>23</sup> Couple this statistical data with the anecdotal experiences of most who will have an interest in this present work and it is hard to argue against an observable decline of Christianity’s influence in America. Perhaps the words of renowned researcher George Barna are true when he says “[w]e are a designer society. We want everything customized to fit our personal needs — our clothing, our food, our education. Now its our religion.”<sup>24</sup> Consumerism has seeped into the sanctuary.

I think it is important to add a cautionary note before we all begin jumping out of windows; all of this is nothing new. In the important work compiled in 1998, *Missional*

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<sup>22</sup> Thom Rainer, “Seven Key Reasons Your Church Attendance May Be Declining,” *Thom S. Rainer, Growing Healthy Churches Together*, July 1, 2015, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://thomrainer.com/2015/07/seven-key-reasons-your-church-attendance-may-be-declining>.

<sup>23</sup> Pew.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony B. Robinson, “Consumerism Goes to Church,” *Patheos*, November 28, 2012, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/progressiverenewal/2012/11/consumerism-goes-to-church>.

*Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Darrell Guder makes reference to a research process undertaken by the Gospel and Our Culture Network.

The Network emerged in North America in the late 1980s as the continuation, on this side of the Atlantic, of the Gospel and Culture discussion initiated in Great Britain during 1983 by the publication of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin's short monograph. *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*. The concerns raised by the bishop certainly were not new... In a word, what had once been a Christendom society was now clearly post-Christian, and in many ways, anti-Christian. Newbigin brought into public discussion a theological consensus that had long been forming among missiologists and theologians.<sup>25</sup>

Guder further points out that "neither the structures nor the theology of our established Western traditional churches is missional. They are shaped by the legacy of Christendom."<sup>26</sup> Said differently, it is not within the core nature of most American churches to view their local communities as mission-fields. They may view them as possessions, parishes maybe, but not mission fields.

"Until the 1950s, 'mission' ... had a fairly circumscribed set of meanings" according to David Bosch. "It referred to the sending of missionaries to designated areas, the activities undertaken by such missionaries, the geographical area where the missionaries were active, the agency which dispatched the missionaries... the non-Christian world or 'mission field'..."<sup>27</sup> Bosch then helpfully points out that

all these connotations... familiar as they may be, are of fairly recent origin. Until the sixteenth century, the term was used exclusively with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, that is of the sending of the Son by the Father, and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. The Jesuits were the first to use it in terms of the

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<sup>25</sup> Darrell L. Guder, "From Sending to Being Sent," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 1.

spread of the Christian faith among people (including protestants) who were not members of the Catholic church.<sup>28</sup>

It is in relatively recent centuries that “mission,” for most ecclesial organizations, morphed into something we go and do somewhere else, just “one of many programs of the church.”<sup>29</sup> With the predominant view of mission among American ecclesial organizations as “over there,” is it any wonder that we continue to see a measurable, sometimes stark, reduction in the church’s overall impact on American society?

### **To what are we attending?**

One of the functions of my district leadership role within the Foursquare Church was to coach local church pastors in the usage of various church health assessments.<sup>30</sup> The common goal of these types of assessment instruments is to provide insight for church leadership relative to strengths and weaknesses across a variety of church ministry areas. Then, drawing upon an assessment-derived compendium of identified strengths and weaknesses, church leaders are able to construct new strategies for doing better when it comes to things like “an outward focus, a commitment to loving and caring relationships and spiritual disciplines.”<sup>31</sup> Since the emergence of the church growth movement in the latter half of the Twentieth-Century, these kinds of assessment instruments have become staples within the Evangelical church in America, noble attempts at turning the tide of the church’s waning impact on the broader society.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Guder, 6.

<sup>30</sup> “Natural Church Development” (NCD); “Church Health Assessment Tool” (CHAT); “Transformational Church” are examples of church health assessments presently available to local churches.

<sup>31</sup> “Church Health Assessment Tool (C.H.A.T.)” *Leadership Transformations Inc.* accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.healthychurch.net/pdfs/CHAT-samplequestions-091306.pdf>.

I recall one conversation with a pastor of a mid-sized church in the district where I served. The leadership of his local church had recently received the results report from [their chosen church health assessment] and I would soon be spending time with a collection of staff and lay-leaders, coaching them through to the creation of a strategic action plan for their church. As our conversation proceeded, he confided that this assessment tool was not the first program they had tried to grow the congregation; it was simply the latest in a long series of attempts from evangelistic outreaches to pre-printed doorknob hangers to fresh takes on leadership structures. This pastor, while admirably maintaining a positive outlook on the helpfulness of the assessment instrument, seemed to retain a bit of latent cynicism that this latest program probably would not work much better than the last two.

I recall some observations, now some six years later, made by that pastor:

It seems like no matter how much we focus on trying to make the church more healthy our community just continues to spiral downward. It seems to be getting worse and we have little impact on the community around us. We try new things to get more people to join but our older folks are dying or just losing interest and we just aren't adding younger people to fill the gaps. I don't know that we are really changing the culture around us much. But what can we really do except to just keep doing what we are doing?<sup>32</sup>

With this statement, he put words around what had been an unarticulated sentiment echoed in other leader to leader conversations through the years. We feel compelled to do the latest things to make an impact on the culture around us, but what should the goal of the church be when all is said and done? *What is its mission?* Is it even within the scope of that mission to transform the culture?

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<sup>32</sup> My paraphrase of a conversation with local church pastor around March of 2010.

As I began to engage with this present research, this conversation came back to my mind and I was reminded of my reflections on this matter so many years ago. I remember wrestling with a nagging curiosity as to whether it is the best expenditure of ecclesial leadership's energy to focus so intently on figuring out how the church can turn the tide of societal erosion. Could this obsession be a distraction from matters of a more important type? Interestingly enough, soon after spending a little bit of time on these reflections, I set them aside, undoubtedly moving quickly on to more pressing matters, like how to help this church grow its membership (the reader will no doubt catch the irony in that). As this conversation, and others like it, return to the forefront of my mind, I am again asking myself, is there something more important to which we might attend, something actually within our grasp to remedy?

It is curious to me that we spend such an inordinate amount of time studying, researching and quantifying trends taking place on a broad, societal level which we have little or no power to cure. We express regret over how the absence of the church's presence and voice in politics has allowed for godlessness to impinge on our governmental power-centers; we are remorseful and repentant over our allowance of secularism in our education systems; we even cry out to God a la 2 Chronicles 7:14 and reclaim our "Christian heritage" as "one-nation under God!" But at the end of it all, secularism still creeps, consumerism still impinges and politicians are still corrupt.

After a couple decades of futility, I am coming to suspect that it might be a better use of our time and energy to attend to matters that we do have within our hands to change. Because of that suspicion, I would rather give attention to the *self-inflicted* causes of erosion. Leader to leader relating across organizational strata is one such cause.

The irony is that in so doing, in a wonderful secondary gain of sorts, we may indeed find ourselves better equipped to contend with the external causes as well.

### **Erosion**

I use the term “erosion” in articulating what I perceive to be a critical ministry problem, *the erosion of the missional footprint*. I should spend some time here defining it more clearly in the context of the missional footprint. The kind of erosion to which I refer is not the kind measured by research centers and modern missiologists, the kind that has so many ecclesial leaders scrambling for answers. I am not here calling attention to the apparent erosion of societal righteousness or the disintegrating voice of the church in the culture, not the whittling away of our influence in politics or education, nor the creeping specter of secularism and scourge of consumerism. I acknowledge that these are relevant, quite probably important, realities that have been exhaustively researched and fretted over for decades now, but over these matters, we within ecclesial organizations actually have very little influence.

The kind of erosion I am concerned with, and to which I have dedicated this present work, occurs at the edges of an ecclesial organization’s missional footprint when edge-located leaders, along with their creativity, adaptability and innovations, are lost to the organization. This being the case, a sensible point of departure will be to provide some insight into what I mean when using the term *missional footprint*. This chapter will develop that idea in greater detail and should provide an apt starting point for my broader progression of thought.

## A Measurable Edge

### Measure twice

“Measure twice, cut once.” My dad was a residential home builder and these words were handed down to me early in life. While I am not a home-builder or handy-man of any kind really, the principle — measure twice, cut once — is helpful when it comes to any project. For ecclesial leadership, the focus of our attention, the things which we invest our time and energy to build, are not so much physical structures like houses and high-rises. Rather, we attend to things of a more eternal value.<sup>33</sup> We are building people and organizations of people, in other words, *making disciples*. It is important to measure well in these arenas of leadership and one element of measuring well is giving attention to measuring the *right things*.

In a mammoth research project undertaken by LifeWay Research over the course of 2009 and 2010<sup>34</sup> the idea of changing the scorecard (the things being measured) for the local church was effectively brought forward. In conjunction with the work of Reggie McNeal, the researchers proposed that if the American Church is to continue using “the old scorecard of the church [which] valued the external measures of the three Bs: bodies, budget, and buildings”<sup>35</sup> it will (in the words of McNeal) remain “church-absorbed. As long as we use it, we will continue to be inward-focused, program-driven, and church-

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<sup>33</sup> Although, in the present U.S. ecclesial climate, it could be argued that the focus of church leadership is precisely that — buildings!

<sup>34</sup> Results of the project are recorded in the book *The Transformational Church* and corresponding church assessment instruments. Over 7,000 Evangelical senior pastors and 20,000 church members were included in the project. See Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer, *The Transformational Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group and LifeWay Research, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Stetzer and Rainer, 26.

based in our thinking and leadership.”<sup>36</sup> Their primary line of argumentation is summarized by McNeal in the opening pages of *Missional Renaissance*:

I think we are in a kind of missional renaissance, where the confluence of thinking by key thinkers is reshaping the landscape of our imagination of what we think the church can and should be. One benefit of this missional renaissance is that we can now begin to say what missional is, not just what it is not. This ability in itself will accelerate the movement. The result will be that within a few years, it will be impossible to think of church the way we used to, as something we “went to” or “participated in” or “joined” or “attended.”<sup>37</sup>

Further:

Going missional will require that you make three shifts, both in your thinking and in your behavior: From internal to external in terms of ministry focus. From program development to people development in terms of core activity. From church-based to kingdom-based in terms of leadership agenda... These three shifts *call for a new scorecard* for the missional church (emphasis added).<sup>38</sup>

It is not within the scope of this dissertation to wade into the ongoing methodological debate between “attractional” or “organic” or “missional” or “sacramental” or “transformational” or whatever term du jour is presently bandied about in ecclesial circles; that is another project for another day. For now, it is sufficient to simply recognize that there are, at present, a wide range of discussions centered around trying to determine what methodology is the most effective for churches in America. In this discussion, if McNeal and the missional church movement are found at one end of the methodological spectrum, we could locate the sacramental church at the other.

Rev. Dan Alger, Canon for Church Planting for the Anglican Church in North America is a leading voice in the resurgence of the sacramental church in America. The

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<sup>36</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 16.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



ACNA is finding an eager audience among Millennials and young GenXers seeking to find an anchor point of stability among the shifting sands of American religious culture. Alger speaks of the important things in church life as “[m]aking of disciples (in which I would include baptism and catechesis) and community impact (advancing Kingdom causes both locally and globally). Measurement of the effectiveness of both of these pursuits would not be strictly quantitative, but would require qualitative research as well.”<sup>39</sup> Notice the emphasis on measurement in that statement.

From both ends of the methodological spectrum it is clear that *measurement is important*, so much so that even the most radical of ecclesial edge-dwellers<sup>40</sup> agree with the traditionalists in the sacramental church even if on little other than that. While the specifics of *what* should be measured may be the subject of disagreement, the answer to the question of *should we measure* is almost universally accepted, *Yes*. To know that ministry energy is being meaningfully expended seems to go a long way in encouraging ecclesial leaders to continue in their efforts; measuring the *right* things helps with this. Regrettably, if Stetzer and McNeal are correct, the present set of success-metrics widely available to Evangelical churches and church leaders is limited at best, erroneous at worst.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The Rev. Canon Dan Alger, interview by the author, August 16, 2016. Where the “missional church” represents one end of the methodological spectrum, surely the ACNA represents the other, the sacramental church. Dan Alger is the Canon for Church Planting for the ACNA and is directly tasked with advancing the mission of the ACNA as it relates to church planting and establishing new Anglican congregations in North America.

<sup>40</sup> Certainly Alan Hirsch, Reggie McNeal, Neal Cole, etc. are widely recognized as innovators in church circles today.

<sup>41</sup> “Butts, Buildings and Budgets;” “Nickels and Noses;” “The Revolving Back Door;” these are all commonly used phrases among church leaders to measure effectiveness in mission.

### Why “missional footprint?”

The reader may be wondering why I am insistent upon using the term *missional footprint* when there are plenty of other available metaphors. I do not believe it to be the only one suitable for examining ecclesial structures, it is one among several no doubt. However, among ecclesial leaders with whom I have engaged in untold hours of conversation, I find the term starting to wriggle its way into our shared vocabulary more and more; it just makes sense. This is especially true among church planting network leaders with whom I collaborate on a regular basis. When used, it is often spoken tentatively with just a hint of uncertainty due to the speaker’s not really having a firm grasp on its meaning, nevertheless it resonates. It seems to all of us “missional leaders” to be really important even if difficult to get a handle on in practical terms. Please allow me an attempt at practicality.

In light of the footprint metaphor, consider this: for everything there is a line of demarcation — sometimes clear, sometimes not so clear — where it ends and other things begin. Said another way, *things have edges*. That edge is where the most wide-spread and direct interaction with *others* occurs. The missional footprint of an ecclesial organization will have a measurable edge, even if difficult to locate at times.

Given that ecclesial organizations are oftentimes complex constructions of many component pieces, it can be a bit of a challenge to precisely locate their edges. This challenge could be a contributing factor in the general disinterest among ecclesial leaders in identifying and measuring a missional footprint. Simply stated, it is a bit tricky at times. On the other hand, things like Sunday morning attendance and financial goals are easy to measure and oftentimes represent the path of least resistance when it comes to

organizational metrics. I am not being critical. I understand fully the crushing weight of pastoral challenges, the scrambling to make ends meet, the under-appreciated nature of ministry work. It can be exhausting to say the least.

Clear-cut, easily-articulated organizational goals are what we have been taught to provide for the people we are leading.<sup>42</sup> Regrettably, most of the coaching I offered to pastors while serving in denominational leadership was directed toward creating tidy lists of these kinds of goals. “How do we close the revolving backdoor of your church” was one guiding question often used. And as a child, who could forget the little sign board over the pastor’s right shoulder? Its little, white, changeable letter and number tiles reported the number of people in Sunday School and worship, along with the amount of the offerings. Those in the congregation could then either share in the joy or angst of this mighty little sign’s proclamation. It was simplistic, easy to measure, easy to report.

When it comes to locating the edge of an organization’s missional footprint, where each component may itself be another organization, collection of organizations or simply an individual person, the challenge is multiplied. The component interplay can be complex and seemingly endless, fuel for a complete research project in and of itself no doubt. It seems that an approach to measurement which returns attention to biblical language could provide an accessible, yet scalable, set of metrics for ecclesial leaders to make use of. I am using “missional footprint” as a framework for this approach.

At the same time I acknowledge the reality that, in the present-day American church, catch-phrases come and go with startling regularity (and this one is likely to have

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<sup>42</sup> Just take a look at any number of current self-help books on leadership within and without church circles.

its own shelf-life as well), leading to a kind of catch-phrase burn out. Even still, since this particular catch-phrase is already in circulation among a set of practitioners standing to benefit from this project, it should be enfolded into our vocabulary and given a useable definition.

### **A Useable Definition of Missional Footprint.**

It is curious how a word — missional — not found in any reputable dictionary has found its way into the vernacular of a particular set of ecclesial leaders, those known in Evangelical circles as “missional leaders.”<sup>43</sup> Dr. Roderick Koop makes the observation, “[i]t’s hard to go anywhere these days without the word *missional* coming up in the conversation. It’s still perplexing how many find difficulty in defining and understanding that word. Part of the reason is the overuse of the term; it’s been stretched beyond its clear meaning.”<sup>44</sup> This is not an uncommon occurrence when words become catch-phrases. Descriptors seem to evolve over time: “Evangelistic” to “contemporary,” “seeker-sensitive” to “purpose-driven,” followed along closely by “transformational” then more recently “*missional*” is becoming en vogue.

Alan Hirsch and his ilk are confident in the assertion that *missional* is more than just the latest in a series of catch phrases. Rather, it is a much more important term, one which should be significantly differentiated from the rest. McNeal claims that the

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<sup>43</sup> A Missional Leader is generally a structural leader within an ecclesial organization tasked with facilitating such things as church planting, church health, church multiplication, etc. During my tenure as a district Missional Leader, my role included these things as well as the more general “keeping the district ministries aligned with mission.”

<sup>44</sup> Roderick Koop, “Denominational Constructs of the Past Giving Way to the Church Prophetic: What Does a Life-Giving, Biblically Faithful Foursquare Church Look Like in the Twenty-First Century?” (Dmin Diss., Bakke Graduate University, 2010), 15.

“missional church is the single biggest development in Christianity since the Reformation.”<sup>45</sup> As proof of its differentness, they offer convincing assertions such as “[a] missional community sees the mission as both its originating impulse and its organizing principle,”<sup>46</sup> the implication being that those who don’t identify as missional must be organized around things, possibly sinister things, other than mission.

Another popular quote is “the church [doesn’t have] a mission, the mission has a church!”<sup>47 48</sup> It is a bit paradoxical that the same people making the assertion that “[t]here are consequences when the meanings of words become confused... particularly within a biblical worldview”<sup>49</sup> seem to relish creating phraseology that fosters confusion. At this point, where I am attempting to offer an accessible, useable definition of “missional footprint,” I will attempt to not fall into the same trap of creating missional confusion. I find Dr. Brandon Hempel’s simple definition to be helpful: “Missional is about following Jesus into the nooks and crannies of a zip code. Missional is about discipleship, relationships, and incarnating Jesus in one’s own context.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> McNeal, loc. 164.

<sup>46</sup> Alan Hirsch, “Defining Missional,” *Leadership Journal* (Fall 2008), accessed December 13, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/fall/17.20.html>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Statement commonly attributed to prominent German Reformed theologian Jurgen Moltmann. Moltmann’s actual statement reads: “It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.” Whether the shortened version maintains the integrity of the author’s original thought is up for debate. See Jurgan Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 64.

<sup>49</sup> Hirsch.

<sup>50</sup> Brandon Hempel, “Sustainable Church Planting: A Missional Approach” (DMin Diss. George Fox University, 2015), 7.

Etymology is important. In the English language “[a]djectives describe [particular] aspects of nouns. When an adjective is describing a noun, we say it is ‘modifying’ it.”<sup>51</sup> In a noun phrase, the *noun is central* and serves as the primary locus of meaning. Adjective(s) deepen the meaning by adding clarity and color to the noun. In the term “missional footprint” *missional* is the adjective; it modifies the noun *footprint* which stands as the central word in the phrase.

A footprint provides *measurable evidence of presence*. It is an impression left upon one thing by contact with another. A footprint is the result of the combination of several factors: size of the thing leaving the impression, the weight bearing down at the pressure point, the substances of both the thing bearing down and the thing being pressed upon just to name a few. A footprint has edges and is measurable so long as it remains intact and is not eroded away. When erosion occurs, the footprint can no longer be accurately measured.

So, continuing with this progression of thought, what is a *missional* footprint? With an imaginary word like *missional*, we need to look into its roots. “Mission” comes to English from Latin, *missio*. In terms of biblical language, the Greek word *apostolos* is closest in meaning — *a sent one*. In the English language, nouns can be converted into adjectives by adding suffixes so by adding *al* to the end of the root *mission* the adjective *missional* is rounded out. A useable definition of *missional* is: *of or related to being sent*.

By combining the two words, the *missional footprint* of an ecclesial organization can be understood to be *the measurable breadth and depth of the activity for which an*

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<sup>51</sup> “Functions of Adjectives,” edufind.com, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://www.edufind.com/english-grammar/functions-adjectives/>

*organization has been sent.* To employ visual language, what is the *impression* (in a literal and figurative sense) left upon a community, culture or society by the presence and activity of an ecclesial organization? Stated yet another way, the missional footprint is *the measurable evidence of the organization's presence.*

With a serviceable definition established, the activities that take place within the missional footprint of an ecclesial organization can be more clearly articulated. This terminology can be applied to organizations of any size and location whether a denomination, association, local church, small community group, even a family. If it is an organization, the missional footprint terminology can be applied.

Since a footprint is the measurable evidence of an organization's presence, it is important to think about what kinds of activity to measure. As I have observed the Church in many expressions become side-tracked with all kinds of extraneous pursuits, oftentimes substituting frenetic busyness for missional activity, I have come to embrace a simple (if not simplistic), biblical, two-columned approach by which the activity within the missional footprint can be measured: *the Great Commission* and *the Great Commandment*. These two provide an apt framework for examining the kinds of activities to be measured between the edges of a missional footprint.

### **The Great Commission**

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”<sup>52</sup> This

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<sup>52</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV).

passage is perhaps one of the most familiar in all of the New Testament text, one of the most important when it comes to shaping the day to day life of the follower of Jesus. These are the final recorded words of Jesus for those to whom he was entrusting his remaining organization here on Earth. They provide us with enduring instruction and clarity when it comes to our role in that organization.

Stated simply, the role of the believer, *our mission*, is to make disciples. By extension, organizations of believers have the same mission — make disciples. As such, it is reasonable to expect to find disciple-making activities taking place within the context of a missional footprint. Disciple-making activities are not always easily visible with a passing glance and are oftentimes overlooked entirely when it comes to tallying up the things measured by organizational leaders. In an attempt to stimulate thinking toward a missional footprint type of measurement, I want to provide a few examples.

The reader should note that this is not intended to be a comprehensive list but rather, to highlight some examples of disciple-making activity that could be easily overlooked by the customary metrics. Here we see two very different exemplars of missional activity; both are connected to the Foursquare Church; both exhibit unique and distinctly measurable evidence of presence. However, leader to leader relating within the ecclesial organization are very different, leading to different outcomes regarding the missional footprint of the Foursquare Church.



### **Dr. Terry Stair**

New Life Prison Ministry<sup>53</sup> is operated by Dr. Terry Stair. Over the years, as an extension of Jacksonville Theological Seminary, this ministry has quietly provided seminary education for over 250 men while they were serving prison sentences. Additionally, over the last 7 years, nearly 2000 men have completed the program entitled “The Quest For Manhood.” The unique aspect of this program is that men who graduate from the program (it takes 26 weeks to complete the entire program) are then invited to lead others through The Quest while they are still incarcerated. This has become a generative, disciple-making process. Dr. Stair is fulfilling the Pauline directive to entrust teachings to faithful men who can then pass them to others.<sup>54</sup> Discipleship, in very simple terms, is facilitating spiritual growth in someone else in such a way that it is reproducible.

Many of these men, upon the conclusion of their prison sentences, have gone on to vocational ministry positions as well as successful careers in business. By making reproducible discipleship the main focus, Dr. Stair has seen the course of immeasurable numbers of families altered. New Life is experiencing fourth and fifth generation discipleship that will never be measured on any membership role or attendance sheet of any local church. In recent days, however, the denomination to which he belongs has updated its reporting system. As a result, this work of discipleship is included in the measurable evidence of presence of the Foursquare Church, its missional footprint.

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<sup>53</sup> New Life Prison Ministry can be followed on Facebook by searching New Life Prison Ministry. Donations are accepted online to support this ongoing work.

<sup>54</sup> 2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV).

In the case of Dr. Stair's work, if his denomination were only measuring the three Bs measured by most organizations,<sup>55</sup> his contribution to the denomination's missional footprint may be considered inconsequential. Make no mistake, the missional footprint of this man's individual ministry is vast and because it is recognized as significant, with appropriate attention given to recording discipleship activity, the denomination's missional footprint is expanded. This clear example of discipleship is included in the measurable evidence of the denomination's presence in society even while not resulting in an increase to the local church's Sunday worship attendance, official membership or money.

### **Dr. Roderick Koop**

Rod Koop was briefly mentioned in the introduction as one who has made an indelible impression on my life and development as an ecclesial leader. It is fitting here to pick up the story and continue it forward to the present day. At the same time, I must acknowledge my personal connection to the Koop family narrative and remind the reader that I am not an unbiased researcher.

During the redistricting campaign of 2009 mentioned in the introduction, the Foursquare Church redefined the role that Rod had occupied for several years. Through a series of prayerful decisions and open doors, the Koops made the decision to return to Alaska (their childhood home) on mission. This move toward mission happened concurrently with a shift outward to the edge of the Foursquare Church for Rod and Teresa. In a bit of a twist in our shared story, the Koops' migration to the organizational edge occurred at the same time as my relocation to the center. To capture the entire depth

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<sup>55</sup> Butts, Budgets and Buildings.

and breadth of their story over these last seven years will require an entire book (which will undoubtedly be written someday), that is not the intention here. Instead, I am seeking to highlight just a few of the discipleship outcomes presently growing up from the vast harvest field of Alaska as a result of their obedience to God.<sup>56</sup>

The things of value to the North Of Hope Project are not easily measured using customary, denominational reporting metrics. Things like summer fish camp — where an indeterminate number of individuals and families come together in campers, tents and storage trailers to fish the Cook Inlet and various rivers — cannot be appropriately quantified in attendance and budget.<sup>57</sup> To even make an attempt would strike at the very core of the values underpinning this missional activity. At a casual glance, fish camp may seem like a quaint, summertime event or maybe some kind of an “outreach” where counting of hands raised to receive Jesus is the end result, but a deeper look reveals something much more substantial.

To begin, cooperative fishing<sup>58</sup> at fish camp provides a present-day equivalent to the Acts 2:44 phenomenon of holding resources in common. All who participate receive food to eat during the upcoming harsh Alaskan winter while stories of the faithfulness of God are passed from one generation to the next. This takes place while co-laboring to bring in the harvest of fish. Oral transmission of faith is a vital component of

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<sup>56</sup> The North of Hope project is the umbrella organization formed by the Koops. [www.northofhope.com](http://www.northofhope.com) provides a real time look at the present scope of NOH projects. The North of Hope FaceBook page can be found by simply searching North of Hope in the FB search bar. A dynamic look at daily activities can be found there.

<sup>57</sup> In the Summer of 2014, I participated with my family in 10 days of fish camp in an autoethnographic research event.

<sup>58</sup> All participants are equal recipients of the collective harvest, regardless of how successful each was on the water.

discipleship. While these easily observed components are important and certainly meaningful, further reflection reveals an even deeper ecclesiology. In Dr. Koop's words:

Two universal needs exist for all Alaskans: food and relationships. It's part of what makes us human. First we begin with the contextualized understanding and conviction that the salmon & halibut resource we have here in Alaska is given by God to supply the food needs of his people. If you divorce yourselves from this understanding nothing else makes sense. Even non-believers have no trouble with this point of view. It's woven into the culture of this land from tens of thousands of years ago.

