

**Learning “The Long Obedience”
A Master of Divinity Portfolio for
Wesley Seminary, Indiana Wesleyan
University**

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*For Beth, Noah, Nathan, and Myla
Mom, Bill, and Kathy
and
My Family, Friends, and Fellow Servants at First Wesleyan Church, Chillicothe, Ohio
and Indiana Wesleyan University*

~

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.
Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the
days of her life.

Proverbs 31:10, New International Version

~

Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many.
I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.
When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble.
Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.

Proverbs 4:10-13, New International Version

~

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, "Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is
my family, that you have brought me this far."

2 Samuel 7:18, New International Version

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Preface

Learning the “Long Obedience”: A Pilgrimage Essay

The pages you are about to read (should you accept the challenge) are the firstfruits of an almost five year seminary experience. It is an experience that has been punctuated by highs and lows, fears and failures, success and significance.

Since I stepped foot on the Indiana Wesleyan University campus in beautiful Marion, Indiana, in May of 2010, my life has changed dramatically. I have transitioned from working in a public library to an academic library. My commute is 90 miles one way where before it was 20. And I have more questions than answers about life, God, the church, and myself.

Five years ago, this tension would have been an emotional and spiritual cancer. Now, I find myself at peace. Where once I would have strained at the gnat of certainty, I am able to let mystery serve as a muse, a jumping off point for life with God and with others.

Wesley Seminary has given me a new appreciation for my growth as a leader as well as the importance of developing leaders in my congregation. I sense a call to intentionally invest myself in our congregation’s young people, encouraging and helping to guide them in their spiritual, personal, and academic growth.

Seminary has shown me the importance of being aware of and engaging culture – specifically the arts, music, news, and popular trends. Defining my own social media presence has become a part of my ministry as well. I cannot fathom a 21st Century Pastor not having at least a minimal presence on Facebook and Twitter.

While I have had a sense of ministry as vocation for many years and can point to finding “creative” ways of infusing pastoral care into every previous job I held, seminary has helped me to see that “the Church” is greater than the local congregation. Five years ago, I anticipated completing seminary, reaching ten years’ service in the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System to earn retiree health care benefits, and then transitioning into congregational service. For the last three years, I have served at Indiana Wesleyan’s Off Campus Library Services as a Reference Librarian. Ministry now consists of serving adult students, faculty, and staff.

I continue to serve my church family at First Wesleyan Church, Chillicothe, Ohio, though I do not know what shape(s) this ministry will take in the future. The coming year will be another transition time, as I seek counsel from my family, my mentor, trusted friends, and my church’s pastoral staff to try and figure out what ministry “looks like” on this journey’s next leg.

Writing that I am not making a ministry decision on my own, but with an abundance of counsel is a huge step for me. Seminary has helped me to “tone down” my pride, independence, and insistence on doing things my own way. Though far from perfect, I am learning a greater dependence upon God.

The most important takeaway of my seminary career is this: “Success” in ministry directly is dependent upon the leader’s spiritual health. The seminary curriculum’s

practical focus has been a Godsend in this area. Reading *Celebration of Discipline* (Richard Foster); *The Friendship Factor* (Alan Loy McGinnis); and *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Peter Scazzero) have made lasting impressions upon me. Henri Nouwen and Thomas Merton have become trusted “co-pastors.” Lenny Luchetti’s *Preaching Essentials* and Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn’s *What Every Pastor Needs to Know* will be “go to” resources in the coming years.

Most importantly, God has used Wesley Seminary to shape me into a more Christlike person. The Holy Spirit has been with me through many toils and snares, most of my own invention. Yet, I am coming to accept my frailty, my inability to change anyone but myself, and the dangers of people pleasing. In fits and starts, I am learning not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. I want to believe that God is transforming me into a more compassionate, empathetic, and forgiving human being.

Though Dr. Ken Schenck, Wesley Seminary’s Dean, may cringe at these next words, I found Kenny Rogers to be the most practical theologian I studied under these past sixty months. In the immortal words of “The Gambler,” I finally learned that “You got to know when to hold ‘em / know when to fold ‘em / know when to walk away / know when to run.” It is deeply ironic that this lesson comes as I write my final paper for the Integration Capstone course.

In his memoir *The Pastor*, Eugene Peterson describes his ministry as “every step an arrival.” Peterson’s journey motif fascinates me, since it places a premium not on performance, but upon perseverance. Flash is not nearly as necessary as faithfulness.

“Pastor Pete,” as he is affectionately known in the book’s first few pages has helped me to see my own ministry, in whatever shape it takes, as learning a long

obedience. May the coming years show that I am continuing to walk, one step at a time, every step an arrival.

At the end of almost every preface, there is a (sometimes lengthy) list of persons the author wishes to thank. More often than not, out of fear of offending someone, there is the obligatory disclaimer/apology, sometimes followed by “You know who you are” or similar phrasing. So, to anyone and everyone who has been a part of this journey, *you know who you are.*

The “balancing act” of family, work, seminary, and church has caused me to realize how very important my wife, Beth, our sons, Noah and Nathan, and our niece/daughter Myla are to me. They need and deserve my attention and presence. This is a gift I hope to give them often in the days, weeks, and months to come.

Part One: Praxis Courses

Wesley Seminary students complete six praxis courses over a three year period. These courses cover ministry “nuts and bolts.” The ideas and concepts in Pastor Church and World; Cultural Contexts of Ministry; The Missional Church; Christian Worship; Christian Proclamation; Congregational Spiritual Formation; and Congregational Relationships helped me to figure out what it really means to be a “Pastor.” Over the course of the following pages, you will see growth and interaction in my attempts to discern issues from a biblical, historical, practical, and theological perspective.

Chapter One: Pastor, Church and World

Pastor, Church, and World is the introductory course at Wesley Seminary. My current philosophy of ministry is a direct outgrowth of readings, discussion, and class reflection. I have learned there is no “one way” to pastor or to be a Pastor. What seems to separate successful pastors from others is a faithful obedience to God, constant attention to God’s Word, and a relentless love for God and people.

Considering the Call: Examining the Nature, Purpose and Practice of a Pastor

The Christian Pastor: A Working Definition

A Christian Pastor is a person set apart and surrendered to the full authority of the Godhead by means of the salvation of Jesus Christ, through the receiving of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (M. Higley and J. Wise, personal communication, May 26, 2010; Seamands, 2005, p. 9-10). The pastor is set apart as a result of a unique calling from the LORD, confirmed by the local church and/or an overarching polity. Pastors accept both the call to the pastoral vocation and the responsibilities to God and to the flock God gives the pastor to shepherd.

Biblically, there are examples of men and women that God has placed special tasks upon and made accountable to Him in ways that members of the community are not. The Christian pastor forms a bridge between the sacred and the ordinary. S/he acts as mediator, not in a sense of dispensing grace necessary for salvation, but as a conduit so that God's life flows through her/him to those under their care. Pastoral purpose and practice are lived out in the following six natures (domains): calling; character; shepherding; intercession; education; and dreamer.

The Nature of Pastoral Calling

Pastoral ministry, at its heart, is both a fulfillment and reflection of the Levitical Priesthood. Instituted by God for the preservation and guarding of His covenant with the Israelites, the Levites were consecrated to the LORD in the place of the firstborn child from each of the twelve tribes. As John MacArthur writes in his explanatory note of Exodus 28:1, "Aaron and his descendants *were chosen by God*...they did not appoint themselves to the position...the law clearly defined their duties for worship and the

sacrifices in the tabernacle and for the individual worshiper and the nation”

(MacArthur, 1997, p. 131, emphasis added). A brief Scriptural survey shows that in both testaments, God personally called, chose, and set apart individuals to serve Him (see Isa. 6:8-13; Jer. 1:4, 5; Matt. 10:1-4; Mk. 6:7-13; and Lk. 9:1-6 as examples).

In describing God’s call to Jeremiah, the New King James Version links the words “set apart” with “sanctified” and “ordained” with “appointed.” In Ezekiel 1:3 we read, “The word of the LORD *came expressly* to Ezekiel the priest” (emphasis mine). The opening verses of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi tell of the messenger receiving God’s word. The beginning verses of Obadiah, Habakkuk and Malachi share the word “burden,” literally a weighty oracle or prophecy centered on judging Israel as a nation.

Further, God gave His messengers clear directives: priests were to teach the Israelites God’s Law and distinguish between clean and unclean persons, foods and things to display God’s Holiness. Old Testament prophecy was in turns predictive (the coming of Messiah) and judgmental (Israel’s future occupation and exile at the hands of gentile nations). In the New Testament, Jesus commissioned the twelve apostles to preach, heal, cleanse, proclaim the coming Kingdom of God. The apostles also called their hearers to repentance, a model carried out to varying degrees of effectiveness from Pentecost to the present day.

While all Christian believers share in ministry (1 Pet. 2:9), the pastorate itself is set apart from the church body by the laying on of hands (Num. 8:10; Deut. 34:9; Acts 8:18; 1 Tim. 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6). The act of ordination, commanded by God and committed by ecclesial authorities, publicly places the mantle of leadership upon the person ordained. Moreover, ordination petitions God to grant the pastor a new portion

of the Holy Spirit. Finally, ordination transfers the church universal's historic authority for all believers' edification (Willimon, 2002, pp. 32, 35).

In the Wesleyan Church, pastors seeking ordination are examined by members of the District Board of Ministerial Development (DBMD). DBMD members bear responsibility that candidates are both truly called and qualified to exercise the privileges of ordained ministry. These privileges are: preaching, administering the sacraments and a commitment to pastoral care (Kelly et al., 2008, chaps. 5782, 5755). Candidates pledge their loyalty to and understanding of Wesleyan Membership Commitments and Articles of Religion. The ordination service, following the outline provided in *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church*, is consummated as Ordination Council members lay hands upon each candidate and ask the Holy Spirit to pour out blessing and power for her/his ministry. This service is a reflection of close to two millennia of Christian thought and practice (Kelly et al., 2008, chaps. 5750-5772).

The Purpose of Pastoral Calling

Edification, building up the church, is the controlling purpose of all those called to be pastors and is expressed through the pastor's role as steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1-2, New American Standard Bible). In this postmodern age where truth is considered by many to be situational rather than unchanging, the Christian pastor comes before his or her congregation with a mandate to proclaim historic, orthodox, Biblical Christianity in an "exegetically responsible way" (1 Tim. 4:1-5, 8, 11, 13-16, New International Version; Willimon, 2000, p. 43). The claims the Scriptures make of themselves (being God-breathed, absolute truth – the very words of Almighty God) and historical explanations of the doctrines of Biblical inerrancy and infallibility add to the weight of the pastor's moral duty. In Proclamation, the pastor examines not only what

the text says, but exposit what the text means. “*Study earnestly to present yourself approved to God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15, Modern King James Version).

It is incumbent upon the Christian pastor to learn the tools of Biblical education: church history, doctrine, exegesis, homiletics, and theology (see Paul’s discussion of his post-conversion training in Gal. 1:6-24). Only by study, by examining Christian Scripture and traditions, can pastors preside over Baptism and the Lord’s Supper in a responsible way, acting as catalysts for the blessings God grants to His people through these sacraments. Baptism’s significance is found not only in the convert’s public identification with the *ecclesia* (the People of God), but also in its representation of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Believers are to examine themselves prior to partaking of the communion elements (1 Cor. 11:20-34), lest they bear the guilt of misunderstanding the full measure of atonement found in the Son’s sacrifice. The text is foundational: it is the locus of doctrine, teaching, moral formation, and Spirit-led regeneration of God’s people (Willimon, 2002, p. 71).

Practices Common to the Pastoral Calling

In addition to administering the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper and teaching the congregation about said sacraments, pastors have a special responsibility to preach and teach the Scriptures; to counsel parishioners in matters of spiritual formation, finances, marriage, parenting, and the like; to educate the laity about pastoral responsibilities to the people and vice versa; and to oversee the church’s participation in denominational activities at the local, district and national levels.

Christian Pastors' Character, Ethics and Morals

Since the pastor's calling is the act of God that separates professional clergy from volunteer laity, the Trinity's moral standards add a deeper dimension to clerical service. Pastors first must answer the Call to Discipleship (orthodox Christian belief), then come to terms with the Secret Call (accepting that God has appointed and set apart an individual for the pastorate). It is in the tension between these two callings that the pastor wrestles with both God's (and the church's) expectations for the pastor's work. The teaching role (*didaskalos*, Jam. 1:3) brings with it a sentence of judgment the congregation is exempt from due to the pastor's responsibility to interpret the Scriptures correctly. The Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) provide a matrix for evaluating the pastor's character: s/he is to be reverent, a truth-speaker, sober, content with God's provision, committed to correct doctrine, and transparent in financial dealings. Pastors are commanded to shepherd their households well and to be a spiritual leader to their spouse, children and other dependents. A radical commitment to meditate on, search and study the Scriptures and to be impartial in matters of church discipline reflects the Providential Call of God as the church (at both the local and denominational levels) continuously evaluates the pastor's character and service in carrying out the Ecclesiastical Call (Willimon, 2002, p. 40; MacArthur, 1997, p. 1865).

The Purpose of a Pastoral Ethic

Pastors' character and morality embody their role as exemplar (1 Pet. 5:3, MKJV) and without a commitment to a distinctively Christian ethic, pastors will suffer both as professionals and as people. Three common windows into the vocation shape the pastorate as calling, profession and office. The danger in this view is that misunderstanding calling can cause pastoral counseling to break down into therapy; a

God-less view of pastoral work turns the profession into a career; and the pastoral office unaffected by the reality of the incarnation of God in Christ leads to power-grabbing hierarchy and relationship-crushing bureaucracy (Jones & Armstrong, 2006).

For pastors, right understanding and right teaching and right living are not linear steps. Rather, they are patterns of a weave that become the fabric of who s/he is as one called by God for His work. Serving others incarnationally, with an awareness of God's work in and through everyone involved in ministry, makes the most impact when that service is connected to a devotional, social and theological understanding of Jesus' life, death and resurrection (Jones & Armstrong, 2006).

Practices Associated with the Pastoral Ethic

Because the very nature of a Christian ethic is incarnational, pastoral practices should revolve around equipping God's people for works of service to the church and community (Eph. 4:11-13). Identifying and training future pastoral leaders, stirring up and developing gifts in lay ministers, mentoring and team building are indispensable for community-focused, incarnational service. The fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 5:9) are evidences of the character of pastor and people. Is the pastor's heartbeat God's heartbeat? Is the church's heartbeat God's heartbeat? Are both pastor and pew sitter challenged to examine their occupations incarnationally? Finally, do all of God's people filter every feeling, thought and action through a matrix that pays attention to God's presence in the world and challenges her/him to unlearn sin and learn holiness? (Jones & Armstrong, p. 53, 173). Pastors specifically need to make their own personal spiritual formation (contemplation, meditation, prayer, study) a priority to be able to model it to others, while guarding against the work of pastoral ministry becoming an unrelenting drive to do things *for* God without nurturing and growing in relationship *with* God

(Seamands, 2005, p. 25). Accountability and transparency in financial and social dealings is incumbent upon pastoral leaders as well.

The Pastor as Shepherd: Caring for God's People

In the final four domains (pastor as shepherd, intercessor, educator, and dreamer) there will be overlap in nature, purpose and duties. Each pastoral domain flows out of each pastor's call lived out in church, community, and family. The shepherd has a deep resonance in pastoral service as it was a vocation the LORD Jesus ascribed to Himself: the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11, MKJV). Matthew's Gospel (9:36) tells that Jesus looked upon the crowd following him with a deep love and yearning compassion for a people who were "tired and scattered like sheep having no shepherd."

Christ as shepherd calls pastors to lead their congregations to pasture, water and rest; to protect them from disease, predators and situations that place their lives at risk. The Christian shepherd is so intimately involved with her/his sheep that the sheep know the sound of her/his voice and will follow her/him to situations in life where there is fullness and abundance (which has both physical and spiritual elements). Last, the Christian shepherd must be willing to lay down her/his life for the sheep (Jn. 10:1-16). In the parish, this can be borne out in the tension for the shepherd to show her/his vulnerability and humanity while at the same time remaining faithful to the pastorate's moral and ethical dimensions as an example to the congregation.

The Purpose of Shepherding.

Shepherding calls on the pastor to be the "Principled Protector" (J. Fuller, personal communication, May 24, 2010). Interpersonal skills and spiritual gifts like mercy and empathy help the pastor to discern others' emotions, bring comfort to them

in times of emotional distress, encourage life change and suggest practical solutions for life's problems.

The pastoral vocation (itself a term taken from the Latin word for shepherding) has “life lessons” that both pastor and parish need to learn. Just as the shepherd is charged with protecting the sheep from predators, the shepherd must also keep her/himself from harm as well. Richard Blackmon and Archibald Hart have identified “five areas of emotional hazard that all pastors...face in their ministry...personal relationships, depression, stress and burnout, sexuality, and assertiveness. The root problem...is that pastors lack an adequate theology of self-care” (Blackmon & Hart, 1990, p. 36, 39). William Willimon counsels pastors to expect unclear expectations from the church and to realize that pastors desiring to mold missional congregations, as a result of alternately leading and being led to reach out to others in community, will experience disappointment, frustration, hostility and resentment (Willimon, 2002).

By nurturing a personal spiritual life, engaging in holy friendships with others while establishing proper boundaries in those friendships, having an accountability partner or group of other pastors to share the successes and frustrations of pastoral work, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle of diet, exercise, rest and Sabbaths/vacations, the shepherd will be able to care for her/himself while being an example to her/his flock. Shepherds and sheep need each other, but both need to know when to move and when to stop, when to rest and when to work, and when to talk to each other and when to be quiet and enjoy the scenery.

The Shepherd's Duties

Pastoral care and counseling will include meeting spiritual and emotional needs as well as physical needs (food, clothing, shelter). Home and hospital visits, cards,

letters and emails, celebrating births and marriages and remembering loved ones at death all impact the shepherd. Teaching on parenting, finances, issues of life and death and work and play can help the shepherd to influence God's people in the spheres of corporate and personal spiritual formation and corporate and personal health and holiness.

The Pastor as Intercessor

A significant role undertaken by pastors for their people is intercessory prayer. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* definition states: "Intercession is prayer on behalf of another, and naturally arises from the instinct of the human heart – not merely prompted by affection and interest, but recognizing that God's relation to man is not merely individual, but social...Intercession is thus to be regarded: (1) as the spontaneous act of man for his fellowman; (2) The official act of developed sacerdotalism; (3) the perfecting of the natural movement of humanity and the typified function of priesthood in the intercession of Christ and the Holy Spirit" (Meyers, 2009).

Both Testaments reveal instances where God's messengers have prayed to God on behalf of others, for their blessing, protection, salvation or to stay the LORD's judgment. Abraham pled for Sodom to be saved from destruction (Gen. 18:16-33) and Moses asked God to hold back from destroying the Israelites at Mount Sinai after the idolatry of the Golden Calf (Exod. 32:7-14). Nehemiah took blame upon himself for the nation's sin that had prompted God to exile His people, first under the Assyrians and Babylonians and later under the Medes and Persians (Neh. 1:4-10). Paul offered to give up his salvation for the Jewish people to turn to Jesus Messiah (Rom. 10:1-20). Psalms 5 and 119 are just two examples of psalms originally written to be spoken or sang in

alternating voices: the individual or people crying out to God on behalf of another and the LORD's corresponding response.

The Purpose and Practice of Intercession

At its heart, intercession is an act of prayer where the pastor recognizes that the earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1, King James Version). By pleading with God for others' needs, the pastor enters into the mystery of a relationship with a sovereign ruler who, through a variety of ways and in a variety of circumstances, cannot or will not act until and unless people pray (M. Dunnam, personal communication, 1997). Intercession is the "fiery furnace" where the pastor comes before the creator, redeemer and sustainer of the universe and acknowledges her/his dependence upon the Savior. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, "we fall into doubt and unbelief and through punishment and repentance experience again God's help and faithfulness. All this is not mere reverie but holy, godly reality" (Bonhoeffer, 1954, p. 53). Intercession is an outcome of pastors injecting themselves into others' lives by walking alongside them in the daily grind of relationships, experiencing joy and heartache, friendship and sorrow, victory and defeat together.

The Pastor as Educator

A sample of Hebrew and Greek words used in *Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionaries* for teacher/instructor (biyn; didaskalos; lamad; sakal; sumbibazo; yarah; yasar; and yissor) indicate that teaching has many elements associated with the skill. Biblical teachers are asked to impart understanding, have the ability to discern and distinguish between choices or principles, direct others, show prudence in their instruction and make others understand the subject matter. Teaching involves

informing students, chastising and correcting them and (hopefully) making them intelligent individuals who will behave wisely.

There also is an element of incentive: lamad (used in Song of Solomon 8:2) is rendered as having an original meaning to goad the student (as with the rod of correction) to accept skillful instruction, contrasted with the elements of judgment and punishment in James' use of didaskalos mentioned earlier (Meyers, 2009). For the twenty-first century pastor, education has come to include the marks of a profession: formal education (liberal arts and/or graduate studies), continuing education, and demonstrated expertise (through preaching, teaching, administration and leadership). At the institutional level in The Wesleyan Church, testing and approval by a group of one's peers happens with the DBMD and the education and examination that leads to ordination. Above all of this is the call to pastoral ministry, the sense of dedication and service to others beyond wage earning.

The Purpose of Pastoral Education

Lifelong learning blends with calling and character in the sense that spiritual challenge and renewal often take place in the contexts of preaching and teaching within the church. Pastoral education also deals with everyday church administration, staff development and team building (both professional and volunteer). Skills gained through education and experience are necessary when the pastor is the sole full-time staff member and is responsible for appointing and keeping watch over lay ministries within the church, budgeting, managing a non-profit enterprise (taxes, insurance, salary issues, etc.) and maintaining the physical plant (building, grounds, equipment and supplies).

The Duties of Pastoral Education

While many everyday tasks in this domain were listed above, scripturally it appears that the preeminent duty of a pastor is to develop generational succession in local, regional and worldwide ministries. This is seen in Moses' appointment of the first judges over the Israelites (Exod. 18:13-27, MKJV) and his commissioning of Joshua as Israel's leader (Deut. 31:7, 34:9) as well as in Jesus' choice of the Twelve and Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus to choose leaders to watch over new Christian communities (1 Tim. 3:2-15; 2 Tim. 2:1-3; Titus 1:5).

To borrow a corporate metaphor, leadership development is one way in which pastors strive to make a return on God's investment in them (Radtke, 2009). Through team building, the pastor provides direction to her/his staff and/or congregation through communicating core values and helping to nurture a culture of learning by surrounding her/himself with other teachable disciples. Further, pastors can work with their people to obtain plans and ideas, while protecting themselves and the church's ministry by not allowing others to bring problems to them without also having potential solutions to those problems.

By teaching and not taking over others' work, the pastor commissions work in the immediate context, further helping to develop the ministry's "spiritual DNA" by expecting that everyone will serve guided by honesty, righteousness and truth-telling. Generational succession helps provide for success when the leader invests in others and has deep mentoring relationships. This mutuality then permits the leader to demand accountability, productivity and execution since "it is right for the laboring farmer to partake first of the fruits" (2 Tim. 2:6). Last, the pastor is called to evaluate ministry outcomes and provide "Gap Leadership" (Nehemiah 4:13-23).

Evaluating ministry effectiveness can take place in team meetings, asking others for status reports on their activities and responsibilities or asking them to make presentations. Pastors also lead by identifying gaps in performance and behavior that do not square with the ministry's values, vision or spiritual DNA (Radtke). By taking these steps and making them a useful set of tools in the pastor's administrative toolbox, the pastor/leader can prioritize gaps and mobilize the talent at her/his disposal to allow the church to function as a Spirit-directed, God-focused group dedicated to meeting the needs of congregation, community, and world.

The Pastor as Dreamer: Sharing and Nurturing a Vision for God's People

Proverbs 29:18a (KJV) reads: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Pastors are called to proclaim (truth) to protect (doctrine and people) to provide (care, comfort, counsel and intercession) and to propel (people toward holy living). Nurturing a vision for God's people is the sum total of these roles and may be the most difficult for pastors to embrace and/or accept. "Vision" incorporates many other dimensions of pastoral work: personal spiritual formation; leadership development; lessons learned while in ministry; core values; the history of the ministry being led right now and the history of the church universal; and the drive needed to communicate God's vision to God's people through God's messenger. Each vision for ministry is as unique as the pastor God calls to execute that vision and requires a deep, Spirit-led discernment (see Matthew 16:2-3). The purpose of nurturing a God-given vision for the church is this: to bring the pastor and people together to impact the present work to ensure future ministry success.

Casting the Vision

Dr. Dean Radtke, founder of The Institute of Ministry Management and Leadership, stresses that a God-oriented vision for ministry often calls pastors to have both the faith and the willingness to leave one's comfort zone and to trust other leaders in new ways (Radtke, 2009). Vision challenges leaders to set aside the important for the essential, both for the pastor personally and for the congregation as a whole. Radtke suggests that pastors and other leaders focus on their job duties: is the pastor positioned correctly as a leader to ensure maximum response to God's leading? Is the pastor looking for and expecting other leaders that God will send to share the burdens of the work? (See Exodus 17:10-13, NIV). If those leaders are available, is the pastor ensuring a legacy by pouring her/his life into the other leaders God has placed within the ministry, adding value by establishing holy friendships, deepening partnerships and building the team? (Radtke, 2009, Jones & Armstrong, 2006, p. 65). Last, as the pastor serves the LORD, is the core of the work done in such a way that everyone (including those outside of the fellowship) sees God's love for people?

Concluding Thoughts

This paper has sought to examine the nature, purpose and practices associated with pastoral ministry. The broadness of the term can create a huge dilemma in that, oftentimes, when we speak of "the minister" or "the ministry," we are making reference both to the office of the clergy and to the work of the church (M. Higley, personal communication, May 26, 2010). What, then, sets apart the pastoral vocation from other "ministry" within the church?

First, the nature of the call: “God has called us. It all rests in the summons” (Willimon, 2002, p. 335).

Second, the inspired words that God used for those he calls to the pastoral vocation: bishop/overseer (episcopos) and elder/presbyter (presbuteros) both indicate separation in rank, duty and responsibility from other members of the community. Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* describes the bishop as a guardian, one “charged with the duty of seeing that *things to be done by others* are done rightly; the superintendent, elder, or overseer of a Christian church” (Meyers, 2009, emphasis mine). Likewise, presbuteros was used in the New Testament to denote those who held membership in the Sanhedrin (the ruling Jewish Council) and outside of Scripture to describe the duties of city managers or other officials who exercised authority over public affairs and administered justice. Thayer comments, “among the Christians, [presbuteros meant] those who presided over the assemblies (or churches). The NT uses the term bishop, elders and presbyters interchangeably” (Meyers). Conversely, “ministers,” the diakonia, were those “who executes [sic] the commands of a master” and were servants, attendants, waiters or oversaw poor relief (Meyers). The duties of proclamation (prophecy, preaching, and/or teaching the congregation) appear in Scripture to be reserved for those whom God has called out and set apart from the people.

Third, God judges the ethical and moral dimensions of the pastoral office and its associated duties with a higher standard or to a greater degree than instructions and warnings in relation to salvation, sanctification and Christian living.

Last, the ordination of those God sets apart for particular service. The six domains of pastoral ministry outlined above represent an Act of God (calling) confirmed by an Act of the Church (ordination and the laying on of hands) that has sought, called and affirmed the gifts and graces seen in the candidate by other ordained pastors. The congregation continues to test the pastor by examining her/his preaching, teaching, care, intercession, etc. as both pastor and people submit to Christ in the Spirit's power for the Father's glory. In the end, though, the call to the pastorate is a call to follow God alone while serving others. As Bonhoeffer said, "Alone you stood before God when he called you; alone you had to answer that call...If you refuse to be alone you are rejecting Christ's call to you, and you can have no part of the community of those who are called" (Bonhoeffer, 1954, p. 77).

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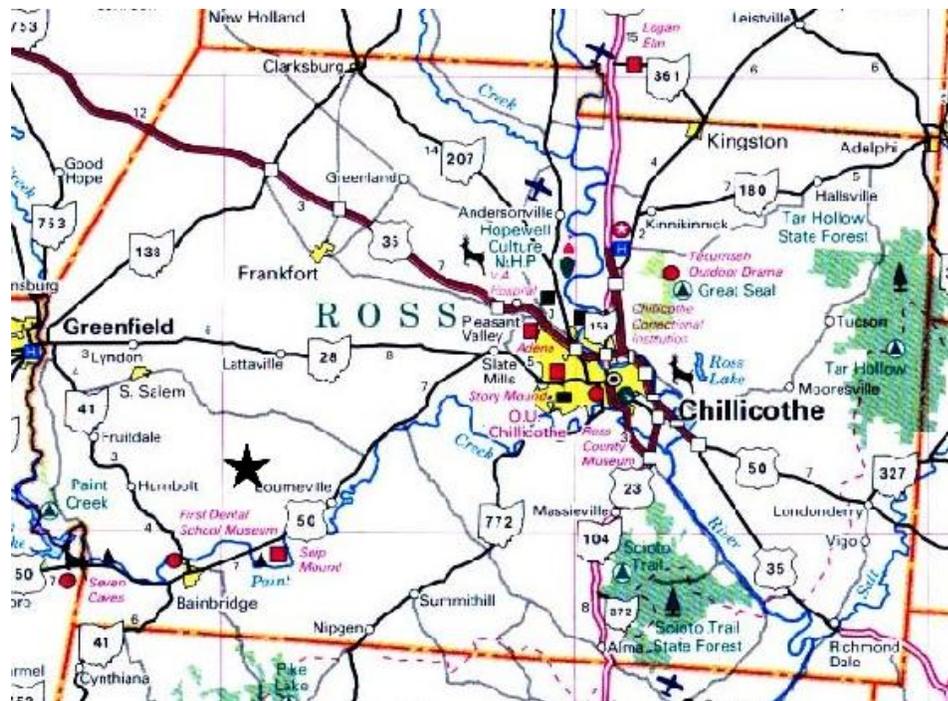
Chapter Two: Cultural Contexts of Ministry

Cultural Contexts of Ministry introduced me to the importance of demographics and surveys. Effective pastors know their church *and* their communities. They have their finger on the pulse of cultural, economic, and social issues that bleed into the church from the surrounding culture. This chapter includes two papers I wrote for the course. The first is a 2012 demographic survey of Chillicothe and Ross County and First Wesleyan Church's immediate neighborhood. The second is a reflection on the difficulties in racial reconciliation I will face as a pastor.

Local Demographics: First Wesleyan Church

In many ways, First Wesleyan Church, Chillicothe, Ohio, does not fit the mold of this assignment easily. The church is located in the east end of Chillicothe, the Ross County Seat. The most recent roster (prepared in mid-2011) lists 720 attendees. Ross County stretches across 634 square miles, and persons coming to the church live in or around most of the county's communities indicated on the map below.

Unfortunately, the church has not kept detailed records on attendees' faith backgrounds. Determining how attendees joined the church family (through conversion or transfer) would require surveying the congregation. The gender breakdown is roughly 65% female and 35% male (including children) based on the 2011 roster.



Of First Wesleyan attendees:

- 66.5% live in an area with a Chillicothe mailing address
- 16.5% live in the Frankfort, Clarksburg, and South Salem areas
- 2% live in the Kingston area

- 3% have mailing addresses in the Bainbridge/Bourneville areas
- 4% live in the Londonderry and Richmond Dale areas
- 5% live outside of Ross County, and
- 21% (144 attendees) live within the church's immediate

neighborhood (a three-mile radius identified by a Percept Group study detailed below)

In 2010, the Greater Ohio District of the Wesleyan Church hired the Percept Group to conduct a detailed study of the church's immediate neighborhood. The study, along with U. S. Census data indicates these major issues affecting the city of Chillicothe, Ross County as a whole, and First Wesleyan's neighborhood:

- ***Lack of Higher Education:*** While 85.1% of Chillicothe residents and 82.3% of Ross County residents have completed high school, only 77.1% of our neighborhood residents earned their high school diploma. The national average is 80.4%. 17.7% of Chillicothe residents 25 and older have completed college; our neighbors, only 16.4%. The US average is 24.4%.

- ***Incidence of Poverty and Nontraditional Families affects our neighborhood greatly.*** 17.3% of Ross County and 20.3% of Chillicothe residents live in poverty. 12% of families with incomes below the poverty line live in First Wesleyan's immediate neighborhood. Just as concerning, single parents head 20.4% of Chillicothe families, and 52% of children living within three-mile radius of the church live in single-parent families.

- ***Many of Our Neighbors are Under- and Unemployed:*** 11.4% of Ross County and 13.5% of Chillicothe residents are unemployed or not in

the labor force. This number rises to 42% of those living in the church's immediate neighborhood.

- ***Our Neighbors are Aging:*** The average age of residents in the study radius is 40.7 years. 36.6% of our neighbors are Boomers (born 1943 to 1960), Silents (born 1925 to 1942) or Builders (born 1924 and older). Over half of neighborhood residents, 52.9%, are Survivors and Millennials (born between 1961 and 2001). Only one generational group, Generation Z, born in 2002 or later, is growing, and most of these children are being raised in poverty. Millennials' and Survivors' population growth has plateaued while Boomers, Silents, and Builders are in decline.

- ***The Immediate Area is "White for Harvest" if we are willing to engage our Neighborhood Consistently:*** There is quite a variety of religious expression in the church's immediate neighborhood. 14.8% of our neighborhood residents indicate no religious preference, while an additional 3.9% are interested in religious matters, but have no preference. 10.9% claim not to be interested in religious matters and have no religious preference. Taking these three groups together, over 30% of our neighborhood residents are unchurched. Of our neighbors who claim a faith adherence, a majority label themselves Protestant (52.3%), while 29.3% identify as Catholic. 2.1% can be considered members of "Christian Cults," such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventist, and Unitarian/Universalists.

- ***First Wesleyan's Church Family Does NOT Reflect Our Neighborhood's Diversity:*** 88.6% of the neighborhood is classified as Anglo,

7% are African-American, 4% are Hispanic, and 3.4% are Asian/Other. From the author's observations, it is estimated that First Wesleyan's attendees are 98% Anglo, with the remaining 2% being African American (approximately 1.5%) and the remaining .5% being bi-racial African-American/Caucasian (Percept Group, 2010; United States Census Bureau, 2010a; United States Census Bureau, 2010b).

The geographic dispersal of First Wesleyan attendees suggests that any number of locations within Ross County might be suitable for a relocation or church plant. Currently, the church provides four Sunday morning services, but the congregation's size (weekly worship attendance ranges from 350-500) strains the building's available space. The church's senior pastor and Local Board of Administration are committed to the current location. The author is not aware of discussions for church multiplication through plants in other areas. If this becomes a future possibility, significant planning, demographic studies of potential communities, and discussions with potential core group members for a church plant will be critical to the plant's success.

This demographic overview indicates a lot of ministry potential for First Wesleyan Church's immediate area. Though the majority of our attendees live outside the three mile neighborhood border, leadership recently re-committed to engaging those who live near the church building on a regular basis. Those who live in the neighborhood often contact the church for help with food, clothing, rent and finances. The pastoral staff is wrestling with ways both to meet these immediate needs and share the Gospel with our neighbors in meaningful ways. A significant percentage of our neighbors are not churched, which gives a compelling reason for going out into the neighborhood and beginning a process of building relationships with them.

This past Sunday, May 20, 2012, attendees and pastors from the church's Connection services (our postmodern worship gathering primarily aimed at those aged 18-34) held our third annual outreach event in Poland Park. The park is located one block from the church. The community was invited to come and enjoy a morning and early afternoon of food, crafts, sports, and large inflatable games. We plan on showing family movies in the park the first three Fridays in June (2012) as another way of showing our community that we care about them. These events are designed to provide safe, fun, and inexpensive events our neighbors will enjoy. As we build credibility and gain the residents' trust, programs and services with a more explicit gospel message could be planned and carried out. Intentional relationship building and a consistent presence outside the church's walls is the approach First Wesleyan's leadership team is taking to serve the neighborhood more effectively.

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I Am Not Who I Should Be: Reflections of a “Want to Be” Reconciler

Over the course of preparing for this class and then reflecting on what I have learned, I am struck by the fact that my local church does not reflect the neighborhood we desire to minister to. Fourteen percent of those living in a three-mile radius of First Wesleyan Church of Chillicothe, Ohio, are non-White. Our congregation is ninety-eight percent White. The pastoral leadership (of which I am a part) is one hundred percent White.

If Manuel Ortiz is right – and I believe he is – when he says, “The [local] church should take leadership in...matters of justice and reconciliation” (Ortiz, 1996, p. 26). If Harvie Conn (as cited in Ortiz, 1996, pp. 9-11) is right – and I am persuaded that he is – that Jesus intended His church to bring people of all ancestries, classes, economic strata, and ethnicities together and not to divide them. And, if Gregory Jones and Celestin Musekura are right when they proclaim that reconciliation is “God’s mission and a journey toward God’s new creation in Christ” (2010, p. 9) – and I am convinced that they are – then First Wesleyan Church is not the church it is meant to be. As a Christ-follower and pastor, I am not who I am meant to be.