[With cooperative fishing] everyone is on this same page, level ground, it supports the rest of what we do. We currently have 37 people that relate to our home church gathering. That's 9 family groups, some singles, some larger families. It's embarrassing to report that to the [Foursquare Church reporting system] as our attendance on any given Saturday night is probably about 22. HOWEVER... Each family group is committed to using Fish Camp each year as an easy, culturally relevant way to *build bridges to people who don't confess Christ as savior*. We talk about it all the time, and though Fish Camp lasts just six weeks, it's what happens while building these bridges [throughout the year] that makes it all work.

A family looks at their natural connections — where they live, go to school, work, play, shop, hike, etc. Just living with their eyes open, expecting God to cross their paths with people who need to be loved. We talk about this and tell stories about this all the time. As a family group makes friends, they just invite people over for dinner and feed their guests fish: halibut or salmon — whatever they caught. While eating, they talk about the excitement and adventure of how they harvested this bounty and tell the stories of fish camp. When people leave to go home, our family group sends them home with some fish. Generosity is one of our markers. *We always harvest more than we'll eat so we have plenty to give.*

And there's a standing invitation too: "Guys...you have to come join us for Fish Camp next summer! It doesn't matter if you have equipment, or even if you don't want to go out on the water. We all pitch in, carry different responsibilities and come home with more fish than we could possibly eat for the winter." Sometimes it takes a couple of years for people to take us up on this offer. But that's because it takes that long to build trust... We're in it for the long haul.

Each day we work and play hard. Each night we gather around the fire pit and somebody always has a guitar. We worship and have just one standing question: "[w]here did you see God today?" No sermons are allowed. People are free to share scriptures and to pray, especially that God would give us a good harvest each day. But that question: "where did you see God" has been the key to open the door for so many people who are doubters. So the footprint is about three or four times our total number of people. We don't care so much how many attend

each gathering on Saturday, but we do care a lot about living our lives with eyes open to those people God brings to us (emphasis added).<sup>59</sup>

Fish camp is one exemplar of contextual discipleship within the missional footprint of The North Of Hope Project, one of several where this organization is concerned.<sup>60</sup> And while this narrative offers helpful insight when examining the broad concept of the missional footprint, the meta-narrative of NOH illustrates, at the same time, an example of what I am calling erosion.

Most of the missional activity presently undertaken by the Koops will not be measured within the missional footprint of the Foursquare Church in America. While Rod and Teresa continue to be connected by ordination and personal relationships with individuals across the denomination, North of Hope stands apart as a separate, legal entity. In a similar pattern as Francine (mentioned in the introduction) the Koops will continue to experience vital, missional activity within the edges of the NOH missional footprint while the larger ecclesial organization misses out on the measurable benefit of their innovations. Rod communicates a sense of sadness over this reality. He had hoped for a different kind of leader to leader relating than has been experienced since going on mission to Alaska. This is an avoidable erosion of the missional footprint of the Foursquare Church.

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<sup>59</sup> Roderick Koop, email to the author, October 26, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Fish Camp is but one example. Parish ministry among the Anchorage Police Department, cultural restoration among first-people groups in the Southeast AK islands, Christian Leadership Network, and an ever-expanding slate of leaders being disciplined are all included in the Koops' body of leadership work.

### **Who is building the church?**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, when I was growing up my dad was a residential home builder and master carpenter. I remember watching the delivery truck arrive from the local lumber yard, delivering the materials necessary to build a new home. Everything needed to frame up the home and leave it “dried in” was contained in that delivery. While the delivery driver certainly played a vital role in the ultimate construction of the new home, it could even be said that the job could not be completed without his contribution, he would have been in error had he, upon completion of the home, come around the job site claiming to be the builder. He did not build the home, my dad did.

Matthew 16:18 records where Jesus clearly stated, “I will build my church...” and further, the church that Jesus builds is the only one that will demolish the gates of Hell. There is a clearly articulated order of activity to be seen when Matthew chapters 16 and 28 are examined side by side. *We* make disciples, *Jesus* builds the church. To carry forward the metaphor of the home builder, we are like the delivery driver. We deliver the different kinds of material then Jesus takes that material and uses it to build his church. We fall into error if we succumb to role-confusion.

When role-confusion occurs, measuring the wrong things can follow closely behind. It only makes sense that well-intentioned ecclesial leaders would spend tremendous amounts of energy measuring membership and attendance numbers along with the capacity of structures and bank accounts, if they are operating under a mistaken notion that they have been instructed to build a church. There is a palpable sense of relief

when a follower of Jesus comes to the realization that he or she is not responsible for church-building, but simply for making disciples.

Forrest Head, North America Director for Big Life,<sup>61</sup> offers this insight into how he measures discipleship within the missional footprint of his organization: “I always ask leaders that we train to be looking for where people are beginning to obey the teachings of Christ in their day to day lives. This is the best indicator of when discipleship is taking place. Are people actually being obedient to Jesus’ teachings? If not, then discipleship is not taking place.”<sup>62</sup> Simple.

Whenever Biglifers gather, there is a simple, three-fold process that takes place. First, there is a *look back* as they talk about the past week(s) and how they have been able to obey the teachings of Jesus. Then, a *look up* to God where self-examination, reflection on scripture and prayer happens. Finally, a *look forward* to the upcoming days and the mission field that encompasses all of their lives each day.<sup>63</sup> This is simple yet profound. Much like the single question guiding the conversations at fish camp — “where did you see God today?” — a persistent statement places the focus squarely on the matters of discipleship that are vital to the measurable growth of an individual life. The collection of lives being discipled composes the missional footprint of Big Life. Forrest continues, “we have actually stopped counting attendance at meetings.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Big Life is a global house church movement seeking to import the effective missional behaviors observed by Biglifers overseas back to North America.

<sup>62</sup> Forrest Head, interview with the author, October 18, 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

### The Great Commandment

If growing in obedience to the commands of Jesus is of central importance when it comes to the missional footprint of an ecclesial organization then it follows that it is vital to understand what command he has given. “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: *‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”<sup>65</sup> The vivid imagery employed in the language of the text is interesting.

Much like the erosion terminology I am using in this dissertation to illustrate a wearing away and diminishing of ecclesial organizations, this picture of “devouring each other” suggests the stark image of a self-inflicted kind of deterioration. With these words, the first-century apostle to the gentiles forcefully articulated the command of Jesus recorded in the following passage:

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”<sup>66</sup>

Much like the Great Commission, this Great Commandment from Jesus provides an opportunity for observable, measurable activity. This provides the second column of measurable activity within an organization’s missional footprint.

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<sup>65</sup> Galatians 5:13-15 (ESV).

<sup>66</sup> Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV).



The present section of this chapter demands far fewer words than the previous, for the simplicity of the Great Commandment invites a simple kind of obedience. *Just show love.* A corollary passage found in The Gospel of Luke invites a deeper look into what this means.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii[a] and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”<sup>67</sup>

Jesus’ selection of the Samaritan as protagonist is telling. To the listening onlooker, there could have been no more stark contrast in characters: Those who organized and oversaw Jewish ceremonial worship (the priest and levite) over and against a religious half-breed whose group maintained, in the eyes of Jewish citizenry, a heretical claim on the locus of worship. For those within earshot of this story, it would have been unthinkable to think of a Samaritan as a neighbor, let alone to conceive of him as hero.

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<sup>67</sup> Luke 10:25-37 (ESV).

Yet this is the story that Jesus, in his wisdom, opted to tell. It vividly illustrates the truth that measurable, sacrificial acts of love are part and parcel of the missional footprint.

It is additionally important to note that the Great Commandment and Great Commission are inextricably knitted together. Notice the words of Jesus recorded in John chapter thirteen. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”<sup>68</sup> In this watershed statement both streams are expectantly envisaged as running together — the Great Commission and the Great Commandment carefully stitched together.

According to Jesus, one indication that the Great Commission (make disciples) is happening is for the Great Commandment (demonstrable love for one another) to be evidenced. These two must be held in close proximity to each other.

Here at the end of this chapter, I would like to pose a few questions. As the reader reflects on these, regardless of what organizational strata he or she may occupy, it is my hope that the Holy Spirit will bring enlightenment, inspiring change where change is appropriate.

- What are the ecclesial activities I have historically valued enough to measure?
- In my organization, how do we know when discipleship is taking place? How do we measure that?
- Do I truly love other leaders within my organization? How do I demonstrate that? Is it apparent in my speech, conduct and prayers?
- When have I fallen prey to the temptation to bite and devour other leaders in my organization? Do I need to repent of this?

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<sup>68</sup> John 13:34-35 (ESV).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have offered examples of simple, measurable elements present within an ecclesial organization's missional footprint. When these organizations place an emphasis on measuring things that serve their own interests and self-preservation (budgets, membership, etc.), to the exclusion of the more important things, components of the missional footprint may be easily missed. For ecclesial organizations, the vital activities are those that take place in obedience to the Great Commission and Great Commandment, things that may be imperceptible through the usual metrics of organizational preservation.

Central to my proposal is an understanding that the loss of edge-located leaders is aptly described in terms of erosion. It seems self-evident that an important part of identifying when erosion is taking place is to know where the edge of the missional footprint is found. For this to happen, a willingness to measure true missional activity is necessary. It is noteworthy that leaders at the edge of an organization are most likely to be engaged in activity more directly associated with the metrics of the missional footprint than the metrics of organizational preservation. Because of this, there is a higher likelihood that their contributions (often deviations from organizational norms) will be overlooked by those who hold decision-making power within the organization.

Stories of leaders like Francine, John, Rod and myself highlight the reality that when a leader's contributions are passed over and ignored, his/her self-awareness of value within an organization is greatly diminished and he/she is more likely to disconnect. This disconnection does not always lead to structural departure from the organization (disenfranchised leaders may indeed remain administratively affiliated), but

an emotional and functional disconnect can occur. Again, the reader will notice strands of this functional kind of disconnect woven through my personal story. “Why am I in this organization?” “I’m not sure why we stay.” “I just don’t think I have a place within the current bishop’s overall direction.” “All they care about is that we send in our [denominational dues].”<sup>69</sup> These are the sounds of disconnect taking place.

Whether it be an administrative departure or a functional disconnect, a gap or frayed point (erosion) at the edge of the organization is the result; the missional footprint disintegrates a fraction at a time. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, there are some causes of erosion that are largely beyond our control, this is not one of them. We can find a way forward where edge and center-located leaders of ecclesial bodies reconnect. What remains to be seen is whether or not they will engage in the kind of conversations necessary to see that reconnection come about. I am guardedly hopeful.

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<sup>69</sup> These statements are emblematic of sentiments that have been articulated to me in various conversations with edge-located leaders in recent years.

### **THREE: TREATMENT OF THE HERETIC**

I verily believe, the real heresy of Pelagius was neither more nor less than this: The holding that Christians may, by the grace of God, (not without it; that I take to be a mere slander,) “go on to perfection;” or, in other words, “fulfill the law of Christ.”

—John Wesley

#### **Tendencies**

In the previous chapter I put forward the notion that the term “missional footprint” provides an apt framework for measuring the evidence of presence of ecclesial organizations in America. Further, I observed that there is a kind of erosion to that footprint occurring when edge-located leaders are lost due to marginalization and disconnect. Before suggesting a possible remedy to that problem, it seems appropriate to give attention to some existing conditions in leader to leader relating within American ecclesial organizations while observing how we arrived here. A measure of clarity about how we arrived at the problem will be helpful as we consider a remedy.

I should here remind the reader that I am not offering a theological treatise, nor an in-depth examination of Church History. My primary arguments are from personal experience and conversations with other church leaders like myself. However, somewhere along the way I began to think: “Hang on a second! This stuff isn’t really all that new!” It seems that a winner/loser paradigm has existed since the earliest days of the church and I am simply exploring a few examples to provide a context. I trust that the reader will understand, after completing this section, the importance of these digressions to my overall thesis.

### **Sucking the oxygen out of the room**

Generationally speaking, I am a member of “Generation X.” When I was twenty-seven years old, a collection of Gen Xers from our denomination were convening to discuss how we might network, learn together and help each other confront the shared challenges of being “young leaders” in an organization dominated by white-haired men. At the first gathering, several, including myself, self-selected onto a steering committee to consider what we might do in the future. The steering committee sessions were facilitated by a male church leader who was about ten years older than most of us in the group. He had the organizational credibility that many of us youngsters lacked.

I recall the first time the steering committee gathered. About twenty of us eager young leaders had self-funded our own travel (not an easy task for young, broke church leaders) from all across the country with the expectation of dreaming together about the great things that could happen in the years to come. Optimism filled the room! Good ideas, dumb ideas, crazy notions, blue-sky dreams, all were offered with no fear of being shut down. We truly thought we could build some lasting collaborations that might help shape the future of our movement. It was a fruitful meeting until the voice of authority spoke up. I remember it well.

The group was discussing how we might make a proposal to the denominational power-center for funding to connect Gen Xers regionally for the purpose of deepening relationships. Mid-conversation, the meeting facilitator stood to his feet, leaned forward and placed his hands on the table.<sup>70</sup> “We’re not going to do that.” The silence was almost

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<sup>70</sup> In the book *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence*, Dr. Mary Kate Morse notes how “a person can use his or her body to guide the group’s response by standing while the others are

immediate. Within a few seconds, all eyes were on him. “We’re just not going to be able to have regional gatherings, we’re just not going to go that way. This is a wasted conversation.” There was visible shock on the faces of some, uncomfortable shuffling of papers by others, I simply stopped talking. As the meeting progressed, at the direction of the facilitator, a quick schedule for an annual conference was framed up, perfunctory prayers were uttered, then we released and went for dinner in self-selected groups. Of all the statements made by the people in my dinner group that night, I only remember one. One of the young men, laughingly commented “I guess a conference will be ok.”

The power to decide was clearly located with the facilitator. All that was required to close down the conversation was for him to make it clear who held that power. What had been spacious conversations, open to boundless possibility, became stiflingly narrow in the span of a few seconds. For those in the room who might have felt that a single, national conference was not necessarily the best next step for Gen Xers, the argument was clearly lost; it was lost before it was even made. The winner had placed his hands on the table and leaned forward. What had been “we can really go deep in our relationships and support each other in our ministries” quickly morphed into “I guess a conference will be ok.” As I recall this event, now nearly twenty years ago, the sense of powerlessness and discouragement that accompanies being the loser still rises in my gut.

### **Leader to leader relating**

Through the years in denominational leadership, regrettably, I have experienced plenty of other versions of that board room scene. I can recall times when I have been the

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seated, or by leaning back in a chair and crossing his or her legs. Others will either feel that they are expected to listen or that they are invited to participate” based upon the body language of the speaker. Mary Kate Morse, *Making Room For Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), loc. 631, Kindle.

guy leaning in, palms on the table, towering over the rest. I have been an argument-winner, a power-holder narrowing the scope of possibilities to the point that only a handful of my own remain. Having grown up in the American Evangelical church, this method seems to have been hard-wired into my leadership style.

Now, twenty-five years into my leadership journey, I am beginning to entertain an inkling that leadership is more than just persuading people to act how I want them to act. There is a difference between convincing others to *buy in* to my vision and inviting them into dialogue where we might co-create a shared vision. I am discovering that I prefer the latter.

As I am slowly accepting this shift in thinking about leader to leader relating, I am also asking *how did we get here?* How have we come to the place where winning is more important than a faithful adherence to the Great Commandment? The more I consider this, the more I realize that we did not arrive here in an instant; a steady disintegration in terms of leader to leader relating is evidenced in the Church History literature.

If we hold the Jerusalem Council as the benchmark and then look into some general tendencies in leader to leader relating through to the present day a stark contrast emerges. What began as dialogic relating quickly became adversarial. Many present-day, edge-located ecclesial leaders describe experiencing hallmarks of a winner/loser paradigm instead of dialogic collaboration which, according to the Book of Acts, was normative for the first generation of the church.

There is a trend beginning with the first generation church leaders (Apostles) and moving outward from there. When it comes to disagreements between the mainstream and nonconformists, between those seeking the preservation of organizational norms and



constructive deviants<sup>71</sup> contending for change, between centers and edges, there is a degenerating cycle of the treatment of those who came up on the losing end of the argument du jour.

Some milestones in the progression: In the fifth century Augustine and Pelagius argued over the original nature of man and whether or not actual sinlessness could be attained. The sixteenth century witnessed the Catholic/Reformer/Radical-Reformer arguments that many times ended with the loss of lives over what oftentimes amounted to politically-fueled, doctrinal minutia. Today, arguments take place over whether “welcoming,” “affirming” or simply “accepting” is the correct manner of obeying the Great Commandment toward those who think differently about human sexuality. In all of these eras one thing can be seen as common: our history (Church History) is one of drawing lines, fighting over those lines, declaring victory on one side or the other of the line, then finally, anathematizing and demonizing those on the losing side of the line. In all these matters, someone will win and someone will lose. This is not the picture that emerges when we examine the Jerusalem Council.

Caroline Ramsey helpfully notes that one way of viewing the history of the Church is “as an ongoing wrestling with complex issues by insisting that there should be a winning and losing argument.”<sup>72</sup> Even a casual reading of Church History seems to support this observation, especially the “ongoing wrestling” part, right up until the present day. It seems that most major shifts chronicled in church history have been

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<sup>71</sup> The idea of Constructive Deviance will be explored in greater depth further along in this dissertation. The underlying principal for this stream of thought in Organizational Studies has been developed by Bella Galperin.

<sup>72</sup> Caroline Ramsey, email to the author, October 5, 2016.

pressed through a binary grid: either *this* or *that*, *wrong* or *right*, *winner* or *loser*. As I reflect on Ramsey's words, I wonder if this type of simplistic processing has done a disservice. Can important issues of substantial complexity be given the treatment they deserve within such a simplistic paradigm? *Winner = power; loser = powerless*. For me, it feels somewhat thin. Yet I suspect this simplistic thinking continues to impinge on present-day leader to leader relating.

I am considering the implications carried forward when it is insisted that there must be a winner with a "right way" about everything. The implication is that there must also be a loser with a "wrong way." If this is true, what kind of conversations does a winner/loser paradigm tend toward, centrifugal or centripetal? Does it throw wide the doors to spacious dialogue between leaders, or does it lead to protectionist, closed-ended conversations? In my experience, much like in that board room some twenty years ago, the fear of coming up on the losing end is enough to shut down even the most creative of individuals.

Nearing the conclusion of the previous chapter, the argument was put forward that Christian love for one another is part and parcel of an ecclesial organization's missional footprint and as such, is included in its measurable evidence of presence. When I consider that, I am confronted with another question: how we are doing in this regard? Since Jesus issued the command to love each other, along with the observation that people will identify us as his disciples when we do, I am wondering if we are actually recognizable as disciples of Jesus according to this criteria. Has our love for each other been on the increase?

Couple that line of inquiry with the observation that the mode of leader to leader relating evidenced in ecclesial organizations today was not arrived at overnight and another question comes forward: Who have been the historical losers among ecclesial organizations and how have they been treated by the winners? Are there identifiable tendencies in leader to leader relating within the church when it comes to those who hold views that diverge from those in the centers of power? We call those who lose doctrinal arguments *heretics* and I do think there are some interesting observations to be made about their treatment.

For the purposes of this dissertation, The Great Commandment offers more than simply one important element of the measurable evidence of our presence, it also provides a foundation for the formation of a dialogic ethos. I am convinced of one thing if nothing else, grace flowing out of love will be necessary if that ethos is to take shape within ecclesial organizations. Since it is often the case that past behavior provides an indicator of future behavior, or at a minimum has a shaping impact on present behavior, I will ask the question again here with slightly different wording: how have *we* treated the heretic, historically?

### **The Heretic**

Dissenter. Nonconformist. Heretic. Descriptive of individuals who do not agree with the main body of thought present within a given organization, these titles are almost universally viewed in a negative light. There is a glaring irony to be observed here for those of us leading present-day ecclesial bodies. When the historical trajectories of our various denominations are traced backward, we discover that many of the ecclesial organizations recognized as mainstream today can trace their origins back to a renowned

dissenter, somebody's heretic. Perhaps the heretic is more valuable than we might care to admit.

Malcolm Lambert insightfully notes that "[r]eform and heresy are twins,"<sup>73</sup> two sides of the same coin it could be said. For the Catholic, the Reformer is a heretic; for the Reformer, the Radical and Pietist are heretics and so the cycle goes. Whether one is deemed to be a heretic or a leading theologian is often simply the result of who made the most convincing argument and rallied the most supporters to his/her cause. In the case of the Magisterial Reformers, to have the support of the ruling princes was a critical element as well.

We have a long and storied history of dividing and conquering. Even when the battles being fought are not physical ones, with real loss of human life, the wars of words can be significantly damaging to the overall vitality of the church. It is a concern of mine that the organizational tendency within the church to turn arguments into battles has had a formative influence on the present-day norms of leader to leader relating. The compulsion to win at all costs runs deep.

### **Pelagius**

If it isn't bad enough to be labelled "heretic," imagine that your very name has been associated with a particular collective and then summarily condemned. Diarmaid MacCulloch points out that

[m]any religious labels started life as a sneer. The Reformation was full of angry words: 'Calvinist' was at first a term of abuse to describe those who believed more or less what John Calvin believed; the nickname gradually forced out the rival contemptuous term 'Picard,' which referred to Calvin's birthplace... No

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<sup>73</sup> Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy, Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 415.

Anabaptists ever described themselves as Anabaptist... Even that slippery term ‘Anglican’ appears to have been first spoken with disapproval by King James VI of Scotland, when in 1598 he was trying to convince the Church of Scotland how unenthusiastic he was for the Church on England.<sup>74</sup>

Clustering and labelling has been demonstrated to be an effective method of winning an argument. In the church’s long history of argumentation, it is difficult to imagine a more striking example of negative name recognition than British-born monk, Pelagius.

As I began to think through this section of the dissertation, the age old adage “throw the baby out with the bathwater” came to mind. Once an individual has lost an argument, especially a doctrinal or procedural argument, is there anything of value to be learned from that person? Is truth only found in the winner’s perspectives? Surely *all* of the loser’s theological perspectives are not worthy of dismissal just because the winner’s view carried the day.

Research, along with a variety of leadership anecdotes, evidence an unfortunate human tendency to think in patterns that are “biased, distorted, uninformed or down-right prejudiced.”<sup>75</sup> Further, people generally hold tightly to the belief that the way they think things to be actually is how things are.<sup>76</sup> And further still, we have a hard time understanding why everyone else doesn’t think the same way that we do!<sup>77</sup> Once an individual has come up on the losing end of one argument, the tendency is to throw out all of his/her other beliefs along with the argument that lost. In many cases, there is a fear

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<sup>74</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), xvii-xviii.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking, Concepts and Tools* (Kindle: Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2009), loc. 37.

<sup>76</sup> The concept of *in-group bias* will be examined in greater depth later in the dissertation.

<sup>77</sup> Paul and Elder, Loc. 260.

on the part of the winner to allow any memory of the loser's contribution to remain lest the defeated position somehow regain momentum and rise from the ashes of defeat. I find this to be unfortunate.

It seems that an illustrative digression is in order at this point. Acts chapters ten and eleven chronicle the story of the Apostle Peter and Cornelius the Centurion as the first instance where non-Jews were recognized as having received “repentance that leads to life.”<sup>78</sup> This created a crisis of identity for the recently formed group of Jesus-followers, known pejoratively as *The Way*.<sup>79</sup> Prior to that encounter, Believers were all national and religious Jews who had embraced a modified messianic expectation.

For several years this encounter with Cornelius could simply be held as an anomaly, a curiosity that did not functionally re-shape Jewish Christianity, until Paul and Barnabas made a notable, volitional shift to an exclusively gentile-centric outreach.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, this shift led to a disputation between the two of them and some Believers with religious roots in the sect of the Pharisees. Acts chapter fifteen records a groundbreaking council of church leaders where a solution to the crisis was reached through civil dialogue;<sup>81</sup> sensible accommodations were made to allow for gentile inclusion into the family of faith. While some were unhappy with the outcome, none were publicly humiliated, exiled or burned at the stake. Holding this story up as an exemplar of leader

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<sup>78</sup> Acts 11:18 (ESV).

<sup>79</sup> Note how even the early Christians were labelled, clustered and scorned by the broader culture.

<sup>80</sup> See the account of Paul and Barnabus in Antioch of Pisidia recorded in Acts 13, specifically verses 46 and 47.

<sup>81</sup> The reader should understand that this is not intended to be an in-depth treatment of the Jerusalem Council, its outcomes and historical ramifications.

to leader relating in the first generation of the church, it can be seen that the winner/loser paradigm evident in the church today had not yet become the norm.

I briefly make mention of the Jerusalem Council here to highlight an important point of contrast. Notice how, over the span of just a few generations, leader to leader communications regarding core differences underwent a noticeable shift — from civil and reasoned to adversarial and *ad hominem*. This shift, from love, grace and a prioritization of unity, to an emphasis on being correct happened in a relatively short time. Not much more than three hundred years after the first generation of church fathers — those who had reasoned together and brought about the outcomes of the monumental Jerusalem council — Augustine was busy working out his corpus of theological work as polemic, arguing *against* heretics more than he was contending *for* pure statements of doctrine. This is an important distinction. With the Jerusalem Council, an emphasis on agreement carried the day. This stands in contrast with Augustine’s practice of articulating Orthodoxy by way of polemic.<sup>82</sup>

Of the three enemies to Orthodoxy providing Augustine with opportunities to codify the Church’s right thinking,<sup>83</sup> Pelagius stands as the most stark and persistent. Another observation by McCulloch which weighs in on this subject is that “[a]ll Augustine’s theology was shaped by various disputes in which he found himself embroiled, and the most significant dispute of all was over this question of sin and

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<sup>82</sup> The reader should note that I am not contending against Augustine’s conclusions, but simply pointing out that the normative method of doctrinal innovation was argumentation.

<sup>83</sup> Manicheism, Donatism and Paliagianism.

salvation.”<sup>84</sup> One such argument, carried forward by a “group of enthusiastic, ultra-austere Christians, [with their] most prominent spokesman a monk called Pelagius,”<sup>85</sup> were earnestly calling Christians to a higher standard of behavior, to pursue sinlessness. They found themselves crosswise with the power-holders in the Church when they dared to consider the possibility that man, by volitional act, could possibly live a sinless existence. Sin was not transmitted from one human to the next.

Those who followed after Pelagius’ teachings became pejoratively known as Pelagians and, in the final reckoning, came up on the losing end of the ecclesial argument. To this very day, if one desires to shut down theological conversation, or to win a debate by completely discrediting an opponent, one must simply whisper the accusation of “*Palagianism*” and the work is done! But was Pelagius, in all things, utterly in error? Was there nothing of value to be gleaned from his work? This is an important question to be considered, one that gets to the heart of the treatment of argument-losers.

As a practical theologian, I find, at a minimum, a logical progression of thought in Pelagius: “God has made us free and the source of [human] evil is in the will... [therefore] human beings have the capacity to overcome sin. Otherwise, sin would be excusable.”<sup>86</sup> In Pelagius’ own words:

[m]an has not been created truly good simply because he is able to do evil and is not obliged by the overpowering inclination of his own nature to do good on compulsion and without any possibility of variation... man’s status is better and higher for the very reason for which it is thought to be inferior: it is on this choice between two ways, on this freedom to choose either alternative, that the glory of the rational mind is based, it is in this that the whole honor of our nature consists,

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<sup>84</sup> MacCulloch, 104.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Volume 1* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 214.



it is from this that its dignity is derived and all good men win others' praise and their own reward. Nor would there be any virtue at all in the good done by the man who perseveres, if he could not at any time cross over to the path of evil.<sup>87</sup>

And further:

If a person could not go over to evil, he would not practice virtue in holding to the good. God decided to give rational creatures the gift of good will and the power of free choice. By making a person naturally capable of good and evil, so that he could do both and would direct his own will to either, God arranged that what an individual actually chose would be properly his own.<sup>88</sup>

Stated succinctly, if a man has no choice whether to sin or not to sin there can be no true expression of sin. This is precisely why the Creator issued the probationary command to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

For Pelagius, there had to exist, in the original condition of man, the option to sin or not to sin. While this may be a largely hypothetical situation (that an individual could actually live a sinless existence) for Pelagius, since God had endowed man with the *option* not to sin, it had to at least be a *possibility* that he could choose sinlessness. Followers of Pelagius did not deny the necessity of God's grace active in the life of the Believer and necessary for salvation, simply that a man should not be considered cursed, deemed sinful, until he had actually sinned for himself.<sup>89</sup>

It is at least within the realm of possibility that Pelagius was simply misunderstood, that his entreaty for Christians to at least make the *attempt* to live free

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<sup>87</sup> B.R. Brees, *Pelagius, Life and Letters Volume II, The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1991), 38.

<sup>88</sup> Pelagius, "Letter to Demetrius" in *Theological Anthropology*, ed. J. Patout Burns (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 43.

<sup>89</sup> I am compelled to mention here that I embrace a view that holds the nature of man as inherently sinful due to the tainting of original sin. As such, I land in the winners' camp when it comes to the Pelagian dispute. However, I can appreciate the rationale behind an alternative interpretation.

from sin and train others to do the same was misconstrued to mean that the grace of God was of no effect. Is it not one of the core tenets and desired outcomes of our present-day discipleship for men to live holy and blameless? I find at least this one issue to be consistent with widely accepted orthodoxy. B. R. Rees and R. F. Evans do as well.

Rees helpfully summarizes: “Pelagius was... ‘fundamentally a Christian moralist’, and he wanted, above all else, ‘to be an orthodox theologian of the Christian Church and to be known as such’.”<sup>90</sup> Pelagius’ plea for Christians to pursue a sin-free existence could have been simply an outgrowth and expression of his embrace of asceticism and austerity. There are some demonstrable points of agreement to be found between him and Augustine and I suspect Augustine had some measure of hair-splitting to do to find in Pelagius a worthy foil. But is that not the way of it? There must be an opponent against which our arguments can be constructed. We are hard-wired to fight.

MacCulloch points out the important point that “Augustine had no objection to austerity, but he found Pelagian advocacy of it grotesquely wrong-headed. Because it was based on reasoning which conflicted with the picture of human corruption *he (Augustine) found* in Paul’s writings (emphasis added).”<sup>91</sup> The two may have come to the same practical outcomes when it comes to ideas about preferred Christian living but because the pathway taken by Pelagius was different, Augustine would not acknowledge that agreement. Austerity and responsible living were perfectly acceptable concepts to be championed, desired actually, it just was not acceptable for Pelagius to do the championing. Whatever contribution Pelagius may have made to the corpus of guidance

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<sup>90</sup> Brees, *Volume I*, xi.

<sup>91</sup> MacCulloch, 104, 106.

for disciplined Christian living was stamped out because he was not in lock-step agreement with the power-holders in *all* things.

Evidently John Wesley embraced a more balanced view of the British monk. In *The History of The Christian Church, Volume I* John Fletcher Hurst quotes Wesley: “I verily believe, the real heresy of Pelagius was neither more nor less than this: The holding that Christians may, by the grace of God, (not without it; that I take to be a mere slander,) ‘go on to perfection;’ or, in other words, ‘fulfill the law of Christ.’”<sup>92</sup> Hurst further asserts that “in this Wesley was right. Pelagius certainly insisted on the necessity of the grace of God”<sup>93</sup> then continues with Wesley’s words: “Who was Pelagius? By all I can pick up from ancient authors I guess he was both a wise and a holy man. But we know nothing but his name; for his writings are all destroyed; not one line of them left.”<sup>94</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Once a heretic always a heretic, or so it seems. As a result, not only have his potential theological contributions been expunged, the very term “Pelagianism” persists as a grossly overused, conversation-ending term of derision some 1600 years later.

This is a matter of tremendous importance as it speaks to the instinctive tendencies underpinning leader to leader relating in the church. One of the primary (if not *the* primary) formative voices in Protestant theology, Augustine, whose themes and

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<sup>92</sup> John Fletcher Hurst, *History of The Christian Church, Volume I* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1897), 459.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> It should be noted that Wesley was not entirely accurate in this assessment but the spirit of his words is clear. There was not an effort made to preserve Pelagius’ words, in fact, given his “heretic” status, it is more likely that an effort was made to expunge his thoughts from the corpus of Christian thought by those who were on the winning side of history.

theological motifs persist to the present day, established a tone of leader to leader communication that is constructed almost entirely on polemic.<sup>96</sup> Further, when his position rose to the place of prominence (when he became the winner), the next move was to crush the loser and expunge the historical record of his existence. Orthodoxy was elevated above orthopraxy; being correct was more important than extending grace born out of love. In my view, this has had a lasting impact on the default method of leader to leader relating that continues through the iterations of church until the present day.

A final thought on Pelagius. What was Pelagius' most egregious error, his most heretical utterance? In truth, it is hard to determine with certainty for precisely the reason reflected upon by Wesley: most of his original words are no longer available, only the recounting of his words by his victorious adversaries who then proceeded to write the history books. One thing seems clear, "[t]he gravest error into which he and the rest of the Pelagians fell, was that they did not submit to the doctrinal decisions of the Church."<sup>97</sup>

It is remarkable that, even though he was utterly suppressed and marginalized, for well over a century Pelagius' influence was tangibly felt throughout the Western Church.<sup>98</sup> Even some 1600 years later, he is still held forth as a polarizing figure. Is it plausible that, had his work been preserved, such a substantially influential monk would

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<sup>96</sup> Of course Augustine was not the first but provides us with an apt example. Our entire system of Orthodoxy has been built upon the backbone of argument with winners and losers.

<sup>97</sup> Joseph Pohle, "Pelagius and Pelagianism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 11, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm>.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

have had at least some helpful theological thought to be enfolded into the broader body of Orthodoxy? I have a suspicion that the answer to that question is *yes*.

### **Hubmaier**

Moving forward by a thousand years, by the time the various Reformations were in full swing, church leadership had fully embraced the idea that it was acceptable, preferable in some cases, to do torturous, horrific acts of violence against other humans as a means of ridding the collective of the virus of heresy. This is an unfortunate and embarrassing element of church history more likely to be glossed over by modern preachers as simply an accepted cultural norm in the Medieval Era than owned up to and repented of. However, as we continue our examination of the treatment of the heretic, this matter cannot be skipped over without leaving an obvious void. It is true. It really happened. And I suspect that a marked influence on the present-day manner in which ecclesial leaders relate to one another can be observed. It can be situated on a progression of leader to leader relating that begins with the Jerusalem Council and ends with center/edge communications today.

In the immediate wake of the Reformations,<sup>99</sup> there sprang forth a three-fold continuation of reformation ideals: Anabaptism, spiritualism and anti-trinitarian rationalism.<sup>100</sup> These all fit within the broader category of *Radical Reformers* and are often examined in contrast to the *Magisterial Reformers*<sup>101</sup> as advocating for a further

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<sup>99</sup> There was not a single Reformation but rather, Reformations in the plural.

<sup>100</sup> Roger Olsen, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Madison, WI: IVP, 1999), 415.

<sup>101</sup> Magisterial Reformers, most commonly recognized as Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, made doctrinal adjustments to their respective churches yet continued to perpetuate the commingling of church and civil governance.

extension of the reforming work. Of the three primary groups of Radical Reformers growing forward from the Protestant Reformation, by far the Anabaptists emerged as “[t]he largest and most influential”<sup>102</sup> of them all. While continuing in the “[t]hree major Protestant principles... usually identified as setting [Protestants] apart from the church of Rome — sola gratia et fides (salvation by grace through faith alone), sola scriptura (Scripture above all other authorities for Christian faith and practice) and the priesthood of all believers —”<sup>103</sup> these Radical Reformers held that the reforms instituted by the Magisterial Reformers did not extend far enough; they were merely “halfway measures taken by Luther and the other [M]agisterial Reformers in purifying the church of Roman Catholic elements.”<sup>104</sup> Stated another way, Calvin, Zwingli, even Luther may have indeed offered a suitable beginning point for accomplishing the shared, “uniform aim [of] return[ing] the church of Jesus Christ to its true New Testament foundation”<sup>105</sup> but for the Radical Reformers, certain retained practices within the nascent Protestant Church continued to violate their collective consciences.

One central issue that quickly became a point of violent dispute between Radical and Magisterial Reformers was the method and timing of baptism, with the timing being the primary point of contention. Does one baptize an infant for entrance into the Corpus Christianum? Or is it important that the one receiving the sacrament of Baptism be a conscious believer first? The German cleric Balthasar Hubmaier emerged as a central

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<sup>102</sup> Olsen, 415.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 370.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

figure in these disputes, ultimately finding himself on the wrong side of the power-holders.

If we look at the continuum of power flowing from Pope Leo X on to Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Zurich and Calvin in Geneva, it is clear that each of the Magisterial Reformers only made reforms so far as their individual desires were addressed. For example, none of them were compelled to put a stop to the use of civil authorities to enforce their version of corpus Christianum. The methods of enforcement were often brutal and inhumane. If one held alternative views related to core Protestant principles, even if those views were underpinned with sound, scriptural rationale, one could expect to be swiftly and harshly punished.

One of the three primary Protestant principles —*Sola Scriptura* — contained a practically fatal flaw in that it ultimately presented more confusion than clarity for Protestant believers. Once it came to be commonly accepted that the scripture alone occupies the preeminent space above all other authorities for Christian faith and practice — including church tradition and opinions of church leaders — the doors were thrown wide for innumerable interpretations of the sacred text. This created a self-perpetuating problem.

Common people, making good faith attempts to follow after Protestant precepts, began to order their lives according to individual interpretations of scripture. Magisterial Reformers were then compelled to exert institutional controls to ensure proper understanding (read: their own “correct” interpretations) of scripture, thereby re-situating control into the hands of church leaders. Said another way, one “consequence of sola scriptura was... myriad interpretations, which they (Magisterial Reformers) in turn would

attempt to control.”<sup>106</sup> (I fear that the desire for a pure dependence on scripture for righteous living is never fully devoid of conflict!) The understanding of sound, scriptural instructions for the sacrament of Baptism is one such matter.

Conflict arose over the timing of baptism. This was not about *whether or not* to baptize but rather, *when* to baptize. That last statement bears restating for emphasis. No one was in disagreement over the importance of baptism as a sacramental duty of the church; *they simply disagreed on the timing*. For Hubmaier, this became a deadly disagreement; he was burned at the stake in 1528. A pause for reflection is here warranted. Ponder for a moment the reality that, for the Magisterial Reformers, it was more important to be the winner in this doctrinal argument than was the life of a fellow citizen of humanity. How had it come to this? How had a matter born of human tradition risen to the level where a man’s life was utterly devalued? This is a much different approach to conflict than was witnessed at the Jerusalem Council.

It seems that Luther, Zwingli and Calvin’s decisions to exempt the practice of pedobaptism from the reforms were anchored purely in their own, unique church traditions. The arguments that “infants cannot hear the gospel, understand and repent and... *nowhere in the New Testament* does Christ command infant baptism”<sup>107</sup> are irrefutable. On the other side of the argument, Hubmaier, alongside other Anabaptist Reformers, escalated, drawing their own proverbial lines in the sand. For the Radical

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<sup>106</sup> Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations, second edition* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 212.

<sup>107</sup> Menno Simons, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J. C. Wenger, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1956), 133.



Reformers, infant baptism was extra-biblical at best, worse, promoting “cheap grace,”<sup>108</sup> and worst, “baptism of the Antichrist.”<sup>109</sup>

Once centrifugal language such as this was introduced, it was virtually impossible to find common ground, even on other important matters. It was not enough to win the argument over the issue of pedobaptism in the public arena, the one giving voice to the opposition position had to be utterly eliminated. Tragic.

There is a further, ironic post-script to the story of Balthasar Hubmaier. While history illustrates that Hubmaier was a dominant figure in the genesis of the Anabaptists, he holds “no great permanent influence on the later Anabaptist-Mennonite movement, since he diverged from the main line of Anabaptists on the question of nonresistance, and his group of ‘Schwertler’<sup>110</sup> did not survive his death more than one or two years.”<sup>111</sup> This is of great interest to me because once again, in the same manner as Pelagius, the loser found himself marginalized and on the receiving end of an attempt to expunge his contributions from the historical record. This time, however, the marginalization occurred at the hands of leaders within the very group he had helped to forge, the Anabaptists! Once again, it seems that to agree on some things was not enough. To walk in unity with the collective, agreement on *all* things was necessary. *Conformity prevails.*

What was the offense for which Hubmaier was anathematized by his one time, Anabaptist comrades? One would assume it to be a major doctrinal disagreement to

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<sup>108</sup> Lindberg, 195.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> “Bearers of swords.” The name given to the minority group of early Anabaptists who believed in the use of violence in defense.

<sup>111</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed August 7, 2016. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hubmaier,\\_Balthasar\\_\(1480%3F-1528\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hubmaier,_Balthasar_(1480%3F-1528))

warrant such extreme measures but it actually was relatively minor. He felt that a Believer should be able to take up arms in defense of his own life or the life of his family. He was ostracized as a result, with “no great permanent influence” on the future generations of Anabaptists. Some among the various, modern off-shoots of the Magisterial Reformers have reclaimed his writings and tepidly acknowledged the injustice of his death, but for many in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, Hubmaier is glossed over.

Before moving on to a more modern kind of polarization, there is one more brief, but important, observation to make regarding Medieval Christianity. Ecclesial leaders did not just awaken one day and begin killing the losers of theological arguments. There was a steady progression over the course of centuries, a slow desensitization coupled with an acceptance of the hierarchical norms within the broader society that culminated with a reprioritization of sorts. Being right and outwrestling the opponent was deemed more important than demonstrating love and grace.

No, it did not happen overnight. A few hundred years before it became tolerable to execute heretical Christians for espousing non-orthodoxy, Charlemagne was engaged in the mass murder of pagans under the banner of the church. It seems that once it was deemed acceptable to take the life of a non-Christian, it did not require much of a shift in thinking to take the lives of Christians who had strayed from truth. All who dwelled outside the boundaries of Christendom could be seen in the light of condemned collectivism. We should not gloss over this too quickly.

Thankfully, leader to leader relating has evolved somewhat. No longer is our violence done with swords, today words are the weapon of choice. But to overlook the

influence of these early tendencies on the present-day, winner/loser paradigm would be irresponsible. The present relational culture within the church still carries strands of that early spiritual DNA. Recalling Ramsey's suggestion that one way to view church history is as a wrestling match, leader to leader relating in ecclesial organizations still lines up with that analogy quite well. The demand for a clear winner standing over a clear loser, arms raised in victory, comes to mind. Or perhaps that thirty-five year old leaning forward, palms on the conference table, mandating what a group of twenty-somethings would do next is a more helpful image. When this unique organizational history is combined with some naturally-occurring, human tendencies, the results can be tragic.

### **The Condemned Collective<sup>112</sup>**

Social Psychologists refer to the human tendency to favor the group to which he/she belongs as *in-group bias*.<sup>113</sup> This terminology suggests that we are naturally inclined to bind together in groups based on commonality. Further, we tend to draw clear, dark lines around those groups, remaining separate from the rest. It has been my observation that oftentimes, within ecclesial organizations, individual leaders identify with the *sub-group* within their ecclesial organization to which they belong more than

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<sup>112</sup> I should here give attention to a functional definition. I have coined this term to refer to whatever group of "others" I tend to hold at arms length because of differences in philosophy, theology or lifestyle decisions. I find that as long as I can keep people safely compartmentalized in their collection of "others" I can avoid the difficult reality of their humanity and the corresponding value that they have been assigned by God. However, when an individual sits across the table from me, eye to eye, I have to look deeply into the soul of that unique individual and acknowledge the one-of-a-kind realities and nuances of his/her story.

<sup>113</sup> There is a sizable corpus of literature focused on the social phenomenon of in-group bias. It is simply natural for an individual to view his/her own group as the preferred group. This seems to be instinctive. One example: Gaven A. Ehrlich and Richard H. Gramzow, "The Politics of Affirmation Theory" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 41 no 8: 1110-1122. This article highlights the human tendency to draw affirmation from status within an in-group as a replacement for lagging, personal self-esteem.

they do the Kingdom of God in a broad sense or Christendom, “the Church,” or even the ecclesial organization to which they belong. It is not my intention to be critical of this tendency, but rather, to simply acknowledge its impact on leader to leader relating in a general sense.

As the turmoil accompanying the Reformations began to diminish, and with the dawning of the enlightenment, history demonstrates a noticeable decline in the acceptability of taking an individual’s life over doctrinal and philosophical arguments. Even while in the American colonies, harsh punishments persisted for relatively minor offenses, such as avoiding worship on Sunday, it became increasingly rare that a person would actually be executed for disagreements about faith.<sup>114</sup> However, the in-group biasing, clustering and compulsion to name winners and losers has still not faded completely.

Time and time again, leaders within American ecclesial organizations express a sense of marginalization when describing relationships with their respective organizational centers. Vertical hierarchies, drawing clear distinctions between leaders at the various strata, foster an ethos where, for these individuals, feelings of powerlessness prevail. In this kind of environment, violence of word and attitude toward those outside of an in-group can find fertile soil in which to take root.

I am reminded of an exchange between myself and Tom. Tom is a priest in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. He and his family relocated to Atlanta to plant a new community of faith. While maintaining fidelity to Lutheran orthodoxy, they were

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<sup>114</sup> Executions for other evil behavior persisted like witchcraft, sodomy, bestiality, etc., but to lose one’s life for simple heresy waned noticeably from the 18th century forward.

exploring methodologies associated with the FiveTwo movement<sup>115</sup> to frame their planting efforts. He was essentially planting a house-church network instead of a single, Sunday-centric church. Tom writes:

In terms of getting sideways [with LCMS leadership], I guess two things stand out. First, when I preached for [Wesleyan pastor] at his church plant, a plant of the Wesleyan tradition. Since our denomination is not in “altar and pulpit fellowship” I [was accused of, and] could have been charged with syncretism or the mixing of heterodox and orthodox theologies. That comes from our denomination’s view that the “Lutheran Confessions” is a true exposition of scripture and all other expressions are broken. For an anti-papist tradition like our own, you can see the irony of the claim of infallibility! (Clearly, I don’t feel that way about our Confessions, though I do love Lutheran theology.) Second, another way that I was sideways, was simply the approach to doing ministry differently. The expectation in our church body for a “church plant” is a program-driven, Sunday morning centered expression. Now, I appreciate that as the process and believe it is of tremendous value, but to begin meeting in our home and not on a Sunday morning raised eyebrows. So I guess you could say we were procedural heretics.<sup>116</sup>

After a few years of work, tilling very difficult soil both in the community and among the denomination, he and his family were beginning to gain momentum. Slowly, other families were joining with them in their constructive deviations. At the same time, Tom was one of seven leaders to join together in an collection of church planting network leaders which gave rise to the Atlanta Church Planting Alliance. Tom served as one of the first board members for the ACPA.

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<sup>115</sup> FiveTwo is a reform movement “born out of a group of Lutheran leaders who are very much entrepreneurial (apostolic) in their gifting. B/c they are that way, they see the value... of learning from others... They started as a church planting network and then went to a ‘best practices’ format and made a few other changes until most recently when they cemented ‘Start New to Reach New’ as a mantra. So they now come alongside to help churches, individuals, businesses, organizations--all who want to start something new to reach people. Back to apostolic roots.” Tom Zucconi, email to the author, 12-1-2016.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

After a few years, the Zucconis were forced to abandon the effort to form “Sanctus”<sup>117</sup> and accepted the call to an existing pulpit back in Texas. It seems that his procedural heresies had finally gone too far. In the eyes of leaders at the center of his organization, he was a Maverick who refused to recant his heresies and get in line. While I am thankful that my friend was not drawn and quartered, he and his family did suffer the verbal violence of accusation, marginalization and abandonment at the hands of those who should have been celebrating the fruit of his adaptations and affirming his unique contribution to the denomination. In the light of his narrative, I am considering a slight modification to the guiding question in this chapter. I am asking “how has the *procedural* heretic been treated?”

The reasonable hope of this edge-located leader was for power-holders at the center to attempt a better use of *peripheral vision*<sup>118</sup> and proactively seek out ways to understanding the work he was undertaking out at the edge. While there is no way to know with certainty if this would have changed their effectiveness in the formation of congregations, what I am sure of is that, for this denomination, a potential goldmine of organizational learning was available if only some degree of cross-strata dialogue had emerged. Instead, however, the message Tom received loud and clear was something closer to “get in line you rebel! We don’t like your tone.”

Returning to MacCulloch’s observation that Augustine’s primary doctrinal developments were essentially polemic in nature, it can be demonstrated that most major

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<sup>117</sup> The name of their faith community.

<sup>118</sup> The concept of organizational periphery and leader peripheral vision, as presented by Day and Shoemaker in Harvard Business Review, will be explored in the subsequent chapter entitled “Centers and Edges.”

advances in Christian Orthodoxy have been developed along polemical lines. This tendency has been hard-wired into our spiritual genetic code. The pattern of argumentation leading to a winner and loser, with the memory of the loser being erased from the collective memory by the winner, has been firmly established as normative. The impact of this tendency can be seen in the overall tenor of leader to leader relating within American ecclesial organizations today.

As I bring this chapter to a close, I am once again reflecting on a few questions. I invite the reader to join me.

- How has a winner/loser paradigm had an impact on how I relate to leaders in my organization? Do I give preference for those occupying space within my same strata over and against those in the other strata?
- Have I given only mental assent to the Great Commandment when it comes to how I relate to those with whom I disagree? Or do I truly allow love to be preeminent?
- How have I treated the heretics in my life?

### **Conclusion**

So, what now? It is one thing to recognize and articulate a trend while another thing entirely to do anything about it. It is my hope that as we explore the ramifications of this trend upon current leader to leader relating, they will serve as motivation to seek a different way, a better way, forward. To that end, the next chapter will examine leader to leader relating with a particular focus on leaders at organizational edges and centers. Where the present chapter has provided insight into how we arrived at our present condition, the next will look at how *centers and edges* might co-exist in an environment of care and affirmation.

In my various ecclesial leadership roles, I have observed that there are strengths and weaknesses possessed by individuals leading at both locations. Those differences

serve to position individuals to be more or less well-suited for service at a particular location. This is not a valuation of *better or worse* nor a statement of *winner and loser*, far from it. This simply is an acknowledgement of differentness. Said another way, I am persuaded that center-located and edge-located ecclesial leaders have a God-designed need for one another. For in the weaknesses of the one, strengths of the other are surfaced. I am bothered by the realization that we do not often grasp the depth of that need. It is my hope that we will come to understand this and, as a result, a God-honoring affirmation of each other will carry the day.



## FOUR: CENTERS AND EDGES

Life begins out at the edges of an organization, flowing inward toward the center.

—John Heinz

### Structural Integrity

I closed the previous chapter with the observation that leaders at organizational centers and edges possess unique strengths and weaknesses which position them to lead at their particular organizational stratum. In this present chapter, I am suggesting that a recognition of mutual need is essential. Centers and edges really do need each other! I do not want the reader to move forward under the impression that I think only those at the center wear blinders when it comes to seeing the value of other strata. It has been my observation that edge-located leaders do their fair share of grappling with accepting their need for the center as well. The aforementioned in-group bias runs deep!

An admittedly simplistic metaphor to be considered here is Earth, this hurtling orb upon which we all occupy space. All of us, with feet planted firmly on the ground, are kept from spinning off into space by the gravitational pull of the center. At the same time, if Earth's edge did not provide some measure of tension against the pull of the center, we would all be sucked into a flaming puddle of magma. The crust (edge) of the Earth is the location of direct interactions with a myriad of things — seven billion humans, all manner of other creatures, not to mention cosmic dust and the occasional meteorite. The core (center) remains safely buffered by the edge and other intervening strata.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Clearly, I am no geologist! This simplistic illustration is only intended to offer an accessible visual. Additionally, I acknowledge the presence of organizational strata other than the center and edge but for the sake of this project, I am only attending to these two.

The structural integrity of the globe depends upon the center and the edge holding together, providing counterbalance to each other. There is a necessary tension present between the two, a type of pulling and pushing toward and away, that when rightly maintained, preserves the structural integrity of the whole. One cannot exist without the other.

Further along in my interview with Tammy Dunahoo (referenced in the introduction), she made the observation that “the center is a vortex, it takes on a life of its own and if you aren’t careful it will suck you in.”<sup>120</sup> As one who has moved from edge to center and back to the edge, I have a deep appreciation for this perspective. There is something appealing about the power and relative comfort enjoyed at the center of the organization! Dunahoo is a self-proclaimed edge-dweller who has been asked to serve for a season at the center of her denomination. As a female pastor and church planter prior to entering the organizational center, she understands very well the highs and lows that come while leading at the edge as well as the ever-present frustration that accompanies dealing with the center.