Reflecting on the realities of ethnic division in my church and community has made me aware of Chillicothe and Ross County’s racialized history. In April, 2011, the Southern Poverty Law Center listed three hate groups active in Chillicothe: the American National Socialist Party; Aryan Nations 88; and the Creativity Movement (Ison, 2011). All three organizations are classified as Neo-Nazi groups. These associations operate in the same county that protected and transported slaves through stops on the Underground Railroad in the mid-1800s.

Our Christian communities include denominations and movements that both have supported and fought against ethnic reconciliation. African Methodist Episcopal, Pentecostal, Southern Baptist, United Methodist, Wesleyan, and independent White and Black churches are found across the city and the county. In the midst of cultural and ethnic diversity, our congregations largely remain separate.

In a 1963 address given at Western Michigan University, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke these words:

“At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this.” (Western Michigan University Libraries, 2005)

Having lived, worked, and worshipped in southeastern Ohio for sixteen of the thirty-seven years of my life, I can say that Sunday mornings in Chillicothe in 2012 have not changed much since 1963. As Christ followers, Ross County’s Christians are not who God has called us to be.

These statements have personal and ministry implications for me.

First, I recognize that I have played a role in perpetuating a racialized society. There have been times I have been an indirect racist (Anderson and Zuercher, 2001, p. 10). I remained silent when other Whites made insensitive remarks to people of color, slurred other groups, or made clear their beliefs that non-White races are inferior. More importantly, I now see that I have (albeit indirectly) supported institutional racism by not working to ensure that Africans, African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and other minorities have access to economic, political, and social equality – a real level playing field.

In the past, I justified this inaction by falling back on legal equality for non-Whites. The existence of Affirmative Action and similar programs seemed to underscore my belief that “times have changed.” My feelings mirrored Brent Zuercher’s in *Letters across the Divide*. I saw absence of minority achievement and economic success due to lack of motivation (Anderson and Zuercher, 2001, p. 69). It shames me to admit that I did not want to believe what objective statistics show: “The black-white income gap is largely the product of a black-white education gap...black children who perform poorly in school do so not because they are black but because they tend to come from low-income, low education households” (Levitt and Dubner, 2005, p. 160, 164).

Reconciliation cannot happen in a society that denies persons access to opportunity simply because they are not White. Individuals certainly contribute to ethnic division, but I now see how society limits minorities systemically and keeps them in bondage to structures that openly and covertly favor Whites. I pray for a transformed mind with a new understanding of racism’s systemic dimensions. I want to make a concerted effort to understand both Black American and minority contexts defined by slavery, colonization, and an imposed White ethos that tried to destroy native cultures.

Learning more about African-American, Asian, and Latin American theologies (views that may be held by the non-White groups living in my church’s neighborhood) is an area I already have begun to explore. Leonardo Boff’s *Introducing Liberation Theology*; James H. Cone’s *God of the Oppressed*; William Dyrness’ *Learning Theology from the Third World*; and Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator’s *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* are titles I have already begun to read or plan to read in the very near future. This way, I can begin to develop a multiethnic mindset before beginning a multicultural ministry (Anderson, 2007, p. 40).

Further, I feel a need to acknowledge to my African-American friends and acquaintances that slavery and racism in all its forms is rebellion against God, usurpation of God's rule over humanity (Cone, 1997, p. 94), and something that I repent of for myself and for other Whites. By God's grace, I plan to be proactive in reaching out to ethnic ministry leaders in my area. Perhaps we will be able to talk about hard questions surrounding ethnic tensions in Chillicothe and Ross County, and what positive impacts I may be able to make in this area.

Within my local church, my own ethnic reconciliation efforts will have to begin with conversations with my senior pastors. These discussions may be part of preparation for the more intentional ministry to our neighborhood mentioned in the demographic study and local church story assignments submitted for this course. Some potential questions that come to mind include:

- As leaders, what will be our response to ethnic, class, and neighborhood issues?
- As a pastoral staff and as a congregation, is First Wesleyan Church interested in, much less committed to, ministries of reconciliation and inclusion?
- And, to paraphrase Elizabeth Drury, How will we use the pulpit when society and Scripture collide? (E. Drury, personal communication, May 23, 2012)

If First Wesleyan Church intentionally moves to bridge ethnic divides in our community, I believe strongly that the congregation will need a Theology of Reconciliation that begins by asking, What does it mean to be the church? Celestine

Musekura provides a compelling framework based on the church as a *called out, sent, reconciling, and spread* community (Jones and Musekura, 2010, p. 105-111, emphasis mine).

Our congregation must be a called out community willing to deal with issues common to a racialized society: residential separation, economic inequality, and access to political power that gives White Americans a “leg up” on non-Whites. Our people will have to grapple with being a sent community that addresses stereotypes, White and non-White attitudes toward authority, and those worship preferences that divide and unite people of faith (Emerson and Smith, 2000, p. 33). Will we acknowledge America’s religious and political history that first sought to Christianize Africans while keeping them enslaved and then, following the Civil War, freed, but refused to integrate, Black Americans into White Society? As a church, our congregation’s willingness to address this question has the potential to effect change in Black-White relations in Chillicothe and Ross County.

Further, will we commit to be reconcilers who reach out to our African-American, Asian, and Hispanic neighbors and engage them in redemptive relationships while honoring their cultural contexts? As a church, how can we partner meaningfully with non-White groups to create a faith community that reflects Jesus’ identification with the marginalized and releases His power into their lives? We must be willing to act as a spread community, taking a vision for reconciliation and ethnic inclusion beyond our neighborhood to the surrounding area.

As I continue to wrestle with these questions and what their answers might mean for my present and future ministry, I recognize that some of my own family will say I

have forgotten who I am and where I come from. These well-meaning, devout Christ-followers hold strong beliefs that churches and races should be separate. However, I do not, cannot, and will not agree with these views. As a Wesleyan pastor, I believe strongly that Christ's church has a mandate to inspire social transformation. This belief has consequences: "In racially divided communities, theology and church are never socially and politically innocent" (Jones and Musekura, 2010, p. 117). My prayer is that the steps I plan to take will prove me to be shrewd as a serpent, yet innocent as a dove (Matthew 10:16, New International Version). May the LORD lead me to serve one day soon in a multiethnic community that proclaims God's desire to redeem and recreate a new humanity committed to loving and serving the least, the last, and the lost, regardless of their color. To God be the glory.

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Chapter Three: The Missional Church

The Missional Church Course was one of the most meaningful and thought provoking courses I completed at Wesley Seminary. The readings, discussions, action research, and Application and Integration Papers stretched my thinking on what it means to be *the church of Jesus Christ*. Throughout the course, we considered how and when a person entered the People of God. Answers to this question influenced my thoughts on discipleship and evangelism, leadership development and leadership multiplication, the social gospel, and creative and culturally appropriate ways for First Wesleyan Church to integrate newcomers and serve the Chillicothe and Ross County, Ohio community. Chapter Three contains papers written on church health, mobilizing volunteers, and First Wesleyan's past, present, and future ministries.

Life Cycle Analysis: First Wesleyan Church, Chillicothe, Ohio

Over the last forty years, First Wesleyan Church has experienced at least one complete church lifecycle. The congregation has gone from a near death experience, struggled through early life, entered a period of sustained growth, and currently is experiencing transition in leadership, mission, and vision. A potential closure, staff changes, physical expansion, and increasing the number of worship services and adding new worship styles have characterized the church's last four decades. With the 2009 launch of Connection, a new and different worship experience, the congregation has entered its second lifecycle.

In June 1973, First Wesleyan was in crisis and at or near the "point of no return" (Arn, 2011, p. 6). The Greater Ohio District was considering closing the doors when Pastor Fred Fox was appointed to the congregation. Worship averaged between 25 and 30, while Sunday school attracted around 40 people (F. F., personal communication, 2012). In action and attitude, First Wesleyan was closed to outsiders. No small groups met apart from Sunday school classes, and there was little ministry to the community apart from the Women's Missionary Fellowship.

After Pastor Fred's arrival, attendance increased, quadrupling by 1978 to close to 100 as the church entered the Initial Structuring phase (Orr, as cited in Arn, 2011, p. 3). Unfortunately, there were no formal records kept in the roughly fifteen years between 1978 and 1993. This period is remembered as a time of steady, sustained growth highlighted by adding a second Sunday morning worship service (M. B., personal communication, 2012), small group Bible studies, a Women's Ministry focused on the church and the community, and a Junior/Senior High Youth Group. In 1994, a Men's Ministry was started. As a result of these "controlled interventions" (Arn, 2011, p. 5),

the church's first lifecycle moved from formal organization to sustained maximum efficiency (Orr, as cited in Arn, 2011, p. 3)

Ministry expansion and increased attendance led the congregation to fund facility improvements in October 1997. A new sanctuary, children's areas, classrooms, nurseries and offices were added to the existing building, effectively tripling the existing space's size. In March 1999, Marty Baker began serving as Assistant Pastor and Jon Welch began a Youth Ministry internship. This was the first time the church employed a professionally trained Youth Ministry worker (distinguished from volunteer lay leaders) as part of the church staff. After completing his internship in June 2000, Pastor Jon was brought on as a full-time staff member.

By August 2001, weekly attendance had increased to approximately 400 people. The church continued its past practice of hiring a full-time staff member for 100-125 new attenders when Assistant Pastor B. Jay Dailey began coordinating the Men's Ministry (F. F., personal communication, 2012). In 2003 Mrs. Carrie DeBord transitioned from volunteer to paid Children's Ministry Director (M. B., personal communication, 2012). In 2006, Pastor Jon Welch left First Wesleyan to attend Asbury Theological Seminary and Andrew Day stepped into the role of part-time Youth Pastor.

In 2006, Pastor Andrew and Pastor Fred began planning to launch Connection, a postmodern, missional worship service geared toward 18-34 year old, largely unchurched persons in Chillicothe and Ross County. Connection services formally began in February 2009, beginning First Wesleyan's second lifecycle. Within one year, Connection added its own second service, but the congregation's continued growth presented challenges as well as opportunities. Pastor Andrew transitioned to full-time Connection Pastor, and Nate Toppins came on board as part-time (now full time) Youth

Pastor. The most significant obstacle was the feeling of “disconnect” between Connection and the church’s traditional and contemporary services that met in the new Sanctuary area. This tension still affects the congregation, as will be mentioned below.

The Sanctuary and Connection congregations both experienced crisis in early 2011. That March, Pastor Marty tendered his resignation (effective at the end of May). Shortly thereafter, Pastor Andrew stepped down as well. Pastor B. Jay left the congregation in mid-June 2011 to begin a new church plant not affiliated with First Wesleyan and, within nine months, close to 100 new and long-time First Wesleyan attenders left to join the new Acts Believe Church. In September 2011, Pastor Jon Welch returned as Connection Teaching Pastor, while Carrie DeBord stepped down as Children’s Ministry Director following December. A number of volunteers answered the call to shepherd the Children’s Ministry Program in Carrie’s absence.

In April 2012, the pastoral staff announced Pastor Andrew would return to First Wesleyan in mid-July (2012) as Children’s Ministry Pastor, a decision that was both supported and challenged by church family members (J. W., personal communication, April 2012). A number of attenders have shared with the author that this series of events made it clear that the pastoral leadership seemed to lack accountability – both to each other and to the church as a whole – and did a poor job of communicating the issues that led to such a significant staff exodus. These setbacks caused First Wesleyan’s attendance and participation to drop noticeably for close to one year.

Since mid-2013, growth appears to be trending upward, especially for Connection. In January 2013, the Connection and Contemporary worship services merged and began meeting together at 10:45 AM, with the Traditional Service gathering at 8:15 AM. As of January 2014 Pastor Jon transitioned to First Wesleyan’s Senior

Pastor, ushering both congregations into a new era of pastoral leadership. On September 7, 2014, a second Sunday morning Connection service will be held at 9:45 AM, with the later service starting at 11:00 AM. Presently, Connection appears to be in a Formal Organization lifecycle stage, while First Wesleyan (the “catch-all” name for the Traditional service) continues as an institutionalized congregation.

As part of this assignment, seven individuals gave their perspectives on the church’s history, its challenges and opportunities, and the one thing about the church they would change if they were able. Five persons agreed to share their answers to a short series of interview questions publicly. Those responses are included in their entirety in the Appendix that follows this narrative. All seven respondents felt that community outreach, children’s ministries, leadership development, and persons’ willingness to serve are First Wesleyan’s congregational strengths. At the same time, a few noted the need to increase ministry participation across age groups and generations. In particular, one interviewee suggested that both specific ministries and overall church health would be improved if a formal, consistent approach to integrating newcomers was put into place. Just as important,

“It would help to know who is leaving the church and why, as the new people come in. Maybe we should have a way to follow-up on those that for some reason do not get connected and we lose sometimes without even noticing that they are gone for a long time.” (S. K., personal communication, August 28, 2014).

Understanding personal, corporate, and missional identity is critical for both staff members and church attendees. First Wesleyan is, in reality, a multicongregational church sharing the same building. For both congregations to remain healthy and to

continue to mature, a concerted effort must be made to keep “the church united and informed with all the different services and activities” (J. G., personal communication, August 27, 2014).

From the author’s perspective, both Connection and First Wesleyan are in a period of transition, both from a leadership and a missional perspective. The challenges faced by both congregations revolve around casting and taking ownership of a vision to “create relevant and authentic relationships with God and people” (E. A., personal communication, August 24, 2010). New ways of “doing church” have to be discussed, developed, and deployed, which might prove difficult, considering that First Wesleyan is an inner city church with a majority of attenders living outside the neighborhood’s three-mile radius. In the author’s opinion, this is the congregation’s biggest challenge and its greatest opportunity.

Appendix

Lifecycle Analysis Interview Questions and Responses

Seven persons who attend First Wesleyan Church were asked to share their thoughts on the following five interview questions. Five of those individuals gave permission for their thoughts to be shared publicly and by name. Their responses are found below. Perspectives of the two individuals who requested anonymity are included in the paper’s narrative portion.

Interview questions were as follows:

1. What experiences - both good and bad - have helped you to serve and keep serving at First Wesleyan?
2. Over the years, what experiences would you say have been the most important for the church family as a whole?
3. If you could change one thing about First Wesleyan to help the church grow, what would that be?

4. What do you see as the greatest opportunity for the church to grow?

5. What do you see as the biggest challenge to the church continuing to grow?

Experiences: “The church has always had a "reaching the lost" concept, but in times past, I think we just didn't know how. I also feel, God put me in this church and that is where He wants me to serve. I do not pack up and leave because things don't go my way. The only time I would leave is if God called me to a specific ministry elsewhere. I think loyalty is an integral part of church growth. Hang In There.”

Important experiences: “I think that opening our eyes to the fact that people are not just going to show up because the church is there and you nod to them as you go in and out of the door on Sunday. Reaching them where they are is what Jesus did. He wasn't as concerned "where" they worshipped, but that they were shown Who to worship.”

Change: “I guess it would be that more people in the congregation would get involved with what is happening. It seems like the same people show up time after time for work day or for Life Groups and many others are happy to let a few carry the load. It's sad to see that, tho' everyone would tell you they want the church to grow, not everyone is willing to get their hands dirty or be inconvenienced for things to go forth and for their own Christian life to grow.”

Opportunity: “If everyone gets the importance of why we are where we are. God has placed us on 5th & Mulberry for a purpose. There were times we talked about relocating but it seemed God blocked those doors. We have a neighborhood of about a 4 block radius where many hurting people just survive day to day. If we can show them that there is more to life than just surviving. That there is life in Christ.”

Challenge: “I guess my answer would be the same as the opportunity question. We need to stop looking at things that in eternity won't matter and focus on doing whatever it takes to reach that neighbor next door to the church. We shouldn't wait for another church to do so.”

1. What experiences - both good and bad - have helped you to serve and keep serving at First Wesleyan?

“First God led me to First Wesleyan church and has not directed me to leave, I have continually been fed by the Holy Spirit. The leadership cares more about serving God than themselves which is demonstrated in their love and care of the body. They have

not always been the best administrators but have been open about their shortcoming[s].”

2. Over the years, what experiences would you say have been the most important for the church family as a whole?

“The development and sustained effort to nourish men through the men’s ministry. A strong and successful children’s ministry has helped develop future leaders and closer families. Seeking the path of outreach to our community.”

3. If you could change one thing about First Wesleyan to help the church grow, what would that be?

“Develop additional methods of accountability for the body in furthering our relationship with Christ.”

4. What do you see as the greatest opportunity for the church to grow?

“Creating more one-on-one ministries to serve our community.”

5. What do you see as the biggest challenge to the church continuing to grow?

“Keeping the church united and informed with all the different services and activities.”

“I cannot think of a particular experience. Instead, the accumulation of experiences is the causative factor. I appreciated not being pressured in the first few years to assume an important role. I was delighted to be asked [and] then to lead a Sunday school class. I have also appreciated that I felt no recrimination when I repeatedly declined to become involved with the administrative bodies of the church.”

“Clearly the most important experience was the abrupt departure of two pastoral staff members and many of the congregation members with them. Another would be the development of a “parallel church,” to-wit: Connection. Then, finally, a major experience has been the combining of Connection with the more traditional portion of the church.”

“If I could change only one thing, believe it or not, I would find a way to add vastly to the parking space.”

“The greatest opportunity would be for the tremendous young couples and singles in the church to find ways to invite and incorporate more and more young families and singles, too, into the fabric of the church. We oldies have built a solid foundation, but the younger corps is the only method of building on that base.”

“Honestly, I think the biggest challenge is to attract in a permanent fashion those young ones I have just mentioned while remaining in our present neighborhood where we feel we need to be to perform the Christian service we feel called to perform. Rightly or wrongly, I believe many potential attenders will not elect to become permanent parts of

our church because of our location. I am certainly not stating a preference that we move, but I am simply answering the question asked.”

What experiences - both good and bad - have helped you to serve and keep serving at First Wesleyan?

“Being part of the Praise Team was a burden and a blessing. When most of the congregation did not seem to engage in the worship service, but just stood there looking, it was a burden. When several of the congregation would come up and say how much they enjoyed the worship service because the songs we sang that day were exactly what they needed to hear, it was a blessing. I continued serving because the blessings encouraged me more than the burden defeated me.”

“I have a love for preparing the saints for service in our Lord’s work. First Wesleyan has afforded me the opportunity to put my gifts into action. They fully support women in ministry and encouraged me in those efforts. The congregation has also been encouraged to embrace women in leadership which has proven to secure me being able to serve as the Lord has directed me.”

Over the years, what experiences would you say have been the most important for the church family as a whole?

“Seeing new families come into the church and become involved and grow in Christ is something that gives hope for the future and makes the church family draw closer together and support each other during times of trial.”

“First Wesleyan encourages fellowship with each other as well as our surrounding community. This promotes the opportunity to know people on more than a surface level creating lasting friendships that help to build the Body of Christ up.”

If you could change one thing about First Wesleyan to help the church grow, what would that be?

“We seem to be two churches in one. The older members [and Connection].”

“Growth in good; however, sometimes with larger numbers some people can become lost in all those numbers. It would help to know who is leaving the church and why, as the new people come in. Maybe we should have a way to follow-up on those that for some reason do not get connected and we lose sometimes without even noticing that they are gone for a long time.”

What do you see as the greatest opportunity for the church to grow?

“A loving community that will make the new people that come in feel at home. Making sure that the new people get connected in a small group or Sunday school class so that

they become to feel a part of the family of God at First Wesleyan. This would also allow us to monitor their presence and growth.”

What do you see as the biggest challenge to the church continuing to grow?

“We are out of building space, and there is only so many additional services (at different times) that can be done. At some time in the new [near?] future this problem will have to be addressed if we are to continue to grow.”

The FAQ Group: A Mobilization Strategy for First Wesleyan Connection

In fall 2013, First Wesleyan Connection's Teaching Pastor shared a one month Frequently Asked Questions sermon series. Attenders wrote down questions related to the Bible; the church in general and the Connection service in particular; culture; family and marriage; sports; and social issues. The pastor answered selected questions each week in worship, through the Connection Facebook page, and by audio and video podcasts. Interest and participation led the Connection Leadership Team and Teaching Pastor to introduce the first "FAQ Lunch."

Persons new to Connection or who wanted to know more about the service's mission and vision or how to become more involved were invited to attend a post-service meal where they could meet leaders and other newcomers, as well as ask questions in a safe and open environment. The first few FAQ lunches were held quarterly. Interest and growth in Connection and in First Wesleyan's Traditional service has led to monthly lunch events.

Church growth and church health is strengthened when congregations take an intentional approach to welcoming visitors. Unfortunately, this is not a task many churches address. Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn note that while "21% of churches [in the United States]...have an outreach and/or evangelism committee" just "3 percent of churches...have a specific group...charged with...integrating newcomers" (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 74). Pastor and church growth researcher Thom Rainer stresses the importance of retaining newcomers or "closing the back door." He notes that visitor attrition rates can be as high as 50% at any one point in a church's lifecycle (Rainer, 2014, para. 1).

Building on the FAQ Lunch's past success, a proposal will be made to First Wesleyan's Senior Pastor to consider offering an FAQ Life Group on a regular basis throughout the year. Potential group leaders will be identified by November 2014. Current and former Life Group leaders, as well as those who have facilitated past New Member classes will be invited to take on this significant role. If three to four group leaders commit to serving as facilitators it will be possible to launch at least one (if not two) FAQ Life Groups in February 2015. An FAQ Lunch will be provided on January 11, 2015 in an attempt to reach those persons visiting during the Christmas season. Presently, Connection Life Groups begin in the spring and fall semesters and last ten weeks. FAQ Life Groups, however, will run for six weeks at a time and will be scheduled on a regular basis to foster a commitment to the group as well as reach out to newcomers consistently (Rainer, 2014, para. 9).

The FAQ Life Group will be tasked with helping to assimilate visitors and members who have not been a part of Life Groups, Connection's primary means of newcomer integration, relationship building, and spiritual formation (Rainer, 2014, para. 8). It is hoped that by taking part in an FAQ group, a larger segment of Connection newcomers will realize that they are not alone in wondering where they might fit in, in a church where attendance averages 400 to 500 persons weekly. The group's stated goal will be to create an environment where each person feels welcomed and that their presence and contributions matter (Rainer, 2014, para. 9, 14).

In order for the FAQ Life Group be successful, each group will be led by a member of the congregation. It is expected that FAQ Group Leaders will be highly relational persons who have gifts of hospitality. Each potential leader will be asked to complete a Spiritual Gift assessment and to take a hard look at her or his church, home,

and work schedules to ensure that the leader has enough time to commit to lead an FAQ Group well. Each leader will be coached to identify and potential apprentice leaders within their group and to encourage potential apprentices to be involved in an upcoming group launch. If an apprentice leader proves capable, she or he will be given the opportunity to lead a new FAQ Group in the near future (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2010, p. 33).

The following core principles for the FAQ Life Group are taken from Thom Rainer's *5 Incredible Steps to Close the Back Door in Your Church*. First and foremost, the FAQ Life Group is an extension of Connection's vision and mission to create authentic relationships with God and with people (Rainer, 2014, para. 7). It is hoped that each member will see the group as a place to ask questions and learn about Connection's worship, teaching and ministries. To help foster a sense of closeness, each FAQ Life Group will be limited to eight to ten persons. Throughout this process, it will be made clear that the FAQ Life Group is for persons new to Connection or who have participated in a Life Group. "New groups, particularly, will be attractive to these new members. They will not have to break into established relationship patterns" (Rainer, 2014, para. 10).

Potential FAQ Life Group topics include opportunities to meet the pastoral staff, lay influencers, other small group leaders, and community ministry partners. A tour of First Wesleyan's campus will take place during the first group session. One anticipated outcome is that regular FAQ Groups will serve as feeder groups for membership and baptism classes (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, pp. 81-83) along with adding more volunteers to the church's Café, Welcome, and Tech Teams; Parking Staff; and Children's and Youth Ministries Teams (J. W., personal communication, September 14, 2014).

With any new addition to the church's ministry offerings, evaluating the FAQ Life Group's strengths and weaknesses will be essential. Group members and leaders will be surveyed at the beginning and the end of the six week period (Rainer, 2014, para. 11). All involved will be given anonymity and the opportunity to share their expectations and concerns as well as the group's opportunities and challenges. For example, did each member feel that they grew spiritually from taking part in the group? Is there interest in leading another FAQ Life Group or serving as an apprentice leader?

The pastoral staff and group leaders will be coached to track FAQ Life Group members' participation in Connection's larger life (Rainer, 2014, para. 12; McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 84). Do those who complete the FAQ Life Group continue to come to worship regularly? Do they plan to or have they joined a semester-long Life Group, Sunday morning class, or other in/outreach option? (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 84). If they have family members, are their children or teenagers involved in FWC Kids or Pursuit Student Ministries? Most importantly, group leaders will be encouraged to follow up personally with members after the FAQ Life Group has ended and invite them for a meal or other non-church social event.

Continuing these relational connections is essential. From a positive point of view, small group members are "five times more likely to stick with a church than a member who is not" (Rainer, 2014, para. 14). Participants are more likely to read and study scripture; report feeling more comfortable sharing their faith; and consistently and generously give their time, expertise, and finances to support the church (Rainer, 2014). Negatively, visitors who do not establish friendships early on in the new church experience are more likely to drop out. 82% of newcomers leave a church within the first year and these "side door exits" increase noticeably after six months and one year of

attending (Arn, 2011, para. 3, 4). First Wesleyan Connection's FAQ Life Group is an intentional method of showing newcomers that they are valued and cared for. With the Holy Spirit's leading, Connection will become a stronger community capable of reaching more people as newcomers are added to the community and, in turn, seek to reach other visitors to Connection and help them develop authentic relationships with God and others.

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Chapter Four: Christian Worship

Christian Worship was a course that opened my imagination to what worship could be. Looking back at my “seminary days,” Worship was the first course that pushed me to develop and use my pastoral imagination. It was a course that reconnected me to my love of music; my appreciation for the creative and performing arts, and how those arts can be used in worship; and my love of the Eucharist as a celebration of Christ’s victory over sin and death, as a celebration of God’s promised redemption of the created order, and as a means of grace to form individuals and congregations into Christ’s image. This short chapter contains two application-oriented oriented papers. The first is a list of ways scripture can be performed. The second is a discussion on rebaptism, a question I have asked and answered as a layman and as a pastor.

Performing Scripture

Five ways Scripture can be incorporated in worship:

- 1) Song – there is something about music (rhyme, meter, patterns) that makes song ideal for sharing and memorizing scripture. Singing, rather than reading, the Psalms, Moses’ and Miriam’s songs, the Our Father, and Ecclesiastes, for example, makes the Bible come alive in meaningful ways.
- 2) Sign (language) with text projected near the person(s) signing. Not only can this help focus the congregation on Scripture’s words, watching God’s Word being signed joins us in solidarity with those who do not have the ability to hear.
- 3) Reading texts from behind the congregation or from a place in the sanctuary where the reader cannot be seen. Attention is raised, emotions are heightened, and a deeper sense of the Word’s majesty is experienced.
- 4) Corporate Readings: Inviting the entire congregation to share in God’s word reinforces that Scripture was “originally intended...to be *heard* in community” (Drury, 2005, p. 36). Dividing responsive readings between groups (men and women; children and parents; or the front/back or right/left sides of the sanctuary) can create a dramatic effect and imprint the moment in people’s memories.
- 5) Lectionary Readings (OT/Psalms or Proverbs; Gospel; NT Epistles) provide a formal guide through the Scriptures as a whole and call attention to seasons within the church year (Advent/Christmas/Epiphany; Lent/Easter; Pentecost; Ordinary Time). Using the Lectionary not only prevents leaders from ignoring portions of Scripture they might not enjoy or understand, but also reinforces that God has entered into time and space to establish and re-establish a relationship with His creation.

Three Scripture Passages:

(Lector) Our Old Testament Reading comes from Exodus, chapter 33, verse 14, and Genesis chapter 1, verse 31 through chapter 2 verse 2. Hear the Word of the LORD given to His people:

“The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”

(Lector): The Gospel of Jesus Christ, from Matthew, chapter 11, verses 25 to 30. Listen to these words from our Savior:

“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

(Lector) Today’s Epistle Reading, taken from The Revelation of Jesus Christ, chapter 21, verses 1 through 7. God speaks to His church:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

Acts of Worship

Call To Worship:

Leader: The LORD, the maker of heaven and earth, invites us into His presence. We come to him as we are, weighed down by the cares of the world, to receive the rest He delights in providing.

People: We cast our anxieties upon the LORD, for He cares for us.

Leader: Let us lift our praises to the LORD, Our God and Our Savior

People: Who daily bears our burdens; Our God is a God who saves.

ALL: Come; let us worship the LORD together!

Worship Band Leader: We invited to stand and join us as we sing.

Songs: Oh Great God, Give Us Rest (David Crowder Band) and **Rest in You** (Hillsong)

Following the conclusion of worship in song, the Teaching Pastor comes to the stage carrying a large item hidden under a blanket. After a few moments of anticipation, the blanket is removed to reveal a large yoke. A short explanation of the yoke's function (to join two animals together so that they can plow in straight furrows) is given.

The Teaching Pastor invites two members of the congregation to come forward. (They have been chosen beforehand and the demonstrations have been practiced, though the Teaching Pastor does not share this). The two members of the congregation are of different heights. They work together to place the yoke on their shoulders and attempt to walk in rhythm across the stage.

Next, the Pastor invites two more people to the stage. This time, the people are of the same height, body style, etc. They are able to place the yoke upon their shoulders and walk across the stage with a minimum of difficulty. (Again, this has been practiced).

The Pastor then asks the congregation to describe what they just saw, comparing and contrasting the two groups. The Pastor also asks the two groups if there was a difference in how the yoke felt (weight, ease, etc.).

One point from the illustration: the only way for the burden to be light (hardly felt) is for the yoke to be shared evenly between the two animals when they are moving in the same rhythm, at the same speed, in the same direction.

The Pastor then begins the sermon, taken from the Gospel Reading (Matthew 11:25-30).

Following the sermon, the congregation sings one final song: **Remedy** (David Crowder Band).

Service ends with the two members of the congregation who are the same size taking the yoke upon the again. The Pastor gives Aaron's Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26). At the sending, the congregation follows the two members who are yoked, leaving the sanctuary in a processional to show that to enter into God's rest, we must be yoked to Jesus.

A Discussion on Rebaptism

I accepted Jesus as my savior in the summer of 1981, at age six, and was baptized on Pentecost 1983 at Hilltop Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Columbus, Ohio. During the eighteen months between my salvation and Baptism, I took part in classes facilitated by our pastor and members of the Board of Elders. Though it did not realize it at the time, this catechism was preparing me to engage in the Christian life. Experiencing Baptism was an important event that taught me, my life was not my own. As a Jesus follower, I had a new purpose. Now, some thirty years later, I see the preparation for Baptism I received from the church as foundational in my call to ministry. The ministry I have entered “is the ministry *of* Jesus Christ, the Son, *to* the Father, *through* the Holy Spirit, *for* the sake of the church and the world” (Seamands, 2005, pp. 9-10).

In my early thirties, I agreed to be rebaptized to join a Bible Baptist Fellowship congregation, in spite of my misgivings. The desire to serve in the church’s children’s ministries as well as wanting to honor and submit to pastoral authority were reasons I told myself that rebaptism was acceptable. To this day, I regret not asking deeper questions about the pastor’s reasons that rebaptism was necessary for me to become a member of that particular congregation. My first baptism was by immersion, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit upon my public confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

I realize now that the pastor’s own understanding of Baptism did not recognize the validity of other Christian traditions. The Bible Baptist Fellowship embraces Landmark Theology and claims an unbroken ministerial line to the early church. Ironically, the Disciples of Christ, part of the Restoration Movement, models Baptism on

what the denomination sees as early church practice. The end result is that I now have reservations of requiring rebaptism for local church membership. The Church universal is one body, guided by one Spirit, calling people to one Lord and one faith through one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-5, New International Version).

I have had the honor of administering baptism once since my ordination. It was a joyous occasion presented both to the candidate and the church as a time of celebration, and I encouraged the congregation to support this young lady as her faith grows. After asking if she would like to share anything about her faith, I baptized her using the Trinitarian formula and presented her to her parents, family, and the congregation.

The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church centers the discussion of rebaptism on those who were baptized as infants and encourages them to reaffirm the promises made by their parents and/or sponsors rather than being baptized a second time (Kelly, Brecheisen, Haines, McClung, Watkins & Wilson, 2008, p. 207). Though rebaptism is not forbidden, my experience in the Wesleyan tradition is that Baptism is seen as a sacrament of entering the Christian faith, regardless of denomination or practice. Its solemnity as a singular act of worship should be respected.

As a pastor, I would first listen to the story of a person who asks to be rebaptized. Does the person understand the significance and purpose of Baptism? Do they feel that their Baptism was done in haste or in error? Can they articulate why they feel rebaptism is necessary? Would s/he feel it is more appropriate to restate Baptismal vows or once again make a public confession of faith? Based on my past experiences and personal convictions, I lean toward reaffirmation of vows, but would not refuse to rebaptize a person if they present compelling reasons for me to do so.

Once the decision to rebaptize is made, how the situation is handled is critical. If family members or others present at a person's first baptism will be present, it may be wise to meet with them to explain the circumstances surrounding rebaptism. Depending on the candidate's views, it may be important or unimportant to share publicly that the person is being rebaptized. In cases where someone is coming to Christ from a Latter Day Saints, Worldwide Church of God, Unitarian, or Unification background, it may be prudent to explain. I am not sure that there is a single, right answer in the situation. Prayer, discernment, and diplomacy should serve as guides.

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Chapter Five: Christian Proclamation

Of the six praxis courses I completed in seminary, Christian Proclamation may have been the most challenging, yet rewarding. For sixteen weeks, I was exposed to the craft of scripture study, prayer, and sermon creation. Dr. Lenny Luchetti introduced me to Lectio Divina, a way of reading the Bible devotionally and not as exegesis or to prepare a message. Proclamation blended the theoretical and the practical and exposed me to new communication forms and sermon formats. I also left the course with a number of practical tools to aid my preaching. A number of these are included here in chapter five: my Preaching Self-Analysis and Strategy; my Sermon Preparation Process; Ten Timeless Tips for the Preaching Event; my Preaching Plan; and *The Preacher Nobody Wanted*, a sermon I wrote, practiced, and preached to my First Wesleyan Church family.

Preaching Self-Analysis and Strategy

My TEMP Matrix scores were: Teaching: 10; Exhortation: 6; Mercy: 6; and Prophecy: 2. Counselor was the dominant mode, followed by Healer. I am much less comfortable in situations where Motivation and Proclamation are called for. In some ways, this is not surprising. I do not preach on a regular basis (the average has been once per year for the past three years) and I have come to fear preaching. This is a weakness, as this fear is real discomfort and not a healthy respect for the privilege of sharing God's Word.

Weaknesses in my preaching style are that my style and approach largely are untested or unknown. Also, I need to consider my context more fully, focusing on the congregation's needs and not my own preferences. Others have told me that I tend to downplay the warmth and affection I have for my church family and can come across as distant, clinical, and academic. The strengths I believe I have are a strong focus on the Biblical text, and a desire to craft sermons that are products of study and prayer. In addition, other's needs, concerns, dreams, and accomplishments encourage me as a minister and serve as illustrations and inspiration.

The greatest strength I have is the conviction that God is willing, able, and ready to transform people's lives for His glory and persons' ultimate good. The most pressing weakness I face is the need to balance exegesis with devotional study, prayer, and discerning God's voice for our people and myself as God's messenger. I also need to be willing to challenge others, press them for greater commitment, and rebuke falsehood when necessary.

My growth goals are to speak to a congregation or sub-congregation in my church quarterly, through a mixture of sermons, devotions, Sunday school teaching, and

sharing how we serve others. I will ask for feedback both in person and through written forms. Second, I will speak with other members of my pastoral staff about their sermon preparation processes and ways to improve delivery, practice, and using technology appropriately. Third, I will explore denominational and other resources for sermon crafting, ministry coaching, and leadership development. Coaching helps are available from Free Source (the Wesleyan Media Ministry). I will access Wesleyan Sermons and Sermon Audio with the goal of reading and listening to one sermon per month from a Wesleyan pastor and one sermon given by a pastor not from my denominational background.

Last, I will identify and look to attend conference or ministry events focused on preaching, communication, and pastoral care, such as a Catalyst One Day conference or Asbury Seminary's Ministry Conference. Over the next year, I will commit to self-learning by re-reading the Proclamation course textbooks, as well as Ellsworth Kalas's *Preaching from the Soul*, Steve DeNeff's *More Than Forgiveness* and Steve DeNeff and David Drury's *Soul Shift*. Working toward these goals has great potential to improve my ministry service and preaching ability.

My Sermon Preparation Process

Of all the papers researched, outlined, and written for this course, this may be the most personal for me. In considering the course readings, professor videos, Blackboard discussions, and exploring new resources to help craft sermon, I have come up with a mnemonic or mantra (Luchetti, 2005, p. 108) to remind me why I do what I do to get to the preaching event. The journey is one from *process to purpose*. The process is not meant to stifle sermon development, but to help the preacher be creative, relevant, and promote interaction between her- or himself and the hearers (Luchetti, 2005, p. 81).

This journey (Luchetti uses the phrase “Exegesis and Encounter”) involves multiple audiences. First, there is the Audience of One, where prayer and faith-filled intercession to God allows “the Holy Spirit to have a voice as you craft your sermon. Don’t be afraid to allow the Spirit to guide you” (C. Sheets II, personal communication, February 26, 2013). Second, there is the Original Audience, the first hearers or readers of the text (Luchetti, 2005, p. 82). Third, there is the congregational audience, as well as the audiences of which the congregation is a part – their families, co-workers, and others in their spheres of influence, as well as the church, community, nation, and world (Luchetti, 2005, p. 82). The preaching event has, at its core, a singular purpose: the delivery of a sermon that incarnates Christ and reflects Him, not the speaker or the message itself (Luchetti, n.d.).

Proverbs 27:17 (New International Version) tells us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” Recent classmate observations, course readings, and pastor interviews all touched on the importance of the preaching calendar and planning messages in advance. As an infrequent preacher, I often do not know in advance when I will be asked to speak. In some ways, my next message always is a work in progress.

Having a notebook on hand to jot down ideas and questions as they come to mind; quotes, concerns, or thoughts from my reading or other preachers' sermons; and life lessons from discussions with others or through prayer is very practical. The notebook will provide "lots of instant material for those times I might be asked to speak...and have no prep time" (T. B., personal communication, February 26, 2013). The notebook could be "beefed up" with resources from websites like www.homileticsonline.org; www.sermoncentral.com; www.textweek.com; and www.workingpreacher.org.

An additional insight, courtesy of a classmate, is the need for honest reflection in our preparation and in our preaching. For me, this involves admitting areas where I struggle. It includes being honest about those moments when the church, family, life, ministry, even God do not seem to make sense. One question we preachers must ask ourselves is, "So what?" Asking this question allows you to get inside the mind of your audience and take the passage and apply it to real life." (A. D., personal communication, February 27, 2013). Honesty may force me to admit that I don't have all the answers, but as a faith community, we can journey together to, in, and through the text to see what God has to say to us.

Speaking of honesty, it is humbling to mention overlooked elements in the sermon preparation process. Work, family, seminary, and ministry tasks have caused me to enter into a pattern of reading scripture almost exclusively for assignments. Devotional reading and personal application sorely are lacking in my life right now. One way to remedy this deficiency is to commit to explore the Lectio Divina process (Luchetti, 2005, p. 83) and its holistic disciplines of meditation, prayer, application, and contemplation. Coming to the preaching event as a discipline for my own life will help

me to remember that I am not just the preacher; I am a God-follower who needs to be comforted, challenged, convicted, healed, and inspired as well.

In crafting sermons, an area for improvement is in blending media more effectively into the preaching event. Each of my church's the three sub-congregations are multigenerational groups. Incorporating multiple types of images (creative, performance, and visual art; dance; icons; music; painting and sculpture; or video) so that those in the pews have something more to look at than PowerPoint slides has great potential. Also, I need to go to the time and expense of building up my library with solid exegetical and homiletical commentaries. Currently, the majority of my time is spent on the Inductive Bible Study portion of exegesis, and too few moments are being spent refining exegetical insights through more thorough scholarship (Luchetti, 2005, p. 89).

On a more practical note, developing Focus and Function Statements that are concise and can preach on their own (the Cliff Notes version of the sermon) is another area for improvement. I must learn to become better at moving from text to message – in other words, stop being a nerd, let go of the exegesis, and get to the sermon! Inviting my congregation into the text by firing their imaginations and honoring their presence by avoiding “jargon...‘seminary talk,’... [and learning] to consider the perceptions of [my] listeners...with the goal of *listener clarity* could be a profoundly meaningful change” (Carrell, 2000, p. 35).

Now that these dimensions have been considered, an ideal sermon preparation process for the future might look like this:

- Begin using a paper notebook, sermon file, or computer application like Evernote to collect material for future messages. Remember to visit websites mentioned above.

- Identify and approach a diverse cross-section of First Wesleyan Church's membership and ask them to serve as a "Sermon Focus Group." Assure the group of their anonymity and complete freedom to share their challenges and fears, hopes and dreams, and topics and/or texts they would like preached as part of worship. Keep such a list and then preach it.
- Use the information learned from Sermon Focus Group meetings to develop a preaching calendar. Consider ways to alternate sermon types (textual or topical) and sermon forms (Four Pages, Lowry Loop, Narrative, Negative to Positive, New Hearing, Shema, or others) that seem to fit the Focus Group's needs.
- Identify and approach a diverse cross-section of First Wesleyan Church's membership. Ask these individuals to serve on a "Feedback Team," and then empower them to critique my sermons honestly. Provide appropriate feedback forms prior to each sermon preached. Develop a thicker skin and see each criticism as a learning moment and opportunity to improve.
- Monday of sermon preparation week: spend time in prayer and fasting for the Holy Spirit's guidance in selecting a text. Read scripture devotionally, engaging in Lectio Divina. Continue to seek discernment until certain the text or topic has been revealed.
- Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday (once text or topic has been identified): begin exegesis process. Pepper exegesis with prayer. Consult study bibles, original language tools, commentaries, and other biblical studies resources.
- Thursday: Begin with prayer. Develop Focus and Function Statements, a prevailing metaphor, outline passage, type manuscript, and complete initial "read-through."
- Friday: Begin with prayer. Read through manuscript multiple times and outline movements (voice inflection, tone, and volume; body) and use of images, props, etc. Time message. Perform message at home/office and in worship space.
- Saturday: Day of rest, with allowance for prayer and reading through manuscript and practicing movements a final time.
- Sunday: The Preaching Event arrives. Begin with prayer and end with a final practice. Provide all necessary forms to Feedback Team members.

Deliver sermon in my own voice, in God's strength, to His people under my care.

This process, of course, assumes a perfect week with limited interruptions and sufficient time, energy, and will to hold to the routine. In the future, I hope to have opportunities to preach on a more regular basis. As I mentioned in a Blackboard message to a classmate, my dream is to craft and speak Spirit-filled messages with structure and form like a well-planned and executed recipe. First, the individual ingredients are gathered (devotional reading, Lectio Divina, preliminary research, initial exegesis, identifying the main idea). Then, the ingredients are combined (word study, focus and function statements, prevailing metaphor and in-depth exegesis). Next, I begin to cook the ingredients (manuscript development) and add a garnish (folding in images, props, or videos). The almost-ready dish is then allowed to stand and adhere together (day of rest) in preparation for the final presentation (practice) and the serving, preaching the message (J. W., personal communication, February 26, 2013).

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Ten Timeless Tips for the Preaching Event

1. How you live your life matters more than the words that come out of your mouth. “Let [your] manner of living be an eloquent sermon in itself” (Augustine, n.d., p. 201).
2. Bathe your speech in prayer and depend on the Holy Spirit to transform your preparation into an effective message (Augustine).
3. Your face is your most important communication tool: “adopt all its movements to the subject you treat of, the passions you raise, and the persons to whom you speak” (Wesley, para. 39).
4. The best speech is that which is distinct, articulate, and full of passion for the hearers and the subject – the hearers being most important (Wesley, paras. 28, 34).
5. Preach to everyone in the room: the angry, the uncaring, the uninformed, and those worried about the future, by story, by object lesson, “greater vigour of speech...entreaties and reproaches, exhortations and upbraidings, and all the other means of raising the emotions,” ***without being manipulative*** (Augustine, n.d., p. 159, emphasis mine).
6. Body language and movements should mirror one another and be as natural as possible. Study and practice speaking well, so that you learn good habits. It is easier to learn helpful speaking techniques than to unlearn poor ones (Wesley, paras. 44, 3).
7. Speak using one or all three major styles: a subdued, quiet voice for teaching or instruction; an elegant, temperate voice of praise that keeps hearers’ attention and delights them; and a majestic powerful voice that exhorts hearers, persuades them to your position and subdues their wills (Augustine, n.d., pp. 154, 176, 183).

8. Watch the audience and gauge their body language – see if they understand what is being said. Be aware of the congregation’s visual clues: interpret your hearers’ movements, where the people are looking, if they are looking forward, etc. (Augustine, n.d., p. 170).
9. Connect your words with your ideas and build to a climax in your speaking. Not only know *what* you want to say, but *how* you will say it and *why* you will say it. Marry your words’ form and function (Wesley, para. 13).
10. Make your point and move on; too much focus on a single fact can be overkill (Augustine, n.d., pp. 170-171).

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My Preaching Plan

20 Topics, Doctrines, or Themes Appropriate to My Ministry Context

1. Who is God for me? (Exodus 34:1-8; Psalm 18). Pastor A. W. Tozer once said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us” (Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University, 2013).
2. Who am I to God? (Psalm 139; Isaiah 43:1-13; John 3:16; Romans 8:12-16). A look at the God who (literally) knows each person inside and out; redeems, restores, sustains, and ransoms those who accept His salvation; who gave His one and only Son to secure our salvation; and adopts those into His forever family.
3. Serving the Community: Who is my neighbor? (Luke 10:25-37; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; James 2:1-16). As First Wesleyan Connection continues to grow numerically and spiritually, there is a need to move those in our gatherings from interested spectators to committed servants.
4. Old Testament Survey: The Bible Jesus Read. The intent behind this is an overview of major themes of the Old Testament, including creation, the fall, the Exodus, the Exile, selected messianic prophecies, and the scriptures Jesus referenced in the gospels in their original context.
5. Why Jesus? (John 1: 1-18; Galatians 3:15-4:7). This series is intended to discuss issues related to Christology, the Incarnation, Justification, and Jesus’ unique role in securing our salvation.
6. Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-31; 2 Kings 2:1-14; Joel 2:28-32). Some or all of these portions of scripture might be used to inform listeners regarding spiritual gifts; how gifts are understood and used in and for the church; and the Holy Spirit’s role in giving and superintending the use of spiritual gifts in believers’ lives.
7. When God Doesn’t Make Sense: Suffering, Tragedy, and Terror (Job; Lamentations; Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Luke 13:1-9; John 9:1-6). These messages will attempt to shed some light on one of the most important questions people ask of God: “Why?”
8. Parenting (Deuteronomy 6:1-12; 2 Samuel 13-17; Proverbs; Ephesians 6:1-9). In many ways, parenting is like the Peace Corps: for some of us, it is the toughest job we’ll ever love, and God’s Word has something to say about this important period

of our lives.

9. **Real Relationships: Family, Friendship, Dating, Marriage, School, and the Workplace** (Genesis 1-3; Joshua 7; 1 Corinthians 6; 2 Corinthians 6:11-18; 1 Peter 2:11-25). Humanity was made for relationships with others, and God's Word has quite a lot for us to consider about how we should live, love, learn, and work with others.
10. **God's Will** (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27; 2 Thessalonians 5:12-23; John 4:34-37, 6:35-40). Most of us may have heard the Christian cliché, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," but does the Bible really tell us God's will for each of us?
11. **Live the Life** (Leviticus 11:44-45; Isaiah 6:1-13; Romans 12; 1 Peter 2:1-11). This series will touch on the historic doctrines of Holiness and Sanctification, utilizing concepts from the book *Soul Shift* such as: Slave to Child; Consumer to Steward; Sheep to Shepherd; and Me to We (DeNeff & Drury, 2011).
12. **Angels and Demons** (Genesis 16:1-15; Numbers 22:21-39; Judges 6:1-24; Luke 8:26-39, 10:16-24, 23:32-43). As First Wesleyan Connection has begun to build relationships with our neighborhood residents, we have met a number of people who consider themselves "spiritual, but not religious." This "mini-series" on Heaven and Hell is an effort to respond to questions these interested seekers might have.
13. **Women in the Bible**. This series will take a look at some of the lesser and well-known female leaders in scripture, such as Deborah, Delilah, Dinah, Hannah, Ruth, Anna, Mary of Nazareth, Elizabeth, Junia, and Priscilla.
14. **Then and Now: Bible Traditions and Contemporary Culture**. (Genesis 29-30; Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14; Matthew 23:13-26; Acts 10:9-22; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, and many others). Have you ever wondered why the Bible has so many weird or misunderstood rules and traditions that we don't follow today? This sermon series attempts to make the stranger portions of the Bible relevant and meaningful to present day people.
15. **Love God. Love People** (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 10:41-45; Luke 10:1-12; 2 Timothy 4:1-5). These and other scriptures will challenge us to follow Jesus' and Paul's example of loving and serving others in Jesus' name.

16. Trust (2 Kings 18; Job 18; Psalm 22; extensive passages Psalms and Proverbs). Faith is not the absence of doubt, but the presence of trust; in these messages, we will take a look at what it means to trust God in spite of difficult circumstances.
17. Miracles (Plagues in Exodus; Elijah, Elisha, and other prophets; Daniel in the Lion's Den; Jesus' miracles of feeding, healing, and raising the dead; Paul's shipwreck). What do the Bible's stories of supernatural occurrences tell us about God's work in individual lives and creation as a whole?
18. Ask the Audience: NT Book Study. The congregation will have an opportunity to vote on a New Testament book to be surveyed in this sermon set, as a "bookend" to our Jonah series (Feb. 24 – Mar. 24, 2013).
19. Back to the Future: Genesis, Revelation, and the End of the World as We Know It. This group of sermons will survey relevant texts in Genesis and Revelation, as well as other apocalyptic passages such as Daniel 9 (the "Weeks of Years" prophecy); Matthew 24 (the destruction of the Temple and Jesus' description of the "End Times"); 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; chapter 5 (the "rapture," and the "Day of the Lord").
20. Ask the Audience: ask for the "One Big Thing" they would like the pastors to address in the coming six months. At the start of April, 2013, First Wesleyan Connection began a series called "FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions," and this series will modify the formal sermon survey found in *Preaching Essentials* (Luchetti, 2012, pp. 190-191).

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**The Preacher Nobody Wanted: A Sermon for the First Wesleyan Church
Family**

Once you've left your hometown, can you ever really go home again? The very word – home – brings with it so many memories. Some are good. Some are bad. Some might be indifferent. What if, for you, there is no place that you have ever called home, and all you have is fear, uncertainty, or change?

I wonder what Jesus felt as he walked the steps to the Nazareth synagogue on that Sabbath morning so many centuries ago. Were his insides churning? Did he feel a sense of relief or accomplishment? So many people knew him, his parents, his story. Could he have felt that nagging bit of uncertainty, the question stuck in the back of his mind: What will they think of me? Will they accept what I have to say?

Luke doesn't tell us what Jesus was thinking as he got ready to preach in Nazareth, but he does tell us that as Jesus stood up to read, He was handed a scroll of the book of Isaiah. I imagine that he carefully undid the ribbon, unrolling the papyrus slowly until He came to the place He was looking for. I imagine Jesus standing in front the crowd for just a moment, looking around the synagogue, scanning the rows of people. In a calm, confident voice, he speaks words that fill the people with hope like they have never experienced:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me...

He has anointed me to preach good news...

There is something about good news that fills us with expectation. Time seems to slow, and your breath gets caught in your chest, that “huhhhh” you hold onto until the

news is shared. This is not just any old news. It's GOOD news, news that seems to get better every time you hear it.

The Year of the Lord's favor. A new age, a new time, a world turned upside down, the Year of Jubilee is here! The year when land sold to buy food and just survive will be returned to its original owners. The year when interest on loans is cancelled.

This is good news if you're poor. The year when family members sold into slavery or thrown into prison to pay debts are set free. **This is amazing news if you have a loved one cowering in a cell or forced to labor at low-wage, high-stress jobs because it seems there always is more month than money.** Healing has come, disease is cured, the weight of anxiety and depression are cast away. **This is fantastic news if you're worried, at the end of your rope, or sick and wondering, "Am I ever going to be well?"** Wrong turns to right, the poor are made equal to the rich, the broken are made whole.

Jesus has come home.

The Lord has returned to His people.

Scholars tell us that during Jesus' ministry, Nazareth was a small town of about 500 people. Nazareth was located in Galilee, an area in the northern part of Israel (Ballentine, 2009, p. 156). Like most small towns, I'm sure Nazareth was a place where everyone knew their neighbors by name and everyone knew their neighbors' business. This sounds kind of quaint, doesn't it? Like what you'd see on an episode of *Little House on the Prairie* or *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, or *Christy*.

With one exception. In the Nazareth of Jesus' day, everyday life was defined by Roman rule (Ballentine, 2009, p. 156).

Think about what it would be like trying to run your business with foreign troops demanding protection money from you and threatening to destroy your livelihood if you didn't pay. Imagine having a teenage daughter and rushing her into the house as soldiers march by, hoping and praying that none of them lay eyes on the beautiful young woman your child is becoming. Imagine the fear you hold in your heart as you see your little boy pick up a stone and hold it in his hand for a moment too long? Will he throw it? Will the soldiers take him?

I imagine that after Jesus finished reading, he slowly rolled up the scroll, gently placed the ribbon around it, reverently and with much ceremony, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down to speak. There's a hush over the synagogue. Everyone's eyes are on Jesus, and they lean forward in anticipation of what he's about to say next.

Jesus words ring out crisply: **“Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

A prophecy from Isaiah, told hundreds of years earlier, has come true in a small synagogue, in an obscure town in Galilee. Here it is, the original, **READ Isaiah 61:1-3, then 60:21-22.**

WAIT – be careful, or you might miss it. Is this really what Jesus read in Nazareth? What's different? ***Where is the day of vengeance of our God?*** Isaiah 60-61 told of a day when Israel would be restored as an independent nation and no longer occupied by a foreign power. Can't you just hear the people in Nazareth's synagogue – Why is Rome still in charge? Where is our army? Why aren't we free?!?!?

This isn't what we expected at all! It's like ordering the thickest, juiciest steak on the menu, only to be served hamburger. Or being told you've won an all-expense paid trip of a lifetime to Paris...Tennessee. Or staring for weeks at beautifully

wrapped presents underneath the Christmas tree, and finally tearing into the package only to pull out socks. And underwear.

Then Jesus ups the ante with just a few words: “Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.” Jesus was having a rough homecoming in Nazareth, but his reputation preceded him. Matthew chapter 4 tells us that Jesus had gone throughout Galilee healing the sick and the diseased, the demon-possessed and those afflicted with seizures, the paralyzed and those in severe pain. This sounds familiar doesn’t it? Throughout Galilee, Jesus gave all the signs of the Year of the Lord’s Favor that He read to the people in Nazareth. In Matthew 4:13, we learn that Jesus left Nazareth and went and lived in Capernaum. And Matthew 4:17 tells us, **“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”**

Jesus pointed to MIRACLES, not military might, as proof the Lord has come to rescue those He loves. Miracles the people of Nazareth were familiar with, but not for the reasons you might think. Elijah prayed to the Lord, and enough oil and flour for two small cakes fed a widow in Zarephath her son during a *three year drought*. Elisha told Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, to bathe in the Jordan River, and Naaman was healed from a terrible skin disease. God sent two of his greatest prophets to a pagan woman and a Gentile soldier – two people Jews would rather spit on than serve.

What we have in our story from Luke is a tale of two Kingdoms. To the people of Nazareth, the Year of the Lord’s Favor was political freedom and military might for the Jewish people. Jesus’ picture of the Lord’s Favor is Jubilee for *all people*, Jew and non-Jew alike. Those listening to Jesus in Nazareth’s synagogue had their world turned upside down. They were no longer staring at Joseph’s son. They had come face to face

with a King who took away their expectations of vengeance on the Gentiles (Jeremias, as cited in Hill, 1971, p. 163).

And like so many of us act when our joyous expectations turn to disgust, the people of Nazareth's gracious words and kind thoughts toward Jesus turned to furious anger and vengeful rage. A mob broke out, some men grabbed Jesus, and they dragged him to the cliff at the edge of the city limits, where they tried to throw Jesus to his death. Only there was a great escape.

But our story doesn't end here. In fact, we trade one synagogue for another. Jesus leaves Nazareth, returns to Capernaum, enters the synagogue there, and begins to preach. Only this time, the people accept the message; they are amazed at Jesus' authority, power, and passion. But, when the Kingdom of Heaven is preached in Capernaum (just like it was in Nazareth) there is immediate opposition. A demon-possessed man comes from out of the crowd, screaming at Jesus, raging "I know who you are – the Holy One of God." But, instead of violence, there is healing. Instead of murder, there is a miracle. Jesus commands the demon controlling the man to be silent and come out of him. The shrieks stop. The synagogue is silent. The demon is gone, and the man is made well.

In Nazareth, Jesus faced opposition and rejection. In Capernaum, Jesus found acceptance and the people experienced restoration.

Why the difference? I think it was because the people of Capernaum accepted the Kingdom of Heaven on Jesus' terms, while the people of Nazareth tried to force Jesus to bring a Kingdom of their choosing. The people of Capernaum accepted the Kingdom as Jesus described it. The Kingdom of Heaven is:

1. Good News for the poor: We are no longer slaves to the economy
2. Sight for the blind: We are no longer slaves to disability
3. Freedom from Oppression: We are set free from spiritual and physical forces we are unable to control on our own
4. Release for the captives: We are forgiven and no longer slaves to sin

All of us face similar decision today: Will we accept the Kingdom on Jesus' terms, or will we reject it, because entering Kingdom of Heaven involves serving people who aren't like us?

Will we reject the Kingdom of Heaven because Jesus first offers it to the poor, the disabled, the addict, and the broken? Because the Kingdom doesn't fit our ideas of what's right, just, or true?

Or will we reject the Kingdom of Heaven because entering it comes at a cost – the cost of our lives, our wants, our terms.

The Kingdom of Heaven calls all of us; it calls you and me, to a decision. Is Jesus the Holy One of God or is he just Joseph's son?

In Nazareth, Jesus is the preacher nobody wanted. In Capernaum, Jesus is the Savior the people desperately needed.

Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing – The Kingdom of Heaven is here, right now, for the people of Nazareth, for the people of Capernaum, for the people of Chillicothe and Ross County.

Which people will we be like? Will we see Jesus as the preacher nobody wanted, or will we accept Him as the Savior we desperately need?

Chapter Six: Congregational Spiritual Formation

How does a body of believers grow more Christlike? Does Christian Education make a difference in a person's life? What role(s) do learning theories play in faith development? These are just some of the questions Wesley Seminary's Congregational Spiritual Formation course addresses. In this sixth chapter, I have included discussions and reflections on ways people learn; whether faith is "caught" or "taught"; Youth and Family ministry models; discipleship and mentoring; and the place of Sunday school and small groups within the local church.

Brain Rules

Medina's eighth Brain Rule, *Stressed Brains Don't Learn the Same Way*, highlights a number of physical, emotional, chemical, and biological impacts stress has on mind and body. These can be both positive (increased short-term alertness, fight or flight responses, and a healthy survival instinct) and negative (chronic health issues, loss of concentration and productivity, and diminished learning). Male or female, we're all hormonal. Adrenaline, cortisol, neurotrophins and other compounds jockey in an ongoing battle of breaking down and repairing the neural pathways used for information processing and learning (Medina, 2008, p. 179). Stress is most destructive when a person is unable to cope with life's demands, feels powerless to change her or his circumstances, or is stuck in a "learned helplessness" that causes their desire to live to wane (Medina, 2008, pp. 172-174).

The discussion is both fun and fascinating. Human beings are complex, multi-faceted creatures. We are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:4) and the undesired effects of stress should motivate pastors, teachers, and believers to care for their bodies as well as their souls (Cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 9:27). The most striking point made in chapter eight is the influence the home has on learning. Medina notes, "One of the greatest predictors of performance in school turns out to be the emotional stability of the home" (2008, p. 183). Civility, conflict resolution, and forgiveness are three crucial skills Christians can model to each other and to society, especially those who are married or have young children. These behaviors (better yet, means of grace?) should be part of any Christian formation approach, whether individual, small group, or congregational. In the end, however, Medina's arguments leave out two crucial components: Godly character and hope in Christ. Striving for holiness and resting in

Jesus' perfect strength – especially when we are weak and powerless (2 Cor. 12:9) – must be a personal and congregational goal in order to move from behavior modification to spiritual transformation.

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Nature and Grace

William James argues that religious conversions, both gradual and instantaneous, take place – but they are not “real” because they cannot be evaluated rationally (James, 2008, p. 178). For James, “conversion” is the development of a unified self where a person’s life is centered on a core belief or moral conviction. There are varieties of religious experiences because people are converted either to faith or to ethics.

Interestingly, James suggests that there are both subjective and objective conversion experiences: Volitional Conversion and Self-Surrender. Volitional Conversion occurs when persons actively choose to live just, virtuous, righteous lives by consciously changing their mind. Self-Surrender is a passive response to crises where persons give up unhealthy behaviors and preoccupations with vice to be set free from sin. Unconscious motives drive self-surrender (James, 2008, p. 174), primarily avoiding punishment.

Sincere conversions often were lasting, but had no significance in and of themselves, since “Converted men as a class are indistinguishable from natural men” (James, 2008, p. 179). No distinction is made between faith and morals because James emphasized character and virtue to the neglect of individual self-centeredness and “man’s inhumanity to man” (Harper, 2003, p. 21). Moral character and humanity’s original righteousness are not one and the same. Virtue without religious affection is utilitarianism and pragmatism. At heart, it is the self-captivity that displays a righteous exterior while hiding inner hypocrisy and decay (cf. Matt. 23:27-28).

James is correct on one account – surrender is necessary. People need to be converted, not to moralism, but to Christ. Biblical transformation goes beyond

rationality, emotion, and the will (Harper, 2003, p. 24). The will can change us only in degree, not in our nature. Grace, whether given in a moment or over a lifetime, changes our nature and essence. It is grace, not the will that transforms evil into goodness and death into life.

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Pursuing God: Youth Ministry Strategies at First Wesleyan Church

Kenda Dean's insightful work, *Almost Christian*, is based on the 2003-2005 National Study of Youth and Religion. The author contends that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, an overarching belief in tolerance, nice-ness, and general happiness, has become "the dominant religion in American churches" (Dean, 2010, loc.93, 165). Religion in general (and Christianity in particular) is not avoided so much as it is ignored. For most American teens (and their parents) faith is a concept, not a conviction. God is neither a judge to be feared nor a perfect father to be loved. Rather, God is a cosmic vending machine who at best gives people what they want and at worst refuses to stand in the way of the American Dream. This is the faith the majority of Christians are passing down to succeeding generations (Dean, 2010, loc. 564).

All is not lost, however. There are identifiable characteristics of highly devoted teen believers who comprise eight percent of study respondents. These "sold out" teens claim a specific creed, community, call, and missional imagination (Dean, 2010, loc. 777, 1514). They articulate a personal "God story" that is shared and supported at church and at home. They find significance in journeying alongside others and attempting to meet felt emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. Though hopeful for the future, these highly devoted teens wrestle with difficult ethical, moral, relational, and theological issues. They reflect frequently on what these questions mean for themselves and for others. The result is that these young people sense a responsibility not to the church, but to God's Kingdom (Dean's "missional imagination"). Often they adolescents have mentors and authority figures both inside and outside the faith community to support, challenge, and critique their views. This larger perspective helps these teenagers to hone a faith-centered vision for the future (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, loc. 105, 124).

Pursuit Student Ministries, First Wesleyan Church's junior and senior high youth ministry, attempts to provide the kinds of structures that Dean and other youth ministry experts suggest are critical for effective teen discipleship. These elements are belonging; purpose; identity; and ideology (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, loc. 144).

Belonging

As with any group, Pursuit struggles with group power dynamics, cliques, and insider-outsider tension. Our Youth Pastor (beginning his third year at the church) consistently challenges Pursuit teens to stress involvement, not membership, to give everyone who attends Pursuit a sense of place with the group. Additionally, the pastor and parents work together to build a foundation of servant leadership. Pursuit teens have set high expectations for participation based on mutual (student-led) accountability.

Sunday evenings are devoted to worship in song (led by the teens themselves) and study. Taking the "Sticky Church" approach, following the sermon, small groups break out to discuss the evening's teaching. The next Sunday, groups review the previous week's talk and relate it to life events of the previous week or at other times in their lives. By linking truth and responsibility, teaching and action, our pastor and our leaders stress that Jesus' followers become different people to serve others in Jesus' name (Root, 2007, p. 85; cf. James 1:22-27). It is our leaders' desire that Pursuit teens feel connected to a group that exists for a reason. Teaching spiritual formation is a primary way this takes place.

Parents and volunteers facilitate small groups whenever possible so that the teens see ministry and service as an individual/family/church activity and not just something that pastors do. This gives spiritual formation a "group direction." Having

conversations together, the community acts as a filter or sounding board for individual beliefs and experiences (Dean, 2010, loc. 1587). We want our teens to know and believe “You never walk alone.”

Purpose

Pursuit’s mission is to pursue a life with Jesus in everything teens do, so that spiritual formation continues from adolescence into emerging and early adulthood and beyond (Setran & Kiesling, 2013). Our pastor believes that who and how we worship reflects belief. Pursuit worship intentionally consists of cruciform practices: song, prayer, scripture study, and service. In addition to weekly teaching, Pursuit teens are asked to journal; complete Bible reading plans; and witness their faith publicly. This past year, one of our teens shared her testimony in front of 200 fellow students in her public middle school. Another walked her high school hallways to hand out flyers to a faith-based pro-life stage play in spite of being discouraged to do so by her principal.

These are just two examples of “liminoid experiences” (Dean, 2010, loc. 2926), disruptive moments that took these young ladies out of their comfort zones into new environments and activities that tested the depth of their faith. When the Youth Pastor shared these events with our congregation, we had an opportunity to support – and be formed by – these young ladies’ experiences. They learned that their courage matches their convictions. By sharing their stories, these young people authenticated the gospel message in the world and in the church (Codrington, 1997, para. 20). Just as important, both these young ladies and our church were reminded that Christianity’s claims are polarizing. When we live a faith-forward life, rejection can be more common than acceptance.

Identity

Along with belonging and purpose, our leaders want our teens to know that they have unique, God-given perspectives and gifts to offer to their church, family, friends, school, and world (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, loc. 144). Whether they share their faith formally (in front of their classmates or in a structured setting) or informally among their peers, when our teens own an identity as Jesus followers, they are empowered to connect belief and action. They see what they do as reflecting who Jesus is and what Jesus does. How teens live, as genuine young women and men who both struggle and strive with their faith publically, helps the gospel be seen as attainable to not-yet-Christians (Taunton, 2013). Christian spirituality can be a lifestyle that others see as life-giving when the focus is centered first on who people are and then on what they do.

Ideology

Through conversations with our Youth Pastor, I have learned that he teaches different approaches to Christian conversion. He believes that teens can come to Christ through a momentary experience and as a result of ongoing reflection on what it means to be Christian. (Taunton, 2013, p. 4) Regardless of the process, Pursuit teens are challenged to see change in their lives as central to Christianity. If one truly encounters Jesus, they will be changed in some form or fashion and can begin to work out their own particular “God Story.”

Our annual Merge weekend, when incoming sixth graders are welcomed into the youth group, helps “set the tone” in terms of ideology for the coming year. Merge blends teaching, games, meals, and times for reflection, journaling, and conversation. Teens build community and focus on God’s presence with them. Merge is a physical reminder to parents and the church of the importance of the teen years in coming to faith. It is

meant to be an intense focus on the “Belief Window,” ages 14-17 when the majority of teens accept or reject Christianity (Taunton, 2013, p. 5).

Parent and Multigenerational Support

Joiner & Nieuwhof (2010) suggest that parent, community, and multigenerational support of teens increases the likelihood they will become highly devoted to Christ (p. 82). Embracing “the principle of wider circle community” (Joiner & Nieuwhof, 2010, p. 65) young people are exposed to others outside of their immediate families and social circles. These “co-pilgrims” offer wisdom, mentor young people, and increase parents’ and churches’ capacity to raise and form lifelong Christian disciples. For the first time this fall, Pursuit held a Parent Breakfast. Our Youth Pastor and his wife publicly and specifically invited adults to be a part of Pursuit Youth alongside their children. Parents received their own copies of Joiner and Nieuwhof’s book, *Parenting beyond Your Capacity* to remind them of their critical influence in their teens’ lives. We also discussed ways families, the church, and the community can come together to minister with and to our teens.

Transforming a “youth ministry” to a “family ministry” will be tricky – teens may view parents as invading *their* group. However, more frequent opportunities to help teens stay in church is worth the risk. This approach runs counter to traditional teen ministries, where adolescents are outsourced to ministry professionals (Smethurst, 2013). Yet, as Cameron Cole notes, “Parents may not believe this, but the reality is their kids listen to them far more than they’re going to listen to us [youth leaders]” (Cole, as cited in Smethurst, 2013, para. 3). As both a church staff member and parent of a teen who resists participating in Pursuit regularly, the author looks forward to seeing if being

a part of the group as a parent becomes an avenue to his son considering the impact Pursuit might have on his own relationship with Jesus.

Going forward, the largest obstacle to lasting spiritual formation among Pursuit Teens may be the adolescent propensity to see their leaders as “substitute Saviors.” Pastor and parent leaders must continue to articulate lovingly but clearly that teens do not need adults to be Jesus for them (Drury, n.d.). What they need is for young and older adults to come alongside them as Peter and Paul, missionary witnesses who bear the scars of ministry mistakes but who also have come out on the other side humbler – and wiser – for the experience.

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Family Models

For the family represented in *The Middle*, faith formation might happen best when each person “unplugs” from the media- and device-centered culture they allow to dominate their time. This is the largest challenge my own family faces in doing life together. The video trailer showed a family that is fragmented among different activities, jobs, and schools. Ironically, they are so used to being apart that they do not know how to act when they are together. Family faith formation is more likely to happen when each member gives others the gift of their presence and attention. Many of the “real” families in my church might try to ask questions by facetime, while texting or on the phone, or after Sunday school, morning worship, or youth group. There might be short conversations on the way to sporting events, 4-H, while shopping, or in those crazy moments before bed.

Ideally, interactions like these happen while family members are getting ready for school and work; share meals together; while having “family meetings” instead of sitting in front of the TV; or while doing homework, chores, and other household activities together. Regardless of the reality, pastors, leaders, and families should take time in worship and informal settings to share how faith is shared in their families. Encouraging, empathizing with, and supporting each other as the church, a “family of families,” can set the stage for deeper and richer faith experiences.

Deuteronomy 6 tells the entire faith community that they have a responsibility to pay attention to God’s commands, decrees, and laws. It is expected that families will have faith because we are part of something bigger than ourselves (vv. 1-3). In loving God with our hearts, souls, and strength, we come to know God personally and look for God’s presence in our lives’ everyday moments (vv. 4-5). God cares about our feelings

and emotions; our attitudes toward God and other people affect our faith in God (the heart). God also cares about our minds, what we think and how we live (our souls). God cares about how we take care of ourselves and others (strength).

These are general principles that can be used by families of all kinds in the ebb and flow of life. The most important actions are to talk about God's place in our families specifically – how knowing and loving God (or ignoring and rejecting God) impacts our relationships with other people. Internalizing and owning that God wants to be a part of every aspect of our lives should impact how we think about and react to situations at home, school, and work; on the playing field; in the mall; or at the grocery. Are there opportunities to help others, to meet their emotional and physical needs or to offer spiritual support?

The scriptures are to be more than symbols or writing; there is a role for creative and performing arts in families. Faith can take shape, literally and figuratively, through art, drama, music, writing, and appreciation for nature and creation as windows to God's presence (vv. 6-9). Do other families and the church as a whole support young people as artists, athletes, inventors, or musicians, using these moments to nurture the talents and abilities God has given them?

Further, we should remember that God has been with us and our families in the past and that God has a future in mind for us as well (vv. 10-25). God asks to be given first place in everything that we do. The decisions we make every day should be filtered on the life principles God gives us through Scripture. Most importantly, we need to pay attention to our relationships with God – as individuals, as families, and as a faith community (the church). Faith formation is possible when we hold each other accountable; are we praying? Are we spending time with God in devotion, rest, and

study? Are we serving others and blessing them as God has blessed us? We can ask others what God is doing in their lives and offer encouragement and support. In doing so, we begin to examine our own family's God story, begin to answer who we are and why we do what we do in the context of our faith in God.

Spiritual Direction and Mentoring in the Old Testament

My past experiences with Spiritual Direction have been positive and challenging. At times, though, I struggle with Direction becoming a performance trap based more on what I do for Christ than for who I am in Christ. Because of this, I have had to separate accountability from Direction so that Direction can be more growth-centered. My Directors have been consistent, caring, supportive, and Christ-centered, an approach I will strive to emulate if I am asked to mentor a fellow believer.

As I think about how Spiritual Direction happens in First Wesleyan Connection, it strikes me that Direction happens both corporately and individually. Our mission statement is, "Connection exists to develop real and authentic relationships with God and with people." We focus on small group discipleship rather than traditional age- or interest-driven Sunday school groups for adults as part of our desire to grow in grace as a community. In conversations I have had with small group leaders and participants, there is a feeling that group members genuinely care for one another. They minister to each other, sharing their dreams, hurts, and passions. In some instances, friendships formed in small groups have led to formal, one-to-one mentoring and intentional or systematic small group discipleship. Perhaps if those of us who are mentors or are being mentored shared the benefits of these relationships, more of our attenders might prayerfully consider Spiritual Direction as a way to deepen their faith.