“I understand how the center can suck the life out of you if you’re not careful.”<sup>121</sup> This is an important observation for edge-located leaders to remember when considering the actions of those in the center. The very nature of the center location tends to work against the kind of creativity often necessary at the edge. For a leader like Dunahoo, there

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<sup>120</sup> Tammy Dunahoo, interview with the author, September 18, 2016.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

is an important, potentially organization-preserving, role to be filled. She represents a type of leader that could serve as an organizational interpreter.<sup>122</sup>

An interpreter effectively empathizes with edge-located leaders who are struggling to understand the actions of the center, all the while appreciating the pressures that may drive those actions. An interpreter does more than just attain understanding for him/herself, an interpreter *assists others* in understanding as well. This is an important distinction to be considered. For example, it would be one thing for me to leverage an understanding of organizational nuance in order to personally navigate a particular organizational culture while another thing altogether to assist someone else in coming to that understanding. The former would be to my own benefit, a work of self-advancement, while the latter would benefit another, a work of benevolence.

In the context of center/edge relating, an interpreter helps leaders at both locations understand each other. Understanding is often the first step toward peace. When it comes to cross-strata dialogue between ecclesial leaders, the interpreter emerges as a vital participant, one who convenes and facilitates dialogue. As I reflect on the last 15 years of my leadership in ministry, it becomes clear that I have found (and continue to find) myself in this position often. Further, largely because of my location at the edge of my ecclesial organization, in recent years I have become friends with others who fit this same profile. *There are available interpreters out there!* It seems that both edge and center located leaders would do well to take this into account, perhaps employing the services of an interpreter more frequently.

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<sup>122</sup> While the role of “interpreter” is mentioned here in passing, the scope of this dissertation will not allow for a full treatment of the role i.e. examining characteristics, context, experiences, etc. Further study and analysis of the leadership profile of an effective interpreter is warranted.

As we turn our attention to these two important organizational strata, the center and the edge, I feel compelled to pause and remind the reader that there is only one body, with one head, Jesus. Every piece of the body has a unique function and is joined together down to the cellular level. When each piece is operating in unity with the others, doing its part, exercising grace born out of love for each other, the entire body is strengthened.<sup>123</sup> I find this truth to be applicable at all levels, from the smallest of local churches to the largest, globe-crossing denominations. When we determine to understand one another, acknowledging and affirming the unique and significant space occupied by each one, we are living out of this truth.

### **Power and Powerlessness**

Edge-located ecclesial leaders often communicate an underlying sense of powerlessness. One cause of this perceived powerlessness could be that, in their organizations, decision-making capacity is situated almost entirely with center-located leaders. Leaders at the edge are resigned to navigating the often-shifting parameters mandated by the center unless they determine to exercise their own brand of constructive deviance. Whether it be a board of directors, a presbytery, a collection of bishops or a single apostle, in the American church, decision-making capacity is generally centralized; the rest are somewhat powerless, swept along by the decisions of a few.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> My paraphrase of Ephesians 4:15-16.

<sup>124</sup> The reader is likely asking, “but what about congregational forms of church governance?” A deeper look into many congregational churches reveals that there are still a few who pull the strings of power.

MaryKate Morse insightfully observes that a sense of powerlessness is often accompanied by other feelings such as “helpless[ness], vulnerab[ility] and small[ness], out of control, frightened, unloved, anxious[ness]. No one talks about powerlessness as a positive experience.”<sup>125</sup> Dr. Morse continues by noting that “[t]he people in power are often the most ignorant about the negative emotional impact that powerlessness has on those deprived of voice and value.”<sup>126</sup> Even if he/she is not the cause of the feelings of powerlessness, a wise power-holder will take this into account when interacting with those who have no power.

In the relative comfort of the center, a false sense of “all is well!” can be mistakenly assumed. Leaders with decision-making capacity at the center of ecclesial organizations are often oblivious to how out of control edge-located leaders can feel when navigating the ever-shifting landscape of initiatives and regulations emanating from the center. This is not always a result of sinister intent. I suspect that, many times, a simple case of “out of sight, out of mind” is the cause. This is understandable given that one primary element of the definition of “edge-located” is for day to day activities to be undertaken beyond the view of the organizational center. To a certain extent, we edge-dwellers like to stay out of the power-holders’ line-of-sight, just “under the radar.”

Whatever the motivation underpinning the feelings of powerlessness experienced by those at the edge, when considered alongside the demand for adaptations due to

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<sup>125</sup> MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), Kindle, loc. 292.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., loc. 310.

interactions with entities beyond the footprint of their organization,<sup>127</sup> the pressure to adjust can be overwhelming. Center-located leaders would be wise to acknowledge this when interacting with leaders across the various organizational strata.

On the other hand, it is understandably difficult for center-located leaders to put themselves in the shoes of others when the daily drumbeat of their own reality is ever present. I can acknowledge that they have their own set of organizational complexities to deal with. Much as the uncertainty of leadership at the edge can be debilitating, the pressure to perform can become extreme for those at the center. This kind of pressure can result in a type of organizational blindness where ignorance of others and self-centricism prevail. Edge-located leaders would do well to remember this.

### **Contend for peace**

The human tendency for self-centricism runs deep. Undeniable, it is seen in human interactions extending back through recorded history. It seems to be woven into the human condition, present even in the earliest recorded instructions to the church. To the troubled church in Colosse, Paul (the *Jewish* Apostle to the *gentiles*) writes:

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, *bearing with one another* and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (emphasis added).<sup>128</sup>

To church leaders in Ephesus, this instruction is issued:

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience,

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<sup>127</sup> The reader will recall the litany of things taking place completely beyond their control such as consumerism in society, animosity toward religion, mistrust of institutions, to name a few.

<sup>128</sup> Colossians 3:11-14 (ESV).

*bearing with one another in love*, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift (emphasis added).<sup>129</sup>

These are merely two examples of a clearly observed New Testament theme: We are all unique with individual strengths and weaknesses. Our default posture toward one another should be patience, bearing with one another, contending for peace. To love one another is part and parcel of the Great Commandment.

### **First-generation organization**

Viewing the first-generation of Christianity through center/edge lenses, it is seen that Jewish Believers occupied space at the organizational center while gentile converts remained at the edge. Not only were Jews the first to believe, and comprising of the majority within the organization, all significant leaders of the first-generation church were Jews, maintaining decision-making capacity for the entire organization. Remember, it was Jewish leadership at the Jerusalem Council that made concessions to gentile Believers who had recently come to faith in Christ. This concession represents a form of “bearing with one another” and stands as an exemplar for center/edge relating.

While this dissertation views ecclesial organizations in strata, primarily center and edge, it is here important to be reminded that individual leaders are in view. Should we, during our study of organization as collectives and categories, forget this we run the risk of falling into a persistent cycle of dehumanizing one another. Yes, leaders exist in clusters at the centers and edges of ecclesial organizations and yes, there are general strengths and weaknesses to be observed at each location, however, those leaders are real

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<sup>129</sup> Ephesians 4:1-7 (ESV).

individuals with real frailties and real strengths, all on display in real experiences. Those unique experiences shape their perspectives and feelings. Both center-located and edge-located leaders would do well to remember this.

I am coming to a place where, much like MaryKate Morse, I recognize that in our frailty, we “[h]umans can abuse power, and when [we] do, [it is usually] those in the margins suffer.”<sup>130</sup> In a myriad of conversations with edge-located leaders, I have heard variations of this sentiment repeated time and again. Edge-located leaders often experience powerlessness within their respective organizations which can lead to resentment over time. Yet I must concede that it is not appropriate to lay the blame entirely at the feet of leaders at the center; multiple factors certainly come to bear. Honesty compels me to admit that I surrender power as often as power is seized from me.

Of the many conversations I have had with edge-located leaders within my denomination, one stands out as emblematic of this. Our national leadership was conducting a listening tour of sorts, traveling to multiple regions across the country as a part of a process called “Reimagine Foursquare.” In a phone call with another pastor, I mentioned the upcoming meeting in our region and asked if I would see him there. His answer, while disappointing, came as no real shock to me: “No, it doesn’t matter what I think about this stuff. They’re (center-located leaders) just going to do what they want to do anyway and we (local pastors) will just deal with it.” He had opted out of the conversation, surrendered power and in so doing, shifted a little piece of organizational responsibility back to the center. This happens time and again. Power is surrendered as

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<sup>130</sup> Morse, 301.



often as it is seized. Many times edge-located leaders surrender power simply by opting out, by exercising “exit instead of voice.”<sup>131</sup>

### **Power = Winner**

In chapter three, I engaged with the question of *how have we treated the heretic* in an attempt to trace the general trajectory of leader to leader relating from the Jerusalem Council, to the early church Fathers, forward to Reformation era leaders and on until the present day. The acknowledged presence of a winner/loser paradigm that culminated in a violent kind of rationalization is seen to have had a lasting impact on how ecclesial leaders relate to one another.

While this winner/loser paradigm continues to have an impact on leader to leader relating, thankfully, it has been moderated since the Reformations (at least we no longer kill the losers). However, the connection between holding power and winning can still be seen when it comes to center/edge relationships. The perception is that those in power must be on the winning side.

For leaders at the edge, if there is an absence of relational affirmation from the center, a persistent “underdog” mentality can take hold. Underdog mentality leads to defensiveness, defensiveness leads to “fight or flight” instincts, fight or flight leads to untempered words, untempered words lead to offense, and downward on it goes. This, along with the ever-present human tendency toward in-group bias, has a tremendous impact on how center-located and edge-located leaders engage each other. However, it is remarkable how “a good conversation can increase the good brain hormones like

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<sup>131</sup> See Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

oxytocin and dopamine”<sup>132</sup> restoring connectivity person to person. Said another way, the right kind of conversation can reshape leader to leader relating.

### **In-Group Bias**

I will here continue with a few more words about in-group bias as we continue with an examination of center and edge-located leaders, and their deep, yet often overlooked, need for one another. When it comes to building bridges between individuals who hold very different points of view, “some of the most troublesome obstacles... are unconscious attitudes on the part of well-intentioned people. It is one of the anomalies of religious faith that certainty of conviction often breeds unintentional arrogance.”<sup>133</sup> Hutcheson and Shriver refer to this as “the arrogance of certitude.”<sup>134</sup> This tendency runs in a similar vein as the previously mentioned *in-group bias* (the natural inclination for an individual to favor the group to which he/she belongs).

In-group bias is evident among individuals within ecclesial organizations. This *in-grouping*, clustering together, is oftentimes evidenced in harsh criticisms and accusations of individuals in other groups, especially those leading at different strata within the same ecclesial organization. While in my experience this can be disheartening, there is evidence that we can do better if some concerted effort is given. Hutchison and Shriver point out:

The Gallup organization explored the proposition that the more deeply religious people are, the more likely they are to be bigoted and close-minded. It developed

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<sup>132</sup> Jane Cresswell, “The Brain and Coaching” workshop presented at the AG Coaching Forum, August 2, 2015.

<sup>133</sup> Richard G. Hutcheson Jr. and Peggy Shriver, *The Divided Church, Moving Liberals and Conservatives from Diatribe to Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 109.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

a twelve item scale to measure the segment of the population that is “highly spiritually committed.” it reported that “while representing only 13 percent of the population, these persons are a ‘breed apart’ from the rest of society. We find that these people, who have what might be described as ‘transforming faith,’ are [in actuality] more tolerant of others, more inclined to perform charitable acts, more concerned about the betterment of society, and far happier... There is at least some evidence, then, that religious commitment at its best leads to greater acceptance of differences rather than to intolerant arrogance.”<sup>135</sup>

Said another way, we do have the spiritual genetic code, so to speak, to find common ground and mutual affirmation among ecclesial leaders. It is no easy task, however. Obstacles are numerous as deep-seated in-group bias is apparently woven into the historical fabric of the church.<sup>136</sup> This can lead to a natural leaning toward centrifugalism and centrifugal speech; the more tightly clustered a group, the more distance develops between it and other groups. We can take heart, however, in the knowledge that our “ultimate hope for a binding unity is found in the Lord of the church and the power of the Holy Spirit. The love of Christ is strong enough to overcome any human divisions.”<sup>137</sup>

Leader to leader relating across organizational strata is one area where the impact of in-group bias is clearly seen. This bias is evidenced when center-located leaders assign a higher worth to the activities of the center or, on the other end of the spectrum, when edge-located leaders give preference to the behaviors of the activities of the edge. In either case, an over-valuing of the one leads to a diminishing of the other. Biases are revealed and clusters are formed. Each has the tendency to think that the *real work of*

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>136</sup> I will here simply remind the reader that the inclination toward a winner/loser paradigm has been forged in the core of the church since the second generation leaders argued over establishing Orthodoxy.

<sup>137</sup> Hutcheson and Shriver, 215.

*ministry* must be taking place within their group. If other groups espouse different points of view, they become obstacles to progress at best, or even worse, opponents to be conquered.

It is here helpful to remember the persistent winner/loser paradigm present within the church. If intentionality is not exercised, a generative cycle — conflict; argument; a winner and a loser; marginalization of the loser; animosity toward the winner; more argument... and on it goes — will simply persist. The net result of this cycle, if left unchecked, is erosion to the organization as edge-located leaders become disconnected.

The story of the church in Corinth is instructive here. The Apostle Paul confronts an instance of in-group bias in his first recorded letter to the leaders there. Note how strife and arguments between groups hinders growth while the recognition of mutual need nurtures it:

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.<sup>138</sup>

Among several important observations that could be highlighted from this text, the one most applicable to this present work is simply that there is not one group more critical to the organization’s mission than another. No single group holds the monopoly position on

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<sup>138</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 (ESV).

prominence! They are different and unique from one another, fulfilling different jobs and outcomes, but one is not of greater worth than the other.

I am here reminded of my conversation with John (his case-study was referenced in the introduction). John wrestles with an ever-present sense of inferiority, as if his work is sub-par and of little consequence to his ecclesial organization in a broad sense. At one point in the interview he noted:

It is easy to see what mode of ministry is valued by [denominational] leadership, just look at who is on every platform at every seminar and conference. It's always either the new church planter that blew up to 500 in Sunday attendance in a year or the mega-church pastor. Even the worship teams will be the ones with recordings and published music. What we celebrate from our platforms communicates clearly: "bigger is better and more valuable." Those of us who have answered the call to shepherd intentionally smaller groups feel the unspoken, but ever present, comparison. Yet because of our specific calling, we will never be able to measure up.<sup>139</sup>

There seems to be a clear valuation of one over the other in John's ecclesial organization, but even if this valuation did not occur, the upsurge of "affinity" groups among ecclesial leaders is further evidence of the centrifugal nature of organizational conversations.

Take a look at many of the church health/church growth conferences in circulation among the American church today. Learning tracks or affinity groups cluster leaders into classrooms based on the size of their work as measured by Sunday attendance or membership. Where ecclesial leaders are continually pressed into relationships with others that are essentially like themselves, it is not surprising that in-group bias is reinforced, perpetuating the cycle of centrifugal conversations.

There is an even deeper motivation toward in-group bias to be found among Christians. Apparently, a perception of righteousness plays a role in this.

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<sup>139</sup> "John," interview conducted by author, April 1, 2015.

Studies show that we attribute the successes of ingroup members to positive character traits rather than to external causes. In contrast, we attribute failures of ingroup members to situational causes rather than to character traits... For outgroup members, on the other hand, causal attributions are less favourable. When outsiders experience success, we are more likely to attribute it to luck or to situational causes rather than to any positive character traits... Similarly, we are more likely to attribute the failures of outgroup members to innate character flaws rather than to external causes.<sup>140</sup>

Beyond just gravitating toward relationships with those who are most like us, while moving away from those that are different, the in-group bias leads to the belief that an individual's righteous or unrighteous character is derived from the group to which he or she belongs.

Stated another way, we tend to be gracious and forgiving to those within our own organizational stratum while offering rigidity and “cutting no slack” to others. When mistakes are made, when words are misspoken, we instinctively move to assigning unrighteous motives to the one making the error where if the same mistake were to be done by a leader within our own stratum, it would more likely be chalked up to any number of legitimate, non-sinister reasons. Social psychologists call this tendency the “fundamental attribution error.”

The attribution of a high or low moral character further drives the tendency toward clustering and separating. It is one thing to exercise graciousness and agree to have interactions with someone from outside the in-group but another thing entirely to enter a relationship with someone of low moral character. This is understandable in the light of various scriptural injunctions to avoid evil, even the appearance of evil.<sup>141</sup> Good-

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<sup>140</sup> “In-Group Bias: Preferring People Like Us,” Culture Plus Consulting, accessed September 16, 2016, <https://cultureplusconsulting.com/2015/06/19/in-group-bias-preferring-people-like-us-2>.

<sup>141</sup> For example, see 1 Thessalonians 5:22; 2 Timothy 3:5; and passages found throughout the Wisdom literature.

hearted Christians instinctively move away from things (people) understood to be of low moral character. Still, I invite the reader to reflect upon the possibility that a hyper-sensitivity to the avoidance of evil might be a factor in the furtherance of an out of balance in-group bias among ecclesial leaders. Can we come to a place of agreement that both center and edge-located leaders are equally righteous in the eyes of God and all working on the same team? That seems to be a good first step.

So, it can be seen that for a number of reasons we instinctively seek out others like ourselves with which to form clusters, in-groups. Couple this with the historical winner/loser paradigm and what emerges is an almost irresistible urge within ecclesial organizations for leaders in different organizational strata to assume adversarial postures toward one another. Centers find it difficult to value edges while edges view centers as obstacles to mission, opponents to be overcome. These tendencies are present even before any actual offenses are perpetrated.

While there is nothing intrinsically wrong about identifying with a particular group or sub-group, the danger of falling into the trap of thinking that one group is superior to another is ever-present. Where winner/loser patterns of thinking prevail, the group holding power can be easily perceived to have won and, because of that, makes the rules and establishes organizational norms. The group with less power is perceived to have lost and must either go along with, or rebel against, those norms.

### **Constructive Deviations in Ecclesial Organizations**

In The Harvard Business Review article by George Day and Paul Shoemaker entitled “Scanning the Periphery,” the proposal is put forward that the edge of an organization is the most likely place where both threats and opportunities will be

encountered.<sup>142</sup> This environment of heightened exposure to threats and opportunities develops a greater propensity for adaptation in the leader located there. It is simply a function of organizational location. Innovations are more widespread at the edge than at the center, not by chance or some kind of adaptive superiority, but rather, of simple necessity. When it is “adapt or die” the motivation to change can be much more pronounced.

For leaders within ecclesial bodies navigating the complexities of liquid modernity, the perception can be that the landscape is shifting constantly. For those of us leading at the edges of our organizations, it can feel at times that we are taking hits on an almost daily basis. It is no wonder that leaders in the outer strata of an ecclesial organization are more prone to adjust and adapt, bending the letter of the regulation from time to time. The very survival of their work oftentimes depends on it! Day and Shoemaker’s proposal suggests that adaptive leadership is more readily exhibited at the edge.

As noted previously, everything has an edge. An edge is the location of the most direct contact and interaction with other things. Another very simplistic illustration of this truism (to accompany my admittedly unsophisticated “Earth” analogy) is to envision a car crash. Where the two (or more) vehicles collide is the location of the most direct interaction between one vehicle and the other(s). Hopefully, the occupants of the vehicles (in the center of the car) are shielded from the brunt of the collision by layers of

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<sup>142</sup> George S. Day and Paul J. H. Shoemaker, “Scanning the Periphery” *Harvard Business Review* 83, no 11 (November 2005): 135-148.



protection — sheet metal, springs, airbags and seat belts. The edge takes the hit. Edges are better equipped to do that; it is what they are designed to do.

When interacting with leaders at the periphery of their organizations, center-located leaders would be wise to consider the importance of those providing a buffer for them, those located at the edges. Much like a wise quarterback of an NFL team takes great care to affirm and value the work of the offensive linemen that are protecting him from the opposing team's defender during game-time, so astute leaders at the organizational center will take great care to affirm and value those edge-located leaders that take the most direct hits.

In *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, Heifetz, Glashow and Linsky make the observation that “[a]daptive leadership is specifically about change that enables the capacity to thrive.” And further, that “adaptation occurs [best] through experimentation.”<sup>143</sup> It is my observation that the periphery, the edge, is where experimentation and innovation have the greatest opportunity to be exercised, the results of which can be most readily seen.

I am considering the potential benefit to an organization if center-located leaders would begin to intentionally tune their peripheral vision, attending to those furthest from the core. What could happen if the adaptations exercised by edge-dwellers were to be acknowledged and celebrated rather than resisted and suppressed? I have observed the hallmarks of an effective, edge-located leader to be agility, adaptability and a capacity to respond quickly, even proactively, when threats and opportunities take shape. It is

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<sup>143</sup> Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Glashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Cambridge Leadership Associates, 2009), 14-16.

interesting that these are all hallmarks of an effective “adaptive leader” according to Heifetz et al. How often do we run the risk of losing these valuable characteristics through erosion due to simple inattention? Center/edge dialogue could facilitate this much needed attention.

### **Constructive Deviance**

The idea of *Constructive Deviance* (CD) is emerging as an important area of interest in organizational and management literature.<sup>144</sup> Along with “potential negative outcomes, deviant behaviors of employees can also be functional and constructive”<sup>145</sup> when those deviations from expressed or implied norms are undertaken with the intent of bringing innovative improvement to the organization. “With the increasing interest in positive organizational scholarship and the dynamics that lead to exceptional individual and organizational performance, interest in constructive deviance has grown.”<sup>146</sup> Leaning on Bella Galperin’s<sup>147</sup> working definition of CD — “*voluntary* behavior that violates significant organizational norms, consequently contributing to the well-being of an organization, its members, or both (emphasis added)”<sup>148</sup> — Tziner et al bring forward the notion that CD can be a powerful catalyst for long-term, systemic change within an organization.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> K.S. Cameron and A. Caza, “Contributions to the Discipline of Positive Organizational Scholarship,” *American Behavioral Scientist* no. 47 (2004): 731-739.

<sup>145</sup> Aharon Tziner, et al, “Constructive Deviance: Leader-Member Exchange, and Confidence in Appraisal: How Do They Interrelate, if at All?” *Collegio Oficial de Psicólogos de Madrid* (2010): 95.

<sup>146</sup> Cameron and Caza.

<sup>147</sup> B.L. Galperin “Determinants of Deviance in the Workplace: An Empirical examination of Canada and Mexico” (PhD Diss., Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, 2002).

<sup>148</sup> Tziner, 96.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

CD is volitional, it is the result of a conscious decision on the part of the one making the deviation from the norm. It is not an accidental innovation. Further, an individual engaging in constructively deviant behavior has made the decision to stay in the organization while undertaking the deviant action *for the good of the organization*. This is an important distinction to be drawn between CD, rebellion or even Machiavellianism. Rebellion separates and undermines while Machiavellianism operates out of self-interest. Stated succinctly, *a constructively deviant individual makes the conscious decision to stay in the organization while operating outside the organizational norms and is willing to suffer the consequences for the good of the collective*.

Organizational Studies literature strongly suggests that CD should be associated with forward progress and organizational innovations. Since ecclesial bodies fit the generally accepted definition of “organization,”<sup>150</sup> it is reasonable to put forward the idea that ecclesial bodies will also benefit from a particular type of CD. I will refer to this particular brand of CD as “Constructive Deviations in Ecclesial Organizations” — *CDe*. A case study may help the reader with clarity.

### **CenterForm**

CenterForm is “a community of creative, forward-thinking, socially-engaged Christians who are committed to working together to seek peace, wholeness, justice, reconciliation, health, and joy”<sup>151</sup> for the city of Atlanta, GA. CenterForm is space —

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<sup>150</sup> [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com).

<sup>151</sup> “About Us,” CenterForm, last modified 2015, accessed December 6, 2015, <http://www.centerform.org/en/about>.

space to create, dream, collaborate, pray, important space and much more. John Heinz writes:

Our intention was to build a proof of concept model of an innovation hub<sup>152</sup> and hope that we could make a clear enough argument for the value of such an organization within an ecclesial sector that is undergoing unprecedented adaptive pressure and is lacking a healthy way to innovate within this dramatically shifting context. Secular sectors from health care to education to manufacturing have implemented an innovation hub model, borrowed from the tech sector, to adapt to the profoundly disrupting changes emerging from the global economic, technological, and social reordering that is resulting from a post recession, rapidly globalizing and urbanizing world.<sup>153</sup>

CenterForm provides space where “missional activity... birthed at the margins of traditional Christian institutions”<sup>154</sup> is collated and supported.<sup>155</sup> Yet even if all of these lofty goals were never to be actualized, CenterForm is valuable for what it exemplifies. We should be careful to not miss its importance as an exemplar of CDe. John and Kathryn Heinz co-founded and co-direct CenterForm and in so doing offer an example of CDe in its purest form. I should elaborate some.

From an organizational standpoint, CenterForm’s founders occupy space at the edge of an American ecclesial organization, one that is generally on the decline and presently, along with the rest of American Protestantism, experiencing a very public

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<sup>152</sup> Within the tech sector, “Innovation Hubs” have emerged as space for tech entrepreneurs to co-occupy, sharing resources, costs and, hopefully, ideas. A helpful treatment of the idea can be found at The Connectivity, Inclusion and Inequality Group’s website, <http://cii.oii.ox.ac.uk/2014/09/16/what-is-a-tech-innovation-hub-anyway/>.

<sup>153</sup> John Heinz, email to the author, June 27, 2016.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Lofty goals! In my personal experience, CenterForm is hitting these marks. In my capacity of executive director of the Atlanta Church Planting Alliance, I co-work at CenterForm and am thankful for the Heinz’ innovative vision.

crisis of identity.<sup>156</sup> John is guided by the belief that “life begins out at the edges of an organization and feeds inward toward the center.”<sup>157</sup> This perspective stands in contrast to the prevailing organizational thought among church organizations that the center initiates ideas and strategies which then trickle out to the edges. The introduction of new ideas is vital to the survival of any organization.

It stands to reason that in any living organism, when old cells die off, it shrinks and withers unless something important happens; the old cells must be replaced with new. Extending their thoughts about adaptive organizations, Heifetz, Glashow and Linsky, note that in organizations “[n]ew adaptations significantly displace, reregulate and rearrange [the] old.”<sup>158</sup> Stated another way, when new innovations appear, there is a likelihood they will have a somewhat disruptive effect on the existing modes of doing/being. Individuals who are happy, or even generally satisfied, with those existing modes are likely to offer resistance to changing them. It seems that the most comfortable individuals will resist change the most vigorously. The question follows then, in ecclesial organizations, which leaders are generally the most comfortable? Who will be the most likely to resist change?<sup>159</sup>

If change is inevitable why do people resist it so fiercely? An answer is suggested by Heifetz et al. They insightfully note that it is not so much change (adaptations) in a

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<sup>156</sup> As mentioned in a previous chapter, from Pew Research to The Barna Group to LifeWay Research Group, all affirm what the gut feelings of pastors across the US are saying... people are exiting the American Protestant Church.

<sup>157</sup> John Heinz, interview by the author, February 2016.

<sup>158</sup> Heifetz, 16.