Old Testament Mentoring: Naomi and Ruth

1. **Mentoring can transcend traditional relationships** – Ruth 1:16-18.
Ruth's relationship with Naomi - and eventually with Boaz - gave her a sense of place (where you go/stay I will go/stay); a sense of faith (your God/my God); and a sense of identity (your people/my people).

2. **Mentoring can be a means of inclusion.** It has potential to help build relationships within a larger community and give access to the one being mentored – Ruth 2:5-13. Naomi encouraged Ruth to follow the Israelite custom of gleaning (Cf. Lev. 23:22, 19:9-10) to provide for herself and for Naomi. After learning that Ruth had gleaned in Boaz' field, Naomi vouched for Boaz' character and encouraged Ruth to continue to glean from Boaz' field (Ruth :19-23). Naomi advised Ruth to approach Boaz for marriage (Ruth 3:1-13) and counseled Ruth to wait while Boaz followed law and custom to become their kinsman redeemer (Ruth 4:1-10).
3. **Mentoring fosters commitment and service.** Ruth and Naomi's story shows that their relationship was others-centered. Both women sought to protect and provide for each other at a time when survival and security largely was dependent upon relationships with men in the community. Also, Ruth's consistent care for Naomi showed that her inner character influenced her outward actions. The story does not tell us whether Naomi gleaned. Perhaps Naomi had physical limitations, or her deep anger at God (Ruth 1:20-21) may have left her wanting to die. Ruth gleaned enough grain to provide for herself and for Naomi. Her actions showed she honored the relationship she had with her mother-in-law mentor.
4. **Mentoring seeks the best for others.** Naomi's role as matchmaker between Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 3:1-13) primarily was an economic, rather than romantic, choice. "Although Naomi's instructions may appear forward, [their] moral integrity...is never in doubt. Naomi's advice to Ruth is clearly for the purpose of appealing to Boaz's kinsman obligation" (Wilson & Stek, 1985, p. 368). In agreeing to provide for Ruth and Naomi through Levirate Marriage (Cf. the story of Judah and Tamar, Gen. 38:13-30; Deut. 25:5-6) the first child born to Ruth and Boaz would continue Naomi's family line. The child would receive land and an inheritance and the family's membership in the covenantal community was assured (Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, 2000, p. 279). The community would be reminded of God's promise of provision and descendants to Israel, strengthening the family and the community's faith in the process.
5. **Mentoring as Spiritual Direction deepens one's dependence upon God and reflects God's love for others.** Naomi's descriptions of Boaz as one who showed "kindness to the living and the dead" and as a kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 2:20) seem to have made a deep impression upon Ruth. Boaz' response to Ruth's request for marriage and redemption, "Don't go back to your mother in law empty handed" (Ruth 3:17b, New International Version) confirmed Boaz' character as a benevolent, caring man committed to providing for his extended

family.

6. **Mentoring as Spiritual Direction seeks lasting, generational faith formation** – Ruth 4:13-22. The women in the Bethlehem community declared Obed, Ruth and Boaz' son, to be a kinsman redeemer, as Naomi had for Boaz. Ruth 4:16 tells us that Naomi took Obed into her lap and cared for him an act “possibly symbolizing adoption” and suggesting that Naomi had a strong influence in Obed's life (Wilson & Stek, 1985, p. 370).

7. **Spiritual Direction seeks change and transformation.** The book of Ruth shows us that each of the main characters experienced deep and lasting change. Naomi's heart moved from bitter to blessed, reflecting the taking of the name Mara (“bitter”) and then reverting back to her original name, Naomi, or “pleasant” (Wilson & Stek, 1985, pp. 364, 366). Ruth went from being a foreigner and outcast to a member of one of Bethlehem's leading families of her day. Boaz life changed from farmer to “father of kings” (David and Jesus). Each of these individuals' character was shaped by God, by each other, and the community around them. Their story “strikingly exemplifies the truth that participation in the coming kingdom of God is decided, not by blood and birth, but by the conformity of one's life to the will of God” (Wilson & Stek, 1985, p. 363).

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Small Groups VS. Sunday school

From the reading what do you see as the most significant points of potential for your ministry context and why?

Beginning January 2014, my congregation, First Wesleyan Church, will transition from our current Senior Pastor to being led by our Connection Teaching Pastor. Since the Connection service's founding in 2008, First Wesleyan has operated as a multi-congregation body – Connection and Sanctuary services - using two meeting spaces and sharing one building. Worship, discipleship, and service opportunities are seen as being for Connection or Sanctuary services, even though our leadership shares information with both congregations. During this transition time, our leadership is emphasizing that we are one church with one mission: reaching people for Christ in Chillicothe and Ross County (OH). This pastoral change involves not only teaching and worship styles and ways the church's physical space will be used, but also how the church's Christian education will be presented to the congregation.

Sunday morning classes primarily have been seen as catering to Sanctuary service attenders, while Life Groups are viewed as a "Connection thing." The upcoming pastoral transition is an opportunity to integrate a significant number of middle and older adults not involved in small groups or Sunday school into the church's ongoing discipleship ministries. This can happen well if our pastoral and lay leaders present existing age- and affinity-based Sunday school classes and Life Groups as two paths to the same goal: lifelong faith formation in community. This approach can affirm a sense of belonging and reflect the importance of relationships in shaping faith (Blevins & Maddix, 2010, p. 239).

We will need to give each Sunday morning class, Life Group, service project, or church-wide event a specific purpose and function, and make each gathering's desired outcomes clear. Building community through Christian education has been First Wesleyan's MO for the past 40 years. Our Sanctuary and Connection services have the same goals. They are accomplished in different ways (and this is not always recognized by attenders in either service). Presenting and promoting Sunday school and small groups as partners, not competitors, can help us maintain unity through a time of change and uncertainty and potentially increase participation in worship, service, and mission (Blevins & Maddix, 2010, p. 235).

Do you agree with the authors' description and differentiation between Sunday school and small groups? Why or why not?

I think the distinction Blevins and Maddix make between a "traditional" Sunday school and "contemporary" small groups is splitting hairs. The primary differences in approaches largely are attractational (come and see/be/do) versus missional (go and see/be/do) and in location, church-based Sunday morning gatherings as opposed to through the week small groups that meet in homes, restaurants, or other venues. Sunday school classes can meet away from church and small groups often use church facilities, so the distinction is not hard and fast. For the most part, though, both Sunday school classes and small groups are exclusive. They divide members based on age, developmental stage, interest, even convenience – an often unstated reason that infants, toddlers, children, tweens, and teens are separated from adults.

I would argue further that "traditional" Sunday school classes and homogeneous small groups both are changes from early church practices and present-day intergenerational models like the Family Integrated Church movement (Grace Family

Baptist Church, 2011). Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 4 indicate that discipleship takes place in the community as a whole and within households and families. The Great Commission's command to make disciples happens best when church and family partner together. "This is not an either/or proposition, but a both/and mandate" (Baucham, 2011, para. 23). As Blevins and Maddix note, the most important factor is that discipleship ministries, no matter their structure or location, be contextualized and flexible to meet all members' needs.

In 50 words or less, provide a description of a transformational small group/Sunday school.

Transformational discipleship links the church's mission, vision, and Christian education approaches to reach the entire community with the gospel message through a culture of caring, accountability, and vulnerability, resulting in transformed individuals, families, and congregations committed to serving Christ and others in love.

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Chapter Seven: Congregational Relationships

Congregational Relationships is a course that will have a lasting impact on my future ministry. Through its action research, group and individual discussions, and biblical and theological reflection, I developed a number of practical ministry tools for pastoral care and counseling. Just a few of the topics covered included conflict resolution and forgiveness; reaching the marginalized; understanding suffering; premarital and marital counseling; sexuality; and identifying formal and informal service providers for addiction and other dysfunction issues. Of the six praxis courses offered by Wesley Seminary, Congregational Relationships gives the most ready, “out of the box” resources to allow pastors to meet their congregations’ and communities’ emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual needs.

Top Ten Visitation Principles

Relationships Matter. Ministry is incarnational, relational, missional, and centered on a balance between doctrinal integrity, discipleship and spiritual formation, and meeting felt emotional, mental, physical and spiritual needs. “The word which we render *visit*...means to *look upon*. And this, you well know, cannot be done unless you are present with them...Having shown that you have regard for their bodies, you may proceed to inquire concerning their souls” (Wesley, n.d., para. 12, 22).

Prepare Yourself: Visitation should be Spirit-enabled service – from Tim Gallant and Nick Coulston. “It was first necessary to take into consideration, what we must be, and what we must do for our own souls, before we come to that which must be done for others: ‘He cannot succeed in healing the wounds of others who is himself unhealed by reason of neglecting himself...He does not raise up others, but himself falls” (Baxter, n.d. para. 2). Both Wesley and Baxter recognized that pastoral care was difficult, often unrewarding work, and both sought to prepare those they led for the realities of practical ministry.

Presence can take precedence over words – from Nick Coulston. Sometimes, just being with someone and not saying a word is the best gift you can give them. Often, the best advice you can give is advice that is asked for, not offered.

Never prize pastoral care over professional care. Both Baxter and Wesley used the analogy of the pastor as physician, and Wesley suggested providing personal medical care: “attend on their sick beds, dress, their sores, and perform the meanest offices for them. Here is a pattern” (Wesley, n.d., para. 14). One of the chief ways Christians can show they are deeply concerned for others to help them access the best medical, dental, and mental health care available.

Spiritual care happens best in community. For the church to be effective, its leaders need to know the limits of their skill, ability, and have a realistic view of what can be accomplished given the congregation’s size, finances, relationships with other agencies, etc. “By the sick, I do not mean only those that keep their bed, or that are sick in the strictest sense. Rather I would include all such as are in a state of affliction, whether of mind or body; and that whether they are good or bad, whether they fear God or not” (Wesley, n.d., para. 10).

Listen twice as much as you speak, or the Two Ears, One Mouth Principle – from Tim Gallant. When you listen, be sure to hear not only what the person is saying, but what they are not saying.

People are more receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit in moments of need – from Jack McClelland. At the same time, people do not care how much you know until they know how much you are. Compassionate help without expectation of return can be an avenue for the Spirit to do transforming work.

Suggest and invite, rather than direct or command – from Adam Kline. A pastor's allegiance to her/his people; using knowledge and truth to encourage and uplift rather than discourage or condemn; and relying on spiritual power, not the weight of the pastoral office, are keys to one's religious credibility (K. Kena, personal communication, July 29, 2013).

Ministry is as much about helping others to be Christian as it is becoming Christian. Spiritual formation, at its heart, is faith informing life and being Christian in every sphere of influence (home, work, church, leisure, etc.). Both Wesley and Baxter used the analogy of the physician to describe a pastor's and a Christian's duty to her or his neighbors. Each placed priority on the person's spiritual life and saw care for their physical needs and family lives as entry points for sharing faith, offering salvation, and beginning a discipleship journey (Baxter, n.d., para. 19-23; Wesley, n.d., para. 12).

Know your limits and involve others as much as you can as often as you can. "The number of souls under the care of each pastor must not be greater than he is able to take such heed to" (Baxter, n.d., para. 4). Conversely, "This important duty...is equally incumbent upon young and old, rich and poor, men and women, according to their ability" (Wesley, n.d., para. 25).

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Conflict Handling Strategy

1. **Conflict is Inevitable.** The best way to deal with conflict is to stay in the situation and address it, not avoid it. (May, 2009, loc. 2181; Genesis 4:2b-6; James 3:2). Approaches to consider when dealing with conflict include: accommodating (I lose, you win); avoiding (I lose, you lose); Compromising (Sometimes I win, sometimes, you win); Competitive (I win, you lose); and Cooperating (I win, you win) (“Co-operantics,” n.d.). The best approach to conflict is to work toward cooperation.
2. **Functional Conflict Is Healthy; Dysfunctional Conflict Is Destructive.** Conflict can have benefits: improved communication and decision making; opportunities to see other points of view; and help focus on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to a person, an organization, or a congregation. Destructive conflict involves punishment, exclusion, manipulation, or revenge with the goal of controlling others for selfish ends (Sande, 2012, loc. 1906-1908; Proverbs 18:21; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Galatians 2:1-16).
3. **Begin with the End in Mind.** Approach conflict as a way for both parties to win and glorify God (Sande, 2012, loc. 286; Proverbs 16:7; Matthew 5:24; Romans 12:17-21).
4. **Count the Cost.** Ultimately, what will hurt or help you more long term: ending the conflict or holding on to issues separating you from another person? Functional conflict accepts the consequences of our actions, even at great cost, for the opportunity to restore a relationship (Sande, 2012, loc. 2046; Matthew 5:25-26).
5. **Know Your Role.** Conflict rarely, if ever, is one sided. Take ownership of your part in the conflict and do not rationalize or minimize your responsibility. Seek grace for repentance, forgiveness, understanding of the conflict’s dynamics, and for power to change your attitudes and your actions (May 2008, loc. 2182; Amos 3:3; Luke 17:3; Philippians 4:1-3).
6. **Use a spotlight and a mirror.** You may be able to discern the underlying cause of conflict and work the issue out by putting yourself in the other person’s place and looking at the situation from her or his point of view as well as your own (Riordan, 2014, para. 3; Proverbs 18:19; Matthew 18:21-22; Galatians 6:1).
7. **Listen intently. Speak slowly. Act lovingly.** Many conflicts begin due to miscommunication (Sande, 2012, loc. 414). Give the other person opportunities to speak without interruption. Ask clarifying questions and paraphrase or restate what the other has said to show that you understand their perspective. Ask God

to help you “RAP: *remember* your own shortcomings; *assume* the best of people; and *pray* for them (Hamilton, 2012, p. 76; Proverbs 15:4, 19:11, 25:21-22; James 1:19).

8. **Keep it in the Family.** Start at home, involve the church if you must, but avoid court at all costs (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Luke 17:3; Corinthians 6:1-7). My mentor, a retired real estate attorney, likes to remind me that he financed his two children’s college education in large part because family conflicts filtered out of the living room and into the courtroom.
9. **Focus on Results, not on Rights.** Be willing to bend, give up, or forfeit your rights so that you can preserve or strengthen the relationship (Exodus 22:21; Colossians 3:13; Leviticus 19:18; Luke 6:29; Philippians 2:5-8).
10. **Hurt Can Lead to Wholeness.** With the Holy Spirit’s help, a commitment to peacemaking, and practicing healthy conflict management strategies, positive behaviors can become natural and automatic (Sande, 2012, loc. 2121; Ephesians 4:17-32).

Revised List with Input from My Mentor/Accountability Partner

1. **Conflict is Inevitable.** The best way to deal with conflict is to stay in the situation and address it, not avoid it. (May, 2009, loc. 2181; Genesis 4:2b-6; James 3:2). Approaches to consider when dealing with conflict include: accommodating (I lose, you win); avoiding (I lose, you lose); Compromising (Sometimes I win, sometimes, you win); Competitive (I win, you lose); and Cooperating (I win, you win) (“Co-operantics,” n.d.). The best approach to conflict is to work toward cooperation.
2. **Functional Conflict Is Healthy; Dysfunctional Conflict Is Destructive.** Conflict can have benefits: improved communication and decision making; opportunities to see other points of view; and help focus on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to a person, an organization, or a congregation. Destructive conflict involves punishment, exclusion, manipulation, or revenge with the goal of controlling others for selfish ends (Sande, 2012, loc. 1906-1908; Proverbs 18:21; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Galatians 2:1-16).
3. **Begin with the End in Mind, But Know What It Will Take to Get There.** Approach conflict as a way for both parties to win and glorify God. At the same time, “maintain realistic, or slightly below realistic, expectations from the very beginning. I know this is not positive thinking or even possibility thinking, but, for me at least, I think it helps me not to throw up my hands in disappointment

after the inevitable set-backs along the way toward possible resolution” (R. Delong, personal communication, February 28, 2014; Sande, 2012, loc. 286; Proverbs 16:7; Matthew 5:24; Romans 12:17-21).

4. **Count the Cost.** Ultimately, what will hurt or help you more long term: ending the conflict or holding on to issues separating you from another person? Functional conflict accepts the consequences of our actions, even at great cost, for the opportunity to restore a relationship (Sande, 2012, loc. 2046; Matthew 5:25-26).
5. **Know Your Role.** Conflict rarely, if ever, is one sided. Take ownership of your part in the conflict and do not rationalize or minimize your responsibility. Seek grace for repentance, forgiveness, understanding of the conflict’s dynamics, and for power to change your attitudes and your actions (May 2008, loc. 2182; Amos 3:3; Luke 17:3; Philippians 4:1-3).
6. **Use a spotlight, a mirror, and Remember WWJD.** You may be able to discern the underlying cause of conflict and work the issue out by putting yourself in the other person’s place and looking at the situation from her or his point of view as well as your own (Riordan, 2014, para. 3; Proverbs 18:19; Matthew 18:21-22; Galatians 6:1). “Use a modified WWJD. Yes, we need to seek to act as Jesus would, but we also must remember that we are not Jesus. For example, He on occasion could exhibit righteous anger. We, however, must be careful attempting to exercise that on our own. We are not innately righteous...even though we may be right in the context of our conflict, the application of anger by us may well be counterproductive” (R. Delong, personal communication, February 28, 2014).
7. **Listen intently. Speak slowly. Act lovingly, and Give It Time.** Many conflicts begin due to miscommunication (Sande, 2012, loc. 414). Give the other person opportunities to speak without interruption. Ask clarifying questions and paraphrase or restate what the other has said to show that you understand their perspective. Ask God to help you “RAP: *remember* your own shortcomings; *assume* the best of people; and *pray* for them (Hamilton, 2012, p. 76; Proverbs 15:4, 19:11, 25:21-22; James 1:19). At the same time, “delay decisions. I don't mean to procrastinate, but I mean to allow things to simmer before attempting to finish the cooking. Simple purposeful delay can often allow amazing results to blossom in unexpected ways” (R. Delong, personal communication, February 28, 2014).
8. **Keep it in the Family.** Start at home, involve the church if you must, but avoid court at all costs (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Luke 17:3; Corinthians 6:1-7). My mentor, a retired real estate attorney, likes to remind me that he financed his two children’s college education in large part because family conflicts filtered out of the living room and into the courtroom.

9. **Focus on Results, not on Rights.** Be willing to bend, give up, or forfeit your rights so that you can preserve or strengthen the relationship. “Remember that relationships are more important than results in most cases” (R. DeLong, personal communication, February 28, 2014; Exodus 22:21; Colossians 3:13; Leviticus 19:18; Luke 6:29; Philippians 2:5-8).
10. **Hurt Can Lead to Wholeness, but It May Hurt Along the Way.** With the Holy Spirit’s help, a commitment to peacemaking, and practicing healthy conflict management strategies, positive behaviors can become natural and automatic (Sande, 2012, loc. 2121; Ephesians 4:17-32). At the same time, during conflict, “avoid escalation by intentionally and consciously avoiding overreactions. The adversary will often put forth totally indefensible proposals and comments early on. Just ignore them. They will not be insisted upon later. They just had to be said for prideful purposes” (R. DeLong, personal communication, February 28, 2014).

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The Bible and Sexuality

Dear Connection Family,

One of my favorite sayings is, “In springtime, a person’s thoughts turn to love.” As we look to spring for longer days and higher temperatures, I wanted to write to our congregation to share some thoughts on what the Bible has to say about love, marriage, and sexuality. As a pastor, it is not appropriate to talk about the “mechanics of sex.” These discussions are better suited for the comfort and privacy of the home. Nonetheless, we can – and should – have open and honest discussions about sexuality that reflect God’s character, purpose, and mission for all of humankind.

First – and I cannot stress this enough – “Because sex is such a powerful and essential part of what it means to be human, it must be treated with great respect” (Life Application Study Bible, 2005, [Romans] 1:26, 27, p. 1878). We are people created to love deeply and in many forms: friendship, families, parents-children, as church members, and as spouses. As Christians who believe that human beings are created in God’s image and likeness (see Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:18-25), how we handle our sexuality impacts ourselves, our families, other people, *and God* (a reality we often overlook or minimize).

Ultimately, the Bible teaches that God’s desire is for purity in all of our relationships as individuals, in families, in the church, and in the community. Devotion to one person throughout one’s lifetime in marriage is God’s best and highest plan. Marriage is designed as a covenant where both spouses promise to be present with, protect, and provide for their spouse. Sexual promiscuity – for married and unmarried persons alike – comes with a high price. Physical, relational, and spiritual bonds are

formed with every sexual encounter and their consequences can last a lifetime. This is why we encourage young people to remain sexually pure until marriage.

What about couples who have weathered infidelity, or are divorced or remarried? Jesus sets a very high standard for marriage in the Gospels, saying that divorce is only “Biblical” when sexual immorality has taken place (such as Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:1-9 and Mark 10:1-12) and Paul’s writings challenge us to reconcile with our spouses in cases of sexual sin (see 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:6-7). In fact, Jesus points to the Old Testament and says that God allows divorce as a concession to sin (the hardness of someone’s heart). Whether or not a couple can divorce over addiction to pornography, emotional affairs, or constant flirtation with someone who is not our spouse is a difficult (and unclear) issue. What seems clear to me, however, is that the Bible allows divorce when a spouse is abandoned or physically or sexually abused, as these acts violate covenant promises to live with and care for one’s spouse. I cannot find anywhere in scripture where remarriage in cases of abandonment, abuse, or a spouse’s death is considered wrong.

We live in a world that asks hard questions concerning homosexuality and same-sex marriage. As Jesus’ followers, we should never trivialize these issues or flippantly condemn persons who identify as homosexual or bisexual, or who struggle with sexual identity (Life Application Study Bible, 2005, [Matthew] 19:4-6, p. 1572). Some persons will suggest that Paul’s writings in Romans concerned pagan religious practices that involved sex with temple prostitutes (Wright, 1993, p. 413). Others say that Paul only condemned promiscuous sex (whether heterosexual and homosexual) and was not speaking about committed same-sex relationships (Wright, 1993, pp. 413-414). New Testament Scholar Craig Keener, however, comments that many Romans “regarded

homosexual practice as disgusting...and ‘against nature,’” (Keener, 1993, [Romans] 1:26-27, pp. 416-417). For me, this suggests that same-sex practices may not have been as widespread – or as accepted in ancient society – as we might have believed.

As I read Paul’s writings, they seem to follow scripture’s “train of thought” that defines marriage as being between men and women exclusively. There may be room in our discussions for the legal distinction of civil unions or partnerships, but the Bible does not seem to allow us to define committed same-sex relationships as marriage. From the Biblical and cultural evidence we have, it seems that “a distinction between persons of heterosexual and homosexual orientation was almost certainly unknown to [Paul]” (Wright, 1993, p. 413). Perhaps one day, the scientific community will help us make a final determination as to whether sexual orientation is a choice or as much a part of genetics as hair or eye color. Until then, it seems that in all matters of sexuality, our focus as Christians should be on sexual behaviors (acts) and not on orientation (identity or personhood).

When “the rubber meets the road,” the Bible teaches that human sexuality is a good gift that God gives to each of us. Unfortunately, sin impacts our sexuality in very real and lasting ways. Remembering that God has designed love and marriage not to make us happy, but to make us holy, can give us a strong foundation for working to control our desires with the Holy Spirit’s help (see 1 Corinthians 6:9, 16-20; 7:1-17; and 25-4). As I end this letter, I want to make it clear that God offers forgiveness and restoration for our sexual brokenness in whatever form that brokenness takes. We should not classify some sins as being worse than others, especially wrongs related to human sexuality. Let’s continue to explore these important issues together in a

respectful, hopeful manner, so that our views on love, sex, and marriage will be a positive witness to everyone around us.

Serving Jesus with You,

Pastor Jay

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Part Two: Application Papers

Each of Wesley Seminary's Praxis Courses require students to write Application Papers. These (often lengthy) papers collate a semester's worth of action research, interviews, guidelines, reflections, and strategies to implement, improve, and evaluate different ministry areas. This portfolio includes application papers in these areas: communicating missional opportunities within First Wesleyan Church; ways the church can celebrate the Eucharist from an Ancient-Future perspective; starting a mentoring ministry within First Wesleyan Church; an inclusion strategy for marginalized persons in our community; premarital and marital counseling resources; a congregational relationships strategy; and a network of providers for my community's financial, mental, physical, and spiritual health.

**Eyes to See and Ears to Hear: Communicating Missional Opportunities in
First Wesleyan Church (The Missional Church)**

In many ways, First Wesleyan Church (FWC), especially its younger Connection congregation, is navigating the transition from attractional church to missional church well. Bible Study, Life Group, and Sunday school attendance are healthy. Multiple events are held each year at Chillicothe High School and Poland and Yoctangee Parks. Service projects are completed throughout Chillicothe and Ross County regularly. Intentional, ongoing efforts are being made to serve away from the church's campus. At the same time, the inability to identify new attenders and track long-time members, and to communicate missional opportunities available to the congregation is a challenge. We seem to struggle to integrate newcomers into First Wesleyan's life. And, recruiting sufficient numbers of volunteers to serve within and outside of the church is a barrier preventing a more complete transition to missional approaches for ministry. A proposed Missional Action Strategy will be developed to address three critical areas: communication and leadership styles; leadership development; and volunteer recruitment and retention.

First Wesleyan lacks accurate and consistent record keeping, especially for attendance and membership. The most recent all church roster dates from September 2012 and largely is inaccurate. Consistent growth and need for more space has brought many new faces to the church and has led the addition of a third Sunday morning service. Efforts are being made to update the church roster. A pictorial directory (informal or professionally done) is a much needed tool to help get to know those who consider First Wesleyan their church home. Further, developing an "Attenders'

Snapshot” that collects basic demographics; service(s) attended; Sunday school, Life Group, or service project involvement; volunteer service; frequency of attendance; physical needs; and spiritual needs will help us to understand better who we are as a faith community. FWC needs to move beyond numbers to names. Tracking Life Group, Sunday school, and worship participation through rosters or “fill in your name” attendance sheets, for example, would allow leaders and teachers to spot attendance trends. Collecting detailed attendance information will provide opportunities to reach out to group members after noticeable absences. This one change would encourage leaders and teachers to communicate with their groups and classes outside regular meeting times.

While it outside the scope of the Missional Action Strategies detailed below, I feel strongly that more attention needs to be paid to bridging the gaps between First Wesleyan’s Traditional and Connection Services. These gaps go beyond demographics, worship preferences, or in-reach and outreach programming. First Wesleyan is experiencing a culture shift through our new Senior Pastor’s desire to see the church move closer to the missional end of the missional/attractational spectrum. In my opinion, there is a need to recognize, honor, and celebrate the unique contributions Traditional Service attenders make to First Wesleyan Church. Identifying Traditional Service attenders’ cares and concerns and appropriately addressing those needs will build goodwill and help the entire church grow closer. With the Holy Spirit’s help, we will work together as *One Congregation with Three Services Reaching One Goal: Reaching One Percent of Ross County for Christ.*

Communication and Leadership Styles

First Wesleyan is blessed with a multigenerational pastoral staff committed to leading a healthy congregation into the future. Each of our pastors expresses clearly and passionately what the church does as ministry; the various ways the church ministers to attenders and the broader community; and why the church does what it does to serve God and others. Our pastors and a number of lay leaders have mentioned the church's goal of reaching one percent of Ross County with the Gospel message and incorporating them into the FWC family in the next three to five years.

As a six-plus year attender, though, I wonder if the congregation as a whole can articulate FWC's mission and vision or how we will reach our evangelism and discipleship goal. Can Jane and Joe Church Attender explain to an interested nonbeliever why we do what we do? Are Joe and Jane aware of the many different opportunities the church provides to serve others, learn about Christ, and grow in one's faith? As a congregation, do we know and understand the church's overall spiritual and financial health? Are we aware of the church's income and debt, or the amount of money received compared to potential giving?

Just as important, does the pastoral staff feel appreciated, cared for, and secure in their ministries? Do our pastors' families feel the congregation cares about them? Do they **believe** that the congregation allows them to be who they are? Do they think they can serve where God has called them to serve without preconceived notions of what pastors' spouses or pastors' children should do? FWC's growth is noticeable – have the “people in the pews” been apprised of future plans for expanding the present campus or planting new churches? In terms of ministry support, are our Children's, Youth, Adult,

Small Groups, missionaries, and other ministry partners fully funded and fully staffed?
Are there gaps? If so, how can these gaps be filled?

I want to be very clear that I feel our pastoral staff, Local Board of Administration, and key influencers are persons of the utmost integrity and moral principles. I do not believe that information purposefully is kept from any attender who would ask questions similar to those above. In my experience, First Wesleyan has not shared this information openly and consistently. This speaks to the congregation's history and culture, one that has relied (perhaps too heavily) on the "Pastor as CEO" model. **The broader congregation often is not told how** decisions are made or reasons why particular ministry approaches are taken.

Knowing How Our Leaders Lead: An In-Depth Leadership 360 Evaluation

To help the congregation know and understand the pastors' and LBA members' communication and leadership styles, the first step in this Missional Action Strategy is to ask these leaders to complete an in-depth Leadership 360 Evaluation. Possible tools include the DISC assessment; Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator; StrengthsFinder 2.0; or a similar assessment. To aid our leaders in examining their spiritual health, they might read Peter Scazzero's *The Emotionally Healthy Church* and its companion volume, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*. In addition, each staff and LBA member, Sunday school teacher and Life Group leader will be asked to complete a SWOT Analysis. **These analyses will identify** the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats currently facing the church as a whole. This writer's SWOT Analysis is included as Appendix A.

Proposed Timeline

- January – June 2015: Pastoral and lay leadership completes Leadership 360 and SWOT Analyses and shares results with one another.
- July 2015: First Wesleyan holds a church-wide Annual Conference. The current Mission and Vision will be affirmed through a “State of the Church” address. Leaders’ SWOT Analyses will be shared with the church family.
- August 2015: The Attender Snapshot is introduced in worship services and Sunday school classes. Life Group leaders will connect with members to go over snapshot and collect information. Information learned from the Attender Snapshot will need to be coordinated with Life Group and other ministry leaders, as well as with the Children’s Pastor, to identify likely ministry volunteers.
- September 2015: Mission and Vision month that includes weekly Small Group spotlights (opportunities for fun/fellowship; Bible Study, and service and mission); Lay Leader spotlight (why that person serves and the importance and benefits of volunteering); and a month-ending Volunteer Recognition Service with volunteers’ names listed on the information sheet and displayed onscreen during announcements. Attenders’ Snapshot information will be collected and collated during the months of October and November 2015.
- December 2015: Attenders’ Snapshot information is shared with congregation as a whole. A list of top physical and material needs

attenders identified are published as potential service projects. The congregation will be asked to vote on their “Top Four” projects for 2016 so that one All Church Service Project will be completed per quarter.

- January-June 2016: Leadership prepares for Annual Review, evaluates progress, notes areas of success and difficulty, and develops a continuous improvement process.

Small Group Leadership Development and Newcomer Integration Strategies

Building community through group discipleship is one of First Wesleyan’s core values. It is embodied in the second portion of our tagline: Meet. Live. Go. To help Life Group leaders grow, I propose that each Life Group Leader and Apprentice Leader complete the Leadership 360 Evaluation as well. Sharing Gary McIntosh’s and Charles Arn’s *Ministry Rules for Small Groups* as a training tool can help both the Children’s Pastor (who oversees Life Groups) and individual Life Group leaders to evaluate group effectiveness and to plan for the future. Specific questions that should be addressed include:

Do we have enough leaders, apprentice leaders, and groups for FWC as a whole?

Are we “too wedded” to the present semester-based Life Group model?

Would having a mix of models, including established semester-based groups, increase overall participation?

Is there a need to establish accountability/Bible Study/discipleship groups that meet on an ongoing basis?

Is there a particular demographic(s) or subgroup(s) that are not being served by Life Groups?

Is an intentional group multiplication strategy in place? If not, why not?

Are Life Group members recruiting others to join a small group? If not, why not?

The Mobilization Strategy proposed in Workshop Five outlined the creation of the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) Group, a six-week Newcomer Integration group. The FAQ Group concept grew out of First Wesleyan's current practice of holding monthly FAQ lunches for persons new to the church or who would like to learn more about the congregation and our various ministries. Each week the FAQ Group meets would be dedicated to one "Big Idea." Big Ideas are concepts like First Wesleyan's Mission and Core Values; Leadership; and the Importance and Value of Small Group Involvement. Sessions might introduce newcomers to the church's ministries, programs, and missional focus. The FAQ Group would be an ideal environment for newcomers to complete an Attenders' Snapshot.

Each Life Group leader and apprentice leader will be given a copy of Gary McIntosh's and Charles Arn's *Ministry Rules for Connecting With and Assimilating Newcomers*. Leaders and apprentices will be asked to consider how these rules fit with First Wesleyan's context and how the rules could be adapted to an FAQ Group structure. Information learned from our Life Group leaders should be shared with our greeters, persons who staff the Connect (Welcome) table, and others who regularly interact with newcomers. Each Life Group leader will be asked to commit to identifying one to two apprentice leaders and potential sponsors for newcomers who would be a part of each FAQ group. These sponsors will serve as a point of contact, information provider, and possible mentor for those new to First Wesleyan.

Proposed Timeline

Mid-December 2014: Present FAQ Group Concept and Missional Action Strategy to Senior Pastor and Children's/Life Group Pastor for their review and consideration. Trainings for Life Group leaders would begin to be held on a semi-annual or quarterly basis.

January 4, 2015: Life Group Leader Training (this has already been scheduled). If approved, Life Group leaders would be asked to complete a SWOT Analysis of First Wesleyan Church.

April 2015: Life Group Leader Retreat. At the retreat, we will review findings from the Leadership 360 and SWOT Analyses and discuss possible new Life Group models. If there is momentum to take a "trial run" for new Life Group models during the summer, initial plans can be made while on retreat.

September 2015: First quarterly or semi-annual Leadership Training. Those in attendance will debrief, talk about lessons learned, and share in creating a continuous improvement process.

Volunteer Recruitment Strategy

In their immensely practical book *What Every Pastor Should Know*, Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn explode the myth of the "80/20 Principle" for churches – and not in a positive way. The authors note, "*REV!* magazine found that our old assumption about 20 percent of the members doing 80% of the work is optimistic. It's even fewer!" (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 135). While this writer has observed that more than 20% of First Wesleyan attenders serve the congregation on a regular basis, more volunteers are needed in FWC Kids, the church's children's ministry. Additional help is a "firsthand

need,” – the author volunteers in FWC Kids’ Loft Ministry to first through fifth grades on a regular three-month rotation.

Before more energy is expended in recruiting persons to fill ministry gaps, we need to begin by asking addressing a critical reality. Is it more important to have more volunteers or to have the *right* volunteers? (Emphasis added). To this end, First Wesleyan would benefit from having each volunteer complete a Spiritual Gifts Inventory. Volunteers’ gift(s) should be compared to the role(s) they currently fulfill to determine if the person is serving in a way(s) best suited to their God-given abilities and natural bent. A second tool is a Volunteer Survey. Questions for this survey could include:

What volunteer role(s) do you currently take on at FWC?

Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience as a volunteer? (A Likert-type scale can be used to rate the person’s experience and to average scores across the group).

Do you feel equipped to carry out your role(s) effectively? (Again, a Likert-type scale can be used, and space should be given for detailed comments).

Is there an area(s) you feel are more suited to your passions and abilities or that you would like to explore?

Do you consider yourself to be a visionary? An administrator? A worker? (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 142). Definitions and examples of visionary leaders, administrators, and workers will be included.

The following portion of the overall Missional Action Strategy lists core values for volunteers adapted from Gary McIntosh’s and Charles Arn’s *Ministry Rules for Volunteer Involvement*.

- The maximum length of service will be one year (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 135). Volunteers have permission and complete freedom not to accept a second term. They may choose to volunteer in a new or different ministry area or remain in the role(s) in which they serve currently.
- Ministry descriptions will be developed for each role, task or need (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 137). Each volunteer will have the opportunity to review the role's duties, expectations, and available resources. Contact information for substitutes, other leaders, the Children's Pastor, and Pastoral staff will be included with each ministry description.
- Training in evangelism and discipleship (basic faith questions and answers) will be offered so that volunteers will feel comfortable in various situations. Children's Ministry volunteers will be encouraged to contact parents and share their interactions with our young people.
- As First Wesleyan continues to add multimedia capabilities to ministries and programs, volunteers will have opportunities to be trained in technology.
- Those ministry tasks that can be scheduled will be to enhance efficiency, increase participation, and improve communication and performance.
- Once per year, attenders will be surveyed and asked if they are feeling led to begin new ministries or become involved in existing ministries. Ministry Action Plans for new ministries will be developed. Those interested in working with established ministries will receive training (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 145).

This Missional Action Strategy proposes setting a goal of involving at least one third of new attenders (those who have worshipped at FWC for less than two years) in outward-focused missional activities in 2015. Another aspect of volunteer recruitment that should be considered is extending a vision for leadership development beyond church-based ministries and small groups. **Attenders should be** encouraged to serve their neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces or to partner with nonprofits and social service agencies. Another option is to become involved with local government to make their communities better places to live. This way, *non-members* are reached and served, and Christ's mission is extended into the neighborhood (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 138; Jn. 1:14, The Message).