<sup>159</sup> The reader will no doubt gather that, by my way of seeing, center-located leaders will be the most likely to resist change.

broad sense that people resist as it is change that leads to loss. “The common factor generating adaptive failure is resistance to loss,” not just resistance to change per se.<sup>160</sup> For those occupying space within the relative stability and insulation of the organizational center, adaptations may stimulate a range of emotions, from low-level anxiety to outright fear, if they perceive loss to be a potential outcome of change.

When seeking to better understand the aversion to change, it is helpful to consider some of the possible kinds and severity of loss that might confront center-located leaders when adaptations are closing in. Perhaps the potential of diminishing power, surrender of authority, loss of positional prestige, are just too daunting for the center-located leader to easily make peace with. This is understandable.

To restate Heifetz et al in ecclesial organizational language, adaptations and innovations occurring out at the edge of the missional footprint hold the potential to disrupt the current power dynamics within the ecclesial organization, foregrounding a difficult decision for leaders occupying space within the organizational center: resist the CDe or embrace it. For a leader who is particularly well-suited for a place of stability, the specter of change can be overwhelming.

We should return to the case-study. The very idea of CenterForm exists outside the present-day organizational norms of all American, Evangelical ecclesial organizations. Even while John and Kathryn are ordained with the UMC, CenterForm is not an official UMC ministry organization. Lest anyone assume that these leaders stumbled onto a new, trendy method of engaging a city with the Gospel by chance, it is

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 14.

an important observation that this particular CDe did not just materialize by accident. It was developed, and is gaining momentum, as a result of a volitional act.

Here again it is critical to note that CDe, like its Organizational Studies predecessor Constructive Deviance, by definition is volitional. Someone had to make a decision to operate outside of the organizational norms *on purpose*, all the while acknowledging and accepting the potential consequences of that decision.<sup>161</sup> CenterForm transformed from inklings in the hearts of urban missionaries to tangible ministry action as a result of very specific, volitional acts by its founders. Then, through a series of significant, leader to leader conversations — dialogue — something brand new emerged. Further, in spite of resistance from leaders within ecclesial organizational centers, generative leader to leader dialogue continues to give birth to the common vision for CenterForm. The evidence is compelling; even in the absence of robust, institutional support CenterForm is working.

Before moving quickly past this point, I am compelled to slow down here briefly. The issue of volitionality is important and should not be glossed over. Volitionality is one component of Constructive Deviance setting it apart from other types of behavior in its nomological network.<sup>162</sup> In order to meet the definition of Constructive Deviance, not only must the behavior deviate from acceptable organizational norms, it must be intentional. At the same time, a decision is made by the leader to stay in the organization

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<sup>161</sup> For an edge-located leader, those consequences may range from relatively minor things like sideways glances and simple avoidance to major ramifications such as loss of credentials or being called up on charges. I am here again reminded of Tom who was charged with syncretism for preaching in a friends' church.

<sup>162</sup> Bella Galperin, "Exploring the Nomological Network of Workplace Deviance: Developing and Validating a Measure of Constructive Deviance," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 42, no. 12 (2012): 2988-3025. 3.

rather than disconnect. This element of the definition has been retained in our definition of CDe.

CDe is a conscious decision, a volitional act. The leader engaging in CDe is operating under the conviction that his/her activities will be of benefit to the organization at large even if violating the expressed or implied organizational norms. I find this to be of particular importance in my personal journey where I have wrestled with the decision to remain structurally connected to the Foursquare Church in the wake of my recent migration to the organizational edge. Simply stated, I stay because I believe I have something to offer this organization and have been assigned here by God. Even still, the disconnect that has occurred represents an erosion of the Foursquare missional footprint. I often wonder how much of my creativity, my CDe, could be of benefit to the organization yet is going essentially untapped due to a lack of center/edge dialogue.

### **Self-contradiction**

At this point I am compelled to swerve into a matter that could be construed by the reader to be a self-contradiction. The reader will recall that in chapter one, I proposed some external causes of erosion along with the acknowledgement that we have very little, if any, ability to stop them. I put forward the opinion that an inordinate amount of leadership energy is devoted to counteracting these things while proportionately little is given to the things that are within our hands to change. Because of this perspective, most of my attention in this dissertation is given to the erosion caused by an absence of healthy leader to leader relating, *internally-caused erosion*.



Here is where the seeming self-contradiction can be seen: while we may not be able to stop many of the external factors,<sup>163</sup> I do believe that another benefit of center/edge dialogue could be an increase in our capacity to respond to them. The capacity for adaptive response to external threats and quick reaction to emerging opportunities found at the organizational edge could serve to better position ecclesial organizations to weather the storms of liquid modernity. So while we may not be able to bring about an end to the threats, and (in my view) should not spend large quantities of energy confronting them, we can learn how to better respond thereby minimizing the damaging impact.

An ironic tragedy for ecclesial centers emerges here. Edge-located leaders are generally of the opinion that leaders at the center are more concerned with maintaining organizational integrity than they are advancing innovative mission. This concern for maintaining the gains of the church drives the continual proliferation of statistical research related to the decline of the church.<sup>164</sup> The irony is found in that the same fear of loss motivating the center to give inordinate attention to the behavior of the surrounding culture also causes them to marginalize the very leaders that could offer the remedy, the edge. The self-induced erosion becomes generative.

### **A bunch of deviants**

In addition to countless leader to leader conversations I have had over the years, I surveyed a diverse group of individuals who were, at the time, leading at the edges of

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<sup>163</sup> Consumerism, secularism, religious plurality, etc.

<sup>164</sup> It seems at times that center-located leaders are more interested in studying the statistics gathered by Pew or Barna or some other research group than they are in having conversations with leaders at the edges of their own organizations.

their respective ecclesial bodies.<sup>165</sup> All had made the volitional act at some point to operate outside the boundaries of organizational norms and were convinced that their decisions ended in a positive outcome for their denomination. In other words, all of them had engaged in CDe during their leadership careers. Of the fourteen respondents, ten of them stated that there were also times when they decided *not* to stray from the boundaries of organizational norms even though they felt that the deviation would have brought about a helpful result. They were willing, in a broad sense, to engage in CDe but sometimes did not.

This intrigued me, why sometimes “yes” and other times “no?” When asked in follow up conversations why this was the case, a common theme emerged: *The hold of the present establishment in their respective organizations was simply too strong to break its grip, the effort required would be too great. It wasn't worth the effort...*<sup>166</sup> It seems that for these leaders, all of whom are quite comfortable functioning in a CDe capacity, there are times when the prospect of resisting the organizational norms, even when the outcome would clearly be in the best interest of the collective, is just too troublesome. I am left to wonder, given the stories of innovative outcomes that happened when they did engage in CDe, what more good things might have come had they not opted out?

One final comment on CDe. When looking for these kinds of constructive innovations, I have found that the most likely location, organizationally speaking, is the edge. A number of reasons, not the least of which being sheer desperation at times, necessitate that the edge becomes an ecclesial body's locus of innovation. For leaders at

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<sup>165</sup> Respondents include leaders seeking change within Assembly of God, PCA, Rhema, Church of God, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Foursquare, Wesleyan and independent ecclesial bodies.

<sup>166</sup> A full summary of the survey is attached as an addendum to this dissertation.

the center, a well-tuned peripheral vision can yield tremendous benefits as these innovations are noticed and affirmed.

Further along in the article, “Scanning the Periphery,” Day and Shoemaker refer to edge-located leaders as “Mavericks” and note that “most organizations have Maverick employees with insights about the periphery, but these individuals are rarely tapped...”<sup>167</sup> for insightful conversations. Perhaps we should be “tapping the Mavericks” a bit more. Could it be that there is some important organizational learning to be had through dialogue with Mavericks? That is my suspicion.

There is another important issue warranting a brief mention here that will be given a more thorough treatment in chapter five — trust. Trust is an issue that many edge-located leaders contend with bi-directionally. They feel as though they are not trusted by leaders at the center and they hesitate to extend trust as a result. An absence of trust, according to Lencioni, is the foundational dysfunction of all five of the “dysfunctions of a team,”<sup>168</sup> ultimately harming the organization and limiting its missional potential. Perhaps if these edge-located leaders were operating in a more robust environment of trust their decisions to not take risk, to remain quietly within the boundaries of their organizational norms, would have been different.

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<sup>167</sup> Day and Shoemaker.

<sup>168</sup> Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2002.), 43.

### **Blind Spots**

In ecclesial bodies, whether local congregations, para-church organizations or denominations with a trans-national reach, identifiable stratification is common. Boards of directors, collections of bishops, elder-boards, even free-standing “apostles” reside at the centers of ecclesial bodies while church planters, entrepreneurs, “Business As Mission” practitioners and chaplains occupy space at the edges.<sup>169</sup> Leaders that thrive within their respective strata generally have certain characteristics in common. These hallmarks can be interpreted as either strengths or weaknesses, depending on the context and who is making the assessment. To a preservationist, a Maverick is dangerous. To a Maverick, a preservationist is an obstruction to progress.

Rather than offering a checklist of characteristics of steady managers (center) and innovators (edge) — one can simply search the internet and find a plethora of those — in the interest of encouraging healthy leader to leader relating, I am opting instead to highlight some blind spots that can occur between center and edge leaders due to differences. While these will be drawn from my personal experiences, I expect that they will ring true in the hearing of practitioners reading this work. These relational blind spots ultimately lead to rifts and organizational upheaval that could be avoided if leader to leader dialogue across strata was pursued. It is remarkable how quickly leaders at both locations can lose sight of shared goals, their common mission, when personality conflicts, competing agendas and power-struggles are introduced.

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<sup>169</sup> Not intended to be an exhaustive list. These are exemplary of a type.

### Procedure vs. agility

While serving in the role of District Missional Director<sup>170</sup> for my denomination, I received a phone call from a pastor in our district. The congregation was experiencing an upsurge in evangelism due, in large part, to a thriving food ministry to the underprivileged/underserved in the surrounding community. This created an “immediate need for more space for meetings and food distribution.”<sup>171</sup>

This pastor had located what he felt to be suitable additional space, but he needed to sign a lease for the property. At the time, according to Foursquare’s unique form of church polity, all congregations were considered to be members of a single church operating in fifty states under the auspices of one board of directors.<sup>172</sup> As such, local pastors were not legally allowed to sign leases for property. A set of specific administrative steps, outlined in the *Handbook for the Operation of a Foursquare Church*, had to be taken in order to secure leases.

These administrative steps had been developed over the course of years and were designed to hedge against liability to the corporation. They were essentially driven by a risk-management ideal. Without straying into minutia, the process — which included layers of review, official sign-offs, local church council signatures and ultimately a resolution from the corporate board of directors — could take months in a worst case scenario and weeks at best. As I described the process to him over the phone, I could hear

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<sup>170</sup> This role was a catch-all that included oversight of, among other things, church planting, pastoral transitions, conferences, camps and pastoral development.

<sup>171</sup> Phone call with the pastor, sometime around June 2010.

<sup>172</sup> Foursquare polity is “modified episcopal.” While we are still modified episcopal, recent adjustments have been made to return authority and responsibility back to local congregations as part of the “Reimagine Foursquare” initiative.

the disappointment settling into his voice. When we concluded, I offered to connect him to the administrative offices to begin the process, he simply declined. I learned, at a later date, that he had signed the lease personally and was simply allowing the church to use his leased space.

As I reflect upon this scenario, I find myself conflicted. If I am completely honest, had I been in this pastor's shoes I probably would have taken similar steps. At the same time, in my district leadership role, I was privy to more than a handful of legal messes created by local leaders operating outside the boundaries of the administrative protocols. I could see clearly the tension between the need for adaptive leadership on the part of the pastor and a process which would preserve the integrity of the organization. Where is the balance? Is there any to be found when procedure collides with agility? It could be said that this pastor was engaging in CDe since the overall mission of the denomination was being moved forward. Or was this a self-serving kind of rebellion? I suppose perspective influences the answer to that question.

Center-located leaders have a tendency to prioritize organizational self-preservation. As a result, they tend to move much more slowly. Edge-located leaders usually assign a higher value to the boundless potential of immediate gains, often acting quickly then sorting through the ramifications of haste down the line. I am not advocating for one over the other. I have been at both locations over the course of my time in ecclesial leadership and can see validity in both perspectives; perhaps that is why I am a capable interpreter. But are there blind spots that leaders at both locations might have toward each other?

The deep seated desire on the part of the center-located leader to preserve the integrity of the organization can get crosswise of some of the Maverick's "risks that conformist employees shirk at"<sup>173</sup>very quickly. When the administrator at the center sees that actions of one individual may be placing the entire organization at risk, the edge-located leader can be misperceived as the enemy. This is a blind spot on the part of the center, but an equally harmful blind spot can take place in the vision of the Maverick; he/she may not have the big-picture perspective to see how his/her actions in the present might cause harm to the organization at a later time. The center's attempt to preserve the integrity of the organization by enacting rules and regulations can be mistaken as obstructionism by the innovator at the edge. This blind spot occurs in more cases than may be realized.

A case like this one illustrates an organizational conundrum. Both the center and the edge can give whole-hearted assent that the mission of the organization is primary and at the same time see each other as enemies of that shared mission. For the center, procedure has been carefully crafted over time to ensure that the organization's mission is carried forward for years to come. For the edge, the mission is an ever-present part of his/her daily life and the center has little understanding of what real mission looks like. Both see the same mission but get caught up in the ongoing wrestling match of process. In this case, both claimed victory — the edge-located leader because he achieved his immediate gains, the center-located administrator because the organization was hedged against potential liability. But in so doing, did either truly win? A deeper divide between

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<sup>173</sup> "Definition of a Maverick" *Seeing Solutions, Making a Difference in Business*, 2013, accessed November 16, 2016, <http://www.seeingsolutions.com/definition-maverick>.

leaders at the center and the edge was formed, making future conversations much more difficult.

I am asking the question, can both procedure and agility exist within the same organization? Can the ecclesial body on the whole benefit from innovative actions taken at the edge without compromising the integrity of the organization? I like to think so, but it is unlikely so long as individuals view clusters of people in condemned collectives rather than as unique individuals. In this particular case-study, the lack of a dialogic ethos was evident.

The pastor making the phone call to the district office had no relational context for the people working in the administrative center. To him, they were just pieces of a monolithic machine, hellbent on making his work more difficult. Because there was no relational context, those of us in the district office had no connection to the real-world ministry he was undertaking in the field. I could not see my way clear to advocate for him since I had no idea who he was. There was an absence of trust on both sides. He had no confidence in the administration's willingness to act quickly and we had no confidence in his ability to maintain the lease. A greater degree of polarization was the result.

Leaders at the center can fall prey to an assumption that edge leaders are ignorant to the value of procedure. Edge-located leaders easily slip into the mode of seeing procedure as the enemy of agility, an obstacle to progress. This mutual blind-spot presents the real obstacle to progress.



### **Comfort vs. discomfort**

Jim<sup>174</sup> is an ecclesial leader, doing urban missionary work in Baltimore, he occupies organizational space at the edge of a traditional denomination with a high-church tradition. He gathers with his parishioners weekly in a borrowed home in a drug-infested community on the southwest side of town. Jim holds a PhD in English and has sacrificed many opportunities in order to follow what he believes to be his calling to the poor and oppressed. He recently took a job teaching in a local community college to make ends meet. His constituents, the poorest of the poor in society, give offerings and portions of those offerings are sent to the national denomination.

Jim perceives that those working in the denominational center live very comfortable lives while he and his family sacrifice their comfort for the sake of mission. This perception of inequity is ever present, operating in the background of his thoughts and communications with the denominational hierarchy. It is difficult for Jim to understand why he, and others like him serving in the same organizational stratum, maintain multiple jobs and income streams “hustling to get it done” while those shuffling paper in the denominational office have comfortable salaries and benefits packages.

It is likely that denominational executives are unaware of the sense of inequity felt by Jim. The reader will here recall that, according to MaryKate Morse, those in power are oftentimes ignorant to the feelings of powerlessness experienced by those on the margins. The common perception of him (and others like him) by those in the organizational center is that of a diligent worker, one who has chosen a particular path to walk of his own volition, to be commended. However, commendation does not always

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<sup>174</sup> Jim is not the respondent's real name.

translate into resources. The “good job!” and “atta boy!” statements do not pay a power bill, buy a new car or take the family on vacation.

This is a bi-directional blind spot between the center and the edge, one to which I am attuned due to personal experience. As recounted in the introduction, when my role within the denominational offices was eliminated due to the district office moving out of state, I lost salary and insurance benefits. While at the same time Tina and I continued to lead a local congregation that was sending ten percent of its offerings to support the organizational center. My perception was that those in power, who had made these decisions that caused tremendous personal loss to my family, continued to live very comfortably and gave no consideration to what I had given up to take the job in the first place.

They seemed oblivious to the reality that when I moved into the power-center a few years earlier, my wife and I surrendered a larger percentage of our salary and all insurance benefits from the local church. Since my salary took care of our family’s needs we no longer needed the full income from the church so we distributed approximately half of our local church income to others doing work locally instead of amassing two full time salaries.

Additionally, we opted into the organization’s insurance plan. A recently diagnosed genetic heart condition, which rendered me uninsurable outside of a group policy, made for a high level of discomfort when that group insurance benefit disintegrated. I am certain that those in the organizational center were completely unaware of this.

Edge-located leaders can experience an increased resentment toward the center as they perceive organizational inequity present in the body. Is the work of a pastor with a smaller budget in the local church worthy of a smaller compensation package than one who has been blessed with a large, local coffer? Those in the power-centers can often be inattentive to the sacrifices made by leaders at the edge, assuming that they are simply living in the results of their career choices. Inequity is a blind spot to which attention should be given.

### **Humanity**

I will not devote many words to this blind spot since much time is devoted to the re-humanizing effect of dialogue in the next chapter. Simply stated, as we find ourselves clustered into in-groups, the tendency to hold entire groups at arm's length becomes irresistible at times. Frustrations mount and battle lines are drawn as violent words begin to creep into our intra-strata conversations. I find solidarity with others at the edge as we rail against our common enemy, the center. In this solidarity, I find that taking up the offenses of others comes easily because when I am fighting against injustices perpetrated against another, my violence feels justified. "Us against the machine!"

Violence against a faceless, nameless monolith does not seem to violate Christ's call to grace born out of love so I dehumanize the enemy, make the individuals in the collective out to be monstrous entities, not actual people. This enemy is easy to do violence against, after all, am I not being faithful to my calling? I miss that these are real people with real families, real victories and defeats; I become blind to their humanity.

Our ever-present tendency to cluster in our in-groups, draw battle lines against perceived enemies within our own organizations and demand a winner/loser paradigm

has created the environment where erosion at the edges of our organizations presents a real problem. As an individual, I have to be willing to take responsibility for the role I have played in creating this environment. Where have I abused or surrendered power? It is here important that we ask ourselves some more questions, the answers to which may stimulate our thinking toward a better way.

- In what stratum do I occupy space within my organization? Am I well-suited to lead there?
- Do I tend to view leaders across my organization in collectives or as unique individuals? How does my view of them shape how I value them?
- Have I made statements that are less than uplifting and affirming to those within my leadership proximity about those outside of our shared space?
- Have I made assumptions about individuals based solely upon the organizational space they occupy? Am I willing to engage in a process whereby these others may be re-humanized?

### **Conclusion**

Having brought forward the claim that erosion at the edges of ecclesial organizations occurs when leaders become disconnected, it is important to envision another way. The very innovations that could allow an ecclesial organization to better adapt to the shifting landscape of liquid modernity are often resident within those disconnected leaders and as such, are lost to the organization when that erosion takes place. In the light of the human tendency toward in-group bias and the winner/loser paradigm historically present within the church, it is easy to see how disconnect between center and edge-located leaders can happen.

I am persuaded that there is a better way; there can be a reconnecting of previously disconnected, edge-located leaders that could facilitate the firming up of their organizations' missional footprints. My research suggests that dialogue, when engaged intentionally and in good faith, invites people to simply understand the *other*.

Understanding another communicates worth, especially when opinions are diametrically opposed.

Dialogue, however, does not happen naturally. There are times when it actually seems to run opposite of our organizational instincts. To counteract an instinctive behavior requires a thought-out, intentional shift. In the ensuing chapter I will put forward an excursus on dialogue. If I have done my work, it will provide clarity for some of the confusion surrounding the proper meaning of the word, enabling the reader to see how dialogue plays a critical role in my proposed remedy to the erosion problem.

## FIVE: AN EXCURSUS ON DIALOGUE

That peoples can no longer carry on authentic dialogue with one another is not only the most acute symptom of the pathology of our time, it is also that which most urgently makes a demand of us. I believe, despite all, that the peoples in this hour can enter into dialogue, into a genuine dialogue with one another. In a genuine dialogue each of the partners, even when he stands in opposition to the other, heeds, affirms, and confirms his opponent as an existing other. Only so can conflict certainly not be eliminated from the world, but be humanly arbitrated and led towards its overcoming.

—Martin Buber

The truth is not born and does not reside in the head of an individual person; it is born of the dialogical intercourse between people in the collective search for the truth.

—Mikhail Mikhailovic Bakhtin

Having given attention in the previous chapter to the relationships between center and edge-located leaders, relational blind-spots, conflicts and potential, this chapter provides an in-depth look at the kind of speech/listening event that I am suggesting as a way forward — *dialogue*. In this chapter, I perceive of dialogue as both an ethos (a general, relational orientation) that facilitates leader to leader relating and as an activity, a specific type of conversation.<sup>175</sup>

To this end, I first describe a nomological network<sup>176</sup> of speech/listening events.

Some self-apparent comparisons between terms will be acknowledged, but more

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<sup>175</sup> My approach represents a merging of ideals from two streams of dialogic thought, Bakhtinian and Bohmian. Bakhtin speaks to how identities are formed, maintained and affirmed in the context of dialogic relating while Bohm describes a method and framework for engaging dialogue.

<sup>176</sup> The inspiration to use the term in this context came from an important article by Bella L. Galperin. In this article the terms Constructive deviance, Organizational citizenship behavior, Whistle-blowing, Voice and Role innovation are said to be situated in a “nomological network,” identifying similarities to each other while also highlighting important distinctions. I am using the term in the same way. See Bella Galperin, “Exploring the Nomological Network of Workplace Deviance: Developing and Validating a Measure of Constructive Deviance,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 42, no. 12 (2012): 2988-3025.

importantly, this will serve to foreground the *contrasts* among the components of the network. Given that cross-strata dialogue within ecclesial organizations is a critical element of my proposed remedy, a firm grasp of its definition is important. Said another way, it will be helpful to understand what dialogue *is not* as well as what it *is*. The contrasts may actually be more important than the comparisons when it comes to obtaining clarity of definition.

I then offer a look at a dialogic ethos in which a “flattening of the playing field” of sorts takes place in leader to leader relating. In this dialogic kind of relating, a healthy relational ethos in an ecclesial organization is supported. Admittedly, it was more difficult than I would have liked to discover case-studies of real organizations where cross-strata dialogue is taking place. Without examples, all that remains is theory so, thankfully, I was able to find a few. I will reflect on the workshop “The Power of Dialogue: Constructive Conversations on Divisive Issues”<sup>177</sup> and the ongoing work of the Texas Methodist Foundation.<sup>178</sup>

It is my hope to render plausible the idea that a similar process could be helpful in reconnecting leaders at the edges that have become structurally or functionally disconnected from their ecclesial organizations’ power centers. For when we seek to understand each other as unique and valuable individuals, the result can be that we allow

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<sup>177</sup> The flagship workshop offered by The Public Conversations Project, Watertown, MA. I was a participant at the workshop held in April 2016. PCP is by no means an ecclesial organization, far from it. Some readers may question my rationale in associating with them at all! They are far afield from anything resembling Evangelicalism. My reasons for including them in my research will be apparent further along in the chapter.

<sup>178</sup> TMF is actively engaged in convening cross-strata dialogue within the South Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church. The desired outcome of these dialogues is to facilitate expanded learning around spiritual community innovation and the role of religious institutions in relationship with innovators and communities; forge new relationships with leaders across faith traditions; foster creative ideas to help spiritual community innovation flourish.

the other a momentary escape from his/her condemned collective. Re-humanization is the unavoidable result. Dialogue puts forward the counterpoint to the winner/loser paradigm.

### **A Nomological Network of Dialogue**

My wife and I, along with a collection of other civic and religious leaders in our small town, were invited to participate in a “public dialogue” around our desired future for our community. We were happy to attend since, after 22 years of ministry in the same community, we felt sufficiently invested in its future and welcomed the opportunity to make contributions to the shaping of our next best steps together. That is what we hoped for anyway, a collaboration, dreaming together about possibilities on the horizon.

We arrived at the event to find a rather large room full of round tables with 6 chairs around each. Seating was prepared for around a hundred people. There was a series of charts and diagrams listing current population and demographic statistics at the front of the room; two microphones were placed on stands and strategically located among the tables on each side of the room. A pre-printed schedule was placed at each chair which laid out the flow of the day, naming speakers and presentation topics. According to the schedule, at the end of each presenter’s time block, an opportunity would be made for “participant feedback.”

The day proceeded in the same manner that most of the readers of this dissertation would imagine given the description I have provided. Moderated by a local expert on community development from one of the major public utilities, the information was good I suppose. It flowed mono-directionally throughout the day from the front of the room out to the rest. Occasionally, a slightly over-eager helper would jot down some of the participant feedback on a large paper flip chart while the professional moderator earnestly



nodded her head, offering comments such as “good insight” or “we will take that into consideration.” This was a day filled with discourse, some discussion, a smattering of debate but, unfortunately, no dialogue to be found.

Was it helpful? I suppose that each person in attendance would have to make that assessment individually. For me personally, I could have more productively spent my day roasting coffee beans for the Community Coffee Shop. But it was a free lunch, so I guess it was not a complete waste of time. It has been around two years now and I can tell you that no visible changes have been made in the community as a result of that public meeting. There was no co-creation of knowledge and certainly none of us walked away feeling as though we understood each other any better than when we arrived. The thing about the day that bothered me the most, however, was that a clear misappropriation of an important word had taken place and no one seemed to notice. Dialogue had not taken place.

It is often the case that, much like the previous example, a word is selected that elicits a very different progression of thought in the mind of the listener than was intended by the person doing the speaking. The risk of this happening increases as, over the course of time, words and catch-phrases become fashionable among a particular group, leading to a word (or cluster of words) being inserted into conversations with greater frequency. All the while, less attention is given to the actual meaning. Along the way, the essential meanings of words can be cheapened, watered down if you will, as more and more people use a word or phrase with less understanding of its actual meaning. I have noticed lately that *dialogue* is one such word. Yet it is far too important a

word to allow the richness of its meaning to be casually degraded. In this chapter, I am seeking to reclaim its full potential.

Maggie Herzig and Laura Chasin make the observation that “[s]ome people call almost any exchange of different views a dialogue. For example, it may be used to attract an audience to an event that involves a debate between experts...” or to gather townsfolk to a listening event with the town council (a la the previous example) when in truth, dialogue is a unique type of speech/listening event undertaken by two or more individuals with a very specific set of desired outcomes.<sup>179</sup> For the Public Conversations Project<sup>180</sup> that outcome is to invite “a conversation in which people who have different beliefs and perspectives seek to develop mutual understanding.”<sup>181</sup> For the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation it is an “innovative process that [can] help people come together across differences to tackle our most challenging problems.”<sup>182</sup> For me, dialogue offers a pathway toward more fruitful leader to leader relating across organizational strata in ecclesial bodies. I hope that in my lifetime I will see the emergence of a dialogic ethos, where a level playing field supplants the tendency toward hierarchy. My research, experience and conversations all suggest that dialogue, if engaged intentionally and in good faith, can accomplish this.

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<sup>179</sup> Maggie Herzig and Laura Chasin, *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide* (Watertown, MA: Public Conversations Project, 2006), 3.

<sup>180</sup> Since 1989 The Public Conversations Project has fostered constructive conversations between people on opposite sides of very difficult and culturally divisive issues. In so doing, they “help groups reduce stereotyping and polarization while deepening trust and collaboration and strengthening communities.” See “About Us,” Public Conversations Project, <http://publicconversations.org/about-us>.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> “News & Information: What We’re All About,” The National Coalition for Dialogue And Deliberation, accessed August 31, 2016, <http://ncdd.org/about>.

When dialogue occurs, “a democracy of multiple voices bearing various perspectives [can serve to move a participant toward] an understanding of viewpoints that are seemingly opposite of their own...”<sup>183</sup> Within the context of a dialogic conversation, all participants are invited to “raise topics, pose questions, challenge other points of view or engage in any of the other activities that define the dialogical relationship.”<sup>184</sup> Said another way, dialogue is invitational — an invitation to relate, an invitation to learn together, an invitation to co-create new knowledge to be owned together.

For the purposes of this present work, I am co-opting the term *nomological network* and employing it to describe a collection of words that are connected by similarity and context while maintaining significantly different meanings. These words, while linked by the context in which they are generally used, can easily be mistakenly interchanged if the speaker is not careful. These words do *not* mean the same thing. This look at a nomological network around the word dialogue will reveal similarities and distinctions between words that are descriptive of speech/listening events.<sup>185</sup>

## Discourse

At the outset of this examination of speech/listening events, it will be helpful to revisit an understanding of the nature of words in a broad sense. Words, be they spoken or written, simply communicate thoughts. As an example of this, when the reader sees the

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<sup>183</sup> Erika Franca de Souza Vasconcelos, “I just wanted to make sure that everyone knew I was an American: A critical discourse analysis of a dialogic speech event,” *Linguistics and Education* 24 (2013) 86-100.

<sup>184</sup> This principal is known as the “rule of participation.” Along with the “rule of commitment” and “rule of reciprocity” comprises Nicholas Burbules’ three rules of dialogue. See N. C. Burbules. *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 80.

<sup>185</sup> See Appendix B for a visual representation of this nomological network.

phrase “awesome car” each reader will immediately experience an image appearing in his/her mind. As a communicator, when I wrote that phrase, I did not do a good job of communicating with specificity what I had in mind. It would have been more clarifying to write: “1972, canary yellow, Chevrolet Camaro Super Sport.” When the reader engages those words a very specific image is conjured up in the mind.

When words are heard or read, the recipient does not imagine the letters that construct the words or even the methodology by which the words are held together. What is “seen” is an image of the thing being described as best understood by the receiver within his/her context. The important thing to remember is that a thought occurs then gives rise to the construction of a word.

Discourse, in a very broad sense, describes the means by which a thought is communicated in words. It would be equally valid to consider this a nomological network of *discourse* as it is of dialogue since discourse is related to all kinds of speech/listening acts. Various contexts and modifiers may nuance the word, but at its core, discourse simply means *to express thoughts using words*. Discourse may be monophonic or polyphonic in nature, but in order to fulfill the intention of the speaker, there is the expectation of at least a single receptor. It is directly related to dialogue in that dialogue *involves* discourse; dialogue (or any of the other elements in the network) cannot occur without discourse. Discourse is sometimes mislabeled as dialogue, but while all dialogue involves discourse, all discourse is not dialogue. In this same manner, discourse is connected to every other component of the nomological network.

## Debate

In a debate-style speech/listening event, the goal is generally understood to be winning an argument. As noted in an earlier chapter, debate is a naturally occurring conversational posture for church leaders. Remember, the polemical development of doctrine from the earliest days has pre-disposed us to look for a clear winner and loser, *wrong and right*. In a debate, “[p]articipants tend to be leaders [of a group] known for propounding a carefully crafted position.” Additionally, “participants speak as representatives of [their respective] groups” and “express unswerving commitment to a point of view... offer[ing] little new information.”<sup>186</sup> That last insight is telling: “...offering little new information.”

It is usually the case that the goal of debate participants is not so much to sway the opinion of the opponent but rather to use the occasion of the debate to sway the opinions of onlookers.<sup>187</sup> Debate dehumanizes the opponent, giving little or no care for whether or not his/her view is adjusted. The debate opponent is merely a tool to be leveraged for the larger goal of swaying onlookers to a particular opinion.

The correlations between debate and dialogue in the network of ideas are twofold. Both are necessarily polyphonic and both assume that the participants are presenting ideas from their particular (usually opposite) ends of the opinion spectrum. This is where the comparisons end. To mislabel a debate as dialogue is a tremendous, and unfortunately common, error.

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<sup>186</sup> “Distinguishing Debate from Dialogue: A Table” (Watertown, MA: Public Conversations Project, 1992).

<sup>187</sup> As an example, in a televised debate between politicians seeking the same office, neither participant holds out hope of changing the mind of the opponent. The opponent is essentially used to provide a contrast in the attempt to sway the millions of potential voters that may be watching.

On the other hand, the distinctions between debate and dialogue are stark and warrant a close reading. Dialogue participants speak as individuals in a relationally hopeful posture, contributing unique ideas born out of their unique life-experience. While a participant in dialogue may be, in a broad sense, representative of a particular point of view, he/she does not necessarily speak as an authorized spokesman of a unified block of people as is expected of a debate participant.

Another distinction is that dialogue tends to be centripetal, inviting people to come together over points of commonality while debate is centrifugal,<sup>188</sup> clearly delineating — *emphasizing* at times — differences. The very goal of debate is to draw clear lines around opposing views, then press those who espouse those views ever farther apart from one another. Debate is not designed to coalesce, it is designed to tear apart. Where the purpose of debate is to *convince* another of a claim's validity, dialogue invites the *co-creation* of new knowledge. In the light of the historical winner/loser paradigm, it is understandable how leader to leader relating in ecclesial organizations so quickly descends into debate.

“One meaning of ‘to communicate’ is ‘to make something common,’ i.e., to convey information or knowledge from one person to another in as accurate a way as possible. This meaning is appropriate in a wide range of contexts.”<sup>189</sup> This insight from philosopher David Bohm continues with his own words about dialogue as a particular type of communication. He writes:

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<sup>188</sup> Thanks to Caroline Ramsey for helpfully articulating the differences between centripetal and centrifugal conversations.

<sup>189</sup> David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (New York: Rutledge, 1996), 2.

[I]n a dialogue, each person does not attempt to make common certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him. Rather, it may be said that the two [or more] people are making something in common, i.e., creating something new together. But of course such communication can lead to the creation of something new only if people are able freely to listen to each other, without prejudice...<sup>190</sup>

It bears restating here, dialogue is invitational. Multiple voices are invited to engage in a creative, generative process while “talking through together”<sup>191</sup> toward the co-creation of new knowledge which is then available to all participants.

Bohm offers an insightful piece of etymology in stating “[t]he derivations of words often help to suggest a deeper meaning. ‘Dialogue’ comes from the Greek word dialogos. Logos means ‘the word,’ or in our case we would think of the ‘meaning of [image behind] the word.’ And dia means ‘through’...”<sup>192</sup> It is clarifying to understand that dialogue is the process by which two or more people talk through together to the co-creation of new knowledge not previously owned by either. The contrasts between debate and dialogue are stark.

## **Discussion**

Discussion is another frequently misappropriated word among ecclesial leadership. It has been my observation that what is actually happening when church leaders say “dialogue” is discussion. One helpful way to envision discussion is as a conceptual “ping-pong game, where people are batting the ideas back and forth and the object of the game is to win or to get points for yourself. Possibly you will take up

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

somebody else's ideas to back up your own – you may agree with some and disagree with others – but the basic point is to win the game.”<sup>193</sup> Here again, in ecclesial leadership circles, we can see an inclination toward discussion.

It is instructive here to note that “the word ‘discussion’ ... has the same root as ‘percussion’ and ‘concussion.’ At its core it means to break things up. It emphasizes the idea of analysis...”<sup>194</sup> While discussion does, much like dialogue, make room for many voices, there are important distinctions between the two which should be acknowledged for the sake of clarity.

Where discussion makes use of polyphony to accomplish breaking down ideas, examining and analyzing already existent pieces of information, as mentioned above, dialogue engages polyphony in the pursuit of creating new knowledge not yet known. In this regard, the primary distinction between discussion and dialogue can be seen. It is a very different thing for two or more individuals to share already existent information with each other than it is for them to come together and co-create new things! In so doing, a centripetal type of conversation takes place, a drawing together as opposed to a pushing apart. Where the church is concerned, these are the kinds of conversations for which we contend. A familiar portion of scripture comes to mind.

The author writes: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but *encouraging* one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (emphasis added).”<sup>195</sup> The

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV).



injunction of scripture is that encouragement-filled conversations should be normative yet how often do ecclesial leaders report that other kinds of conversations carry the day? Centrifugal speech supplants centripetal as people are driven ever farther apart by words. With a word, one can invite or repel meaningful conversation, attract another or turn him/her away from relationship, even tear down or build up.

Dialogue enables participants to enter into deeper understanding of each other even when positioned on opposite sides of polarizing issues. Dialogue softens stereotypes and nurtures an environment where the seeds of more trusting relationships can take root.<sup>196</sup> Dialogue provides a counterpoint to the dehumanizing effects of in-group bias and the aforementioned “condemned collective” by entering into re-humanizing relationships. The nameless, faceless “other,” against which we may have previously taken up arms, is acknowledged to be a valuable child of God, worthy of respect.

#### Diatribes

“A bitter and abusive speech or piece of writing.”<sup>197</sup> Anchored in the Protestant Reformation, an emphasis on the spoken word thundering from the pulpit has been evident among the American Church since its inception. Even while the goal of putting the Scriptures into the hands of the common man was clearly in view, the Reformation functionally fell short of the goal of returning the holy Scriptures “back to the people...

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<sup>196</sup> Herzig and Chasin, 3.

<sup>197</sup> “Diatribes” in Merriam-Webster dictionary online, accessed October 21, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diatribes>.

[I]n the process it ushered in a new era of biblical preaching, in both quality and quantity... except for Philip Melancthon, all of the major reformers were preachers.”<sup>198</sup>

The primacy of the spoken word can be seen throughout the course of post-Reformation church history. Ecclesial organizations in America are nested within the tradition of the Reformations including the primacy of the Word of God preached from the lofty sacred desk. Much of that preaching has been performed as polemic carried along on streams of diatribe. The most popular of Fundamentalist preachers today do their best work when railing against the enemies of the Lord.

Diatribes maintain some common elements with discussion and debate yet it occupies a uniquely divisive space among the nomological network. Diatribe is *intentionally* confrontational and, much like debate, patently adversarial. It is designed to bring to the surface the wrongness of an individual then shine the proverbial spotlight for all to see. Diatribe is intended to humiliate and demoralize its target, devaluing all who would be so unfortunate to turn up in its crosshairs. This element of humiliation further serves to encourage people to put distance between themselves and the object of the diatribe, resulting in further isolation. The reader will recall how that the fear of being the loser, or being associated with the loser, causes people to shut down and stop talking. This element of isolation may be diatribe’s most sinister effect.

Contrast this with the words of the Apostle Paul where he instructs the Church in Colosse to “[l]et your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer each person.”<sup>199</sup> Clearly, it is God’s intent that our words bring

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<sup>198</sup> Richard G. Kyle, *God’s Watchmen, John Knox’s Faith and Vocation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 159.

<sup>199</sup> Colossians 4:6 (ESV).

healing when possible, lifting up rather than tearing down. Diatribe accomplishes the opposite. It is regrettable, but I find the words of Andrew Marin to ring true: “Christians, it’s broadly supposed, are more well known for what they’re against than what they’re for.”<sup>200</sup>

## **Dialogue**

### **What it is**

Through the preceding sections of this chapter, I have articulated an understanding of dialogue primarily in the negative. I have been demonstrating what dialogue *is* by pointing out what it is *not*. I would now like to pivot and spend some time articulating what dialogue *is*. This is a deeper look at how I view dialogue as a unique speech/listening event and how it may offer a way forward for ecclesial leaders. There are a few important elements of dialogue to which I will turn my attention.

The polyphonic nature of dialogue, multiple voices talking through *together*, is of primary importance when it comes to leader to leader relating. Harkening back to the example given early on in this chapter, my disappointment with the “public dialogue” event, and that of several others who talked with me in the ensuing days, was primarily due to unfulfilled expectations. The organizers had promised (to my way of hearing anyway) a time of hearing from and being heard by fellow community members in the pursuit of mutual understanding and the co-creation of new ideas. What we experienced was a listening event where presenters disseminated information to the group. Even if the event allows for people to talk back to the presenters in a “listening tour” format, an

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<sup>200</sup> Andrew Marin, *Love is an Orientation, Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), Kindle, loc. 2447.

environment like the one described simply is not conducive to dialogue. Perhaps discussion can happen, diatribe for certain, not dialogue.

When dialogue takes place, individuals are drawn together for the purpose of each *sharing* what is already known, *listening* to perspectives and experiences offered by the others, then together *creating* new knowledge that none of them possessed before they began. Again, simply stated, dialogue is invitational and co-creative. By virtue of the commonly held goal of co-creating new knowledge, dialogue invites contributions from others. Its natural outcome is the creation of knowledge not presently known by inviting others to contribute to the collective learning.<sup>201</sup> While this element of dialogue, *talking through*, serves the important end of co-creating new knowledge, there are additional, equally important, outcomes that also advance leader to leader relating.

Imagine for a moment, individuals from diverse situations in life, looking deeply into each other's lives, genuinely inquisitive about things the other has learned, hearing the stories of victory and defeat, gleaning insight from shared experiences. As they do, new ideas and concepts emerge from the collective, ultimately generating innovations that serve to make all of their situations better. At the end of the encounter, all of these people hold a meaningful experience in common, a camaraderie of sorts has been created.

This scenario imagines a desirable secondary gain derived from the co-creative nature of dialogue, one of particular importance to leaders among ecclesial organizations. Consider this, it is much more difficult for individuals to hold each other in adversarial postures when they have experienced the connectedness of co-creating new knowledge.

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<sup>201</sup> The reader should be careful to not conflate the collective learning that accompanies dialogue with "groupthink." While groupthink enables a kind of intellectual laziness and emphasizes conformity, collective learning builds upon the available contributions of all dialogue participants.

Even when fundamental differences persist across multiple arenas of life, the camaraderie between individuals forged through the crucible of this type of discourse is not easily dissolved. Stated in even simpler terms, *it is really hard for me to hate you once we have innovated together*. The importance of that thing which we hold in common tends to transcend my momentary irritations with you.

### **Re-humanizing the other**

In previous chapters, the idea of in-group biases and the preferences that emerge from those biases were examined. I will further expand upon that idea here. It can happen that an individual's perception of a group as homogeneous, even monolithic, becomes so entrenched that he/she loses the ability to see individuals within that group as unique personalities at all. The result being a dehumanization of individuals within those collectives. When a collective is condemned, violence could be waiting in the wings.

A stark example from recent history is the Holocaust of the Jews. Once it was widely accepted that Jewish people were sub-human (dehumanization), it became notably less offensive for the rank and file among the Third Reich to participate in their extermination en masse. In a similar manner, slavery (shockingly, still a global phenomenon) relies on the ability to dehumanize entire blocks of humanity so that the collective conscience of the oppressor is assuaged. Wherever dehumanization occurs, the potential for violence increases.

I find a more recent example from my own life to be germane. Having been raised in a very traditional, Evangelical, Christian family, my view of the LGBTQ community has always been very narrow and resolute: "*Those people* can't be Christian and it is heresy to even consider such nonsense." And while I certainly never engaged in, nor

would I condone, physical violence against them, I am afraid that I have perpetrated violence with my words on more than one occasion. So long as I could successfully group them into a condemned collective, I could very easily, and with a clear conscience, dehumanize them. As a result of this dehumanization, I felt no compulsion to make any attempt at understanding them or to put myself in their shoes.

Then one day in recent years I met a dear lady and over the course of time came to know her as a unique person, gifted by God and deeply loved by Jesus. She has now become a cherished friend. I remember the day when, after I had been engaging in some typically insensitive joking on social media about the very public “Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner” gender transition, my friend mustered the courage to share part of her story with me. She confided that she had, up until just over fifteen years prior been living in a man’s body. To say the least, I was surprised. But the next emotion following along closely was remorse for the pain I had undoubtedly caused her by my very public, flippant comments about matters of which I had no personal knowledge.

Before I knew this piece of her life’s story, I had come to know her as a person; a human, doing her level best to follow Jesus in the middle of a crazy world; someone who, despite a very long list of political and philosophical differences between us, I had grown quite fond of. Now, as I often reflect on our relationship (one that has added tremendous depth and texture to my life), I wonder if I had known about this element of her life before we became friends, would I have been willing to enter into this relationship at all? Would I have engaged her humanity? Or (and it pains me to admit that this is more likely) would I have simply avoided her, keeping her safely tucked away in the LGBTQ condemned collective that I had created to neatly contain individuals such as her?

On the other side of the relationship, I hope that I add value to her life in similar measure to what she adds to mine. I have come to realize that I am truly interested in understanding the world through her eyes. The two of us engage in dialogue regularly, co-creating new understanding that enriches both of our lives. That dialogue further serves to re-humanize each other. She is no longer one of *those people* and I hope that I am becoming more to her than just another bullying, brutish, American man. And neither of us has to win any arguments! We simply love each other.

It will be helpful to be reminded of MacCulloch's and Ramsey's helpful observations noted earlier in the dissertation. MacCulloch: Augustine's primary doctrinal developments were essentially polemic in nature. This observation can be enlarged to cover most, if not all, significant advances in Christian Orthodoxy. Ramsey: One perspective of Church History is to view it as an ongoing wrestling and the insistence that there always be a winner and a loser. Argument has been hard-wired into our organizational genetic code. Surely this has had a profound and lasting impact on the overall communicative ethos established within the church; it is largely conflictive. It can be demonstrated that a conflictive ethos runs counter to a dialogic ethos.

Rianna Oelofsen writes of a conflictive ethos that persists post-atrocities, such as Apartheid or the Holocaust. She notes that "a conflictive ethos is a worldview — encompassing habits, attitudes and beliefs — which enables what might otherwise be an absurd situation."<sup>202</sup> While the kind of violence done to each by ecclesial leaders in America certainly does not rise to the level of that witnessed during the Holocaust or

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<sup>202</sup> Rianna Oelofsen, "De- and Rehumanization in the Wake of Atrocities," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 28, no 2 (2009): 179.

Apartheid, some of the characteristics of individuals who live within a conflictive ethos are common. One such characteristic is the propensity to dehumanize.

“[D]ehumanization occurs through the processes of exclusion or maltreatment which result in the *perception* that the other (or oneself) is less (or more) worthy of moral consideration.”<sup>203</sup> This is interlaced with the concept of in-group bias examined in the preceding chapter. Remember, the in-group bias causes one to assume a preferred position for his or her in-group while assigning moral deficiency or unrighteous motives to the out-group.

How often is the phrase “those people” or “them” used in the description of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgendered individuals as if to indicate that they are not unique, individual humans? I personally overheard a young man in his twenties say “*we* would all be better off if *they* would just go start *their* own country somewhere on an island somewhere. Then *they* could do whatever *they* want to themselves and leave the rest of *us* normal people alone.”<sup>204</sup> They, them, themselves — all are words indicating a homogeneous view of the “other” which creates space where a collective can be treated in a manner beneath that of “real” humans. Dialogue confronts the in-group bias and tendency toward collectivizing by allowing individuals to step out from their group while engaging them as fellow humans. *Where collectivizing dehumanizes, dialogue re-humanizes.*

Dialogue invites leaders at various strata of ecclesial organizations to engage each other, not only with respect (which, while better than disrespect, can at times still be

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Overheard at a coffee shop.



arm's length and cold) but also with a sincere acknowledgement of value and mutual worth while seeking to co-create together. It is unlikely, however, that in the present leadership climate within American ecclesial organizations dialogue will simply materialize as a viable option for leaders to embrace. If dialogue is to become the new normal, it must be accorded a place of importance much higher than simply another activity alongside a litany of other organizational activities. It is not just another team building activity or group trust building exercise. It must become environmental, a dialogic ethos, where dialogue events naturally take place as a matter of course.

### **A Dialogic Ethos**

#### **Many Voices**

The idea of polyphony, while uncommon in present-day leader to leader relating, is certainly not a recent innovation. In Ezekiel 43:2 of the Old Testament, and again in Revelation 1:15 of the New Testament, the voice of God is described as sounding like “many waters.” The sound of the Divine is a construction of many layers with diverse textures, overtones and undertones. Proverbs 11:14 warns that safety is found in the voices of many counselors. It could even be said (without bending our theology too terribly) that the Holy Trinity is an example of polyphony,<sup>205</sup> a single mind employing multiple voices in discourse, enticing the flawed to engage in a divine conversation with the Holy. This conceptualization of God speaks of a dialogic ethos, an environment replete with invitation and response.

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<sup>205</sup> For a further development of this thought see Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

A dialogic ethos gives rise to an environment where many voices are invited into a stream of conversations that might travel in a multitude of unpredictable ways.<sup>206</sup> It can also be said that a dialogic ethos facilitates the formation of a worldview, one where it is normative for many voices to be involved as individuals navigate the complexities of relating one with another. Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's polyphonic innovation in the Russian novel offers an understanding of dialogue as ethos. In the Bakhtinian dialogic ethos, hierarchies are flattened as the lofty are pulled down and the lowly are lifted up. It is this kind of leveling of the leadership "playing field" that I envision when describing a dialogic ethos.

### **The Carnival**

Bakhtin utilizes the metaphor of carnival to articulate the kind of polyphony found in Dostoevsky's novel. Nearly every culture has some variant of the carnival where reality is suspended *temporarily and volitionally* while the absurdity of real life and inter-relating is often demonstrated by the use of absurdity itself. Carnival invites individuals into a safe, relational space by a common embrace of

an attitude towards the world which liberties from fear, brings the world close to man and man close to his fellow man (all is drawn into the zone of liberated familiar contact), and, with its joy of change and its jolly relativity, counteracts the gloomy, one-sided official seriousness which is born of fear...<sup>207</sup>

Where in real life, organizational strata are often rigidly imposed (even if implicitly so), during carnival these hierarchies are flattened out. The occupant of the lowest stratum addresses the one in the seat of power as equal with no fear of reprisal.

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<sup>206</sup> Thanks to Caroline Ramsey for developing this idea. See "Conversational Travel and the Identification of Leadership Phenomena" in *Leadership as Practice*, ed. J. Raelin (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, forthcoming).

<sup>207</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (USA: Ardis, 1973), 133.

Those occupying the high and lofty positions of privilege and power interact with the least and powerless as peers. Carnavalesque relating occurs as all agree to the suspension of hierarchical norms. How fruitful might our leader to leader conversations become if some carnivalesque ideals were to be introduced? In a dialogic ethos, hierarchies are flattened if not eliminated entirely.

“In carnival there develops, in a concretely sensuous, half-real, half-play-acted form, a new modus of interrelationship of man with man which is counterpoised to the omnipotent hierarchical social relationships of non-carnivalistic life.”<sup>208</sup> In the carnival, egalitarianism wins out over hierarchy. To further illustrate the egalitarian ideal, the lowest of the low may be elevated to the high place of “King of the carnival” and then quickly “discrowned.” One minute you’re on top and the next, you’re trampled underfoot.<sup>209</sup> The ladder is toppled; the ivory tower is laid on its side. No single voice speaks over or more loudly than the next as the invitation is extended to all for entrance into the co-creative space of dialogic relating. This kind of space becomes a fertile seedbed from which dialogue activities can spring into full bloom. Yet for this kind of polyphony to become more than “pie-in-the-sky,” to see it actually take place in real time, a measure of trust must be offered by all participants.

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 102.

## The Power of Dialogue: Constructive Conversations on Divisive Issues

For over thirty years The Public Conversations Project has been embodying the principal “the way we talk to each other makes a difference.”<sup>210</sup> <sup>211</sup> Even the most precise information, if spoken in the wrong manner, can fall to the ground ineffectually.<sup>212</sup> Correctness alone is not enough to force another to hear, especially if emotions are elevated with the *fight, flight or freeze* response activated in the amygdala portion of the brain. This fear response, activated when a person feels attacked or in danger, prohibits logical processing of information, even if that information is factually correct.<sup>213</sup> Restating and expanding the opening line of this section: The *WAY* we talk to each other matters as much, perhaps more, than *WHAT* we say to each other. Dialogue, ala the Public Conversations Project, gives attention to the way individuals talk with each other, especially when interacting over divisive issues.

By and large, people are unaccustomed to engaging in genuinely curious conversations where the goal is simply understanding another’s point of view without arguing for a particular position. In their extensive experience convening people from polar ends of hot-button issues, PCP practitioners have observed that people do not naturally move toward dialogue. This is consistent with what was noted in a previous

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<sup>210</sup> Herzig and Chasin, 1.

<sup>211</sup> It is important to note that the organization which is carrying forward the work of the Public Conversations project is now called “Essential Partners.” The organization underwent a recent restructuring with a new name.

<sup>212</sup> I would encourage leaders at all strata to read *The Secret Language of Leadership* by Stephen Denning. Denning effectively proposes that leaders who offer narrative rather than proposition are far more likely to move people toward changing their minds. Stephen Denning, *The Secret language of Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2007).