Last, the pastoral staff and Local Board of Administration should consider establishing the position of (lay) Ministry Coordinator. This person "would meet with those who might be interested in serving somewhere in the church and work with them to find a good match" (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 149). The Ministry Coordinator would need to be trained in giving and assessing Spiritual Gifts tests and be in constant communication with the pastoral staff and other leaders to have her or his pulse on ministry opportunities available for First Wesleyan attenders. This position would free the pastoral staff to focus on other high priority projects and pressing ministry needs. It also would convey to the church family that persons do not have to be "professionals" to be in ministry.

Proposed Timeline

January-March 2015: Identify all roles, tasks, and ministry positions and create appropriate Ministry Descriptions.

April-May 2015: Volunteers complete Spiritual Gift Inventories and Volunteer Surveys.

June-July 2015: Inventory and survey information is collated and analyzed.

September 2015: Children's Ministry Worker Training, Life Group Leader Training, and other volunteer trainings.

Concluding Thoughts

This writer is (painfully) aware that the preceding Missional Action Strategy offers more questions than answers. First Wesleyan historically has not been an information- or communication-driven church. The congregation's current transition from a mainly attractional approach to a combination of attractional and missional methods has been successful in many ways. Charismatic senior leadership, attenders' profound generosity, a significant number of volunteers and heightened visibility within the community is the foundation of this successful shift. FWC is a congregation that is passionate, hard-working and willing to experiment with new ideas and concepts. Many of our attenders serve from the conviction that offering "church for people who don't like church" matters in our city and county (E. A., personal communication).

This success, however, has caused us to have built a cart before finding the best suited horse to guide the cart where it needs to go (if you will excuse this overused metaphor). The attractional to missional shift will not live up to its potential if the church as a body of believers resists evaluating ministry effectiveness. Currently, this writer is not in a position to mandate change. These strategies simply represent the observations and critique of a volunteer leader and ministry student.

Nonetheless, this paper will be presented to First Wesleyan's Senior and Children's Pastors in the hope that it will provide useful suggestions to improve the

church's ministries. We must continually and consistently communicate the "why and how" of our desire to be a more missional congregation. By intentionally examining communication and leadership styles, ways of better integrating newcomers into the church family, and increasing the number of volunteers, First Wesleyan's culture will continue to shift from one of "Come and See" what God is doing in the church to one that challenges every attender to "Go and Be" the people of God that God has called us to be.

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Ancient-Future Eucharist: Communion in First Wesleyan Connection
(Christian Worship)

Sanctuary Arrangement. For this week’s Connection worship celebration, a simple, rough-hewn wooden table is placed in the Sanctuary’s center. A large loaf of bread is placed on a simple black plate and is laid next to a plain, brown stoneware chalice. A black burnished metal cross is placed on the table’s far corner. Chairs are arranged in a circular pattern around the Table, with aisles spaced at equal intervals for ease of movement. In each corner of the Sanctuary, smaller tables are arranged in the same manner as the center Table. The lights are dimmed, and a single white spotlight illuminates the Center table.

Note: this is the first time the Sanctuary has been arranged in this manner. It is designed to heighten anticipation for Communion. Hopefully, it will not be a distraction.

Worship Flow. The service is ordered to follow established, familiar movements. Background music plays until everyone has gathered in their seats. Worship begins with a warm welcome from the Worship Leader and an invitation to join in a congregational song, “Let God Arise,” by Chris Tomlin. Brief announcements follow, after which an attendee offers a prayer for everyone assembled. We return to worship in song, singing “10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)” by Matt Redman to reinforce that we have gathered for a holy purpose – to worship the Lord. A third song, “Kingdom and a King” (Robbie Seay Band) is used to signal preparation for our time in God’s Word. A member of the congregation comes to the side of the Table nearest the bread and reads Genesis 18:1-15. Instead of the customary sermon, however, the Pastor (standing in the place vacated by the lector) shares a short homily on the ancient practices of hospitality, its importance

for Abraham and Sarah, and for us as well. Following the celebration of Holy Communion, the congregation, still standing, sings “Death in His Grave” by John Mark McMillan. Worship ends with the Pastor giving the Great Challenge. The entire service is patterned on “the taking, blessing, breaking, and giving of bread and wine” re-enacted in the Ancient Eucharist (Patterson, 1994, p. 208).

The Pastor circles the table, smiling and making eye contact with each person, and says:

“This morning, we are all gathered around a table, a symbol of acceptance, refreshment, and hospitality; a place where God Himself declares that you are wanted and loved. ‘Through hospitality, Christians imitate God’s welcome. Therefore, hospitality is not a program, not a single hour or ministry in the life of the congregation. It stands at the heart of a Christian way of life, a living icon of wholeness in God’” (Bass, 2006, p. 82). At its core, hospitality is an invitation to enter another’s world, to share in life’s struggles and triumphs, joy and pain, hurt and healing. As we enter into this time of Holy Communion, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit invite you to share in a sacred meal served at a Welcome Table and given to you for healing, redemption, restoration, strength, and service to others.”

Scripture. “Will you stand with me as we read God’s Word together?”

The congregation stands and reads 2 Peter 1:3-11 in unison. The scripture is printed in the Worship Guide and projected on screens at the front and rear of the Sanctuary.

Confession. “God has invited each of us on a journey with Him. He asks us to love Him with everything that is in us: heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love others the way

He loves us. If this is the journey you are taking now, or if it is a journey you would like to start, God is here, ready and waiting to walk alongside you.

Everyone who truly wants to change, to lead a new life, to follow God's direction, and live in ways that please Him is invited to come to the Table. As you prepare to receive the bread and the juice with its strength for your journey, take a moment to confess to God your need for His forgiveness and love. And as you confess, know that God hears the cries of your heart and forgives you.

Blessing of the Elements. Join me as we ask God to bless our time of Holy Communion. You will find the words in your Worship Guide. They will also be projected on the screens at the front and rear of the Sanctuary." **The Pastor raises her/his hands over the congregation as she/he and people read together:**

"God of grace and mercy, we thank You for Your love, a love so great that it moved You to set us free from our sins and the death our sin brings. You have redeemed us and call us Your children.

We thank You for Jesus, Your Son who died to save us, and for Your Holy Spirit who welcomes us to Your Table. Guide us now as we remember the suffering of our Lord. Help us to understand our salvation's cost. Watch over us as we enter into this journey with You and with each other.

Holy Spirit, bless the bread and the cup we are about to receive, that as we share Jesus' Welcome Meal, our bodies and souls will be strengthened and restored through Jesus' body and blood, broken and shed for us. In His name we pray. Amen."

The Pastor then instructs those assisting with Holy Communion to take their places at the tables in each corner.

Words of Institution. “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread **(the Pastor takes the bread and holds it at chest level)**, and when he had given thanks, he broke it **(the Pastor breaks the bread, turns and shows the congregation the two halves)** and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup **(the Pastor holds the cup at chest level, turns, and presents the cup to the congregation)**, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25, New International Version)

The congregation is asked to move slowly to the table nearest where they are seated, with those in the center area coming to the large Table.

“As we prepare to receive the bread and the juice, I ask you to take a piece of the bread, dip it into the cup, and carry the bread back to your seat, where you will remain standing.” **(The congregation does so. The Pastor and those assisting her/him in distributing the elements greet each person with the words, “Jesus’ body and blood, given for you ____” and repeat the person’s name if it is known. After all have returned to their places, the Pastor takes a piece of the bread, dips it into the cup and holds it up for all to see).**

“The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, broken and shed for you, to preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Take and eat this remembering that Christ died for you. Feed on Him in your heart, by faith, and be thankful.”

[Adapted from the Order of the Lord’s Supper – as part of a service, §5615, The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church 2008]. (Kelly, Brecheisen, Haines, McClung, Watkins, & Wilson, 2008, p. 212-213).

The Pastor raises her/his hands over the congregation and shares the Great Challenge: This morning, we have gathered together to be welcomed by God to His Table, a Table of Blessing, Healing, and Transformation. Remember that this is not our table. It is God's Table. Go from this place committed to welcome strangers into your lives, sharing the faith and hope you have in Jesus, who gave Himself for you, for me, and for the world. To Him who keeps you from falling and brings you into His glorious presence, free from sin and guilt, and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 1:24).

(Background music resumes as the congregation leaves the Sanctuary).

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Making Connections: Mentoring as Ministry at First Wesleyan Church
(Congregational Spiritual Formation)

First Wesleyan's Current Practices

At First Wesleyan, discipleship is both stealthy and formal. Among our junior and senior high youth, for example, parents lead young ladies and young men in small groups. These parents and a few of our college age Emerging Adults also have one-to-one mentoring relationships with some of the teens. A number of our junior and senior high teens (male and female) serve in the nursery, toddler, and kids' ministries with their parents and their peers. In Connection (our emergent worship gatherings), a number of our study-based Life Groups begin with communal interpretation, with the expectation that individual mentoring will take place (Nouwen, Christenson, & Laird, 2006, p. xvii) as a result of taking part in larger group discipleship.

Meals and meaningful events have a funny way of fostering mentoring at First Wesleyan. Monthly Men's Breakfasts, Women's Ministry gatherings, and informal fellowship times for our adult Sunday school classes seem to "till the soil" for intentional one-to-one guidance. I have a few acquaintances who have sought mentors after taking part in weekly prayer meetings or after the church's annual Advent Prayer Vigil. I also am getting to know a group of friends who were affected profoundly by their experiences on Chrysalis flights and the Walk to Emmaus. They sponsor pilgrims regularly and have mentored pilgrims who have finished their flights and walks.

First Wesleyan's approach to mentoring happens intentionally and it happens organically. Part of this is due to persons' involvement as disciples or mentors and part of this is due to community being a Connection core value. From my observations, the

people I know who are discipled regularly or who disciple others regularly, also serve outside the church. Their lives have changed and they are changing others' lives, too.

Mentoring and Spiritual Direction: A Brief Overview

Traditionally, Spiritual Direction has involved a guide (director) and pilgrim (fellow disciple) who explore the pilgrim's life and faith, particularly the ways God has worked and is at work in the pilgrim's life, (Nouwen, Christenson, & Laird, 2006, p. xix). Spiritual Direction (or Christian mentoring) is very different from therapy or behavior modification. The goal is to point both mentor and mentoree to God as both rely on the Holy Spirit for wisdom and discernment (Suslick, 2013, para. 4). Working in tandem, guide and pilgrim explore ways of fostering greater intimacy with God. They seek to confirm the mentoree's identity as God's beloved child. They partner to identify the follower's unique kingdom responsibility (Anderson & Reese, 1999, p. 12).

Direction also is linked to private and public worship: prayer; scripture and devotional reading; praise in song; fellowship; receiving the sacraments; fasting; and acts of service (Harper, 2003, p. 71). Contemplative prayer, personal retreats, journaling, and examining one's motives are just a few activities designed to help Christians focus on the Holy Spirit's work in their lives. Ultimately, the goal is to help pilgrims answer the following questions: Who am I to God? Who is God for me? How do I hear from God? Where do I fit in in life? And, What do I do with my life now? (Nouwen, Christenson, & Laird, 2006).

Improving First Wesleyan's Discipleship and Mentoring Programs

An area my church's one-to-one and group discipleship can improve in is more consistent communication and marketing. Connection Life Groups are semester based and a big push to involve the congregation usually happens a month or so before the

groups start. Having members and leaders share how they have been mentored individually from being in a Life Group can increase group participation. It also will help mentoring to be seen as a partnership and not as a formal teacher-student relationship. Sharing short video clips of Life Group activities, inviting Connection attenders to a meal and talking about discipleship is another strategy to consider. Leveraging and strengthening the church's involvement with the Chrysalis and Emmaus movements mentioned earlier should be considered, too. I know quite a few persons who have leadership gifts that have not been invited to Chrysalis or Emmaus. These women and men would benefit from the experience and I am sure the whole church would as well.

I think First Wesleyan will do a better job of making disciples by asking our attenders if they are being disciplined. Are they discipling others? Do they see a value in discipleship? What discipleship approaches really would change their lives? We also need to determine commitment and interest levels. Do prospective mentors and mentorees want a formal or relaxed approach? Is there a desire for ongoing discipleship or would people prefer a set time, say six months or so? Would people like to be paired with someone from the same or a different generation? (Laird, 2006). Do the church's key influencers support one-on-one discipling? Answering these important questions will provide insights to improve the mentoring already happening in our congregation and will identify issues to consider in launching new discipleship programs.

Strategies for Moving Forward

First Wesleyan's new ministry to middle and older adults, Primetime, is set to launch in January 2014. Purposefully targeting our Traditionalists and Boomers by appealing to mentoring as a way to leave a legacy can leverage these generations'

wisdom and experiences. At the same time, the entire congregation would benefit from learning about the discipleship already happening with our teens, in Connection, and in other informal ways they might not think about or be aware of.

I believe using a Life Coach discipleship model would be more appealing to many of our attenders, especially the men (the congregation is made up of roughly 65% females and 35% males). Using the term spiritual direction with my church family would turn quite a few of them off. In my opinion, spiritual direction implies a level of spiritual maturity that many of our potential mentors would say they do not have - even though I believe they do. Focusing on individuals' current life situations, spiritual goals, available options, strengths and weaknesses, and the will to change (Suslick, 2013, para. 2, 3) would make mentoring seem practical, not religious.

For mentoring to become an "ordinary practice" at First Wesleyan, any approach to one-to-one discipleship has to be personal. Our attenders need to hear and accept that discipleship is an essential, not optional, part of the Christian life. The whole church will benefit from praying for guidance together in considering spiritual direction and making a commitment either to be led by someone or to lead someone. Mentors need to be coached on identifying potential mentorees and trained in setting appropriate boundaries, creating spaces where both the guide and pilgrim can be vulnerable, and ensuring confidentiality (Anderson & Reese, 1999, p. 13). In the end, the congregation needs to see that discipleship is not doing more for God, but learning to be the people God intends for us to be.

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**Reflecting the Neighborhood: An Inclusion Strategy for First Wesleyan
Church, Chillicothe, Ohio**

To learn ways an almost all white church congregation could begin to form relationships with other ethnic and cultural groups, the author interviewed two former colleagues who serve their local churches and who are members of blended families. One colleague is an African American pastor married to a Caucasian spouse; they parent two bi-racial daughters. The second colleague and her husband are Caucasian and the adoptive parents of two African American children. Respondents raised issues ranging from power dynamics and access to economic and social services to the need for friendship and shared experiences. The potential for resisting efforts to increase diversity are mentioned as well. Approaches to greater inclusion require active and empathetic listening, the support of all involved, and a desire to be a constant and consistent presence within the community.

The reality of ministry situations at First Wesleyan Church is that they mirror consonant adaptation (Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University, n.d., p. 5). The congregation is homogenous, professional/working class, and Caucasian. By and large, the congregation is reflective of the surrounding county and larger region's economic and demographic makeup. However, over a tenth of Chillicothe, Ohio's population is non-white; African American, Asian, Hispanic, and multi-ethnic families live in the church's immediate neighborhood and within Chillicothe's city limits (United States Census Bureau, 2014).

Among the church's attenders, there are small, relatively isolated pockets of selective adaptation (Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University, n.d., p. 5). This

occurs mostly through a small number of multi-ethnic families and five families who have adopted or who care for non-white children and relatives. This embracing of diversity and appreciation and advocacy for non-white culture has had little noticeable impact on the church's ethnic composition.

To fulfill the assignment's requirements, the author interviewed two former colleagues who serve their local churches and who are members of blended families. One colleague is an African American pastor married to a Caucasian spouse; they parent two bi-racial daughters. The second colleague and her husband are Caucasian and the adoptive parents of an African American son and daughter. Both asked to remain anonymous but graciously shared their experiences. Each offered suggestions on how an almost completely white congregation can reach out to diverse communities that surround it with dignity and integrity.

Both respondents shared feelings of exclusion by the society that surrounds them, but for different reasons. As an African American, the author's colleague has felt the pain of being estranged from other church groups that "don't have a mixed racial makeup" (Anonymous, personal communication, February 14, 2014). This individual expressed a sense of resignation that many churches and their leaders did not want to build relationships with his family or congregation. Rather, they preferred a transactional acquaintance: "You don't really hear from these groups until they need information or help" (Anonymous, personal communication, February 14, 2014). An unwillingness to engage persons and groups with different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, yet wanting to have their "perspective" on a particular issue(s) is condescension, not cooperation.

Further, well-meaning intentions, particularly the belief that 21st century America is a “post-racial society,” can serve to perpetuate division, injustice, and oppression. Power dynamics, access to economic, judicial, and social services, and opportunities to better oneself financially, physically, and socially still favor white America. As the author’s second respondent stated so forcefully,

“‘Color-blindedness,’ or the profession that “we don't see color” as an affirmation of treating everyone equally...is NOT treating everyone equally. People of color have different experiences (individually and societally), are viewed and treated differently by people such as authorities, police, employers, etc., and *need to have these differences known, affirmed, and discussed by the larger group* (church, school, family, etc.)” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 18, 2014, emphasis added).

Education, involvement, and cultural awareness are critical for First Wesleyan Church to work toward inclusion within its community and the congregation. Confronting stereotypes and recognizing diversity within ethnic communities can promote a sense of welcome. The first respondent noted that not all African Americans like the same music or enjoy sports (Anonymous, personal communication, February 14, 2014). Further, First Wesleyan’s members and leadership need to accept that working to be more ethnically and culturally diverse will be uncomfortable for all involved - including historically marginalized groups. Cultural adaptation is something that will be embraced, accepted, and resisted to varying degrees, depending on the level of trust established between the church and the communities it seeks to get to know.

If steps toward a more inclusive congregation and/or developing multiethnic ministries are taken, First Wesleyan Church must resist the temptation to want to be

seen as being progressive. Rudy Rasmus pulls no punches in this regard when he writes, “[A] sense of entitlement – that we deserve a positive response – ruins our motivation and clouds our relationships” (Rasmus, 2007, loc. 351). At the same time, First Wesleyan must be willing to enter into others’ lives, share their experiences, and reflect on ways to confront the challenges minority communities face in Chillicothe and Ross County. As a church, we must involve ourselves in our neighbors’ lives intentionally and *with our neighbors’ permission and support* (emphasis added). In time and with effort, First Wesleyan’s neighbors will recognize that church members’ compassion is genuine and heartfelt. Proximity does not equal inclusion; however, sharing experiences can lead to inclusion.

Building on this discussion, the author’s colleagues offered the following steps to foster a greater sense of welcome and invitation for all people at First Wesleyan Church:

1. “Don't try to focus programming for groups [create programs for the entire church]. They will see through that a mile away” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 14, 2014).
 2. “Get involved with community programs that can help educate. For example, Black History programs are a great way to learn about others in the Black community” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 14, 2014).
- Within Chillicothe, this could mean that First Wesleyan Church makes real and lasting efforts to partner with the NAACP and the Carver Community Center. This involves working with local African American community leaders to explore partnerships that meet felt needs in underserved

- communities. Then, we will need to commit to working together to address those needs and follow through on that commitment.
3. Three, church members must examine their beliefs and motives to ensure that their intentions are godly and honorable. “It troubles me [that there is a widespread] cultural assumption that every child has access to the same...supports in the wider community” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 18, 2014). As Jesus followers, First Wesleyan attenders need to own and confess our lack of engagement with non-white communities and for insulating the church from our neighbors to a large degree. If First Wesleyan is to be a church that reflects our neighborhood’s diversity, members must listen to our neighbors’ concerns to build credibility. “Empathetic listening builds trust and respect, enables people to reveal their emotions...facilitates openness...and creates an environment that encourages collaborative problem-solving” (Riordan, 2014, para. 7).
 4. Invite others different from you into your personal circle and let them see your successes and your failures (Richmond, 2014, para. 7). “Many times we only let our hair down when around those that we comfortable with, so it takes time to expand that comfort zone” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 14, 2014).
 5. Last, and most important, “Be friendly! I always say that my friends have been to my house, and I have been to theirs. Friendship means closeness, and this can't happen if you are not willing to get close enough to be a friend” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 14, 2014).

In his book *TOUCH: Pressing against the Wounds of a Broken World*, Pastor Rudy Rasmus contends that churches have three options when reaching out to their communities. Congregations can nurture ministries to other groups; provide care in or among these groups; or they can partner with other groups (Rasmus, 2007, loc. 992, emphasis added). Outreach to other groups runs the risk of being patronizing or promoting dependence instead of growth and independence. Serving in or among heterogeneous groups, while well-intentioned, can perpetuate division if efforts to build respectful relationships and dialogue do not take place. Ministry that seeks to include marginalized groups is countercultural and can be difficult. Rasmus puts it bluntly: “I had to defend their right to be there” (Rasmus, 2007, loc. 194). If First Wesleyan ministered with the marginal, we may encounter needs for economic, physical, and social justice that could force the church out of its comfort zone.

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Premarital and Marital Pastoral Counseling

Pastoral Counseling Policies (Core Convictions)

As one who is ordained but not serving in a formal ministry position, the author is not asked often to provide pastoral, pre-marital, or marital counseling. Thus, the thoughts in this brief paper, extended outline, and appendix rely heavily on concepts from textbooks, blogs, and personal interviews with fellow pastors who have many years of ministry experience. Regardless of the type of counseling requested, one of the author's goals is, if the counselee desires, to connect the person(s) seeking counseling to the church's other ministries and supports after formal counseling ends (Childs, 2001, p. 161).

Since "finite time is a defining feature of parish ministry" (Childs, 2001, p. 155) for pastoral counseling of any type to be effective, it has to be brief in duration and focused on practical outcomes. Activities or tasks should be ones that the counselee(s) can implement on their own with other resources and support from the pastor. To ensure a commitment to focused, short-term pastoral care, the author has decided to follow a colleague's suggestion and limit pastoral counseling in general to three to six sessions of 60 to 90 minutes each (roughly three to six hours' total). "If more help is needed, I refer to a professional counselor" (L. W., personal communication, March 28, 2014).

To gain a good grasp of the situation, clarifying questions should be asked at an initial counseling session. These questions are an important part of the intake process. Questions include:

- “Why have you sought *me* out for this problem?” (Willimon, 2002, p. 179). The answer to this question can help the pastor determine if pastoral counseling is sufficient to meet the person’s need or if more specialized treatment is called for.
- “Why are you here? What would you like to get for yourself out of counseling?” (Vernick, 2013, para. 12). These questions can help identify intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.
- What is working in your relationship and why? This helps to focus the counselee(s) on their strengths and maintain a positive attitude toward the counseling process itself

Goal setting and evaluation also is essential to point the counselee toward tangible results. Asking the questions, “How would you go about changing your situation?” or “What are you doing to bring about change in your life?” can help the counselee recognize important “step-by-step success[es] toward each goal” (Thomas, 2001, p. 144).

Both partners must be sincere in wanting counseling and be willing to do the hard work that change requires (Vernick, 2013, para. 10). “Often times it was clear they had their minds made up before I ever met with them” (F. F., personal communication, March 29, 2014). The pastor’s role is to the parish and the community of which the parish is a part; individuals, couples, or families do not have to attend or be members of the congregation to receive counsel (L. W., personal communication, March 28, 2014; J. W., personal communication, March 28, 2014).

Pre-Marital Counseling

Strategic Goal:

“In premarital counseling, my goals are to (1) help the couple understand the primary areas that can cause problems in their relationship and (2) establish a relationship that may lead to further pastoral help as needed in the future” (L. W., personal communication, March 28, 2014). A difficult question, and one the author has not yet resolved, is whether or not he would officiate a wedding service between a professed Christian and someone who is not yet a Christian. The author’s former senior pastor, who is one of the author’s mentors, has the clear conviction that he will not perform these weddings (F. F., personal communication, March 29, 2014). Another colleague, however, takes a different view:

While Scripture is clear that a believer should not marry an unbeliever, I do not think marriage is restricted to believers alone. And, since it is an institution created by God, I believe it is one that should still be carried out by the church. Therefore, I do perform marriage ceremonies for unbelievers, but only after they’ve sat through 4-6 hours of counseling in which they will hear the repeated proclamation of the gospel. (R. D., personal communication, April 1, 2014).

At this stage of the author’s ministry journey, this is the position he feels most comfortable with. Before making a decision, as an inexperienced pastor, the author is committed to praying, seeking God’s leading, and asking other trusted pastors for their input and discernment.

If asked to perform a wedding ceremony when one or both partners have been remarried, counseling is required. Time must be spent to explore past issues, both partners’ feelings toward the past spouse(s) – the “ex” and the person they are going to

marry), especially when children are involved. “Will the parent(s) have continued contact with their child(ren) after remarriage or will the children be ignored?” (F. F., personal communication, March 29, 2014).

Pre-Marital Counseling Outline

I. Intake/Pre-Session

- a. Clarifying question: Does the couple desire a secular or explicitly Christian wedding?
- b. If couple chooses an explicitly Christian wedding, pastor and couple negotiate a pre-marital counseling schedule
 - i. Minimum of 2 sessions, maximum of 6 sessions, 60 minutes each
 1. Couple agrees in writing to number of sessions, set appointment schedule, and homework
 2. Couple only participants – no parents
 - a. “A lot of times, I had parents setting up appointments and wanting to come with the couple. That was not acceptable” (F. F., personal communication, March 29, 2014).
- c. Read Genesis 24 and Matthew 19:1-2 (Imago Dei Church, n.d.)
 - i. Marriage as Covenant or Contract? How does the couple view their upcoming marriage?
- d. Clients complete couples survey of potential topics that can be addressed in counseling
 - i. 1-5 Likert Scale: 1 = Not At All and 5 = Must Have, which of these topics would you like to devote one counseling session to?
 1. Finances: budgeting, saving, emergency fund, credit, insurance, retirement planning/investments,
 2. Does the couple wish to have a session with a mentor couple from the church?
 3. Support Networks: Does each partner have same-gender friends to provide accountability, encouragement, fellowship, and fun?
 4. Christian Views on Sexuality
 - ii. Couple takes ownership in counseling sessions, “charts the course”

II. Session #1: “Family Matters”

- a. Discuss questions/comments from Gen. 24 and Matt. 19:1-2
- b. Couple shares their stories, faith, beliefs about marriage, engagement, parental roles, family backgrounds (Imago Dei Church, n.d.)
- c. Homework

- i. Create a Resource Map – an infographic that links persons, books, media, etc. that couples can use to supplement pre-marital counseling sessions
 - 1. Another way for couple to take ownership of the counseling process
 - 2. “People have within their experience a wealth of skills and resources, both known and unknown to them” (Thomas, 2001, p. 140).
 - ii. Read Genesis 2:15-25; Ephesians 5:22-33; Romans 5:1-11
 - iii. Write down any questions about reading
 - iv. Take Gallup StrengthsFinder assessment online (<http://strengths.gallup.com/default.aspx>)
- III. Session #2: “What’s Love Got to Do with It?”
 - a. Q & A over homework / share StrengthsFinder results
 - b. Shared discussion about society’s/church’s/couple’s view on love
 - i. Ephesians 5: Love, Honor, Respect, Mutuality
 - 1. “My overall strategy is for them to understand the marriage relationship, as it's spelled out in Scripture. I hope to provide a few practical tools for guiding them in this endeavor” (J. W., personal communication, March 28, 2014).
 - c. Homework:
 - i. Read summary of *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman (provided by pastor); and Ecclesiastes 5:1-8
 - ii. Write down any questions about reading
 - iii. Each partner will draw a picture or storyboard how she/he communicates and makes decisions as an individual and how she/he would like to make decisions in the future as a couple (Welch, 2014, para. 2)
 - iv. Write down three (3) practical and doable ways your spouse-to-be can show you love and respect
- IV. Session #3: “We Need To Talk”
 - a. Q & A over homework; share pictures/storyboards; share primary and secondary love languages
 - b. Discuss differences between love and respect – and the importance of both in marriage
 - c. Highlight the Three C’s of Marital Intimacy: Closeness, Communication, Commitment (Whitbourne, 2012, March 17).
 - d. Share communication strengths and focus on what communication strategies work well in the relationship
 - e. Homework:
 - i. Read Song of Songs 2:1-17, 4:1-15, 8:1-14; and the introduction to *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy Keller (provided by pastor)
 - ii. Write down any questions you have about the reading

- iii. Write down family's values/teachings on physical intimacy (sex); your own views on physical intimacy; and society's views on physical intimacy
 - 1. Look for areas of agreement and disagreement
 - f. For Further Reading (if couple is interested): *Love Talk Starters: 275 Questions to Get Your Conversations Going* by Les and Leslie Parrott
- V. Session #4: "I Am My Beloved's and My Beloved Is Mine"
 - a. Q & A over homework
 - b. Couple shares values on physical intimacy, areas of agreement and disagreement, and why those similarities and differences are important
 - c. Great (Marriage) Expectations: Sex, Money, Married Life
 - i. "For instance...the marriage foundation, familial backgrounds, and handling/managing conflict within the home...I spend a lot of time discussing expectations and where those come from" (J. W., personal communication, March 28, 2014).
 - ii. "SEXpectations": not mechanics, frequency, or physical issues, but fears and concerns
 - 1. For Further Reading: *Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage* by Ed Wheat, M.D., & Gaye Wheat; *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* by Tim LaHaye & Beverly LaHaye; and *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* by Gary Thomas
 - iii. "Money Talks"
 - 1. Read together: Proverbs 22:1-11
 - 2. Brief discussion on importance of knowing and understanding how each partner views, values, and handles money
 - 3. For Further Reading: *Dave Ramsey's Complete Guide to Money* by Dave Ramsey; *Money and Marriage God's Way* by Howard Dayton
- iv. "Them's Fightin' Words": Conflict in marriage
 - 1. If, not when: Conflict is inevitable
 - 2. Active and empathetic listening
 - 3. How to fight fair
 - 4. "Do Nothing Option": When agreement or compromise just can't be reached, table the discussion, cool off, and set a time to resume in the near future
 - a. For Further Reading: *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before – And After – You Marry* by Les and Leslie Parrott; *The Good Fight* by Les and Leslie Parrott; *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande

- VI. Pastor's Parting Gift for completing Pre-Marital Counseling Curriculum: *Couples Devotional Bible* (New International Version) and *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* by Timothy Keller

Marital Counseling

Vernick (2013) cautions that joint or couples counseling may not be the best fit for a given situation. She advises counselors to look for red flags during the initial meeting or as part of the screening process. Whitbourne (2012, March 20) suggests that the counselor ask the couple if they want to save the marriage or if they have truly "called it quits" (para. 1). The author's colleague Lawrence Wilson, Pastor of Fall Creek Wesleyan Church in Fishers, IN, echoes Whitbourne's assessment:

In marital counseling, my objectives are (1) bring the couple to a point of decision about whether they will be reconciled (generally people don't come for counsel until they are contemplating divorce) (personal communication, March 28, 2014).

Vernick (2013) notes areas of concern counselors should be wary of. Such situations include those where one partner seems apprehensive or reluctant to speak and where answers do not seem honest or forthright (Vernick, 2013, para. 2). Pastors should be wary when one partner tries to control the counseling session; minimizes his or her shortcomings; makes the session uncomfortable for all involved; or shows an unwillingness for the spouse or partner to share his or her perspective (Vernick, 2013, para. 2). If only one partner engages in the counseling process, it may be better to suggest individual counseling.

Couples counseling likely will not be successful when all responsibility for the issue at hand or all the energy to change rests on one person (Vernick, 2013, para. 3). In

such cases, it is critical that the counselor establish and maintain objectivity to avoid the appearance of favoring one partner over the other while, at the same time, avoid allowing partners to assign blame to the other (Whitbourne, 2012, March 20, para. 7). One goal of marital counseling should be to identify and modify dysfunctional behavior (Whitbourne, 2012, March 20, para. 8). The pastoral counselor should have strategies in place to help in cases of abuse, addiction, financial or gambling problems, potential or actual self-harm, or where anger management is needed. Just as those who come for counseling should have a resource map of helps available to them, the pastor will benefit from creating an infographic that displays her or his referral network.

The foundation for any and all pastoral care situations is “to give the counselees biblical hope very early in the counseling process, and the overall goal is to help the counselees become more Christ-like in their lives” (R. D., personal communication, April 1, 2014). The Christian gospel proclaims that change always is possible and that this involves both partners in the marriage examining their motivations, personalities, upbringing/family influences, previous relationships, and faith. Modeling healing, hope, and holiness in Jesus’ name can be the needed catalyst to help couples “confront the underlying ‘truths’ both partners have accepted as normal” (Welch, 2014, para. 7). Further outlining his marital counseling objectives, Lawrence Wilson notes:

(2) Help them to assess their own need to give and receive forgiveness, that is, to humble themselves in this process, and (3) refer them, if needed, for longer term therapy. Beyond that, one of the things I do is help them see themselves more clearly, and help them see the biblical principles that relate to their situation (personal communication, March 28, 2014).

Childs (2001) notes that Time Limited Counseling sessions will deal with negative interactions between counselor and client (p. 160). One proactive step the pastoral counselor can take to reduce the possibility of negative interactions is seeking to nurture spaces where each person feels safe in expressing her or his emotions. The pastor also should seek to mitigate the counselee's fear of self-disclosure (Whitbourne, 2012, March 20). Counselors will need to address active and empathetic listening skills and guide the couple to work toward mutual support and understanding (Whitbourne, 2012, March 20, para. 10). There is a very real difference between communication that promotes listening and talking that leads to further conflict.

Throughout the time spent together, "the counselor must be loving, truthful, and a great at listening - this is not an exhaustive list, but three very important aspects of the counselor's approach" (R. D., personal communication, April 1, 2014). In the end, there is no perfect pastor, no perfect church, and no perfect person. Even when the counselor and the client do their best to take an active role in the counseling process (Childs, 2001, p. 158) the outcome may be less than desirable.

All of the players who take the counseling field – the pastor and participant(s) – must strive for realistic expectations of what pastoral counseling can accomplish. Pastoral counseling intrinsically is part of "pastoral care – not cure. Care enables us to go on, even when we are not fully healed of our afflictions" (Willimon, 2000, p. 183). This care will not always be pleasant and may result in the severing of relationships rather than reconciliation. If the individual or couple receiving care are connected to the church in some way, the pastor should "not be surprised if what is revealed in counseling results in the couple leaving the church" (F. F., personal communication, March 29, 2014).

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Dysfunction Network Resources

Chillicothe and Ross County, Ohio, is fortunate to have access to the 2-1-1 Database of Community Resources, available by dialing 2-1-1 within the county or at (740) 773-HELP/ (740) 773-4357 for surrounding areas. The 2-1-1 clearinghouse provides information connecting individuals and families with a range of financial, medical/dental, mental health, relational, and religious assistance. The 2-1-1 number also serves as a crisis hotline with direct links to trained suicide prevention counselors.

Addiction

Veterans Affairs Medical Center Substance Abuse Treatment Program

172 State Route 104 Unite 116-A3

Chillicothe, OH 45601

(740) 773-1411, ext. 5855

<http://www1.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?id=29>

The VA Medical Center also provides assistance for Acute and Chronic Mental Health Conditions and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I included the VA center as Chillicothe and Ross County is home to a number of active duty servicemen and servicewomen, National Guard members, and veterans.

Scioto Paint Valley Mental Health Center (SPVMHC)

Floyd Simantel Clinic

312 E. Second St.

Chillicothe, OH 45601

(740) 775-1270

Martha Cottrill Clinic

4449 State Route 159

Chillicothe, OH 45601

(740) 775-1260

<http://www.spvmhc.org/>

SPVMHC provides mental health assessments; behavioral counseling and therapy services (individual or in a small group); community psychiatric support treatment; help for Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED); Transitional Services; and Residential Treatment Services (at the Floyd Simantel Clinic).

Substance Abuse Services include one-to-one, small group, and family counseling; intensive outpatient treatment; and ongoing case management services.

Depending upon the service needed, attempts are made to help the individual or family remain in their home, work, or current residential setting, provided that setting is healthy and conducive to positive outcomes. Detailed information on services offered can be found at

http://www.spvmhc.org/images/clientid_297/Agency%20Available%20Services.pdf.

Suicide

The 2-1-1 Database of Community Resources, available by dialing 2-1-1 within Ross County or at (740) 773-HELP/(740) 773-4357 for surrounding areas serves as a crisis hotline with direct links to trained suicide prevention counselors.

Additional assistance is available from the Scioto Paint Valley Mental Health Center (above) and from Adena Regional Medical Center's Adena Counseling Center (listed below under Depression).

Abuse

Child Protection Center of Ross County

138 Marietta Road, Suite E

Chillicothe, OH 45601

(740) 779-7431

<http://www.thechildprotectioncenter.org/>

The Child Protection Center (CPC) offers help and hope to children in Ross and surrounding counties who have been physically and/or sexually abused, regardless of ability to pay. Assessments include interviews and physical examinations and an onsite therapist is available. The Center also serves as a site for supervised visits between non-custodial parents and children. Prevention programs and parenting classes are offered as well.