<sup>213</sup> Jane Cresswell, “The Brain in Coaching.” A workshop presented August 2, 2015.

chapter about the church's historical inclination toward clustering, pitting clusters against one another, then declaring winners and losers between those clusters. The natural human inclination is to take a position on a given matter then set about the task of convincing others to join in said position. Said another way, to *convince* is powerful motivation for human conversations.<sup>214</sup>

At the Public Conversations Project, dialogue is referred to as “a conversation in which people who have different beliefs and perspectives seek to develop mutual understanding... They often gain fresh perspectives on the cost of the conflict and begin to see new possibilities for interaction and action outside of the dialogue room.”<sup>215</sup> While dialogue (for a PCP practitioner) is not intended to be a problem-solving exercise, it is often the case that dialogue generates relationships that then lead to solutions down the line.

Dialogue, in the PCP sense, is something that occurs, it is an event that takes place with a clear starting point and a clear ending point. While dialogue from a Bakhtinian perspective is invitational and creative of a dialogic ethos (WHY we talk together), PCP dialogue is more closely tied with a Bohmian view where dialogue is an activity (HOW we talk together).

Bakhtin envisions dialogue as intrinsic, woven in, through and under the daily interactions of people as their relational selves are being formed in a carnivalesque, conversational dance of sorts. A person's identity is emerging as dialogue shapes his/her self-view along with others' perceptions of him/her. For Bakhtin, to live is to dialogue.

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<sup>214</sup> Sallyann Roth, notes taken at the workshop.

<sup>215</sup> Herzig and Chasin, 3.

Bohm and PCP are much more interested in the shape of dialogue, carefully crafting that shape toward an outcome where mutual understanding and affirmation are brought into focus. In Bohmian dialogue, one is not so interested in creating an emerging self as in helping others to understand the already created self along with its contribution to the whole body of co-created knowledge. Bakhtin provides a context for dialogue, Bohm/PCP constructs dialogue within that context.

For the Public Conversations Project practitioner, rarely is the desired outcome of a dialogue to settle a matter or even to find compromise on a given issue. Dialogue is not perceived as a roadmap to agreement or method of mediation. It is, however, an apt vehicle for arriving at a place of deeper understanding of the *other*, to see individual people where monolithic groups of enemies had previously been found. This can be a difficult thing to come to grips with for those who struggle to accept that a conversation can be valuable even when no problem is solved or agreement reached.

It is important to note that dialogue, in the sense that the PCP embraces the word, does not work against solutions, compromise or finding common ground. These simply are not the primary goals. Many times it is the case that “solutions grow up naturally from the fertile seedbed created when enemies begin to understand each other,”<sup>216</sup> but when that does happen, it is a secondary gain. The purpose of PCP dialogue is to expose the value in the people seated across the dialogue room by coming to know and truly understand them.

By any measurement, the Public Conversations Project is considered to be “far left,” certainly not mainstream Christian by any means. I was quite possibly the only

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<sup>216</sup> John Sarrouf, at the workshop.

straight, male Evangelical in a room of about 25 people. At first blush, their work could easily be overlooked by people like me as feel-good, new age, pop-psychology, touchy feely nonsense. “Let me hear you and be heard by you...” Then early in day two, an unusual turn of events began to take shape. As I sat in the room with every intention of simply observing the methods of facilitation, day after day I began to realize that they are doing in real time what we claim to be important. They actively look for the value in the individual, watch out for the feelings and sensitivities of others and assign worth to a person based on who he/she is more than what he/she can do. I was struck by how they carry out the things that I claim to be important far more effectively than I do. Their orthopraxy seems to align with our orthodoxy more closely than our own.

Within the first few hours, I discovered what it felt like to be the minority, the outsider, the one with no power or influence. I was received with graciousness and kindness. As I reflected on my time there, I wondered if in my church circles we would be so quick to offer kindness to some of these unbelievers. Or would we be more concerned about convincing them of how wrong they are, winning the argument? I suspect that there are some things to be learned from the PCP, not only in the arena of meeting facilitation.

I am naturally drawn to the inquisitive nature of dialogue in the PCP model. Facilitators spend hours precisely constructing questions with just the right combination of words, tone and pace of verbiage that will have the best chance of leading to deeper levels of mutual understanding. These are not questions in the sense of the modern “Socratic Method” which has become not much more than a thinly veiled manipulation.

“Socratic dialogue” began as a legitimate method of truth-finding but has become degraded into a simple means of expressing already-discovered, ready-made,

indisputable truth. It has become little more than a tricky method of passing information along, pedagogy. It no longer has the carnivalistic sense of wonder and discovery which was first intended.<sup>217</sup>

Questions in a PCP dialogue do not manipulate participants into pre-constructed answers desired by the teacher, the opposite is very much the case. The questions designed by the PCP practitioner are carefully crafted to invite honest disclosure of feelings, not to press a particular point of view. When presented in the reflective, dialogic ethos offered by the Public Conversations Project, these kinds of questions can facilitate a deepening of understanding of the other. Understanding of the other leads to re-humanization.

#### Trust

Arvind Parkhe and Stewart Miller provide a useful treatment of *optimal trust*. “One interpretation... is that one willfully submits to vulnerability to another, in the expectation that the resulting relationship, marked by mutual interdependence, uncertainty, and partial loss of control, will have eventual net positive payoffs...”<sup>218</sup> This definition of the kind of trust demanded of participants in dialogue is as good as any I have found. It acknowledges the intrinsic motivation for self-preservation found in all of humanity while enfolding the expectation that we also possess the capacity to look upon the interests of others. This kind of trust is “required in situations where the possible damage exceeds the advantage one seeks.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Bakhtin, *Poetics*, 100.

<sup>218</sup> Arvind Parkhe and Stewart R. Miller, “Dialogue,” *Academy of Management Review* 25, no 1 (2000): 10-11.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.



In truth, when engaging in dialogue, the potential for damage is always lurking. Damage to reputation, damage to emotions, damage to career... Trust in this context is volitionally (almost arbitrarily) given since rarely is there opportunity for trust to be earned. Remember, participants are oftentimes entering into dialogue with others who have, up until that point, been perceived as enemies. They are holding out hope for a positive outcome, but all they have for certain is an invitation.

In an ideal set of circumstances, a polyphonic dance of sorts is entered as one voice invites another through a “word in living conversation directly, blatantly oriented toward a future answer-word.”<sup>220</sup> Hopefully, a hearer recognizes a glimmer of genuine curiosity extended by the initiator and moves toward the relational space created there, weaving the beginning strands of a band of commonality. By responding to the curious inquiry, the second voice affirms the worth of the first. It could then happen that a third voice, perhaps a fourth, offer unique perspectives that had not occurred to any of the participants prior to that moment... and the dialogic dance continues! When the desire to co-create new knowledge becomes more powerful than the intrinsic desire to prove oneself right, then dialogue can find a fertile environment in which to take root.

Contrast this idyllic, trust-filled, dialogic ethos with the following from a leader at the edge of a small Evangelical denomination operating around the globe out of North America. In an ongoing, multi-part email exchange, we were engaged in dialogue over the matter of trust between center and edge-located leaders within his organization, Sam<sup>221</sup> writes:

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<sup>220</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), xix.

<sup>221</sup> Sam is not the respondent's real name.

I've been amused (at times) to find myself on the ground with the center's boot on my throat. And when I reach up to move it just a bit so I can breathe, I'm told, "I don't like your tone! You clearly have a problem with authority." Here's the deal; I don't have a problem with authority. (in fact, most of the edges I know who have abandoned their centers did not have a problem with authority) I (we) have a problem with those who abuse positional authority and the power with which they've been entrusted. I simply have a problem with someone's boot crushing my windpipe. The purpose of power is to use it on behalf of those who have none. When this isn't happening, it's a crying shame.<sup>222</sup>

This does not feel like a relationship marked by mutual trust and respect. I pressed back to Sam, commenting that surely the leaders, like himself, at the edge must have exercised their own share of violence directed back to the center, to which he replied:

Thinking about the edge and acts of violence towards the center for a second. Those acts of violence are often the result of years of oppression, years of experiencing pain at the hand of those who were supposed to extend blessing. When they finally have had enough, they stand up on their own 2 feet and say enough is enough! Whatever they do whatever they say at that point? In my mind, is understandable. That the center gets their feelings hurt at that moment, baffles me. That the center rarely if ever stops and reflects on how its actions might have led to this reaction is what leads to more of the same.<sup>223</sup>

Clearly, this is not a relationship characterized by trust; it seems that the opposite is true in this case. Sam does not trust that the leaders at the center of his ecclesial organization will care for him and affirm his work. He has come to embrace an expectation that center-located leaders in his organization will act out of a desire for organizational preservation as a matter of course, misconstruing his attempts at communication. In much the same way that Tom (procedural heretic case-study in chapter two) did not receive words of affirmation and celebration, Sam hears the continuous grumblings of an organizational center demanding that he "get in line."

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<sup>222</sup> "Sam," email exchange with the author December 2, 2015.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

It has been my observation, both through personal experience and in countless conversations with ecclesial leaders, that at the heart of many center to edge relationships, an absence of trust is apparent and in many cases, the absence of trust has given way to blatant mistrust. Mistrust is different, more severe and active, than a mere absence of trust. Where a void of trust exists (where trust is simply missing), mistrust can rise up to quickly fill that void. This being the case, when an absence of trust is detected, it is important that leaders move to resolution before mistrust takes root.

The reader will recall that erosion occurs when leaders at the organizational edge are marginalized and then spun off, disconnecting from the ecclesial body, taking their creative innovations and contributions to organizational learning with them. Cross-strata dialogue offers a remedy, but if that dialogue is to be engaged by leaders across organizational strata, a willingness to extend trust is prerequisite. Where mistrust has filled the void created by an absence of trust, this can be very difficult. But again we should be reminded that important things often are difficult. There seems to be, in my experience, a direct correlation between how important a matter is and how difficult it is to accomplish.

Robert C. Solomon and Fernando Flores offer a keen insight related to this matter: “Both trust and distrust seem to be self-confirming... If one person trusts another, the second person, knowing that he or she is trusted, will be more likely to be trustworthy, thus confirming the trust on the part of the first person.”<sup>224</sup> Stated another way, both trust

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<sup>224</sup> Robert C. Solomon, Fernando Flores, *Building Trust in Business, Politics, Relationships and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 33.

and mistrust are generative; trust extended leads to trust earned. The question at hand is, *who will be the first to extend it? The Center or the Edge?* Time will tell if either.

Once again, as we near the conclusion of this chapter, I would like to offer some questions that invite further reflection. These are the things I am asking of myself, I simply share them with the reader.

- How have I confused dialogue with other types of speech/listening events? Has this confusion of definitions contributed to a lack of clarity in my leader to leader relating?
- What groups have I pressed into a “condemned collective” and held at arm’s length? In so doing, have I violated the Great Commandment?
- Am I willing to expend the energy to engage in dialogic conversations with *others* with no agenda other than simply to understand them? Or must every conversation have a strategic outcome?

### **Conclusion**

Where a genuine desire for leader to leader relating is present, dialogue offers a way forward. That may be as simple as the recognition that a person previously categorized in a condemned collective is, in truth, as human as me. Or it may be as complex as figuring out together where radical innovations fit within a given organizational construct, reshaping the accepted organizational “norms.” Since dialogue is a “talking through together” it requires participation by others. In this regard, dialogue is invitational and relational.

With regard to the problem at hand, the erosion of the missional footprint of ecclesial organizations in America, dialogue offers a remedy. When leaders have experienced the joy of co-creating together, it is much more difficult to hold each other in adversarial postures, in condemned collectives. This is especially important when it comes to cross-strata relating. Within a dialogic ethos, when times are challenging, it is

more likely that an edge-located leader will stay connected to the center. So not only is co-created knowledge sure to have more staying power than that which is dreamed up in the mind of one then passed along to another, the re-humanizing effect of dialogue can serve to bind hearts together that would otherwise be pushed apart.

As I bring this excursus to a conclusion, leaders at the centers and edges of various ecclesial organizations come to mind and I am tentatively hopeful. The more this topic finds its way into my conversations with ecclesial leaders, the more I come to believe that it is possible for centers and edges to come to see their value and respect for each other increase. However, where mistrust fills the empty spaces left where trust has disintegrated, the task is daunting. *Possibility does not always connote probability.* There is work to be done. If dialogue is going to foster the building, or rebuilding, of connectivity where disconnection has taken place, someone has to be the first to extend trust.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> A helpful view of the progression from trust to mistrust is included as an appendix.

## SIX: A HOPEFUL WAY FORWARD

When leaders at the center and leaders at the edges come together and really listen to each other, really pay attention, it can't help but be a powerful space for the Holy Spirit to work.

—Lisa Greenwood

### A Brief Pause

Before working through this concluding chapter, I invite the reader to pause and enjoy some of my favorite words from my favorite book, Gordon MacKenzie's timeless work, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*. From the introduction:

Most commonly, the schedule had me visit with one grade level at a time, spending about 50 minutes with each. As I was putting on my welding goggles and scarred leather apron, the teachers would herd the children in, barking orders for them to sit cross-legged on the floor in rows facing the semi-circle of sculptures...

Satisfied that order had been attained, the teachers would retire to the back of the room to lose themselves in grading papers, leaving me, for all practical purposes, alone with the children. I always began with the same introduction: 'Hi my name is Gordon MacKenzie and among other things, I am an artist.' [MacKenzie would then comment on all the beautiful artwork hanging in the halls and ask] 'I'm curious, how many artists are in the room? Would you please raise your hands?'

The pattern of responses never varied.

**First grade:** En masse the children leapt from their chairs, arms waving wildly, eager hands trying to reach the ceiling, every child was an artist.

**Second grade:** About half the kids raised their hands, shoulder high, no higher. The raised hands were still.

**Third grade:** At best, 10 kids out of 30 would raise a hand. Tentatively. Self-consciously.

And so on up through the grades... By the time I reached the sixth grade, no more than one or two did so and then only ever-so-slightly — guardedly — [afraid] of being identified by the group as a "closet artist."

I would describe to the sixth graders the different responses I had received from the other grade levels. Then I'd ask: 'What's going on here? Are all the artists transferring out and going to art school?' (Usually in recognition of my little joke, the students would laugh.)

'Uh-uh. I don't think that's it. I'm afraid there's something much more sinister than that at work here. I think what's happening is that you are being tricked out

of one of the greatest gifts every one of us received at birth. *That is the gift of being an artist, a creative genius*’ (emphasis mine).<sup>226</sup>

Every time I read this story I am saddened. Creativity is one way that we are able to reflect the Divine nature. The more I consider the problem of erosion, the more I recognize a deeper, more self-centric motivation to seek out a remedy. I suspect it has something to do, at least in part, with what I perceive to be the waning of creativity among ecclesial bodies in America. I have witnessed for too long, in too many organizations, the staleness resultant from the loss of creativity when edge-located leaders disconnect. There are ideas, *truly innovative ideas*, that never receive a hearing from those in the power centers of ecclesial organizations simply because center/edge dialogue is missing. Additionally, persistent erosion presents a real, existential threat to ecclesial bodies. I believe we can find a better way.

### **What I Hope to Accomplish**

In this brief, final chapter, I hope to tie together the various strands that have been woven throughout the dissertation. Each strand winds its way around and through the problem being addressed. I acknowledge that, at times, my writing strays into an overly digressive sort of rambling that can foster bewilderment for some. To counter this tendency, I have attempted to compartmentalize the main ideas throughout but still, in the final wash, I believe this work invites a glimpse into the way my mind develops progressions of thought. The individual strands of this dissertation’s progression of thought are inter-related yet unique.

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<sup>226</sup> Gordon MacKenzie, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A Corporate Fool’s Guide to Surviving with Grace* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998), 18-20.

First, I observed how an ecclesial organization's *missional footprint* is deteriorated when leaders located at the edge are marginalized and disconnected. This deterioration is what I have referred to as *erosion* and is the problem I have put forward in this work. Further, the missional footprint is the *measurable evidence of presence* for an ecclesial body. This terminology (missional footprint) is finding its way into conversations among missional leaders with increasing frequency, leading me to embrace it in place of other, available jargon. It is not my claim that it is the best, only the one that resonates with me at this season of ministry.

As we seek to advance a remedy to this erosion, it is important to acknowledge that there is a general tendency toward argumentation evidenced among leaders of ecclesial organizations. This tendency is deeply entrenched, resultant from a winner/loser paradigm established in the early generations of the church. Coupled with the natural leaning toward in-group bias, this tendency militates against centripetal conversations among leaders, advancing the centrifugal type instead. I am contending that *dialogue* offers a remedy. Alternative speech/listening events, while often-mistaken for dialogue, are not well-suited to counter the prevailing, adversarial posture.

Dialogue is a unique form of conversation which serves to re-humanize, facilitate understanding and allow *the other* to step out of his/her condemned collective, recognizing and celebrating the individual's worth both personally and organizationally. When dialogue between the center and the edge of ecclesial organizations takes place, a few important things begin to happen. The tendency toward a winner/loser paradigm leading to centrifugalism is resisted, fostering the repair of organizational breaches where



edge-located leaders are lost (erosion). This is the primary benefit for which I am contending.

There is, additionally, an important secondary gain to be realized when real dialogue is introduced. The constructive deviations (CDe) undertaken by edge-located leaders can introduce creative innovations into the organization which can be to the benefit of all. In this present era of liquid modernity, these innovations may be the very things that enable the church to thrive in its God-pronounced mission! Finally, dialogue within a dialogic ethos is more clearly aligned with the pattern of Scripture articulated by the Apostle Paul when he wrote

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all...<sup>227</sup>

than is the wrestling, marginalizing and demonizing presently exhibited by ecclesial leaders in America.

Now, nearing the conclusion of this work, I am offering some examples where cross-strata dialogue within ecclesial organizations is being engaged with promising results. Organizational disconnection is being replaced by reconnection, re-humanization where dehumanization had previously existed and a purposeful tuning of peripheral vision by center-located leaders. There is hope.

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<sup>227</sup> Ephesians 4:1-6 (ESV).

### Centers and Edges Need Each Other

Lisa Greenwood serves as Vice-President of leadership ministry for the Texas Methodist Foundation. Their stated mission is to empower the church in its God-appointed mission. While this kind of mission statement is by no means unique among ecclesial organizations, it may even sound a bit cliched, what is unique are the measurable steps they are taking to move this mission forward. Their commitment to “strengthen leaders for the church of today” extends very specifically to leaders that are taking “risks for the sake of the mission of the church as opposed to minimizing risk for the sake of the institution of the church and preserving that institution,”<sup>228</sup> and is evidenced in an intentional convening of dialogue events.

Reflecting on one recent dialogue event where the TMF joined with innovative community leaders confronting the crisis of isolation in our society by “build[ing] support systems for [leaders] who are bringing people into meaningful, life-giving, transformative communities,”<sup>229</sup> Greenwood observed:

When leaders at the center and leaders at the edges come together and really listen to each other, really pay attention... it goes beyond any transactional expectations, and moves into the realm of true transformation... the kind of deep transformation that occurs when we realize that everything we need is in the room and we are able to access the wisdom and giftedness that exists in each other. I went to the [dialogue] event with that kind of understanding of the process of facilitation (everything we need is in the room...). What leapt out at me at the gathering in Boston was that this approach is more than good pedagogy, it’s actually what it means to be the church in the world—NOT, “We have what you need,” but rather “We all have gifts/wisdom/experiences to offer for the good of the world and each other.”<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Lisa Greenwood, embedded video, “Strengthening Leadership at Every Level in the Church,” *TMF, Stewarding Potential*, accessed December 4, 2016, <https://www.tmf-fdn.org/leadership-ministry>.

<sup>229</sup> “Gather Together,” event invitation.

<sup>230</sup> Lisa Greenwood, email to author, December 11, 2016.

Said another way, this was not just another training event where a monophonic voice was employed to disseminate information from the center outward to the edges,<sup>231</sup> nor was this a veiled attempt at obtaining buy-in from subordinates by creating an appearance of dialogue. In this case, co-creation of new knowledge actually occurred as they intentionally fostered “powerful space for the Holy Spirit to work.”<sup>232</sup> The polyphony included voices from the edges and centers alongside the voice of the Holy Spirit. Is this not the kind of conversation for which we strive?

I include Lisa’s comments here with the intention of casting a hopeful light on our present circumstances. She comments from experience, not just theory, about the real potential offered to an organization when an intentional movement toward dialogue takes place. When it does occur, leader to leader connection — or *reconnection* in some cases — *can* happen, repairing the disconnection that leads to organizational erosion. In this case, it is seen that dialogue offers a possible remedy to the problem at hand.

As mentioned previously in the dissertation, my readings in Organizational Studies literature; conversations with Bella Galperin (a thought-leader in the field) about Constructive Deviance in the workplace;<sup>233</sup> observations of adaptive, edge-located leaders; and my own experiences as an adaptive leader suggest that there are deviations undertaken by good-hearted leaders within ecclesial organizations that are intended to

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<sup>231</sup> I am here reminded of John Heinz’ previously referenced words: “Life begins out at the edges of an organization and flows inward toward the center.”

<sup>232</sup> Greenwood, email.

<sup>233</sup> In a telephone conversation, Dr. Galperin commented that when she was engaged in her original PhD research she suspected that there could be an application for the principal of Constructive Deviance in ecclesial contexts. I agree.

bring good to the entire organization. I further observed that the locus of these innovations is, by and large, the organizational edge. The TMF is intentionally exploring these innovations by way of dialogue; they are, to use the terminology put forward by Day and Shoemaker, attending to the periphery.

In ecclesial organizations, when erosion of the missional footprint is recognized and attended to by center-located leaders, there is a much greater likelihood of finding and embracing these creative innovations, the ones desperately needed by the organization in order to flourish in the complexity of liquid modernity. Greenwood's further observation:

All too often, we don't truly listen to each other. Those in the center often fall into the trap of thinking it's their job to provide the answers, the resources, etc. which sets up a dependency model that not only doesn't benefit anyone in the end, it actually causes harm to all involved by limiting the best use of resources (e.g. If a leader on the edge only sees someone in the center as a source for funds, they've missed their wisdom; if the person at the center only sees the person on the edge as the recipient of resources, they've missed a tremendous opportunity to be transformed by their story and their experiences). We get the best effort and fruitfulness when we pay attention to the voices, experiences and giftedness of those on the edges and in the center.<sup>234</sup>

Simply stated, *centers and edges have a deep need for each other*. While the TMF case provides me with a degree of optimism, I continue to grapple with the belief that ecclesial power-holders, on a larger scale, will posture themselves to learn from edge-dwellers. Further, what about the edge-located innovators? Can they come to value the strength of the center? The invitational nature of dialogue allows for sincere inquiry at both strata.

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<sup>234</sup> Greenwood, email.

## Trust

At the end of the previous chapter it was noted that trust is an essential element in moving forward toward a dialogic environment within ecclesial bodies. Further, in order for the generative nature of trust to come into full-bloom, someone has to be the first to extend it. Where there has been a winner/loser paradigm with marginalization and mistrust present, this is a very difficult thing to ask. Remember Sam? His self-described experience of having the center's boot on his neck does not conjure up a flowery image! It is doubtful that he will be extending trust to the organizational center any time soon! Contrast this with Greenwood's perspective on the nature of trust between centers and edges.

[Trust] is essential. Without it, the work can't happen. The most important role of the facilitator [read: dialogue convener] is to create safe space, a container if you will, where authentic dialogue can occur. People on the edges of a system occupy a fragile, even vulnerable, position within a system. Those at the center of a system, who have responsibility for the system, can likewise feel threatened by movements which question the very foundations of that system. If there is to be conversation which leads to fruitful relationships, developing trust is absolutely vital.<sup>235</sup>

She acknowledges the anxiety experienced by leaders at both locations while, at the same time, holding out the potential for “conversation that leads to fruitful relationships” — Dialogue. As the facilitator (convener), she essentially serves as an interpreter, offering help to those at both locations to move toward greater understanding of the other.

It is my hope that, as we move forward into the increasing complexity of liquid modernity, there will be more, perhaps even some reading this present work, who will see

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

the value in and take up the cause of the interpreter. As they do, perhaps new ways of leader to leader relating, much different than what has been the norm within their respective tribes, will begin to take shape. Here, nearing the end of this dissertation, I am inviting center and edge-located ecclesial leaders to lay down their swords of argumentation and monophonic manipulations and replace them with knitting-needles of dialogue instead.

In my understanding of Scripture, I believe it causes the Lord of the church grief every time an edge-located leader disconnects and walks away, whether structurally or functionally, from his/her God-ordained ecclesial body. Additionally, due to the loss of the individual, that body loses a little piece of itself. This erosion robs the organization of vital creativity and some measure of agility to make innovative adaptations; its missional footprint is deteriorated a little bit more.

### **Peripheral Vision**

#### **Texas Methodist Foundation**

Continuing our look into the work of the TMF, we find real-time examples of intentional dialogue events taking shape within a broader dialogic. These events are beginning to yield fruit, establishing a new paradigm of leader to leader relating. Along with several other leader development initiatives, the TMF convenes consistently-scheduled dialogue events which call the bishops (center) alongside other groups within the UMC for the purpose of mutual understanding and growth in relationship. This is still a fairly new initiative so long term results are not yet available to begin measuring “success,” but the way I see it, any actions taken to intentionally convene ecclesial leaders for cross-strata dialogue make it a success already! I take heart in the knowledge

that leaders in ecclesial power centers is attending to important matters involving their edge.

One example of an intentional dialogue event undertaken by the TMF convened in December of 2015, “The Forum on Wesleyan Potential.”<sup>236</sup> The opening statement of the forum’s printed material states: “We believe in the power of conversation to open new paths of discernment, decision-making, and action by leaders... We look forward to a challenging and rewarding time together so all of us will leave this gathering with: Hope...; Ideas...; [and] Relationships...”<sup>237</sup> The schedule for the ensuing days provided ample opportunities for their desired outcomes to be accomplished.

Without getting lost in minutia, one emerging relationship is notable. One of the presentations on day two of the 2015 forum was entitled “How We Gather: Secular Millennial Communities And Religious Innovation,” presented by Caspar ter Kuile and Angie Thurston.<sup>238</sup> Leaders from the South Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church engaged in challenging dialogue with these two Millennials (one, a “minister for non-religious people in a same-sex union and the other, a practitioner of Urantia), resulting in an emerging friendship.

It is an understatement of monumental proportions to say that these two are very different from bishops, presiding officers and denominational executives found at the center of their faith traditions. Yet an upcoming gathering, scheduled to take place in

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<sup>236</sup> The purpose of this forum was: “To gather thoughtful leaders from different fields of experience and generations for a conversation about the future of faith communities, less constrained by what is, and more encouraged by what could be.” See Conference Book for the forum.

<sup>237</sup> “Conference Book” from The Forum on Wesleyan Potential, December 1-3, 2015.

<sup>238</sup> “How We Gather” is the product of these two Harvard Divinity school students’ research. Full versions of their literature can be found at <http://howwegather.org>.