Ross County Prosecutor's Office Victim/Witness Assistance Program

28 N. Paint Street

Chillicothe, OH 45601

(740) 702-3190

<http://www.rossctyvictimassistance.org/index.html>

The site's links page, <http://www.rossctyvictimassistance.org/links.htm>, includes information for a number of helpful local, state, and national agencies that advocate for and assist victims and witnesses of abuse and criminal activity. I included this site for its information on victim and witness rights and services provided by the prosecutor's office (<http://www.rossctyvictimassistance.org/services.htm>).

Cyclical Poverty

Love INC of Ross County (Love in the Name of Christ)

213 E. Water Street

Chillicothe, OH 45601

(740) 773-0525

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Love-INC-of-Ross-County-Ohio/182794415116098>

Love INC provides transitional housing to the un- and underemployed, homeless, and others battling generational to prepare them become positive, contributing members of their communities. The staff and volunteers partner with area churches and local agencies to provide limited financial assistance, basic construction help for home rehabilitation, beds and small appliances, and transportation assistance for those in need. Love INC also provides information on GED education, job skills, and training opportunities for persons searching for work.

Additional Resources would include government agencies such as the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Ross County ABLE/GED (Adult Basic Literacy Education/GED) program.

Bulimia

The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center

Mental and Behavioral Care

OSU Harding Hospital

475 W. 12th Ave.

Columbus, OH 43210

(614) 293-9600

Talbot Hall

1441 Phale D. Hale Dr.

Columbus, OH 43205

(614) 257-3760

http://medicalcenter.osu.edu/patientcare/healthcare_services/mental-behavioral/Pages/index.aspx

Though directed primarily at residential college students, Ohio State University's Office of Student Life Counseling and Consultation Service has helpful information on bulimia, anorexia, and related eating disorders online at <http://www.ccs.ohio-state.edu/self-help/eating-body-image/>.

Note: The Scioto Paint Valley Mental Health Center website provides general information on eating disorders. However, it is not clear if the center provides specific counseling or other treatment options for persons struggling with bulimia.

Depression

Adena Counseling Center (Adena Regional Medical Center)

455 Shawnee Lane

Chillicothe, OH 45601

(740) 779-4888

<http://www.adena.org/locations/detail.dT/adena-counseling-center>

Adena Counseling Center offers child, adolescent, and adult psychiatric and psychological services on an outpatient basis. The Center's services primarily focus on personal and professional relationship counseling and utilize individual, group, and family counseling sessions. Medication is suggestion when necessary. Additional support is provided by Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Counselors, Psychiatric Nurses, and Medical Health Technicians.

Other local resources are available through the Scioto Paint Valley Mental Health Center.

Gambling

Health Recovery Services, Inc.

224 Columbus Road, PO Box 724

Athens, OH 45701

(740) 592-6724 or (866) 614-9588

<http://www.hrs.org/>

Health Recovery Services' (HRS) Division of Community Services coordinates Gambling Education and Treatment. An initial intake process begins with completion of the South Oaks Gambling Screen (http://www.stopgamblingnow.com/sogs_print.htm) at an outpatient education and treatment center. HRS' treatment approach promotes abstinence from gambling as well as family and parenting skills when such are needed

and beneficial. Trained staff also provide financial counseling, debt management tools, budgeting, and money management skills to recovering gamblers and their families.

Additional resources include:

Gamblers Anonymous, <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/ga/>, with links to speak with someone about a gambling problem and to find a local Gamblers Anonymous meeting.

Ohio Casino Control Commission's Responsible Gambling website: <http://casinocontrol.ohio.gov/ResponsibleGambling.aspx> includes a toll-free helpline and contact information for regional treatment centers.

Congregational Relationship Strategy
(Congregational Relationships)

Life Together: The Importance of Understanding Congregational Relationships

I recently conducted an informal, unscientific, one question poll of family, friends, and fellow ministers related to job satisfaction and work/life balance. When asked what they enjoyed most about their employment, the majority said their colleagues brought them more fulfillment at work than their daily tasks. Not surprisingly, when invited to share the thing or situation that caused them the most job-related frustration, almost all mentioned the people they work with.

Human relationships are wonderful, trying, encouraging, supportive, draining, and maddening all at the same time. Experiencing conflict to greater or lesser degree is not a matter of if, but when (Sande, 2012). Christians, in our interactions with other believers through worship, service, discipleship, or celebrations, are not exempt from the ups and downs of life. We willingly spend time with other fallen persons made in God's image and likeness. Still, within the community of faith, Christian relationships merge the temporal and the eternal as together the church awaits "the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13, New International Version).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer may have understood this tension more than any other theologian of the past century. He wrote,

"The physical presence of other believers is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.... [but] not all Christians receive this blessing. The

imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimer of God in heathen lands stand alone. They know that visible fellowship is a blessing” (Bonhoeffer, 1954, pp. 19, 18).

Throughout the New Testament, followers of “The Way” are commanded to come together in worship, mutual care, and service (cf. Heb. 10:24-25; 2 Cor. 13:11; Rom. 15:5-7; and Matt. 18:20 among other passages). Yet the church often is the locus for dissension and dispute as the desires that battle within each of our hearts spill over into fights and quarrels among God’s people (Jas. 4:1).

Nurturing congregational relationships is critical for churches of all traditions, styles, sizes, locations, and ethnicities. Congregational health, growth, and strength rises and falls on the quality of interpersonal relationships. How people treat each other, whether they are a pastor, a leader, a guest, or are a member of the larger community the church seeks to reach with the Good News of Jesus Christ, is the primary factor in building transformational churches (McIntosh & Arn, 2013; Stetzer & Rainer, 2010, loc. 1348). Relationship tools, whether offered through teaching and preaching, small groups, Sunday school classes, programs, or ministry events, matter to churches’ present and future effectiveness. For this reason alone, a semester-long course on congregational relationships is warranted.

**Analyzing First Wesleyan's Relationships:
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats**

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multigenerational congregation • Targeted ministries to all ages (birth to Senior Adults) • Excellent staff-to-member ratio of 5 FTE staff for estimated 400+ regular attenders (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 163) • Healthy giving patterns to General Fund and specific ministries • Debt-free congregation with monies regularly set aside for future expansion • 3 of 4 full-time salaried pastors live within church's immediate neighborhood • Average member age 35 years (est.) • Dedicated lay leadership and volunteer participation • Small Group and Discipleship Ministries 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mono-ethnic (98% Anglo) • Only 15% (est.) of congregation lives within the church's immediate neighborhood (3-mile radius) • 25%-30% (est.) of attenders volunteer time regularly • Lack of awareness/consistent communication across services and demographic groups • Tension between traditional Sunday school classes and Life Groups (small groups that meet throughout week) • Have not analyzed church attendance/giving/demographic trends in-depth recently (to my knowledge)
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12% of neighborhood families' incomes below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau, 2010) • 52% of children in 3-mile radius live in single-parent households (United States Census Bureau, 2010) • 30% of neighbors identify as unchurched (Percept Group, 2010) • Significant African-American, Hispanic, Asian/Other, and multi-ethnic population lives close to the church (United States Census Bureau, 2010) • Growing presence in neighborhood through ongoing outreach events held in the neighborhood (beyond church's walls) • Potential to hold new services/locations in very near future • Leadership/worship service changes • In-depth analysis of demographics/service/giving/participation trends if time and effort given 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12% of neighborhood families' incomes below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau, 2010) • 52% of children in 3-mile radius live in single-parent households (United States Census Bureau, 2010) • Less than 20% of neighbors have post-high school education (United States Census Bureau, 2010) • Average age of neighborhood residents is 40.7 years (United States Census Bureau, 2010) • 42% of neighbors un- or underemployed or not participating in the workforce (United States Census Bureau, 2010) • Volunteer burnout • Lack of space for 10:45 AM Connection service • Uncertainty over future plans, leadership/worship service changes

This SWOT analysis reveals a number of significant relational trends impacting First Wesleyan's ministry to the surrounding neighborhood and the congregation. One, we are a neighborhood church made up largely of attenders who live outside the campus' immediate neighborhood. Two, the congregation's demographic makeup does not reflect the neighborhood. However, this also serves as an opportunity to make a lasting difference among at risk families who live in close proximity to the church building. Three, while the church enjoys a larger than average percentage of regular volunteers (participation exceeds the well-known "80/20 Principle") volunteer fatigue and burnout is an ongoing threat (A. D., personal communication, February 2014). Four, there is an uncertainty over leadership and worship service changes reflected in a belief (right or wrong) that the congregation does not have a consistent communications strategy across multiple services and demographic groups.

These trends affect both internal (congregational) and external (evangelism and outreach) relationships. Difficulties arise when others' views aren't taken seriously or are dismissed as unimportant. This was seen as highly destructive (J. K., personal communication, January 19, 2014; A. I., personal communication, January 18, 2014). Cautious uncertainty or open or disguised displeasure with changes to First Wesleyan's worship services and the residual effects of a church split (detailed below) may contribute to what some in the congregation see as the difficulty of building "below the surface" relationships with pastors and other attenders (Scazzero, 2013). Another barrier is the number of "homegrown" First Wesleyan families related by blood and/or marriage (Stetzer & Rainer, 2010, loc. 1500) which can be a challenge for new and long-term attenders to feel as though they fit in.

Spiritual Formation and First Wesleyan's Relationship Quotient

Scazzero (2013) puts it very bluntly: emotional and spiritual maturity are inversely proportional to ministry health (loc. 1018). This holds true for pastor and parishioner, layperson and leader alike. It cannot be underemphasized that the strength of congregational relationships, participation and service, and taking self-ownership of First Wesleyan's mission and vision is dependent on the depth of individual and group spiritual formation. A person's beliefs reflect their choices in all areas of life, spiritual or secular, and these choices influence others. As Emerging Church leader Dan Kimball contends, "Spiritual formation is not done in isolation" (Kimball, as cited in Kumar, 2014, para. 4).

Interviews with a small focus group of members who have attended First Wesleyan for at least one year revealed that personal and congregational Spiritual Formation is needed within the church. Every individual said they lack regular, quality times of prayer and Bible study and struggle with discerning God's voice (G. D., E. M., B. M., & K. H., personal communication, January 26, 2014). In January 2014, pastors, lay leaders, and attenders worked together to create "The Acts Reader" and blog, a month-long print and electronic devotional that supplemented the Acts: I Love His Church sermon series. The response to the devotional largely was positive. However, the approach was abandoned after the sermon series ended. I do not know if this was due to lack of volunteers, time and energy, or support. What is clear, though, is that many in the congregation would benefit from learning about tools for personal devotions, basic Bible study, and journaling.

As a congregation, First Wesleyan still may be working through the aftermath of a church split that occurred in April 2011 following the resignation of the previous

Executive Pastor and an Assistant Pastor. “There seemed to be a toxic atmosphere among the pastoral staff, and I think it trickled down to the congregation...It also exacerbated the unique issues we had with our two-congregations-in-one-[building] scenario” (E. A., personal communication, January 19, 2014). First Wesleyan currently is growing numerically and in terms of new ministries and changes in approach to existing ministries. For all intents and purposes, we have moved forward. I am not sure, however, if we ever really dealt with the emotions surrounding the church split as a congregation.

(Congregational) Life’s Only Constant is Change

This past January, First Wesleyan’s associate pastor transitioned to the senior pastor role. Along with this leadership change, the church’s weekly worship services were consolidated. The traditional service (with its use of choruses, traditional hymns, and special music that mostly is bluegrass, southern gospel, and Christian country) remained at 8:30 AM. The former contemporary service (largely patterned after 1980s and 1990s praise and worship styles) was combined with Connection, First Wesleyan’s emergent/ancient future worship experience geared toward 18-34 year olds and their families and now meets at 10:45 AM. While the use of contemporary music has continued, adding live music through a worship band, lowering the sanctuary lights to incorporate shadow, and more frequent use of animations, slideshows, and video is a visible reminder to those who previously attended the contemporary service that things are not as they used to be.

As a congregation, we are “feeling our way” through these changes and their full effect still is unknown. There has been consistent and vocal support for this leadership transition. Yet, I fear that a number of members are concerned that a drive to “move

ministry forward,” though not a bad thing in and of itself, means that leadership is forgetting or not taking time to honor past accomplishments and those persons who have contributed to First Wesleyan’s growth. When asked to give her impressions of the congregation’s relational health, one member shared anxiety over how a new service schedule will impact others’ sense of belonging. “So much has changed in the past couple of years that I don’t see the personal ministries and relationships as much as I used to” (B. M., personal communication, January 26, 2014).

To address this feeling, the pastoral staff and Connection Leadership Team planned “I’m In!” Sunday, held April 27, 2014. This special serviced highlighted ministry opportunities available to all who attend First Wesleyan. Information cards and a tear-off section of the weekly bulletin will be collected through May 2014, and each Sunday the Senior Pastor has encouraged the congregation to commit to serving as part of his welcome prior to the sermon. It may be more effective to invite a member of the congregation to highlight ministry accomplishments, share the need for more children’s ministry workers, or mention “behind the scenes” ways of serving such as “contributing financially, volunteering, visiting, [or] intercessory prayer” (K. K., personal communication, January 29, 2014).

Communicating Welcome, Want, and Worth

A twist on a well-known cliché has application when considering methods of increasing First Wesleyan’s spiritual and relational strengths. People do not care what you have to tell them until they can tell you care about them. In my opinion, the most significant barrier to greater spiritual and relational growth at First Wesleyan is communicating that all generations are welcomed, wanted, and seen as worthwhile to the congregation purposely and on a regular basis.

For the first five years' of its existence, the Connection service met in a different part of the building. Though worship now takes place in the same sanctuary, recognizing that First Wesleyan is one church with two distinct congregations sharing the same vision will take time. The desire to build unity within the diversity of personalities, gifts, and abilities needs to be shared over and over again. "The relationship between 'Connection' folk and 'Traditional' folk is completely fractured. [We need to] come alongside the Traditional Service to communicate that they are valued and a vital part of First Wesleyan" (G. D., personal communication, January 26, 2014).

To overcome this "Us versus Them" mentality, two attenders suggested scheduling all church events on a regular basis. Specifically, they proposed "congregation wide fun events to allow people to get to know each other on a level outside of the church walls" (K. H., personal communication, January 26, 2014; G. D., personal communication, January 26, 2014). How these events are presented, though, is critical. For example, for the past four years, the Connection service has sponsored an annual May "Day in the Park" at Poland Park, a city greenspace located one block from the campus. This year, a concerted effort has been made to invite members from the Traditional service, as well as the 10:15 Connection Service to take part in the event. The "two congregations in one building" stigma means it might be more beneficial for someone who attends the 8:15 AM service and has helped with the Day in the Park in years past to speak in the Traditional service. This person could share how the Day in the Park impacted them personally and encourage others to join in, rather than to have the senior pastor or another member who is seen as a "Connection person" extend the

invitation. This small change can make a big difference in helping our Traditional service attenders feel included rather than excluded.

Another potential remedy for these concerns is for the pastors and lay leaders to host focus groups to explore these matters in greater depth. Determining if these fears are motivated by individuals' self-interest (resistance to change); misunderstanding or mistrusting leadership; evaluating change from a different perspective; or being shut out of or lacking confidence in decision-making processes (Cooke, n.d.) are difficult, but necessary questions to ask and answer.

First Wesleyan also needs a broad-based communications strategy that takes generational preferences into account. Phyllis Kritek, in her helpful single page handout, *Generations on the Job*, notes that persons from different generations initiate and receive feedback in different ways (Kritek, n.d.). Traditionalists (or Builders, those born between 1900 and 1945) may feel that constant communication is overkill, preferring only to be informed on a need to know basis. Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) operate via the maxim "Trust, but verify" and want the reasons for and approaches to change put in writing. Generation Xers (1965-1980 births) seek out feedback, often in terms of personal performance or needs they can address. Communication for Millennials (or Next Gens, those born from 1981 to 1999) should come in the forms of push notifications, or "feedback whenever I want it at the push of a button" (Kritek, n.d.).

For First Wesleyan to increase member involvement and ownership in outreach and in-reach ministries, volunteer recruitment and general information will need to be packaged in different ways, according to the group(s) we want to reach. "It's a never ending job and it's a vital part of a church's ministry" (Sheppard, 2005, p. 42). More

important, these conversations have to involve listening (receiving feedback) in addition to passing along messages. As a congregation, First Wesleyan needs to hear what others have to say, especially when communication styles do not match or if what is said causes conflict (Goulston, 2013).

Mark Goulston, a business psychiatrist and leadership consultant, notes that most people fall into one of two communication styles: venter/screamer or explainer/belaborer (Goulston, 2013, para. 1, 2). When confronted by a venter, it is critical to acknowledge his or her emotion, verbalize the importance of what the venter is saying, and ask what the person believes would be a positive outcome. Goulston recommends asking the venter to prioritize the decisions or changes they want to be made into three categories: important things that can be accomplished long-term; critical things that need short-term attention; and immediate issues to be resolved as soon as possible (2013, para. 9, 10). Once these priorities are shared, the hearer should restate or clarify the venter's statements and confirm with the person that they are on the same page. When interacting with an explainer, it is vital that the other person hears and sees from your body language that the speaker has your full attention. Be patient, hear the complete explanation, and counter with the same important, critical, and immediate priorities used with a person who vents.

Implementing this approach could be very helpful for First Wesleyan's pastoral and lay leaders, or for anyone seen as a person of influence in the congregation. Change, especially the profound shifts in leadership and worship locations the church has gone through, can be unsettling and cause friction among persons or groups. At the same time, conflict is an opportunity to show God's sovereign care and bring God glory by affirming different perspectives. God is honored when Christians work together to

arrive at creative, mutually beneficial solutions, and navigate change as one community of faith (Sande, 2012).

Strategy for Positive Change

A commitment to congregational spiritual formation only will be effective if it is supported by a larger strategy of regular self-evaluation. Those who attend First Wesleyan need to share our hopes, dreams, fears, and concerns with each other as a church (Silberman, 2000, loc. 2459). We need to speak life into one another, be willing to voice Big Hairy Audacious Goals (“What is a BHAG?” n.d.) and believe that with God and with each other, we can surpass the church’s stated goal of increasing attendance by one percent by 2015 (F. F., J. W., A. D., & N. T., personal communication, November 3, 2013).

This evaluation should include an in-depth analysis of the congregation’s demographics (age, family members, and length of attendance); seek to learn attenders’ passions (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 24); note attenders’ type and length of service in specific ministries, programs, or small groups; chart trends in giving; and ask attenders to list non-churched friends and family members to tie outreach to existing social networks (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 26). Such detailed information gathering could take place during the spring, when people’s thoughts are centered on growth and renewal or as part of Lenten worship or preparation for Easter). It could be repeated in the fall, with its emphasis on a new school year, education, and self-improvement. A third round of data collection might take place in January, when persons’ minds are attuned to resolutions, change, and enthralled with the possibility of a new beginning.

A second prong in this change strategy is surveying the congregation’s felt needs, and then offering Life Groups, short-term Bible studies, sermon series, and multimedia

and print resources that address those needs from a Christian perspective. Help in understanding anger and managing conflict, expressing and dealing with grief in healthy ways, and winning the battle between faith and doubt were topics mentioned by those in my congregation who completed the Emotional and Spiritual Health Inventory for workshop two.

It is easy to camouflage or mask pain in a church of 400+ members. As part of the Emotional and Spiritual Health Inventory, one respondent commented how easy it is to feel lonely even when you are surrounded by others. Another indicated a need to hear stories of encouragement and overcoming as she deals with the challenges of balancing home and work life while caring for an elderly parent (B. M., personal communication, January 26, 2014). Issues such as death of loved ones; job changes and job eliminations; and the loss of friendships from the church split still are very raw to the group. Sam Storms, Pastor of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma's Bridgeway Church, notes that a pastor or Christian leader's most effective ministry can come when she or he endures suffering with the church family:

“For too many years I naively assumed that if I wasn't hurting, neither were they. I wish I'd realized the pulpit isn't a place to hide from the problems and pain of one's congregation; it's a place to address, commiserate with, and apply God's Word to them” (Storms, 2014, para. 3).

Third, I will seek to be a person who champions celebration. Children's Ministry pastor and author Michelle Anthony strongly encourages congregations to host quarterly “Remember and Celebrate Weekends,” all church events where faith and food are shared, accomplishments are noted, and God's goodness is recognized (Anthony, 2012, p. 143). Such events have strong spiritual formation potential not only because

they build community, but also because they “translate pause” (Anthony, 2012, p. 143) and introduce regular periods of rest from ministry on the Sabbath. To heighten excitement and increase buy-in to the Remember and Celebrate concept, First Wesleyan might work with children, parents, Life Groups, Sunday school classes, new attenders, or members of the pastoral staff to create short video snippets sharing how they are growing through ministry at First Wesleyan. Links to these videos “could be provided in text messages, or e-newsletters or on your church's website...find ways to avoid postponing celebration--do it while it is current” (K. K., personal communication, January 29, 2014).

Fourth, experiencing three years of structured Spiritual Formation courses at Wesley Seminary has deepened my commitment to be a person of prayer. A practical, yet transformational change strategy would be to talk with other members of the congregation who are known as prayer warriors and implement the Monthly Prayer Rule (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 163). Very simply, this group would commit to pray for every attender by name at least once per month. Utilizing an updated church roster, and with the pastoral staff's blessing, such a group will ask for specific prayer requests. A prayer journal will be used and, with permission, answered prayers will be mentioned in the lead-up to and during quarterly Remember and Celebrate weekends. In time, the Monthly Prayer rule could become a way to integrate more persons into the church's prayer life and, hopefully, challenge them to serve on an ongoing basis. Why should First Wesleyan invest in a structured prayer ministry? Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn note,

Sporadic prayer will not keep (or get) a church healthy. It must be an ongoing lifestyle. Yet few churches provide a systematic way for members to integrate

regular prayer into their life or into the life of their congregation....What if each member and family in your church were prayed for – and knew they were being prayed for – specifically *each month*? What spiritual energy would be generated! (McIntosh & Arn, 2013, p. 233).

My Impact upon First Wesleyan Church

As a volunteer pastor who has not served in a defined ministry role for over one year, I often feel as though I am on the “outside looking in” when it comes to assessing my actual or potential impact at First Wesleyan. I feel I have strong and supportive personal and ministry relationships with our pastoral staff and quite a few of the church’s lay leaders. At the same time, though, not being a part of staff or leadership team meetings means I have to seek more in-depth information from our pastors and leaders. First Wesleyan’s culture (set by the previous senior pastor’s forty year tenure) is not intentionally to withhold information from the congregation, but rather to share when asked. Our new senior pastor seems to be working to change these patterns. As with any organizational or culture change, establishing new ways of operating will take time, effort, and a strong commitment to transparency.

A number of long-term members know me in a pastoral or quasi-pastoral role, while newer attenders or those who know of (heard about) me but have not yet met me do not know my history with the congregation. Being a functional extrovert, I feel more comfortable serving where I can be with and interact with people without necessarily being “in the spotlight.” For now, I plan to continue what I am doing already: serving regularly with FWC Kids, our church’s children’s ministry, building relationships with our first through fifth grade students; attending the Fellowship Sunday school class;

participating in worship; and filling in for adult Sunday school teachers if I am available when I am asked.

Many times over the course of this semester, the question “Who pastors the pastor?” has caused me to pause and consider ways I might be able to support First Wesleyan’s staff in a pastoral role. My own father was a local church pastor for close to a decade. As one of those dreaded “Pastor’s Kids,” I have experienced the stresses of ministry both from the pulpit and the pew. Regularly and purposely asking our pastors – and their spouses – how I might help (even if it is only to listen and keep their joys and concerns close to my heart) is a simple gift I am willing to give, once I have proved myself worthy of their friendship and trust. This type of ministry is an area in which I can both grow and serve as a sounding board for those who give so much of themselves for our congregation (K. K., personal communication, January 22, 2014).

Commitment to Personal and Professional Growth and Ministry Exploration

I am still seeking to find what it means specifically for me to be “in ministry” in a local church context. In some ways, this is not surprising. Will Willimon hints at this in the early chapters of *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. He notes that contemporary images of the pastor – media mogul, political negotiator, therapist, manager, resident activist, preacher, and servant (Willimon, 2002, pp. 56-68) – often can be at odds with each other and may be mutually exclusive. Some of these images (therapist, preacher, and servant) are attractive to me while the others conjure fear, distrust, or outright revulsion. The key will be to use counsel, discernment, prayer, and study to take helpful skills from each image but not depend on any one exclusively.

As Willimon cautions, “uncritical borrowing from culture’s images of leadership can be the death of specifically *Christian* leaders” (2002, p. 155).

Over the summer, I hope to connect with my Senior Pastor and District Superintendent to talk about my call to ministry and how my gift mix might best meet needs of a local church, whether that be First Wesleyan or another congregation. I sense that I am not yet ready for a senior pastor position. However, I also am not sure if local church ministry is part of my skill set. Learning if there are denominational resources to help me figure out my next steps for ministry is an important way that I can develop a sound strategy to serve my current (or future) church family in positive ways. I know that I need to take these steps with others, and not make plans in isolation. This includes seeking my wife’s and sons’ input, as these decisions might require moving, new schools, and other life-altering decisions. Bringing mature Christian friends who have personalities different from mine into this conversation will help, too. In these ways, I can proactively “take steps to compensate for [my] weaknesses by surrounding [my]self with people...who...[will] challenge [me] in healthy ways to be honest about what [I] can and cannot do” (Storms 2014, para. 6).

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Part Three: Integration Papers

I do not think it is a stretch to say that what sets Wesley Seminary apart from other seminaries and graduate schools of religion is the seminary's focus on integrating practical theology, Biblical Studies, Christian Theology, and Christian History into a coherent whole. Along with the Application Papers described in Part Two, Wesley Seminary students complete an *Integration Paper* as part of each praxis course. The Integration Paper takes one pastoral question – often posed through a hypothetical real-life ministry scenario – and tries to answer that question by incorporating aspects of Bible, theology, and history to the core concept under study. Part Three of my Master of Divinity Portfolio collects three of what I believe are my best integration papers.

The first, from the Missional Church course, is titled *Bridging the Great Divide: When Is a Person "In" the People of God?* and examines issues surrounding salvation.

The second paper, *More Than a Meal: The Eucharist and Corporate and Individual Spiritual Formation* explores how Holy Communion can serve as a means of shaping persons and churches into Christ's image. The third and final paper addresses an issue from my own life as I struggled to learn to forgive my own father after his death. This paper is titled *Forgive, Forget, or Both: A Christian Understanding of Forgiveness* and is the most meaningful paper I wrote while a student in Wesley Seminary.

Bridging the Great Divide: When Is a Person “In” The People of God?
(The Missional Church)

This integration paper examines the nature, process, theology, and practical implications of Christian conversion to answer the question, “When is a person ‘in’ the People of God?” The reality of sin and need for a Savior is addressed through concepts that include Covenant; repentance; confession; belief; conversion; receiving the Holy Spirit; and assuring and persevering in faith. Through this examination, the author concludes that receiving the Holy Spirit is what determines whether or not an individual can number her- or himself among God’s people.

Scenario:

Tim was born into a Methodist home and was baptized as an infant. His parents took him to church regularly during his childhood. After college, he attended a church every once in a while. He tried to live out the basics of "loving your neighbor as yourself," and he even prayed occasionally. Sadly, at the age of 29, he was tragically killed in an automobile accident.

Shortly thereafter, his sister, who attends your church, came to you a little troubled. "You know," she said, "my brother was a good guy. But I was never quite sure if he was really a Christian, whether he was really 'in' or not. I always thought that you had to confess your sins and ask Jesus to forgive them in order to make it to heaven or wherever we will spend eternity. I don't think Tim ever had a 'moment' of this sort.

"I know Tim believed there is a God. I know he believed Jesus was God. It just never seemed really personal to him—he never really seemed to have a 'relationship' with Jesus and all that. I asked him once if he had ever had a personal experience with God and he didn't have any idea what I was talking about. Do you think he was 'in,' pastor?"

Why Does Humanity Need a Relationship With God?

The question Tim’s sister asks in the scenario above reflects humankind’s desire to have answers for three fundamental existential questions. One, who am I as an individual? Two, what is my destiny or reason for living? And, three, what, if anything,

will happen to me when my life ends? From the dawn of recorded history, persons have pointed to ethical behavior and morals; religious systems that link human beings with “the divine” (in multiple forms); or a belief in the possibility or outright nonexistence of an all-powerful divine being(s) who determine(s) whether or not a person experiences an afterlife – or if there is such a thing as an afterlife – to attempt to answer these questions.

Genesis 2 and 3 provide the Bible’s first glimpse into the dynamic caused by temptation, sin, humankind’s fall from innocence, and the resulting spiritual separation from God. Space does not permit a thorough investigation into the full effects of sin. However, sin caused guilt and shame to enter into the human condition, a reality attested to in both testaments (Gen. 3:10; Deut. 32:5; Job 10; Prov. 13:15, 18:3; Isa. 54:4; Jer. 6:13-15; Eph. 5:11-12; Phil. 3:18-19). Daniel’s personal and national prayer (Dan. 9:4-19) summarizes the great divide between God and the nation of Israel. Every Israelite, the prophet says, has done wrong, rebelled, and committed wickedness. Everyone has turned away from God’s commands and ignored God’s messengers sent to help restore the people to the Lord. Israel, the nation God chose to share God’s glory with the whole world, scorned God’s Covenant, refused to obey God’s commandments, was unfaithful to God, and remained powerless to remedy their state. Daniel’s words picture how greatly sin had affected his people: “The iniquities of our ancestors have made...your people an object of scorn...Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see...Lord, listen! Lord, forgive!” (Dan. 9:16c, 18a, 19a, New International Version).

The Apostle Paul extended Daniel’s understanding to every person, everywhere: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Thus, the whole of the biblical narrative points to humankind’s propensity to sin. Pride leads humans to

believe in their own essential goodness; to trust in their own abilities; to seek to control God; and to worship themselves instead of their Creator (see Isa. 59). Paul portrayed himself as “a prisoner of the law of sin at work within” him and a “wretched man” who needed to be rescued from death (Rom. 7:23-24). Building upon this understanding, Saint Augustine noted that sin corrupted a person’s entire nature. Confronted with the extent of his sin, Augustine recoiled at “How vile I was, how twisted and unclean and spotted and ulcerous. I saw myself and was horrified” (Augustine, 1942, p. 169).

Into this eternal breach, God sent the Incarnate Son of Man, Jesus Christ, “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:35). Jesus, the sinless Son of God, became the Lamb of God who took away the world’s sins (Jn. 1:29) through the blood of the New Covenant (cf. Matt. 26:26-28; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:14-23). This New Covenant allowed all people to receive forgiveness (Jn. 3:16) and made it possible for persons from every nation, tribe, and tongue to meet God’s standard, to be holy as God is holy (Rev. 7:9a; Lev. 11:44; Gal. 3:26-29; 1 Pet. 1:16). Jeremiah highlighted God’s active and personal role in making a New Covenant with God’s people. Covenant no longer would be based on a perpetual sacrificial system where life after life was given to make atonement. Instead, the LORD God would put the law into the people’s minds, write that law upon their hearts, and offer forgiveness to all creation (Jer. 31:33b, 4b).

The New Testament extends this idea. It is the Holy Spirit, the seal and deposit of the Christian’s future salvation, who marks the believer as God’s child and a member of the Covenant community (Eph. 1:13-14, 4:30). Entering into God’s people involves repentance; confessing Christ as Savior and Lord; faith and belief in Christ’s atoning death on the cross, resurrection, and future return; and persevering in one’s faith through grace given by the Holy Spirit. This process has come to be called conversion.

Apart from receiving the Holy Spirit at salvation and continuing in fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Spirit, a person cannot be said to be “in” the People of God (see Rom. 8:1-4). Scripture makes clear that God’s People are a Covenant People, a concept that will be explored below.

A Covenant Relationship

Biblical covenants have a two-fold objective. They reflect God’s sovereign choice to enter into relationship with individuals and peoples and God’s universal purpose to offer salvation to all who call upon God’s name (cf. Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:5-13). YHWH has initiated each Covenant (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the New Covenant) in order to redeem, reconcile, and re-establish a love relationship between God and people. Entering into Covenant with God means that persons enter into community with God (traditionally through public confession and taking on aspects of the group’s identity). Ladd (1959) asserts the New Testament does not recognize a privatized or individual faith. In a very real sense, keeping Covenant is the working out of leaving behind the individualistic or self-centered thinking that "the community exists for me", and [moving] together toward 'I exist for community and the community exists for the world'" (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2010, p. 192).

Covenant terms outline what it means to live under God’s reign (O’Brien, 1993). This authority is intended to transform the community’s actions, attitudes, and beliefs. By entering into Covenant with YHWH, Israel was empowered and expected to assume God’s identity and to take on God’s characteristics. The evidence of this new people would be found in how they treated one another (see, e.g., Exod. 20:8-17, chapters 21-23; Lev. 19:11-37, 25:35-43); how they cared for non-Israelites in their midst (Exod. 22:21, 23:9; Lev. 19:9-10, 33, 23:32; Deut. 10:17-19, 24:17-22); and the extent to which

they obeyed YHWH's commands, decrees, and laws (Exod. 34:6-8; Lev. 11:44-45; Deut. 6:4-8, 13-25; and Deut. 7-9 among many other passages).

Entering the New Covenant Community

Scripturally speaking, Covenant is a relationship, not a transaction. Keeping Covenant implies ongoing obligations that both parties maintain. In return for faithful obedience and exclusive worship, YHWH promised to be present with the people; to provide for their material and spiritual needs; to protect them as they entered the Promised Land; and to extend the Lord's love "to them and their children forever" (Deut. 5:29a). The LORD takes an active, lead role in choosing those who enter into Covenant with YHWH, a choice made out of love and the desire to keep the ancestral promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. While a person enters into relationship with God as an individual, Covenant is lived out in God's presence and among God's people.

The prophets (particularly Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah) pointed to Israel's and Judah's exile to Assyria and to Babylon as proof that being born an Israelite (born into the Covenant) did not exempt that person from adhering to Covenant terms. The nation needed God to intervene, to cleanse the people, and to make keeping Covenant possible. In response, God mercifully intervened and established a New Covenant, one that would make it possible for the people to keep God's statutes and to conform to the LORD's holy standard. YHWH's Spirit would be "in [them] and move [them] to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezek. 35:27). Jeremiah highlighted God's personal and active role in mediating the New Covenant. The LORD God will put the law into the people's minds and write the law upon their hearts (Jer. 31:33b). Through this

unfolding of the divinely initiated Covenant relationship, all peoples will come to know God and receive God's forgiveness (Jer. 31:34b).

Covenant establishes an individual's identity both as a child of God and as a member of the *ekklesia*, ones separated from the world around them and "who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Rom. 8:28, New Living Translation; cf. Acts 14:10, 16:10; Rom. 1:6-7, 8:29-30, 9:22-26; 1 Cor. 1:2, 9; Eph. 1:4-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 2:9-10, 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3-4). Observing YHWH's statutes, decrees, and laws once established the borders of God's Covenant community. Now, placing faith in Jesus' singular sacrifice serves as the door of entry into divine-human fellowship. Entrance into Covenant is not confirmed by human decision, but by the giving of the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 5:5, 7:6, 8:1-17; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22, 5:5; Gal. 3:1-3, 13-14, 5:5, Eph. 1:13, 2:13-22; Phil. 1:27-28; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:14; Tit. 3:4-8)

In the New Covenant, the Spirit is given to persons so that humankind can love God the way God loves his Covenant people. The Spirit, in turn, empowers believers to fulfill their obligations to their Creator, Redeemer, Savior, and Sustainer. To come to God, however, a person must accept their condition, seek forgiveness, and change their life. They must repent (cf. Matt. 3:11 and Acts 2:38). Jesus began his earthly ministry by proclaiming, "The time has come" ... "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk. 1:15). What does it mean to repent and believe?

Repentance

In scripture, repentance has technical and experiential definitions, forcing us to depend on a passage(s) context(s) to establish meaning. Gaventa (1992) notes that the primary Greek words translated into English as "repent" (*metanoun*) and 'convert'

(*epistrophein*)...are actually used only a limited number of times in the New Testament” (p. 46). Smalley (1979) observes that scripture pictures repentance both literally – physically turning one’s body around and returning to God – and figuratively, through “the restoration of a broken covenant relationship” (p. 196; cf. McKim, 1992, p. 124). Within the context of the Gospels, Ladd (1959) defines repentance as the willed and willful choice to come under God’s sovereign authority (Mk. 10:15; Lk. 16:16, 17:20-21), to “receive God’s rule” (p. 21; cf. Greear, 2013, p. 55; Kreitzer, 1993).

In the New Testament, repentance as a concept is seen in numerous references where believers in Christ shun darkness and embrace light (Matt. 4:16, 6:23; Lk. 11:34-36; Jn. 1:4-5, 3:19-21, 12:34-36, 44-50; Acts 26:18; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 4:5; Eph. 5:8-20; 1 Pet. 2:9-12; and 1 Jn. 1:5-10, 2:7-11). The truly repentant turn from the worship of idols to serve the living God (Isa. 42:17, 44:9-11, 17-20, 45:16-17; Jer. 3:21-25; 1 Cor. 10:6-22, 12:1-2; Col. 3:5-11; 1 Thess. 1:6-10; 1 Pet. 4:2-3). Most importantly, wholly converted believers in Jesus have been delivered from Satan’s power and have come under God’s rule (Matt. 11:12, 13:1-23, 25:31-46; Lk. 10:1-12, 13:22-29, 17:20-37; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; Eph. 2:1-7; Col. 1:12-13).

Scriptural repentance, then, is holistic: it is a turning of heart, body, mind (Willimon, 2002, p. 229), and spirit (Smalley, 1979, p. 193). There is a yielding and a surrender to God’s will and God’s ways. This “absence of settled defiance” (Greear, 2013, p. 67) results in a “reorientation of the soul” (Nock, as cited in Gaventa, 1992, p. 42; cf. McKim, 1992, p. 124; Ladd, 1959, pp. 94, 96; Smalley, 1979, p. 194). Thus, repentance is more than an intellectual decision to “choose Christ.” The repentant sinner also accepts her or his guilt, acknowledges God’s right to judge sin, and recognizes God’s authority to carry out or to allow the consequences of God’s judgment.

Smalley (1979) notes that one Old Testament understanding of repentance pictures YHWH turning toward humanity “either in blessing (Ps. 80:14) or in wrath (Josh. 24:20)” (p. 194).

Repentance is more than feeling sorrow over coming short of God’s standard. It is more than being sorry that one’s guilt and sin have been exposed, or regret over “getting caught.” In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul contrasts “worldly sorrow” (v. 10) – shame over one’s actions becoming known but does not lead one to change – with “godly sorrow [that] brings repentance.” This repentance, Paul says, “leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2 Cor. 7:10). Worldly sorrow brings death and eternal separation from God. Godly sorrow begins with repentance.

This was the fundamental change in his life that Augustine expressed when he wrote, “You converted me to yourself so that I no longer sought...any of the world’s promises, but stood upon that...rule of faith” (Augustine, 1942, p. 179). Yet, becoming a person of God and entering into the people of God does not end with repentance and belief. Instead, it is the beginning of “a lifelong redemptive journey with Christ” where one “practice[s] repentance throughout their lives” (Willimon, 2002, pp. 228, 229; cf. McKim, 1992, p. 129; Greear, 2013, p. 5). For the Gospel to result in saving faith, first it must be heard. Then it must be received and accepted. Next, there must be a response, or confession. Finally, there must be change in action and belief, the producing of “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:8; Acts. 26:20). It is to these subjects, confession, faith, belief, and conversion that we now turn.

Confession and Faith

An individual cannot enter into God’s people without confessing that Jesus is Lord and believing that God raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 10:9). One of the earliest

Christian confessions, the Memorial Acclamation, states simply: “Christ has died, / Christ is risen, / Christ will come again” (Seaman, n.d., para. 7). Confession, at its heart, is a public proclamation of the Gospel (2 Cor. 9:3). Noted Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann points out that, for Israel, faith in YHWH was the primary means of persons’ enculturation as God’s people (Brueggemann, as cited in Fretheim, 2008, p. 168). Within the *ekklesia*, entrance into the community is a process of appropriating and internalizing faith and of moving from doubt to repentance to belief to maturity.

Faith is confident trust that through Jesus’ death and resurrection, Christ’s followers will be saved. It is belief that Jesus has forgiven our sins (Matt. 9:22) and results in obedience to Jesus’ commands (Rom. 1:5, 16:26). Through faith, Christ’s righteousness is imputed and imparted to believers (Rom. 1:17, 3:21-31, 4:1-25; Phil. 3-9). By faith, believers are justified, legally declared not guilty of the consequences of their sin, and are reconciled to God (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 2:16, 3:11-14, 24; Col. 1:21-23). Faith is the means by which believers are adopted as God’s children (Gal. 3:26). Faith is the content of the believer’s confession (Rom. 10:5-12).

Understanding faith’s mysteries leads to maturity (Eph. 4:13; Col. 2:5-8; Tit. 1:1) and motivates sacrifice and service (Phi. 2:17; Jas. 2:14-26). By faith, believers persevere to inherit the promise of eternal life (Heb. 6:12; Jas. 1:3; 1 Jn. 5:1-5) and are assured of their salvation (Heb. 10:19-23; 1 Pet. 1:3-9). Faith is a gracious gift (Eph. 2:8) and “the experience of all real Christians...both the testimony of God’s Spirit, and the testimony of his own, that he is a child of God” (Wesley, n.d., para. 7). Most importantly, faith has an object - Jesus Christ, the High Priest and mediator of the New Covenant, the author and finisher of faith (Heb. 7:11-8:13, 12:12).

Belief and Conversion

Gaventa and McKim note that scripture provides a “diversity of imagery” to describe conversion (Gaventa, 1992, p. 41; McKim, 1992, pp. 130-135). We must wrestle with the implications of the prophets’ messages to Israel, God’s chosen people, to return to YHWH. John the Baptist’s and Jesus’s ministries called for acts of repentance. Large numbers of believers accepted the Apostles’ message, repented of their sins, received forgiveness, were baptized, received the Holy Spirit, and joined “The Way” at Pentecost (Acts 2:21-41). Paul wrote of his desire that those who heard the Gospel would “turn to God” (Acts 20:21, 26:20; 1 Thess. 1:9).

Gaventa proposes that conversion can be understood as alternation, a natural outcome of established choices or cultural norms (1992, p. 42). She cites the story of Ruth and Naomi as an example where culturally-conditioned religious practice and family relationships influenced a personal faith decision. McKim refers to this process as nurture and renewal (1992, pp. 131-132), and sees conversion as a process or response to the cumulative effect of life transitions.

Gaventa contends that scripture also points to incidents of “pendulum-like conversion,” where one’s previous beliefs are “rejected in favor of a newly chosen...system” (Gaventa, 1992, pp. 42-43). The choice of the Philippian jailer and his family to turn from (likely) polytheistic pagan practices to The Way can be understood as a pendulum-like conversion (Acts 16:25-33). Transitioning from one worldview to another, often as the result of being educated or taught about that faith, is pictured here (McKim, 1992, p. 131).

A third approach to conversion is transformation, when what an individual believed she or he has known about her or his faith in the past is understood in light of

new experiences (Gaventa, 1992, p. 43). The prime example here is Paul, whose encounter with the risen Lord on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-31) completely reoriented his understanding of the law and scripture, the Messiah, and salvation. Images such as new birth, taking on a new identity, liberation, and reorientation can describe dramatic, transformative conversion experiences (McKim, 1992, pp. 130, 133-134).

While each of these categories helps to explain different roads people may take to come to faith in Christ, the preponderance of scriptural evidence is that conversion is a God-initiated, Christ-made-possible, Spirit-aided *transformation* (Gaventa, 1992, p. 54, emphasis added). This transformation can be instantaneous. It also can be gradual, a lifelong response to successive movements of God's spirit in the Christian community and in individual believers' lives. What is clear from scripture is that both God and the individual meet in the process of conversion and that the individual undergoes change. "Conversion is not completing a ritual, it is commencing a relationship" (Greear, 2013, p. 42) that is worked out through belief and obedience. One mark of a converted individual is that her or his obedience comes from a desire to please God, not out of mere duty (Jn. 14:15). Obedience is a matter of faith. Without obedience there is no faith, no belief, and no conversion (Jn. 3:36).

Receiving the Holy Spirit

A brief survey of the New Testament reveals that all truly converted believers receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 8:14-16, 10:44-48, 19:1-7; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 12:1-3; Eph. 1:13, 4:30; 1 Thess. 4:8). The Holy Spirit indwells all believers (Lk. 1:15, 41, 67, 2:25, 4:1; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:14). The Spirit serves as an advocate (Jn. 14:26), intercessor (Rom. 8:26-27), and teacher (Lk. 12:12; Jn. 14:26; 2 Pet. 1:21) who helps Jesus' followers mature as individuals and as communities of faith (Tit. 3:3-8). The

Spirit instructs and commands (Acts 1:2); exhorts and encourages (Acts 9:31, Jude 1:20); and is active in salvation (Rom. 7:6; Heb. 6:4-6).

While there is some dispute over whether believers receive the Holy Spirit upon their confession of faith, at their baptism, or following their baptism (and space does not permit this discussion), scripture is clear that the Spirit inaugurates the Kingdom's arrival (Matt. 12:15-21; Lk. 4:14-30). The Holy Spirit imparts eternal life to the believer (Rom. 8:2-4; 2 Cor. 3:6), makes believers' obedience possible, and is proof that a person belongs to Christ (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5). One cannot be in the people of God without belonging to Christ; and apart from the Holy Spirit, one cannot become God's child (Rom. 8:14-17; 1 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 4:29; Foster, 2000, p. 9). "The gift of repentance, baptism, and the coming of the Spirit are inseparable in the New Testament theology of conversion" (Smalley, 1979, p. 203).

A Brief Discussion on Baptism

John the Baptizer made a distinction between his prophetic ministry and Jesus' Messianic ministry through baptism. John's baptism used water and signified confession of sin and repentance. Jesus, in turn, baptized in order to carry out God's righteous judgment (Matt. 3:11). "In Matthew 3:11, the wicked are baptized, or immersed, in fire (3:10, 12), the righteous in the Holy Spirit" (Keener, 1993, p. 53). This writer believes that to be baptized in or with the Holy Spirit is the same as being filled with the Spirit or receiving the Holy Spirit in salvation. The Spirit imparts new life to the believer and is the culmination of conversion (Lyon, 1979, p. 17) and entrance into the People of God.

“It is through baptism in or by the Spirit...that members are added to the body of Christ” (O’Brien, 1993, p. 129). Christian Baptism in the first centuries of the church was a radical, subversive act. In an age of empire, idolatry, and polytheism, believers expressed faith in one God revealed through Jesus Christ, the Lord. This was the Baptismal confession, one that marked a decisive break with the “old life apart from God,” the beginning of “life in the risen Christ,” and “participation in the inauguration of the kingdom of God through Jesus” (Beasley-Murray, 1993, pp. 61, 64). Baptism is the celebration of conversion. It is not its beginning, nor its end.

Conclusion: Is Tim “In” or “Out”?

J. D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, shares a sobering statistic. Nearly eight of ten Americans claim they believe in Jesus’ literal death and resurrection, “though for many it makes little difference in their lives” (Greear, 2013, p. 39). From the scenario given above, this seems to have been Tim’s normal, “Christian” life. Tim’s sister indicated that he believed in God, attended worship and prayed on occasion, and took part in religious activities. However, her description of Tim’s life does not indicate “a decisive, Godward orientation” (Smalley, 1979, p. 197) that marks the truly repentant and truly converted. Most importantly, Tim’s life seemed to lack the growth and maturity that is a vital part of an ongoing relationship with Jesus (see Jn. 15:1-17; Heb. 10:19-25, 13:1-8; Jas. 1:22-25; 2:14-25; 1 Jn. 2:12-14; 4:7-21). I have to believe that, on the basis of the evidence, Tim is not in the People of God.

It seems that Tim took God’s grace for granted. Perhaps he allowed the comfort of being raised in a Christian home, his belief in a higher power, his baptism as an infant, and his commitment to a basic Christian morality to lead him to believe he knew

God through Christ. In reality, the way he lived his life made it clear that Tim, not Jesus, “called the shots.” The working out of one’s salvation depends on “God’s action in believers as they respond to God’s call in the gospel” (Beasley-Murray, 1993, p. 61). Unfortunately, Tim’s response to the gospel appears to have been one of apathy and self-reliance, not vitality and self-surrender.

Further, God’s people give evidence that God is working in their lives. What is this evidence? In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul notes that true repentance results in “earnestness” (v. 11), a desire to please God; concern for others in the faith community; and a promise to seek others’ good. Matthew and Luke speak of “fruit keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:8, Lk. 3:8). In other words, people who believe in Jesus as Savior as Lord *both walk the walk and walk the talk*. Their words and their actions reflect the prophet Micah’s words: they “act justly...love mercy...and walk humbly with...God” (Mic. 6:8). From Tim’s sister’s words, it does not seem as though Tim acknowledged his sinfulness and need of a savior. Nor did he repent and turn his emotions, mind, spirit, and will from himself to God.

As a pastor, it is not my place to judge the state of Tim’s soul. I do not know the circumstances surrounding the tragic accident that ended his life on earth. Perhaps, in his final moments, God blessed him with an opportunity to consider what he really believed about life, death, and Jesus. When talking with Tim’s sister, I would hold out the hope that Tim was able to confess his faith in Christ as his Savior and Lord, truly repent, and receive the gift of salvation through his faith. With the Spirit’s help, if it was an appropriate time, I also would seek to discern the depth of Tim’s sister’s relationship with God and begin to share the Gospel if it became apparent she was not a Christian. If

Tim's sister is a believer, I would try to comfort her with the assurance of salvation the Holy Spirit offers to her, to Tim, to their family, and to all people.

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**More Than a Meal: The Eucharist and Corporate and Individual
Spiritual Formation
(Congregational Spiritual Formation)**

Hypothetical Scenario

Morning worship had just ended. The congregation had shared in what Pastor Smith felt was a very moving time of worship in song and word that ended with Holy Communion. In the receiving line John, an attender who has worshiped at First Wesleyan Connection since the congregation was launched five years ago, startled Pastor Smith with a comment. “Pastor, I don’t understand why you make such a big deal out of Communion. You talk about examining our hearts, being more like Jesus, and having strength to do God’s work, but I don’t feel anything. It’s like I’m just eating some bread and drinking some grape juice. Am I wasting my time taking Communion, or is something supposed to happen to people because of it?” Pastor Smith replied, “John, you’ve asked a very real and important question. I want to give you an honest answer, but it will take some time. Could we meet over a meal and talk about it later in the week?”

Question: What role does Holy Communion play in shaping members and congregations into more faithful Christians? Can the Eucharist be presented in ways that foster deeper individual and corporate spiritual formation?

Introduction

Orthodox Christianity places God at the center of faith, practice, and culture. Nowhere is this reality seen more beautifully than when congregations celebrate the breaking of bread and the giving of the cup. Whether termed Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist, the act of celebrating, giving thanks for, and remembering Christ's death, resurrection, and future return re-presents the Christian belief in a God who creates, redeems, and transforms individuals, peoples, and the created order.

This integration paper will examine the role the Eucharist plays in re-forming congregations and individuals into God's image. Beginning with a brief overview of the major theological views of the Lord's Supper, the paper will examine select scripture passages related to the Eucharist along with the importance of forming a Eucharistic imagination. Approaches to celebrating Holy Communion designed to promote corporate and individual spiritual formation will be shared as well. In so doing, the author will attempt to show that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace through which ordinary, everyday elements and simple words catalyze extraordinary transformation.

Major Views of the Lord's Supper

Over two millennia, four major views concerning the Lord's Supper have emerged: transubstantiation, consubstantiation, memorialism, and real (spiritual) presence. Each of these perspectives takes a position that seeks to answer "exactly what is happening to the elements, the participants, to Christ, and the Church" when congregations celebrate the Eucharist (Staples, 1991, p. 213). Jesus' request to the disciples to continue the Lord's Supper, "in remembrance of me" (Matt. 26:-26-30; Mk.

14:22-26; Lk. 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26, New International Version) has made the Eucharist a foundational part of the faith's historic, collective, and theological memory.

Transubstantiation, a view held in Roman Catholicism, contends that the elements of bread and wine are changed from one substance into another, both in their attributes and their properties (Staples, 1991, p. 213). From a foundation of Aristotelian logic and Thomist theology, the elements' substance and accidents become Christ's body and blood. Christ's presence is fixed in the bread and the wine through a miracle performed each time the mass is celebrated. Further, it is the Eucharist itself that forms the church through what Edward Schillebeeckx calls an historical, embodied, personal encounter with God in Christ (Schillebeeckx, as cited in Staples, 1991, p. 216). The church gathers primarily not to adore and praise the Godhead or to hear the Word declared in their midst – though these actions are an integral part of the liturgy. The church is formed when the Eucharist is celebrated, Christ's sacrifice is remembered, Christ's presence and future return are proclaimed, and the celebrant and congregation receive the consecrated host and wine (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.d.).

Consubstantiation, with its roots in the theology of Martin Luther and his successors, holds that Christ is really and truly present in bodily form in the sacrament at the words of institution (Staples, 1991, p. 218). This is possible through the Christ's omnipresence. Consubstantiation recognizes Christ's physical and spiritual presence in tension through the Doctrine of *Communicatio Idiomatum*. The human and divine Christ share the same properties (attributes and essence) at the same time, in their entirety, without division (Staples, 1991), p. 218). The risen Lord is both exalted in heaven, where He sits at the Father's right hand (Rom. 8:34) and present at the table during the Eucharist.

A memorialist view, championed by Huldreich Zwingli and held today by Anabaptist, Brethren, Christian/Disciples, and some Reformed groups, sees the Lord's Supper as a sign or symbol of grace *already* received through faith (Staples, 1991, p. 222, emphasis added). The Eucharist is a holy fellowship that confirms the reality of believers' salvation secured through Christ's sacrifice. The memorialist view diverges from consubstantiation through the belief that the risen Lord is present in the Supper in His divinity, but not His humanity (Staples, 1991, p. 223). Jesus, the Great Redeemer, instituted Holy Communion to commemorate His death and its benefits, a remembrance by reenactment that recalls Christ's past sufferings, Christ's continued presence with the Church, and Christ's promise of future glory.

A fourth view of the Lord's Supper, that of real (spiritual) presence, is the position taken by John Calvin and his successors; French and German Reformed churches; groups within the larger Anglican movement; and Scottish Presbyterianism. Staples (1991) notes that spiritual presence is the view most similar to that of John Wesley, who included some memorialist leanings in his Eucharistic theology. As with transubstantiation and consubstantiation, those holding to Christ's real (spiritual) presence see the Eucharist as an efficacious sacrament. The Holy Spirit confers grace through the bread and the cup (Staples, 1991, pp. 224-225). The elements' physical properties are not changed; they do, however, become Christ's body and blood when they are received in faith. The Eucharist is a means of spiritual union with Christ that witnesses to and strengthens believers' faith at the same time it testifies to Christ's death, resurrection, and future return.

John Wesley believed that Christ's physical presence was restricted to heaven (Staples, 1991, p. 226). At the same time, he understood Christ's spiritual presence to be

active, dynamic, and related to saving and sanctifying grace. The bread and wine shared in the Lord's Supper do not have inherent power. Through their use as symbols of Christ's broken body and shed blood they are endowed with grace that nourishes and sustains the physical and spiritual bodies of those who partake of Holy Communion. Constant (frequent) communion was Wesley's ideal. He saw the Eucharist as both "a command of God... [and] a mercy to man" (Wesley, n.d., para. 14).

These phrases give a glimpse into Wesley's understanding of the divine-human relationship. God commands man to be "like himself; namely, by being like him in holiness" (Wesley, n.d., para. 18). At the same time, God "knew we could do nothing toward this [being holy] of ourselves" and so has given "the Lord's Supper...that we may obtain holiness on earth, and everlasting glory in heaven" (Wesley, n.d. para. 18). The individual's (and the church's) responsibility is to submit to God's authority; receive these means of grace in faith; purpose to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength; and treat others as they wish to be treated. Wesley sums up humanity's role this way: "Our power is the one rule of our duty. Whatever we can do, that we ought" (Wesley, n.d., para. 16).

The Bible and Eucharistic Theology

Though a Christian understanding of Holy Communion primarily is found in New Testament scriptures, principles common to a scriptural understanding of the Eucharist span both the Old and New Testaments. Holy Communion is more than a meal that remembers Jesus' death, resurrection, and future return. It is an act of worship that calls us to consider God's presence and provision; our participation in Christ's mission; sacrifice; fellowship; and the firstfruits of the kingdom. Each of these aspects of Eucharistic theology is bound up in the concept of covenant.

Presence and Provision

The Passover (Cf. Exod. 12:1-30) is celebrated to this day as “as a lasting ordinance” for all of Abraham’s descendants (Ex. 12:24). The Passover story records YHWH’s divine protection in the sparing of Israelite families who spread lambs’ blood over their doorposts. The text – and the accompanying Exodus narrative – points to God’s presence with and provision for the nation. “The LORD kept vigil that night to bring them [the Israelites] out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the Lord for the generations to come” (Ex. 12:42). In much the same way, Christians gathering to partake in the Lord’s Supper “do this in remembrance of” Christ (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).

The angel of God went before and came behind the Israelites as they journeyed toward the Sea of Reeds (Ex. 14:19) while pillars of cloud and fire guided them as they journeyed through the wilderness (Ex. 13:21-22). Following the Hebrews’ escape from Pharaoh’s armies, Moses sang of YHWH’s presence: “In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength, you will guide them to your holy dwelling” (Ex. 15:13). YHWH continued to provide for the people, in spite of their grumbling, through quail and manna (Ex. 16:13-14). The LORD provided water from rock in the midst of the desert (Ex. 17:1-7) to prove to the people that the LORD was with them.

This Old Testament picture is painted most beautifully and most completely at Sinai. The entire people came near to hear YHWH speak to Moses *and to them* (emphasis added). YHWH began the conversation with these words: “I AM the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Ex. 20:1ff). YHWH based covenant on YHWH’s presence with the people, setting them free from oppression

and bringing them to him. The point of rescue is not revenge upon Egypt for oppressing God's people but in renewing the covenant as a means of reconciling the Lord and the Lord's people (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-21). "This covenant relationship...is rooted in an act of deliverance that God has performed on their behalf" (Bell, n.d., loc. 870).

The promise of divine presence, protection, and deliverance continues into the New Testament. Jesus's first miracle, the turning of water into wine at Cana, points to an age of abundance. There will be both a "feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines" (Isa. 25:6; cf. Isa. 25:7-9). This banquet heralds all peoples' salvation (cf. Isa. 25:7-9) at the wedding supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:6-9). The feeding of the 4,000 and 5,000 also point to Messiah inaugurating God's kingdom. This kingdom will be unlike any other. Messiah provides for his people both now –through the miraculous multiplication of bread and fish – and in the future when Jesus would sacrifice his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). "The God of the exodus, who divided waters (Ex 14:21) and provided manna from heaven (Ex 16:14-18), was at work in history again" (2 Kings 2:8-14; 4:38-44; Mt 14:13-33) ("Feeding of the Five Thousand," n.d., para. 4). Seen in light of the feeding miracles, the Eucharist affirms, confirms, and celebrates Jesus' provision of physical and spiritual strength for His followers.

Mission

At first glance, one might not consider the story of Paul's shipwreck in Acts 27:33-38 in terms of the Lord's Supper. Geoffrey Wainwright (1971) sees this passage as a story of protection and deliverance centered on celebrating the Eucharist. Beginning at Adramyttium (Acts 27:2), the ship made its way towards Rome. Some fourteen days later, in the Adriatic Sea, having gone without nourishment, Paul encouraged those with

him to take food (Acts 27:34). In an act reminiscent of Jesus at the Last Supper, Paul “took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves” (Acts 27:35-36).

An angel of God promised Paul divine protection and deliverance: “I urge you to keep up your courage, because none of you will be lost” (Acts 27:22a). Ironically, these men were saved as they were crossing the sea, making it possible that Luke intended this passage to be understood as a type of New Testament Exodus. Reminiscent of Moses’ confrontation with Pharaoh, YHWH, the God Paul served, kept Paul safe in order that he would proclaim God’s power and might to Caesar, the most powerful man in the world at that time. A Eucharistic meal, then, set the stage for taking the gospel message to the known world’s political and religious center.

Sacrifice

Covenant is intimately linked to sacrifice through the shedding of blood. In the Adamic covenant, animals were slayed to provide coverings for the man and woman after the two were expelled from Eden (Gen. 3:21). Birds and livestock were sacrificed when God made covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:9-21). A ram was offered on the altar in place of Isaac, Abraham’s beloved son (Gen. 22:9-19). The Mosaic Covenant, centered on the Ten Commandments and given more detailed expression in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy established the sacrificial system the prefigured Messiah’s atonement (Edie, 2010, p. 91). The Davidic covenant established a perpetual kingdom through David’s descendants (2 Sam. 7:15-16), culminating in Jesus, the Son of David. This same Jesus healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, and entered Jerusalem, David’s City, as David’s son who came in the name of the Lord (Matt. 9:27, 15:22, 20:30-31, 21:9).

The gospels' Last Supper narratives link Jesus' crucifixion with covenant. Both Matthew and Mark describe Jesus's offering of the cup as the *blood of the covenant* (Matt. 26:28, Mk. 14:24, emphasis added). Luke and Paul depict the cup as the *new covenant in Jesus' blood* (Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25, emphasis added). Blood sacrifice forgives and atones for humanity's sins, appeases God's wrath, and makes peace between a holy God and sin-scarred women and men (Matt. 26:28; Rom. 3:24-26, 5:8-10; Eph. 2:14-18). In turn, Jesus' sacrifice motivates His followers to give of themselves for others and for the kingdom. As living sacrifices, Jesus' disciples offer true, proper, holy, reasonable, and acceptable acts of worship to the Father (Rom. 12:1). Just as the Lord Jesus offered His life for all people, His followers are to seek others' best, not their own. We are bound to community and kingdom, not solely to ourselves.

Fellowship of the Faithful

Christians' living sacrifice first is to the Lord and then to others. In Romans 12, Paul commands his readers to be "devoted to one another"; meet others' needs before their own are met; practice hospitality; be at peace (in harmony) with those they live with and near; bless those who would harm them; and associate with women and men of low social standing (cf. Rom. 12:9-16). These distinctives build Christian community and establish *koinonia*. Paul specifically links *koinonia* with celebrating the Eucharist. In 1 Corinthians 10: 23-26, *κοινωνία* can be understood as "joint participation...fellowship...association ...in the (mystical) body of Christ or the church" (*κοινωνία*, n.d.). The Communion cup, the *εὐλογία* itself, is consecrated and sacred, implying that those who partake in the Lord's Supper are made holy through receiving the elements (*εὐλογία*, n.d.). Christians come together as a community to affirm Christ's presence and provision; to renew their commitment to the Christian mission; to

give thanks for Christ's atoning sacrifice; and to recognize the Lord as Giver of the feast (Moltmann, as cited in Staples, 1991, p. 242).

Firstfruits of the Kingdom

In much the same way that the tithe of grain, produce, wine, and livestock was to be offered to the LORD (Gen. 4:3-4; Lev. 2:1-16, 6:14-18) the Eucharist represents the firstfruits of God's Kingdom (Wainwright, 1971). The elements are an earnest or down payment of humanity's complete redemption at the eschaton. Use of the term firstfruits in his epistles suggests that for Paul, the Eucharist showed history has an intended end – the salvation of humankind and the bringing of all powers and principalities under God's control (Cf. Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; 2 Thess. 2:1-2, 13-14).

Eucharist as firstfruits unites Old and New Testament theologies into a larger whole. In the Pauline writings, firstfruits begin with Christ, who is the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Firstfruits recognize divine sovereignty and control over the created order and picture Christ's ultimate triumph over sin and death. In this way, the Eucharist answers the problem of evil. "From a biblical perspective, this is probably the most significant image of all" (Staples, 1991, p. 243). Holy Communion shows that forgiveness is God's greatest desire, not judgment and condemnation. "Jesus...succeeded in taking into Himself all the dark powers of this present evil age and...defeated every one of them by the light of his presence" (Foster, 1978, p. 126). The Eucharist shows God's plan is for reconciliation with humanity, not eternal separation from those created in the *imago dei*.

Developing a Eucharistic Imagination

"Persons brought up in the Wesleyan/holiness churches have generally not been well instructed as to the potential of the Eucharist as a means for the promotion of

holiness” (Staples, 1991, p. 204). If the Lord’s Supper truly is to function as a means of grace for Christian believers, developing a Eucharistic Imagination is paramount. This is not idolatry, or assigning magical qualities to the elements. Rather, it is having a “sanctified mind” that looks beyond Communion’s words and actions to the greater story the Eucharist tells. It is the shift from moment to metaphor. God is “storied,” the Lord’s Supper becoming the height of the gospel’s drama (Edie, 2010, p. 85). Consider this example of the Eucharist as story:

Genesis 2 shares a creation account where God creates man from the earth but leaves the man without a suitable helper. Recognizing the man’s loneliness, God causes the man to fall into a deep sleep, removes one of his ribs and fashions a new being, woman. God then presents the woman to the man. Woman and man are joined in a God-ordained love relationship, living together in harmony and perfect innocence.

The couple’s choice to give in to temptation and their decision to listen to the serpent’s words, however, brought chaos, shame, and guilt into the universe. Their perfect relationship with God, with each other, and with the world around them was marred. Woman blamed the serpent, while man lashed out against woman and God. Two humans, made in God’s image, were banished from Eden and cast from God’s presence in a great divorce. Covenant between God and humanity (pictured as marriage) was broken. Humankind’s original purity and blameless character became things of the past.

At the appointed time, Messiah entered into the world, taking on human form to give his life as a ransom for many, making peace with God through the cross (Col. 1:20). Prior to the cross, Messiah shared a meal with His closest friends. During the meal, he took bread and wine and presented them to his friends as symbols of his soon-to-be

broken body and soon-to-be spilled blood. This blood, making a new covenant, would reconcile sin-stained humanity to a holy God. These simple elements, gifts of the very creation the first man and woman were commanded to work (Gen. 3:17-19), would bind Savior with sinners, who through Messiah's death, resurrection, ascension, and future return, are presented to God as pure and blameless. Having become God's righteous people (2 Cor. 5:21), they once again are in right relationship with God on earth as it is in heaven.

This meal, which the church celebrates regularly as the Lord's Supper, affirms "the original goodness of creation and [a] creation worthy of redemption" (Blevins & Maddix, 2010, p. 59). What God first joined, human choice rent asunder. In the great reversal, Messiah transforms this divine human marriage. Vows are renewed through the everlasting covenant, sealed in Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and immanent return.

This is just one example of the power of a Eucharistic imagination to form individuals and congregations. Others include God's presence in the Exodus and recounting Israel's return from exile in Babylon. Envisioning the joy of recovering what once was thought missing in the parables of the lost coin, lost sheep, and lost son powerfully point us to themes of sacrifice, celebration, and redemption available to humanity through Jesus Christ. The Eucharist as a means of grace turns our attention from created gifts to the Creator God.

We are invited to the table of God's beloved Son for "renewal, for spiritual sustenance, for thanksgiving, for fellowship, for anticipation of the heavenly kingdom, and for celebrating our pilgrimage toward perfection in the image of Christ" (Staples,

1991, p. 202). Through the Eucharist, that which is imagined can become real for all who receive the elements in faith.

Presenting the Eucharist in Ways that Promote Corporate and Individual Spiritual Formation

The Eucharist as Sacred Time

In addition to internalizing a Eucharistic imagination, the concept of Holy Communion as sacred time can help individuals and congregations grow spiritually. We remember the past, pay attention to Christ's present activity in our midst, and envision the future with an eye to Christ's return (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, loc. 215). Viewed in this light, the Lord's Supper becomes a holy appointment where one enters into God's presence, is taught about God's nature and character, reflects on her or his identity in Christ, and can be changed through divine-human encounter (Edie, 2010, p. 82). We are God's people. Christ is our brother, Savior, redeemer, healer, and coming king.

In the original language *anamnesis* ("remembering," as in recalling Christ's sacrifice) also means to put "back together something that has come apart" (Dean, 2010, loc. 1719). The Eucharist brings the believing community together to "re-member" all that God, in Christ, has done for us. A fractured community can be mended. Those estranged from Christ and from each other are brought near to each other through Christ's blood (Eph. 2:13). Holy Communion becomes a time of commemoration, renewal, unity, and thanksgiving (Armstrong, 2007). This is not done in somber reflection or to assuage guilt, but "with the expectation that that the transformative power of these past events is made present to worshipers today" (Edie, 2010, pp. 83-84). One way to present the Eucharist as sacred time is to receive the elements in silence as an "echo of the presence of God" (Doherty, as cited in Foster, 1978, p. 86).

The Eucharist Gives Life Meaning

Holy Communion can be a catalyst for personal and communal spiritual formation when the sacrament is presented in existential terms (Staples, 1991; Edie, 2010). Through the sacrament, Christians encounter the God who took on flesh and entered into the created order. God's Son uses our ways to meet us in our world: eating and drinking, sharing hopes and dreams, pointing to a better way of life. The Lord's Supper brings forth the remarkable power of grace in everyday situations, those "settings or practices where God's offer of loving relationship is especially and reliably present" (Edie, 2010, p. 84). Moreover, the Eucharist is personalistic (Staples, 1991, p. 216). Holy Communion brings together the gospel's content – "He [Jesus] took bread...saying, 'This is my body...This cup is the new covenant in my blood'" – and personal experience – "given for you...poured out for you" (Lk. 22:19b, 20b; Blevins & Maddix, 2010, p. 169). Presiding at the Last Supper, Jesus fully identified with humanity's sin and presented his followers with their need of a savior.

More than his teaching, more than the miracles he performed, Jesus' reappropriation of the Passover Meal into the Lord's supper became a "threshold experience...[a] glimpse [of] who Christ really is and what loving him really costs" (Dean, 2010, loc. 3172). The communion elements are not just symbols of Jesus' agonizing death on the cross and the spilling of his blood. Bread gives life and strength. Wine relieves thirst, heals wounds, and is a symbol of God's abundant provision. Bread and wine are more than courses of a meal. They are symbols that connect us to God's story of salvation made available to all people (Edie, 2010, p. 91).

Rather than seeing the Eucharist as a sacrament reserved only for Christians, congregations might consider celebrating Holy Communion beyond the church walls,

publicly and with no restrictions as to who may receive the elements. In much the same manner as John Wesley shared the Eucharist with all who would receive it (Stamm, 2002, p. 263), Holy Communion as *Coram Publico*, for all who would come, allows “as many as possible [to] be drawn towards the Christ who is present... the better it will show forth to 'outsiders or unbelievers' who witness [in] it the qualities of the kingdom” (Wainwright, 1971, p. 134).

The Eucharist Symbolizes Relationship and Healing

In addition, the Lord’s Supper can form faith communities and individual believers through its relational nature. Communion not only is a means of reconciling people with God, it also can reconcile believers with one another. Times of confession, passing the peace, and corporate prayer before receiving the Eucharist can renew bonds between Christian sisters and brothers. When we come to the table, we are reminded that everyone around us is a neighbor and that we are called to show mercy to one another (Cf. Lk. 10:25-37). Just as the Samaritan poured oil and wine into the beaten man’s wounds to cleanse them and bandaged them to promote healing, the Lord’s Supper can bring healing from physical sickness. John Wesley seized on this reality when he described Holy Communion as “the means we may be assisted to attain those blessings which [God] hath prepared for us... [an] opportunity of increasing your strength in a word” (Wesley, n.d., para. 18, 19). The Eucharist also is a means of spiritual healing: “of [God’s] infinite mercy...that we may attain holiness on earth, and everlasting glory in heaven” (Wesley, n.d., para 19). Truly, by Christ’s wounds, we are healed (Isa. 53:5).

The Eucharist Can Change the Way We Live

Staples (1991) notes that the Lord's Supper is phenomenological and experiential. It has the potential to change how people live. Coming to the table is an opportunity to practice holy hospitality: "Biblical *koinonia* is restored when we are able, again, to partake together at the one Table of the Lord" (Gros, 2008, p. 21). Theologian Charles Foster describes Holy Communion as an avenue to creating "event-full" sacramental worship. Shrouding the elements and then revealing them as those gathered are invited to come forward to receive the holy meal is a way to present the Eucharist as a "performance that actively engages the bodies, minds, hearts, and souls of worshipers" (Foster, as cited in Edie, 2010, p. 88).

In and through the Eucharist, we are called to serve God and the world in sacrificial love. By grace, we are changed into God's people. By grace, we are empowered to follow Christ's example. John Wesley's sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion*, offers a structure for transformational worship centered on the Lord's Supper. As a community, all are called to repentance and given opportunity to confirm or reconfirm their faith. Through reading and proclaiming the Word, all are given assurance of salvation. Last, all receive the Sacrament (Wesley, n.d., para. 31). Presented in this manner, the Eucharist can be a means of grace to transform character, change behavior, empower reconciliation, assure salvation, and symbolize God's promises.

Conclusion

The Eucharist is an essential part of Christian Spiritual Formation. Celebrating the Lord's Supper reflects the Trinity's mission: Father, Son, and Spirit are present, active agents in forming people into the Godhead's image. All the church's activities, its

teaching, fellowship, worship, preaching, and service impact Christian spirituality, but the Eucharist can do so in ways often not considered among contemporary Wesleyan-Holiness churches. While each person chooses to take part in or absent themselves from communion, scripture, history, and tradition mediate against taking a strongly individualistic approach to the sacrament. As Maria Harris notes, “One Christian is no Christian; we go to God together or we do not go at all” (Harris, as cited in Drury, 2011, loc. 5020). The Eucharist can – and should – be seen as an opportunity to ask and answer questions about our faith, especially when Communion is open to those not part of the local community or who might not even yet be Christians.

The following is the text of a letter Pastor Smith wrote to John after the two met for a meal to talk about John’s reactions to receiving Communion:

Dear John,

Thanks for making time to meet with me. I hope our discussion on different approaches to Communion will help you to come to the sacrament with an expectation that God works in and through the bread and the juice. If you can, think of Communion like an epic story that shows how our Heavenly Father keeps His promises.