January of 2017, will be hosted by ter Kuile and Thurston where even deeper dialogue is planned around the “role of religious institutions in relationship with innovators and communities.” Said differently, *where can centers and edges engage in fruitful dialogue that will be to the benefit of the communities around them?* Here the reader will recall our understanding of dialogue derived from its nomological network: a *talking through together* to the co-creation of new knowledge which can be held in common by all who contributed. This kind of cross-strata dialogue is happening! And even if still early, we are hoping for a promising result.

The leadership of the TMF are, perhaps without using this exact terminology, tuning their peripheral vision. As leaders at the center are coming to grips with the idea that they may lack the ability to discern adaptations vital to their organization’s survival, they are turning their eyes outward, toward the edges of their organization. In so doing, they are acting on an instinct consistent with Day and Shoemaker’s observation that “wisdom doesn’t always flow from the top down, of course, and so listening for weak signals from within the organization is important...,”<sup>239</sup> What one may hear loud and clear from edge-located leaders, because of close proximity, may indeed be a “weak signal” to someone far removed, near the organizational center.

This hearkens back to John Heinz’ perspective that “life happens out at the edges and flows in toward the center.” It requires a high degree of intentionality for the center-located leader to look across the various (sometimes vast) strata of his/her organization, seeking out inklings of new creativity. It doesn’t happen automatically. A leader with a

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<sup>239</sup> George S. Day and Paul J. H. Shoemaker, “Scanning the Periphery” *Harvard Business Review* 83, no 11 (November 2005): 135-148.



keenly tuned peripheral vision will be looking regularly and intently outward to the edges.

### **Frank**

Early in 2015 I interviewed Frank.<sup>240</sup> He had recently stepped down from a national leadership position in an American, Evangelical denomination to form a new congregation out West. Just as the new congregation was ready to begin public services, the district in which the new church was located underwent a leadership transition in the bishop's office. Frank and the leadership of the new congregation had already been through the entire process of preparation and were at the point where the administrative leadership would now formally acknowledge and "launch" the new work. Then, all was brought to a halt. A new bishop was setting up his office.

The administrative leadership of the denomination was now requiring the opening of the new congregation to be put on hold simply so the bishop's office could get new leadership structures in place. This was going to require a delay of six months to a year. Frank had countered with a creative work-around (CDe) that would allow the timeline to continue as planned, but the administration was unwilling to go that route. When I interviewed Frank in early 2015, he had made the decision that the new congregation would simply form as an independent church and, as such, the denomination would miss out on the benefits of having this new congregation within its missional footprint. In terms of my research, this narrative stood as an exemplar of leader disconnect which led to erosion of the missional footprint of the denomination. I had added this case-study to

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<sup>240</sup> Frank is not the respondent's real name.

my list of ecclesial organizations where innovations had been stifled. Thankfully, Frank recently communicated an update that took place during 2016.

In an example of tuning his peripheral vision, the incoming bishop intervened and allowed for a work-around of the organizational procedures, allowing the new congregation to move forward. Frank is unsure what all steps were taken by the new executive but what he does know is that “when [bishop] took the reigns everything went relatively smooth.”<sup>241</sup> This was a notable departure from what had been prior to the new leader’s arrival. In this case, an example is seen of a center-located leader (the new bishop), in a new place of authority, intentionally looked across the organizational strata, engaging his peripheral vision. As an edge-located leader, Frank has now experienced a measure of organizational redemption. Because of this bishop’s exercise of peripheral vision, a door for dialogue has been nudged open a little bit more.

As Frank offered this update, I noticed a much different kind of attitude toward the institution than when we originally spoke. Frustration over the administrative situation that had tinted his words previously was replaced with gratitude; value and optimism had replaced cynicism and resignation. Having served at the administrative center of an organization similar to Frank’s, I understand that the action taken by the bishop really was not very difficult. As the leader at the power-center of that organization, he was in possession of decision-making capacity; it simply required some attention. In this case, the bishop’s attention to the edge is nurturing a dialogic kind of relating and has circumvented erosion of the district’s missional footprint. It is my belief that we can expect to see more of these kinds of examples if a commitment to a dialogic

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<sup>241</sup> Frank, email with the author, September 9, 2016.

ethos takes hold among American ecclesial organizations. Often these kinds of small actions, seemingly inconsequential to the center, can carry a tremendous weight when it comes to speaking value to those at the edge.

### **CenterForm**

CenterForm was referenced previously as an exemplar of CDe. Where TMF represents center-located leaders tuning peripheral vision, engaging in center/edge dialogue, CenterForm supports this same type of activity from the edge inward. With few exceptions, all of the members and co-workers at CenterForm occupy space at the edges of their respective organizations.<sup>242</sup> It is becoming a laboratory of sorts, a place where organizational edges encounter each other with regularity. In these edge to edge relationships, ecclesial leaders across a broad spectrum of traditions are offering support and affirmation to each other, sometimes when that support is lacking within the leader's own ecclesial body.

It is my hope that as these robust, edge to edge relationships are forged, the organizations represented by these leaders will begin to take note of the benefits from these shared innovations. However, if this kind of relating, between leaders at the edges of different organizations, is never extended inward to the centers of their respective organizations, I fear the erosion problem will persist.

In my work with the Atlanta Church Planting Alliance, I have found that dialogue happens naturally among those who occupy space at organizational edges. There seems to be something in the profile of the edge-located leader that allows for quick and

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<sup>242</sup> For a complete listing of member organizations and co-workers, see the CenterForm website, <http://www.centerform.org/en/directory>.

meaningful engagement with other edge-located leaders, both within their own organization and others. But when it comes to engaging in dialogue with their respective centers, the adversarial posture seems to rise up almost instinctively. If caution is overlooked, even a life-giving location such as CenterForm holds the potential of deteriorating into a fellowship of the oppressed where the disenfranchised gather for mutual commiseration. As one presently at the edge of my own organization, I acknowledge this to be an ever-present possibility.

### **Conclusion**

At this point in my years of ministry, having witnessed the best and worst possible kinds of leader leader relating, my deep desire is to offer a concluding word that inspires hope. At the same time, the pauline admonition "...if you bite and devour each other, watch out that you are not consumed by one another"<sup>243</sup> again comes to mind. Oftentimes, by our words, violence is perpetrated against one other in such a way that relational integrity is threatened. When that relational integrity is threatened, the missional footprints of the involved organizations are in danger of erosion. In my view, this is a problem deserving of attention by ecclesial leaders at both the center or the edge.

Dialogue offers a means of countering the prevailing trend toward argumentation, the "ongoing wrestling"<sup>244</sup> between ecclesial leaders across organizational strata. As we engage in dialogue together, we re-humanize each other while moving toward a more crystalized understanding of our need for each other.

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<sup>243</sup> Galatians 5:15 (ESV).

<sup>244</sup> Ramsey.

By way of a secondary gain, dialogue invites ecclesial leaders at the center to embrace their need for the edge, celebrating and enfolding the creativity located there. The constructive deviations (CDe) undertaken by edge-located leaders may provide the innovations which will enable American ecclesial bodies to thrive in the shifting landscape of liquid modernity. It remains to be seen whether leaders at the center will affirm and celebrate the creativity offered.

Additionally, dialogue offers a way forward for the edge to acknowledge the importance of the center. When mutual affirmation is present, the edge may begin to see the value of a rigid core where a firm anchor point may be found. This fixed position can provide a measure of confidence in risk-taking to the edge-located leader if the relational “playing field” is flattened. A dialogic ethos provides that.

I am reflecting upon what it could be like if the edge and the center were to truly recognize each other’s unique contributions to the organization and celebrate them. What if the prevailing winner/loser paradigm were to be replaced with a dialogic ethos, one that prioritized co-creative dialogue? How far might our collective reach extend? While my imaginations are grand, and perhaps tinted with rose, I suspect that anything I may dream up would still fall short of describing the potential. If nothing else, I am confident of this, Jesus would be exalted in our love for one another and as that happens, the measurable evidence of our presence in the World, *our missional footprint*, would persist.

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*“By this, all men will know that you are my disciples...”*

— Jesus

## EPILOGUE

New Year, 2017. I find myself feeling a bit concerned as I bring this project to an end. “Did I say all that I wanted to say?” “Have I been overly critical of others?” “Is my progression of thought clear?” These are some of the questions with which I am grappling. I feel that this topic is so important, much more than just an academic capstone to a degree program, that I want American, especially Evangelical, church leaders to take the time to consider what I have proposed. They may very well land somewhere different than where I have and I am comfortable with that so long as they are at least thinking about it. Perhaps other helpful actions will grow out of the fertile seed-bed of their serious considerations.

During the course of this project, as expected, corollary issues were hinted at but passed over for meaningful consideration. It is my hope that someone will attend to these matters in subsequent works. It is possible that this “someone” will be me but I would relish hearing other voices. If other voices were to join in the conversation, the opportunity to spend some time together in dialogue would prove to be fruitful without a doubt. Among several topics that I believe could provide fuel for further inquiry, I will mention just a few here.

First, it seems to me that there is a paradigm shift in the making, from a winner/loser paradigm to a dialogic paradigm. The reader may discount this observation as, for obvious reasons, little more than my wishful thinking. Yet, my gut tells me that with the coming of age of the Millennial Generation there is a natural leaning toward a collegial kind of relating that could supplant the hierarchical leanings of the present. I believe a wealth of helpful findings are just waiting to come forward should someone

find the time to look into this matter. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* by David Bosch provides tremendous insight into the topic of shifting paradigms. This seminal work is an apt starting place for this line of inquiry.<sup>245</sup>

I intend to give further attention to the examination and articulation of the profile of an “interpreter.” This is the unique leader who is equally comfortable occupying space at either the organizational center or edge. I see an important role for this leader when it comes to helping leaders at centers and edges to better understand each other. I fear that my hopes for the emergence of a dialogic ethos within ecclesial organizations will remain unfulfilled without the work of interpreters. During the course of this research, I have met a few leaders that I feel possess the characteristics necessary to fill the role but it will be helpful to have a working profile and a relevant vocabulary.

Finally, I suspect that there are many parallels to be articulated between Constructive Deviance (CD) in the Organizational Studies and Constructive Deviations in Ecclesial Organizations (CDe). With the undeniable tendency toward fractioning present within the church, to have leaders that volitionally *stay* will prove to be vital to our witness in the World. Just as Constructive Deviance, by definition, requires that a person remain in an organization while engaging in volitional acts outside of the bounds of organizations norms, so does CDe. There is, however, the unique factor within ecclesial organizations of the sense of calling. How does a sense of calling influence CDe, either positively or negatively? I suspect that to more fully flesh-out the idea of CDe would prove to be a worthy pursuit.

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<sup>245</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

Humbly submitted.



## Appendix One Summary Of Survey

### Summary of Survey Results 11-6-2015

14 respondents representing Lutheran, PCA, Foursquare, Rhema, AG, Church of God Anderson, COG Cleveland, Wesleyan and Independent.

All answered that

- they **had** operated outside the bounds of their organizations' norms
- they had engaged in the referenced behavior **volitionally**, knowing it violated the norms
- in their opinion, the referenced behavior resulted in a positive outcome for the organization
- they had no real regrets about making the decision

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The following are the respondents' unique answers and self-described organizational roles.

#### ***Respondent one***

***-Exiled church planting leader. Licensed ordained pastor. Marketplace minister.***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "The norms were designed for a different time when the church was 80 percent white and Westernized. My work required openness to a church and demographic that is 80 percent brown and multi-cultural and multi-lingual. "

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "It was positive at first. Then the complexity of issues related to working with ALL of the harvest created marginalization of my work. Stated values (we love all people) became nothing more than rhetoric."

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. "Administrative blindness and fear prevented the 'better way'."

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. "No."

#### ***Respondent two***

***-Senior Pastor***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "Cultures, lifestyles, and rhythms of life are very different now than in past years. Organizations need to adjust - not change core values, but at least be open to new ways to walking out those core values."

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "From some, we received positive encouragement to 'carry on.' From others, we did not receive direct negative feedback but skeptical remarks and "Be careful" comments."

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. "Because I knew the risk would involve repercussions for others and not just myself."

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. "No."

### ***Respondent three***

#### ***-Heading a taskforce developing standards and strategies for growth for a group of leadership training centers across Africa/Middle East.***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "To demonstrate healthier leadership practices and potentially positively influence the culture/values of the organization."

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "Gratitude for my willingness to go the extra mile. Ownership by my superior of the positive results of my actions. Recommendations that some of my practices be applied in other areas of the organization."

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. "It would have undermined the impact of the other positive changes I was able to bring about. It would have been in direct defiance to clear instructions. The actions would have been funded out of my pocket."

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. "No."

***Respondent four******-Staff Development & Teaching Pastor.***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "Unless it is a pretty corporate church setting I have found churches have a wide variety or "norms." We have a saying at our church that there is "freedom to fail" so we try to do different things to reach people for Jesus. "

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "It was welcomed. "

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. "Wasn't worthy the tension it would create. "

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. "No."

***Respondent five******-Community pastor, motivator and inspirer!***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "I have taught apart from understood bylaws on gifts of the spirit and tongues being the initial evidence of spirit baptism."

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "No response, dialogue was vague, but I have not tried to hide anything and have been vocal about the full inclusion of all gifts as evidence, and not making tongues the end all achievement at the expense of the other gifts."

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. "Yielded to group consensus, basically at higher levels such as District advisory councils or cabinet meetings"

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. "No."

**Respondent six****-Pastoral**

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "Getting the job done"

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "Understanding."

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. NO

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. NA

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. NA

**Respondent seven**

***-As CMM's Coaching Catalyst, I train, develop, recruit and manage the relationships with gospel coaches for church planters and church leaders in the US and Latin America.***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "The opportunity to expand our coaching training in Cuba was not on our radar and not part of the scope of the ministry previous to my joining staff but the opportunity to be part of transforming church leaders in an explosive multiplication movement there made it seem clear CMM should reconsider limiting ourselves to only the English speaking world."

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "There was a little hesitancy but the President and board have become enthusiastic supporters. There is an understood norm that CMM staff should innovate and expand the ministry and that the community of the staff will be supportive after considering the options together."

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. "Early on in my tenure with CMM there were other staff persons with whom I disagreed often but whom I had no influence or reporting relationship. So I offered my opinion to the President and stayed out of the decisions, endured what was required and waited for God to move.

Since then, the other staff have resigned and moved on."

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. "No"

***Respondent eight***

***-Lead pastor of a traditional, 60-year old congregation***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "The norms are restrictive, meant to control behavior so that doctrinal purity is maintained. There is a "herd" mentality within the denomination where norms are both written and "understood."

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "I received a voice reprimand with "soft" warning but no further action."

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. NO

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. NA

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. NA

***Respondent nine***

***-President of financial services ministry for the denomination.***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "The norms of the organization were unwritten rules, born of a long season of bureaucracy. They were needlessly restrictive, thus discouraging creativity and innovation."

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "Due to success of outcome, warmly received and applauded. Not sure it would have been the same otherwise."

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. "The institutional norms were "too strong" and "too established" to take a different path. The path of resistance would have been too great, which would have led to a failed effort. A classic example of "choosing your battle."

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. NO

***Respondent ten***

***-Lead Pastor of Church Plant District Evangelism and Church Growth Leader***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "I operate outside of norms because that is what is required to be effective and to see change. The norms and policies were normally established for churches of yesterday (10-50 years prior). We are living in a time where we have to start operating in the norms of the NOW and the future."

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "Positive if it worked. Questioning and taking back authority if it didn't work. Balance of superior wanting positive change and living in the system."

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. I wanted to respect the authority of my superior. Romans 13 weighed heavily on me at the time. Hard balance to be respectful of authority and know when to defy authority.

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. YES

I would have been more bold and communicated more with authority about my concerns and desires.

***Respondent eleven***

***-Pastor and District Elder***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "Motivated by a prophetic directive."

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "Positive"

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. Respect for leadership above.

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. NO

***Respondent twelve***

***-Organizational executive***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "Alignment to biblical practices

Engagement in mission

Faithfulness to God's leading"

Q. When discovered, "please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior."

A. "Being personally marginalized"

Q. "Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's 'norms'?"

A. YES

Q. "Why didn't you take the 'better way'?"

A. "Other leadership involved did not concur"

Q. "Do you regret not taking the better way?"

A. NO

***Respondent thirteen***

***-Senior Pastor***

Q. "In a few words, please describe your motivation to operate outside of the organization's 'norms'."

A. "The norm doesn't seem as effective as it has been in the past. I wanted to discover new ways of getting the same stated desired outcome as the norm but In a different way"

Q. When discovered, “please provide a brief description of the response you received from your organizational superior.”

A. “Initially, I was given permission but not a lot of support. It was kind if like we'll stand back and watch. If you fail you'll clean it up. There never really was a discussion about if it succeeds but I know they'd take the credit then lol”

Q. “Have you ever experienced a situation where you saw a better way of operating but DID NOT GO THAT WAY because it required operating outside the bounds of your organization's ‘norms’?”

A. NO

Q. “Why didn’t you take the ‘better way’?”

A. “NA”

Q. “Do you regret not taking the better way?”

A. NA



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***Collective answers***

***Motivation to operate in a Constructive Deviance capacity.***

-“The norms were designed for a different time when the church was 80 percent white and Westernized. My work required openness to a church and demographic that is 80 percent brown and multi-cultural and multi-lingual.”

-“Cultures, lifestyles, and rhythms of life are very different now than in past years. Organizations need to adjust - not change core values, but at least be open to new ways to walking out those core values.”

-“To demonstrate healthier leadership practices and potentially positively influence the culture/h-pvalues of the organization.”

-“Unless it is a pretty corporate church setting I have found churches have a wide variety or "norms." We have a saying at our church that there is "freedom to fail" so we try to do different things to reach people for Jesus.

-“Getting the job done”

-“The opportunity to expand our coaching training in Cuba was not on our radar and not part of the scope of the ministry previous to my joining staff but the opportunity to be part of transforming church leaders in an explosive multiplication movement there made it seem clear CMM should reconsider limiting ourselves to only the English speaking world.”

-“The norms are restrictive, meant to control behavior so that doctrinal purity is maintained. There is a "herd" mentality within the denomination where norms are both written and "understood.”

-“The norms of the organization were unwritten rules, born of a long season of bureaucracy. They were needlessly restrictive, thus discouraging creativity and innovation.”

-“I operate outside of norms because that is what is required to be effective and to see change. The norms and policies were normally established for churches of yesterday (10-50 years prior). We are living in a time where we have to start operating in the norms of the NOW and the future.”

-“Motivated by a prophetic directive.”

-“Alignment to biblical practices, Engagement in mission, Faithfulness to God's leading”

-“The norm doesn't seem as effective as it has been in the past. I wanted to discover new ways of getting the same stated desired outcome as the norm but In a different way”

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***Response from organizational superiors***

-“It was positive at first. Then the complexity of issues related to working with ALL of the harvest created marginalization of my work. Stated values (we love all people) became nothing more than rhetoric.”

-“From some, we received positive encouragement to ‘carry on.’ From others, we did not receive direct negative feedback but skeptical remarks and "Be careful" comments.”

-“Gratitude for my willingness to go the extra mile. Ownership by my superior of the positive results of my actions. Recommendations that some of my practices be applied in other areas of the organization.”

-“It was welcomed.”

-“No response, dialogue was vague, but I have not tried to hide anything.”

-“Understanding”

-“There was a little hesitancy but the President and board have become enthusiastic supporters. There is an understood norm that CMM staff should innovate and expand the ministry and that the community of the staff will be supportive after considering the options together.”

-“I received a voice reprimand with "soft" warning but no further action.”

-“Due to success of outcome, warmly received and applauded. Not sure it would have been the same otherwise.”

-“Positive if it worked. Questioning and taking back authority if it didn't work. Balance of superior wanting positive change and living in the system.”

-“Positive”

-“Being personally marginalized”

-“Initially, I was given permission but not a lot of support. It was kind if like we'll stand back and watch. If you fail you'll clean it up. There never really was a discussion about if it succeeds but I know they'd take the credit then lol”

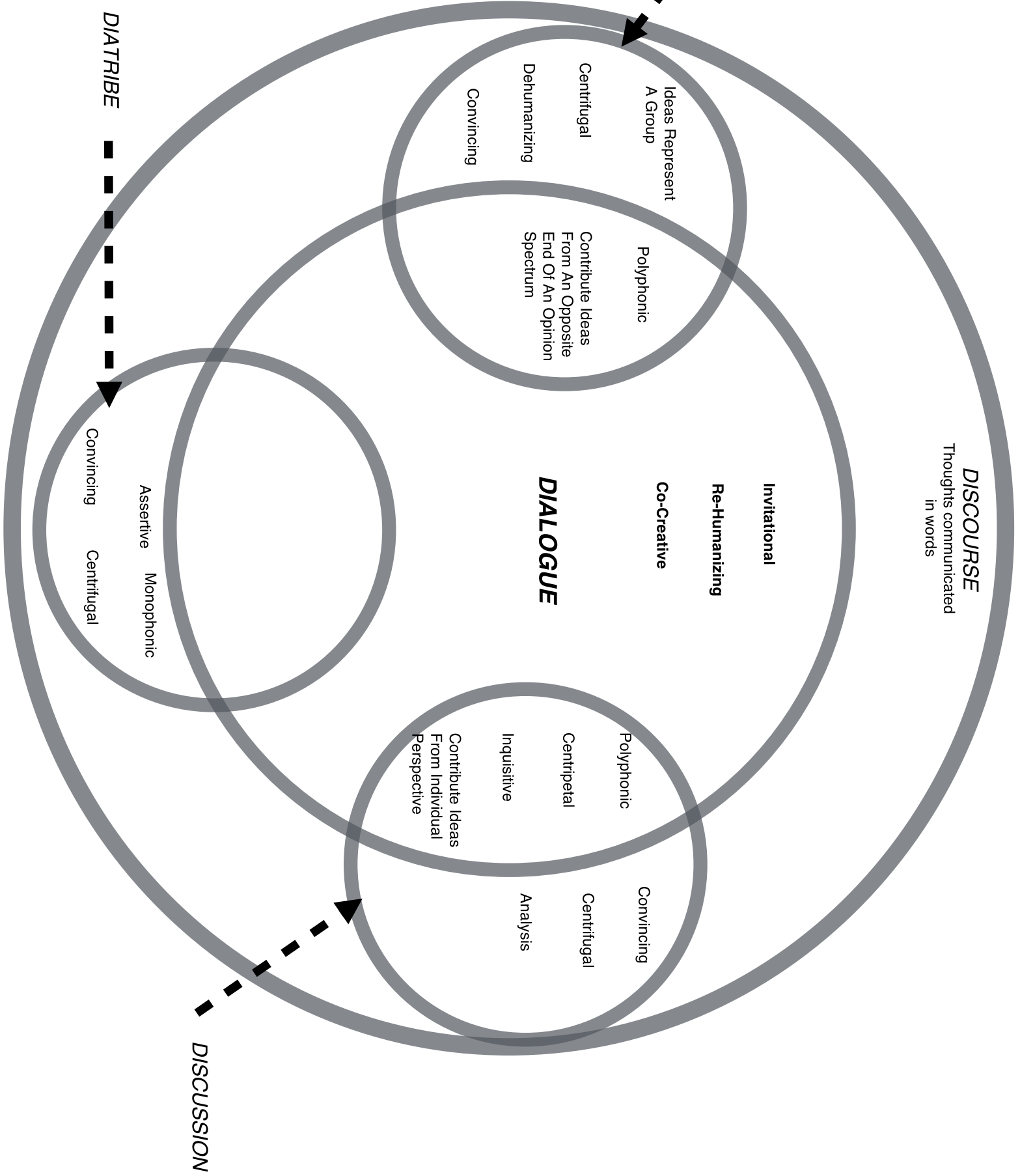
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*Avoidance of CD due to understanding of the existing norms.*

- “Administrative blindness and fear prevented the ‘better way’.”
  - “Because I knew the risk would involve repercussions for others and not just myself.”
  - “It would have undermined the impact of the other positive changes I was able to bring about. It would have been in direct defiance to clear instructions. The actions would have been funded out of my pocket.”
  - “Wasn't worth the tension it would create.”
  - “Yielded to group consensus, basically at higher levels such as District advisory councils or cabinet meetings.”
  - “Early on in my tenure with CMM there were other staff persons with whom I disagreed often but whom I had no influence or reporting relationship. So I offered my opinion to the President and stayed out of the decisions, endured what was required and waited for God to move.
- Since then, the other staff have resigned and moved on.”
- “The institutional norms were "too strong" and "too established" to take a different path. The path of resistance would have been too great, which would have led to a failed effort. A classic example of "choosing your battle.”
  - “I wanted to respect the authority of my superior. Romans 13 weighed heavily on me at the time. Hard balance to be respectful of authority and know when to defy authority.”
  - “Respect for authority.”
  - “Other leadership involved did not concur.”

**Appendix Two**  
**A Visual Nomological Network of Dialogue**

DEBATE



DIATRIBE

**Appendix Three**  
**Trust/Mistrust Continuum**

# Trust Development

**Trust** ←————→ **Distrust**

**Question:** Where are people on this continuum, and which direction are they moving?

**The Potential Exists for Change-** We must steward this opportunity well.

## Observable Progression

State of Being	Actions of Leadership	Predictable Results
Partnership in Trust	Disruption*	What was THAT?!
Questions	Lack of Clear Answers	Things Don't Add Up
Confusion, Frustration	Failed Expectations	Deepened Discomfort
Pessimism, Criticism	Marginalization	Sense of Injustice
Anger, Cynicism	Withdrawal	Re-Evaluate Relationship
Apathy, Disconnection	Intervention	End of Relationship

*\*The primary disruptions referenced here would be District Multiplication in January of 2003 and then again with District Consolidation in May of 2009. For the sake of this example though, any broad action by leadership that doesn't make sense to those it affects would qualify.*

## Notes:

1. How do we devise a process to catch things at the point of questions/confusion?
2. The longer it takes us to intervene, the more resources it will take to correct things.
3. Over the past ten years, we've seen a clear deterioration from a sense of trust to distrust, and from a sense of partnership toward disconnection. This flow is hard to stop yet this past year has seen progress in this area.
4. This trend can be reversed by leadership coming to a place of understanding and taking intentional action over a period of time.
5. When senior leadership proactively re-engages pastors and churches, it's possible to slowly win the confidence of pastors. There is an important halt to the slide toward distrust, and a return to true partnership. This is arduous and it takes time.
6. Re-established trust with District leadership is only half the battle. If the NCO is still held in suspicion, we all lose.
7. It is the District's job to work, over the long-term to reestablish the bruised or broken trust the local pastor has in the Foursquare denomination.
8. The NCO and the District would do well to avoid unnecessary disruptions, and when they are necessary, but able and willing to provide sensible and clear explanations.

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