Communion proves that God will give up anything - including God's own Son - to have a relationship with people that changes how they think, how they act, how they love, and how they live. Christian authors Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof put it this way: “The main point in the epic is that God can *always* be trusted” (Joiner & Nieuwhof, 2010, p. 109).

Communion means so much to Christians because it not only reminds us that Jesus has set us free from sin and death, it also sets us free from false ideas of what it means to be human. Taking the bread and the juice shows us – powerfully, I hope –

that our salvation does not depend on what we do, how much we serve, how often we read our Bibles or even how deeply we feel about Jesus. These things are important, but they do not save us. The Lord's Supper does not reflect what we *do*; it is a picture of who we *are*. It is not a meal that reflects the Christian lifestyle. It is an act of worship that declares it is possible to be transformed by Christ to love and serve others in His name and for His sake (Root, 2007, p. 98). Pastor Steve Harper puts it this way: “The key to Christian growth is not feeling but *faithfulness*” (Harper, 2003, p. 76).

John, the next time we celebrate Holy Communion, my prayer is that you will receive the elements as a declaration that you – and all of humanity - were created to be in relationship with our God and with others. I pray also that, through simple gifts of bread and juice, you will come to sense how deeply God wants to make you – and all of us – more like God's Son, Jesus. Thanks again for a great conversation. Let's get together again, soon.

In Christ,

Pastor Smith

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Forgive, Forget, or Both? A Christian Understanding of Forgiveness
(Congregational Relationships)

Situation

Pastor Fred attended the funeral calling hours for the father of one of his church's assistant pastors. During the course of the evening, he was able to spend a few minutes speaking with the young man in private. During their conversation, Pastor Fred was shocked when his young assistant told him, "Pastor Fred, you have *no idea* what this man did to me, my wife, my mother, and our family. I hate him so much that if he wasn't already dead, I'd kill him myself. I know Jesus says we are to forgive and love our enemies, but I don't – I can't love this man, even if he was my father. I may be able to forgive him, but I'll never forget!"

Over the next couple of days, Pastor Fred pondered his colleague's response and began to think about what forgiveness demands of a person. Was there anything he should or could say to his hurting colleague?

Questions

As Christians, who, what, and how are we to forgive? Do those who claim Jesus as their Savior and Lord have the right to forgive but not forget? Are there situations where forgiveness is conditional?

Introduction

An oft-used quote from the English poet Alexander Pope commends excusing another's faults on the basis of virtue: "To err is human, to forgive divine" (Pope, n.d.). Feeling that one has received divine absolution for wronging a fellow human being can be freeing, even gratifying. Yet, was Alexander Pope only half right? While erring,

frustrating, hurting, killing, or wounding others is bound intimately with evil, wrong, and human existence, the Bible contends that forgiving is both a human and a divine act. Persons made in God's image forgive one another in response to the divine extending forgiveness to humankind (Eph. 4:32). The human race is a forgiven – and forgiving – one.

Yet, is forgiveness an ideal to which all too fallible persons only aspire to but fail to put into practice? Do we settle for excusing actions rather than forgiving them? (Lewis, n.d., para. 3). This integration paper will seek to examine what it means for Christians to offer forgiveness to those who have hurt them. It also will examine if there are limits or conditions to forgiving. To do so, first we must define what forgiving is and what it is not; explore the relationship between forgiveness and justice; and place forgiving within a framework of healing, restoration, and reconciliation. Finally, we will outline briefly how and why Christians forgive.

Defining Forgiveness: What Forgiveness Is

In his book *The Art of Forgiving*, ethicist and theologian Lewis Smedes wrote, “One of God's better jokes on us is to give us the power to remember the past and leave us no power to undo it” (1996, p. xi). Pain, injury, and hurts that we inflict upon others – and others inflict upon us – affect persons as individuals and families. Corporations, armed forces, and corrupt governments carry out unethical and depraved acts that harm ethnic and religious groups, states, even entire nations, leaving death and destruction in their wake. Seeking accountability, redress, and restitution for those wrongs can begin to chart a course toward justice, but economic and legal remedies are insufficient fully to “make things right.” What really is needed is a means of bringing about healing, justice,

and peace. The Bible and Christian teaching point to forgiving as a powerful way to make what is wrong, right again.

N. T. Wright (2006) contends that forgiving is a reaction to moral evil that is present in the world (p. 29). Persons' choices and actions reveal the depth of unforgiveness resident in our souls. Fundamentally, human beings have a choice. We can withhold forgiveness; place the bulk of responsibility upon the offender; hold fast to claims of complete innocence; and rail against injustice. And in so doing, we take on a victim mentality and project hatred and vengeance upon others (Wright, 2006, p. 29). Or, we can turn inward, believing the accusations that we are the cause of the pain we experience and determining we alone are to blame for what has happened. Both of these options are "immature and inadequate responses" (Wright, 2006, pp. 29-30).

Forgiving rights wrongs and overcomes evil with good because to forgive another humanizes them. Forgiving points us to the possibility of healing relationships on earth while giving us a foretaste of glory divine. Forgiving looks toward the day when humanity will live in a world without death, mourning, crying, or pain; where the old order of hatred and vengeance have passed away; where creation is redeemed from sin's curse; and the Lord God will reign forever and ever (Rev. 21:4b, 22:3, 5b, New International Version). "Forgiveness...including God's forgiveness of us, our forgiveness of one another, and our forgiveness even of ourselves...is a central part of deliverance from evil" (Wright, 2006, p. 135). When we forgive and receive forgiveness, we extend and receive the very same forgiving grace God offers to us. But, what exactly do we *do* when we forgive?

Smedes (1996) sets a high bar for forgiving. He notes that we forgive persons' *actions* – what they *do*, not who they *are* (Smedes, 1996, p. 21, emphasis added). More

importantly, those actions that qualify for forgiveness are not slights, personal offenses, or offhanded or unfiltered insults. In other words, we do not forgive the person who cuts us off while we are driving. We do not forgive innocent or unintended mistakes. We do not forgive common, every day accidents, such as a toddler spilling her milk on the table or children who break a window from playing baseball too close to the house. These common occurrences might better be excused, overlooked, and forgotten about. Their impact, while distressing, did not end or break a relationship. Perhaps no relationship existed at all between the one hurt and the person doing the hurting. Forgiveness involves dealing with the consequences of *calculated actions* meant to injure or wound; betrayals of trust; or the carrying out of immoral activities (Smedes, 1996, p. 20, emphasis added).

Forgiving separates acts of evil from persons committing those acts. “To forgive is to condemn the fault but to spare the doer. That’s what the forgiving God does” (Volf, 2005, p. 141). This separation of person and action may be how God forgives and forgets: “I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more” (Jer. 31:34b). “[The Lord] does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities...as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:10, 12). At least one aspect of divine forgiveness is to choose not to remember, to number, or to credit sin to the perpetrator (cf. Heb. 8:12, 10:17).

For human beings, however, forgiving is a process. Rarely is one able to forgive and move on from being wounded quickly. Forgiveness often is an ongoing action where the victim releases her- or himself from the desire to seek redress. Hurt is acknowledged; loss is noted; and yet, the perpetrator is spared. The victim does not judge the evil that may be seen in the offender. The evil act is condemned. An analogy

to the process of forgiving might be found in Genesis 4:7b, where the Lord says to Cain, “Sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” To rule over sin (and the temptations, evil desires, and enticements that accompany it, cf. Jas. 1:14) we “have to give up...jealous anger so that sin [does] not find a foothold in [our lives]” (Life Application Bible, 2005, [Genesis] 4:7, p. 12). Forgiving then, can be understood as a continuum where the victim gives up her or his anger, refuses to be enticed to revenge, and rules over the desire to take vengeance with her or his own hands.

Forgiving is an act of agape love that seeks what is in the perpetrator’s best interest, not the victim’s. Forgiving cancels the debt the perpetrator owes the victim – the perpetrator’s obligation to make amends, to offer restitution, and to right wrongs (though acts of sincere repentance and restitution may be carried out and reconciliation may occur). Not only are the perpetrator’s transgressions and sins forgiven, but the wrongdoer also is not kept in debt to the one who has been hurt (Ps. 32:1-12; Rom. 4:7; Morris, 1993, p. 312; Volf, 2005, pp. 130, 169, 180).

Forgiving is a loving act precisely because it is the victim, not the offender, who initiates forgiveness. The victim bears the emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual costs of ending the vicious cycle of payback. When a person forgives, she absorbs the blows of hurt and pain, surrenders the right to punish, lets go of the desire for vengeance, and views the perpetrator as someone made in God’s image and likeness, just as she is (Deut. 32:25; Rom. 12:19; Gen. 1:27; Zahnd, 2010, p. 98). Humanizing the perpetrator while not overlooking or excusing the harm the offender has caused is not easy. However, it is essential if true forgiveness is to take place. Only when the victim

initiates the process of forgiving and willingly chooses to bear the burden of forgiving another can peace be found in the midst of a violent, inhospitable world.

Defining Forgiveness: What Forgiveness Is Not

Now that we have examined what forgiving is, we must determine what forgiving is not. Forgiveness is not self-denial (Jones, 1995, loc. 158). In forgiving, the victim does not deny the reality of the injustice, hurt, or evil experienced. Forgiving does not ignore, disguise, diminish, or deny injustice (Bonhoeffer, 1995, p. 142; King, 1981; Lewis, n.d., para. 6; Smedes, 1996, p. 59). In forgiving, we do not mitigate the consequences of another's actions. If an act that hurts another has legal ramifications, the offender can be forgiven but must suffer the judicial and legal penalties of the act. Further, releasing a perpetrator from her or his debt does not mean that the victim accepts the wrongdoing done to her. Rather, she agrees to live with the consequences of sin, whether they be to her liking or not (Anderson, 2000, p. 223). The victim does not wave a magic wand and instantly turn bad into good. "Forgiving intolerable things does not make them tolerable" (Smedes, 1996, p. 150).

Forgiving also does not mean we surrender our right to justice. This may be the most difficult aspect of forgiveness, since there is not universal agreement amongst Christian theologians that in forgiving, the offender retains her or his right to justice. Lewis Smedes argues that forgiving does not mean we allow ourselves to be wronged again. "We are not to be doormats" (1996, pp. 55-56). Smedes contends one can extend genuine forgiveness to the person who has harmed them and with a clear conscience separate physically from that person to prevent further mistreatment.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, however, links forgiving with loving one's enemies and being reconciled to those who hate, curse, and mistreat a person. For Bonhoeffer, one

cannot love an enemy without seeking the enemy's ultimate good and, in the process, extending blessing to them (cf. Matt. 5:24, Lk. 6:28; Smedes, 1996, p. 11). This, he says, is the Christian's "supreme demand. Through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God" (Bonhoeffer, 1995, p. 148). C. S. Lewis echoes Bonhoeffer when he writes, "Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin...seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness, and malice, and *nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it*" (Lewis, n.d. para. 5).

Yet, does the obligation to love one's enemy necessitate that we place ourselves in harm's way as evidence of that supreme enemy-love? When we resist an evil person and turn our left cheek toward them that they may slap it as they slapped our right cheek previously (Matt. 5:39), are we obligated to stand our ground and allow the perpetrator to continue to have his way with our jawline? Jesus reminds us that we save our lives when we give up our lives for Jesus' sake and for the gospel (Mk. 8:35) not for remaining in an unsafe personal or business relationship. Removing oneself from an abusive situation when it is in one's power to do so seems to have scriptural warrant.

One of the most difficult aspects of forgiving is working out whether the one offended is obligated to renew a personal relationship with the offender. If forgiveness is extended to someone who has wounded another deeply, must they be reconciled in the sense that victim and offender now spend time together, share resources, and move in the same personal, professional, and social circles? True reconciliation places a priority on the offender's relationship with God. Thus, forgiving obligates the victim to do all she or he can to ensure that the perpetrator finds peace with God. Reconciliation renews the bond of common humanity between those who are injured and those who injure others. While we are commanded to forgive others as God has forgiven us, we are

not obligated in turn to extend trust to those who have betrayed us. The issue may (and the author stresses *may*) be settled when we consider that forgiving – and, by extension, reconciliation – does not mean reunion (Smedes, 1996, p. 23).

Is Forgiving Conditional?

One can argue that the gospels present forgiveness as being both conditional and unconditional. Jesus' model prayer to His disciples in Matthew 6:9-15 inextricably links forgiving and receiving forgiveness with the appearance of God's kingdom (cf. Jones, 1995, loc. 48). The prayer's structure points to forgiving others as a way one's relationships with God and others are preserved and extended: "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). It may even be possible to claim that forgiveness shields a person from temptation – perhaps the temptation to take revenge or to "play God" (Matt. 6:13). These verses paint forgiving in a positive light. Verses 14 and 15, however, warn that withholding forgiveness results in the Father refusing to forgive our sins. Why is this? "God's forgiveness of sin is not the direct result of our forgiving others...when we don't forgive others, we are denying our common ground as sinners in need of God's forgiveness" (Life Application Study Bible, 2005, [Matthew] 6:14, 15, p. 1542). Just as forgiving humanizes the perpetrator, withholding forgiveness can cause a perpetrator to remain less than human and not worthy of forgiveness in the victim's eyes.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) extends these themes. Both Peter's question to Jesus – and Jesus' answer – are hyperbole, "obvious and intentional exaggeration" (hyperbole, n.d.). By offering to forgive a brother or sister who sinned against him "up to seven times" (Matt. 18:21b), Peter evidenced a willingness to go beyond accepted rabbinical teaching. Instead of limiting forgiveness to

three occasions, Peter offered to pardon an offender a perfect (or holy) seven times (Life Application Study Bible, 2005, [Matthew] 18:22, p. 1572). Jesus, however, challenged Peter to go even farther, urging that he offer forgiveness seventy seven (or seventy times seven) times. In other words, “we should always forgive those who are truly repentant, no matter how many times they ask” (Life Application Study Bible, 2005, [Matthew] 18:22, p. 1572). Forgiveness is to be ongoing and unlimited, not constrained by forgiving a specific number of times.

Much like the Disciples’ model prayer of Matthew 6, the parable’s context shows that brazen, stubborn unforgiveness separates the person refusing to forgive from God’s mercy and acceptance. To “forgive your brother or your sister from your heart” (Matt. 18:35b) a person must make a conscious, willed choice. There is the internal release of anger and revenge, the giving up of the right to carry out retribution on our own” (Hamilton, 2012, p. 57). Ensuring the payment of a debt (making restitution or carrying out retribution) was the king’s duty, not the servant’s. Forgiveness is both an attitude and an action that points away from the victim and perpetrator and toward God. Extending or withholding forgiveness reflects our understanding both of the human and of the divine. We forgive because “refusing to forgive is to reject the reality of God’s forgiving grace” (Volf, 2005, p. 180).

Luke 17:3-4 lays out a scriptural process of extending forgiveness to another person: give a rebuke; receive the offender’s repentance; and forgive the offense. To rebuke the perpetrator (*επιτιμαω/epitimaō*, n.d.) is to charge her or him with wrong; to find fault; to levy; to reprove or censure severely. The word underscores the economic and legal dimensions of forgiveness. The victim (the person who initiates forgiveness) always endures a greater cost than the perpetrator because the one who is injured finds

fault and levies blame, only to cancel the warrant as it were. In this sense, “forgiveness is free, but not cheap” (Garland, 2004, p. 38). When an offender is forgiven, neither party (victim or perpetrator) ever receive what is just in a strict legal sense. The victim surrenders her or his right for redress while the offender may not receive the due penalty for their transgression.

The context of Luke 17 is the disciples’ faith, which Luke tied directly to their willingness to forgive a sister or brother “even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent’” (Lk. 17:4). The disciples, seeing the high standard Jesus set for forgiving, asked for the faith to continue to forgive others. They sought faith to discern genuine repentance and faith to believe that, in forgiving, both victim and perpetrator would be restored to God and to each other. In forgiving another when genuine repentance is offered, we have done our duty to God, to the ones we have forgiven, and to ourselves. From Luke’s vantage point, then, it appears that forgiveness is conditional upon the offender offering genuine repentance.

Forgiving and Justice

There are a number of compelling reasons for wanting to label forgiveness as conditional. The first is that forgiving is not just. The argument can be made that when a perpetrator is forgiven, she or he does not get what they truly deserve. Another is the belief that failure or unwillingness to confess wrongdoing, to repent, or to make amends if possible makes a person undeserving of forgiveness (Smedes, 1996, p. 91). Third, forgiving an unrepentant enemy is unfair to the victim. Moreover, it is highly likely that the perpetrator “will just do it again” (Smedes, 1996, p. 91). How, then, can forgiveness be offered to an offender who has no intention of changing their actions or their attitudes? In cases such as these (and in all instances of forgiveness) we forgive not to

let the perpetrator “off the hook,” but to help heal our own damaged emotions (Smedes, 1996; Anderson, 2000, p. 222). Refusing to forgive continues to give the perpetrator undeserved control and power over the victim. Forgiving is an act meant to change the one wounded as well as the one who wounds.

If forgiveness is extended, though, does this mean that evil triumphs? “We cannot and must not soften the blow; we cannot and must not pretend that evil isn’t that bad after all” (Wright, 2006, p. 40). Christian teaching encourages forgiveness because Christians believe that God intimately cares for humanity, is kind and compassionate toward those who are abused, manipulated, and taken advantage of, and bears victims’ suffering with them (Anderson, 2000, p. 215; Smedes, 1996, p. 97; Volf, 2005; Zahnd, 2010). The manner in which a Christian understands the interplay between freedom and justice and revenge and punishment will influence their willingness to extend forgiveness to others.

Any substantive discussion of forgiveness must wrestle with the notion that when people are wounded and cry out for justice, what they really desire is revenge. Miroslav Volf describes justice as the legitimate acquisition of recompense (2005, p. 159). Contrast this definition with Lewis Smedes’ understanding of vengeance as personal satisfaction (Smedes, 1996, p. 8). Justice permits others, often using the judicial power of the state, to seek redress on the victim’s behalf. Revenge demands that the victim take an active role in securing her or his pound of flesh. Justice involves law and order. Revenge calls for a gang.

The Apostle Paul commands Christ followers to be subject to, aware of, concerned for, and to follow laws set and regulated by ruling authorities (Cf. Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2). For Paul, government has a specific cosmological and divine purpose:

“The one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:4). In seeking justice, one who is wronged sets aside her or his right for punishment and retribution and gives that right to government, who carries out punishment on its authority, compensating the victim through legal means.

Revenge is illegitimate taking (Volf, 2005, p. 159). When the victim seeks revenge rather than justice, she or he improperly takes on the role of punisher, becoming the perpetrator’s judge, jury, and executioner. When the victim seeks revenge over justice, she or he takes on a role they never were intended to, that of God, the only being who is right in giving a verdict and justified when carrying out judgment (Ps. 51:4). When the one who is wounded seeks to wound the one who hurt them, God’s role in avenging God’s people is wrested from God. We are not to seek vengeance in God’s name, lest we obscure God’s plans and use words without knowledge (Job 38:2). Rather, we are to be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful (Luke 6:36).

Forgiving and Healing

When we are brutally honest with ourselves, we have to reckon with the thought that forgiving is not easy, nor is it natural. Whether a person strives to forgive deep, calculated hurt; whether one extends an olive branch because they are told that forgiving is “the right thing to do”; or if one gives into pressure to forgive simply to “get the whole thing over with,” forgiveness clashes with the human compulsion for retribution. This reason alone is why it can be helpful to see forgiveness as a process of healing.

More importantly, forgiving can be a means by which one forgives themselves for being hurt, setting one's self free "from the trap of persistent and unfair pain" (Smedes, 1996, p. 66). Even if a person truly is an innocent victim, projecting pain onto ourselves or others can cause the wounded person to become so attached to that pain that she or he rationalizes bitterness and guilt and attempts to justify wanting to hurt others. Forgiving has the power to sever these bonds (May, 2008, loc. 1797). We forgive to heal ourselves as much as we forgive others to help reconcile them to God.

William Willimon encourages Christians to be generous forgivers so that they can take part in the universal church's ministry of *cura animarum*, the "cure of souls" (Willimon, 2002, p. 172). Scripture contains a number of restorative images for forgiveness, such as covering wounds (cf. Isa. 43:25 and Ps. 78:38); cleansing (cf. Isa. 4:4; Acts 22:16; and Heb. 9:22) and the releasing of burdens. God removes the weight of sin from those who repent and come to God to receive forgiveness, going so far as to "tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19; Smedes, 1996, p. 126).

These images of forgiveness can be transformational because they have the power to change both the victim and the perpetrator (McGinnis, 1979, p. 156). When we forgive and receive forgiveness, we allow the Holy Spirit to bend our hearts, minds, souls, and wills toward grace instead of revenge (Smedes, 1996, p. 66). Forgiving can give new life both to the wounded and the one who wounds when both are reconciled to God (cf. Isa. 55:12; Rev. 21:3-6). Genuine, heartfelt forgiveness is a living witness that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness" so that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:26a, 28a). We forgive, N. T. Wright says, so that we can be

“release[d]...from the burden of always being angry at a world gone wrong” (2006, p. 136).

Forgiving and Forgetting

The choice to forgive is not a choice to forget if, by forgetting, we mean that we are no longer affected by the act(s) that caused us pain. What we forget is not the hurt we experienced or the suffering we endured. What we forget is the desire to get even. “Christian forgiveness allows us to remember but calls us to end the cycle of revenge” (Zahnd, 2010, p. 12). Forgiving declares that those who live by the maxim of demanding a wound for a wound seek only to maim and destroy others, replacing justice with vigilantism. We would do well to remember that requiring an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth “was instituted as a guide for judges, not as a rule for personal relationships” (Life Application Study Bible, [Exodus] 21:24, 25, p. 127).

Miroslav Volf implores Christians to cultivate and maintain a “forgiver’s memory” because forgiving forces us to remember the wrongs that were endured (2005, p. 173). In choosing to forgive, we come face to face with our anger, bitterness, rage, resentment, shame, and eagerness for retribution. Forgiving challenges the entire spectrum of our emotions. We grapple with our own moral weakness. Forgiving challenges us to consider how zealously we guard our reputation, how deeply we desire control and security, and how desperately we feel the need to “win” in the end. “The words ‘I will forgive you, but I’ll never forget what you’ve done’ never explain the real nature of forgiveness...when we forgive, we forget in the sense that the evil deed is no longer a mental block impeding a new relationship” (King, 1981, pp. 50-51). Thus, in forgiving, we do not “forget” injustice (thereby denying the reality and horror of

calculated evil). Rather, the one who forgives *chooses not to remember* injuries perpetrated against him or her (emphasis added; cf. Hamilton, 2012, p. 30).

This is not semantics or exegetical gymnastics. To “put the act out of one’s mind” reflects that forgiveness is a process, an ongoing set of actions that involve the emotions, spirit, and will. When we forgive, we refuse to “keep score.” The record of the perpetrator’s wrongs is not recalled, but erased (sometimes again, and again, and again). Forgiveness is not used to manipulate interactions with the perpetrator. Forgiveness is not to be presented as something that is given only to be taken away when the perpetrator does not express remorse or if the victim does not “feel like” forgiving anymore. We forgive so that we can “unlearn sin and learn the ways of God” (Jones, 1995, loc. 42).

How We Forgive

At its heart, to forgive is divine. No matter how well-intentioned, how great the desire to let go of the past and its hold upon us, true forgiveness does not happen in our own strength. Human beings are empowered to forgive through grace given by the Holy Spirit, the one who leads us into all truth (Jn. 16:13). The Holy Spirit is an essential partner in our forgiving because canceling debts owed to us requires us to “remember the past truthfully” (Jones, 1995, loc. 38; Smedes, 1996, p. 173). We can move forward in forgiveness by thinking through and clarifying the situation (Smedes, 1996, p. 138).

This, in turn, allows us to focus on what was done to us, not the person who wounded us. At the same time, as the victim, there is a “safe distance” between us and the person who wronged us (Wright 2006, p. 15). This distance is essential so that we can accept our own role or part in conflict (if there is or was one); consider the perpetrator’s humanity; and love our enemy in the midst of an act of calculated hurt.

Forgiving others involves owning our feelings and naming our reactions for what they are, whether they are holy, profane, or indifferent (Smedes, 1996, pp. 133, 134, 139). In a sense, we “grow into forgiveness” as we pray to and with God; admit our desire for revenge and our resistance to forgiving; and humbly and persistently seek God’s grace to continue to forgive those who have injured us.

Volf notes that “forgiveness [is] born out of [God’s] compassion for the guilty” (2005, p. 125). While it seems wrong for a victim to have compassion for a perpetrator of injustice, we must remember that biblical compassion is not a sentimental feeling. Compassion is placing ourselves into another’s world, experiencing what they experience, and to show self-sacrificing love, pity, and mercy toward another (σπλαγχνιζομαι/splagchinizomai, n.d.). This holy compassion, itself intimately bound up in humanizing the perpetrator, is what helps us to live at peace with others, allow God to avenge and repay, and overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21).

Finally, we must act. “If we wait too long to forgive, our rage settles in and claims squatters’ rights to our souls” (Smedes, 1996, p. 140). Unforgiving hearts often become embittered, raging hearts that know only damage, hurt, and pain. If the victim refuses to let go of her or his pain and if the desire for revenge consumes calls for justice, a tragic role reversal can take place. “The offended becomes the offender” (Hamilton, 2012, p. 53). In situations like these, it can be helpful to remember that we do not have to forgive on our own. The church, as a community of forgiven and forgiving people, can come alongside the wounded and help them to heal. Just as a follower of Jesus is instructed to take two or three witnesses to help resolve conflict within the church (Matt. 18:16), persons seeking to know when and how to forgive should seek other believers’ counsel and discernment on how best to move forward in a given situation.

Why We Forgive

N. T. Wright sees forgiveness as part of the tension between the already breaking in and not yet fully realized Kingdom of God in this world. “We are...called to be people of forgiveness in the present because that is the life we shall be living in the future” (Wright, 2006, p. 143). At the same time, the reality of evil moves the Christian beyond him- or herself as an individual to consider communal, institutional, and global evil. Does forgiveness play a role in advancing God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven?

God forgives our wounds, our wrongs, and our abuse of our God-given freedom. In forgiving humankind’s rebellion against God’s rule, God recognizes the image and likeness of God that remains in each of us despite our sin and misuse of personal liberty. Perhaps most importantly, God forgives out of love and mercy, not out of sentimentality or a gesture of goodwill toward us. God forgives humanity in order to be reconciled to humanity. Forgiving erases the past to build the present and to create hope for the future (Hamilton, 2012, p. 122).

In a very real way, forgiving is God’s final victory over evil. Where hate and unforgiveness separates persons from each other and from God, forgiving reconciles offender and offended to God and (in some cases) to each other. Forgiving someone for committing a calculated act designed to bring pain and heartache to another shows that the perpetrator has value and worth as a human being. The person is worth reclaiming even though she or he may be an enemy, and even though the victim struggles against the inclination to humiliate the perpetrator. The person is forgiven not because forgiveness is easy, or because the perpetrator is liked but because, in God’s eyes, the offender still is worth being loved. The perpetrator is forgiven so that they might not be

separated from God for all eternity (evil's ultimate victory). "The true goal of forgiveness...is the redemption of the other person" (Hamilton, 2012, p. 83).

Conclusion

Perhaps more than any other Christian act, forgiving another for deep injury reminds us that we are growing toward Christlikeness. We are not yet perfect and complete, lacking nothing (Jas. 1:4). Though we are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and through God's Word have been given everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 1:3) what we do to others and what others do to us evidences ungodliness and sin that "so easily entangles" (Heb. 12:1). And, while through the Spirit and the Word, Christ has "given us his very great and precious promises" that allow us to "participate in the divine nature," (2 Pet. 1:4) we still are works in progress. Christ has forgiven and continues to forgive us. Following Christ's example, we are to be forgiving people. As L. Gregory Jones so beautifully reminds us, we are "saints-in-the-making" (Jones, 1995, loc. 145).

An important consideration in a Christian understanding of forgiveness is that God bears the cost of extending mercy to humanity (Jones, 1995, loc. 35). Evil dehumanizes humanity, while forgiveness remembers and reconfirms that every person, whether their actions are righteous, unrighteous, or somewhere in between, is made in God's likeness (Tutu, 1999, emphasis added). When we forgive, we "live into the *imago Dei*" (Hamilton, 2012, p. 131). Forgiveness is a virtue, attribute, and dimension of authentic personhood.

Forgiving serves as a buffer between the all-too-human tendency to idolize the good in ourselves and demonize the bad in others. Forgiveness also reminds us that, unlike God, humanity is bound by space and time (Childs, 2001, p. 157). As such, there

is a theological impetus to forgive because we are not promised another breath. To forgive is divine. To forgive also is human. Through the process of forgiveness we confront reality of our sin, our finitude, of our need for grace and mercy so that we do not “escape, [run] away from reality and God, and [become] quite unreliable in dealing with people” (Barth, as cited in Childs, 2001, p. 158).

As we forgive, we embrace the reality of how humanity is returned to right relationship with God. Through God the Father’s act of sending God the Son to earth as the Incarnate Christ; through the death and resurrection of God the Son made man in Jesus of Nazareth; and through the giving of God the Spirit as the seal, promise, and down payment of our future redemption (Eph. 4:30), the Trinity absorbs sin by placing sin on God (Volf, 2005; Zahnd, 2010). In forgiving humankind our trespasses, God models how we are to forgive those who trespass against us (Matt. 6:12; Lk. 6:37; Jn. 20:23).

Forgiving does not begin with people; it begins with God. The Godhead initiates, accepts, executes, and satisfies the penalty for evil and wrongdoing. We forgive because God first forgave us (Matt. 6:14, 9:6; Mk. 2:10; Lk. 5:24; Eph. 4:32). “We are forgiven, that we may be like him who forgives us” (Horatius Bonar, as cited in Torrance, 1986, p. 59). We forgive so that we might participate in God’s kingdom now, while we are on earth, and when the Kingdom comes in its fullness. Finally, we forgive because it is through forgiving that God is forming “a new humanity...capable of living together in peace” (Zahnd, 2010, p. 137).

Response to Pastoral Issue

After spending most of the next two weeks praying, studying scripture, and looking through his resources, Pastor Fred asked his young colleague to lunch. Pastor

Fred shared with his protégé how deeply sorry he was for the pain the young man's father had caused him and his family. Pastor Fred noted that forgiveness is a process, one that can take quite a bit of time and does not happen all at once. Many times, the seasoned pastor said, we forgive again and again and again. Because forgiveness can be continual, it is impossible to forget what happened. There just is no way to put something this hurtful out of a person's mind.

Placing his hand on his colleague's shoulder, Pastor Fred gently spoke. "Forgiving your father for what he did does not mean you have to forget what happened. It does not mean that you let him off the hook for the pain he caused." In fact, he said, by forgiving, a person names and owns their hurt and assigns blame for what happened. When a person forgives, they do not forget the hurt; instead, they forget the right to take vengeance on their own and give that right over to God. "You do not have to give him power over your life any longer, hoping that one day everything will be all right. You forgive first to heal yourself, to bring yourself closer to God."

Pastor Fred also explained to his associate that forgiveness does not mean that the young man needed to associate with other family members who ignored, downplayed, did not agree with, or did not understand the pain his father had caused. Fred encouraged his staff member to pray for his father and the members of his father's family who hurt him and who took his father's side in the conflict. Forgiving, though difficult, was something that only the young pastor could do. He had to be the one to take the first steps toward healing and wholeness, for himself and for those close to him. After prayer, Pastor Fred reminded his young colleague that he would continue to be available anytime he was needed.

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Part Four: The Disciplines: Bible, Theology, and Church History

This Master of Divinity Portfolio concludes with selected writings from Wesley Seminary's foundational disciplines: Bible, Theology, and Church History. The cornerstone of a seminary student's Bible study is the help she or he finds in God's Word. Students are asked to formulate Biblical and Systematic Theologies to help answer Integration Paper questions as well. Individuals, documents, and events from recent (and not-so-recent) history are considered to give a "broad" picture of how the Christian faith has dealt with crucial questions of life and godliness. Bringing together these areas of study, timeless truths and practical principles join together to provide a divine-human perspective on issues related to life and ministry.

The portfolio's final section addresses those topics that had the most personal and professional impact on me during my years in seminary: forgiveness; the Lord's Supper; the Social Gospel; and Suffering. We have come to the end of the rainbow. It is up to those who have read this far to determine if what they find is a pot of gold or that they have come to the conclusion, "Well, that's [insert number here] hours of my life I'll never get back." ☺

Exegetical Conclusions: Deuteronomy 7:6-11 (The Missional Church)

Does your book's situation (its cultural, historical, and social background) potentially contribute in some way to the meaning of your passage? If so, how might it affect your interpretation?

Deuteronomy's similarities to and differences from, ancient near eastern treaties (Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, 2000, p. 47) help, in part, to understand YHWH choosing Israel as "his treasured possession" (Deut. 7:6b). Terms of love and loyalty; blessing and obedience; and faithlessness and cursing commonly were used in the Old Testament world (Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, 2000, p. 179). However, Deuteronomy takes a known commodity – the treaty – and transforms it so that both the people and the deity are made known to each other through a Covenant. Walton et al. (2000) note:

In the ancient world, "gods did not reveal their natures or give any idea of what would bring their favor or wrath....One of the main reasons that God made a covenant with Abraham was in order to reveal what he was really like – to correct the false view of deity that people had developed." (p. 46)

Thus, the relationship that YHWH initiated with the Israelites through the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants (cf. Gen. 15 and 17; Exod. 20 and 24) is more than a treaty that binds a sovereign Lord and a vassal people. The Covenant between YHWH and Israel is the promise to keep the promise that God would lead the Israelites into "the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Deut. 6:10). YHWH's interaction with Israel transcended "geographical, political, and ethnic divisions" (Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, 2000, p. 47) common to other ancients' and the relationships with their deities.

Covenant is to be the means by which the Israelites would learn the LORD's attributes and personhood, and then live in such a way that the community reflected YHWH's character to the nations that surrounded them. Deuteronomy 7:6-11 claims that in keeping Covenant with God, YHWH expects Israel to have a culture and society that is markedly different (even physically separate from) the pagan peoples already possessing the Promised Land. This is an area that needs to be explored further to help determine what it means to be "in" the people of God.

Clements (1998) contends that YHWH setting his affection and love upon Israel (Deut. 7:7, 8) was "a unique act of divine choice" (p. 349). Deuteronomy's writer takes pains to place the description of the LORD selecting Israel to be the LORD's holy people (Deut. 7:6a) immediately after a section that contrasts the Israelites with the seven larger and stronger Gentile nations. This suggests another potential avenue for interpretation. It is the LORD who takes an active – perhaps even the lead – role in choosing Israel to enter into Covenant with YHWH and "follow the commands, decrees

and laws” given to them (Deut. 7:11). An important question then becomes: Does a person enter into relationship with God as an individual or through the community?

What does the historical-cultural background information potentially contribute to the interpretation of your passage?

Patrick Miller’s analysis of Deuteronomy notes that the writings that make up the book likely were collected “between the eighth and sixth centuries – from the time of the divided monarchy into the exile” (Miller, 1990, p. 3). He suggests that Deuteronomy may have been arranged and edited in response to the rediscovery of the Book of the Law during Josiah’s reign (2 Kings 22 and 23). As such, Deuteronomy can be seen as a commentary on Judah’s efforts to return to pure worship of YHWH and to forestall the exile which the northern tribes of Israel had experienced already (Miller, 1990, p. 3). This perspective sheds new light on the order to exterminate the pagan peoples living in Canaan as well as the prohibitions against intermarriage and alliance-making with the Gentiles (Deut. 7:2-5; Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, 2000, p. 26). YHWH’s choice to reveal YHWH’s very nature to the Israelites was made with the expectation of exclusive worship.

Here, though, important questions arise. Is God’s pledge to protect, provide, and bless Israel *fully contingent* on the people placing themselves under YHWH’s rule? Israel is to maintain their consecrated state as the LORD’s holy nation, and give themselves, their children, and all their material possessions “to the service of the LORD” (Youngblood, 1985, [Gen.] 17:10, p. 31). Once Covenant is broken, would it be possible for that relationship to be restored, or would God continue to repay those who hate him by destroying them (Deut. 7:10)? Or, does Deuteronomy 7:9-11 suggest that those who hate God never entered into Covenant relationship with God? Last, knowing that Deuteronomy was written both to persons in exile and to those taking care to abide by the Covenant (Miller, 1990), could the passage imply that God’s presence, protection, and blessing is available to those outside the Covenant community? If so, we must wrestle with the notion that there is a process both to enter into God’s people and to maintain that relationship. It may be that beginning and sustaining Covenant relationship with YHWH is at the heart of Deuteronomy 7:6-11.

Exegetical Conclusions

First and foremost, Deuteronomy 7:6-11 teaches us that Israel’s destiny as a people is bound up intimately in the Covenant made between YHWH and Abraham and the Israelites, Abraham’s descendants (Clements, 1998, p. 350). Freely and lovingly choosing Israel to be God’s people, YHWH confirmed his care for the nation by redeeming them from bondage in Egypt. Interestingly, immediately after reminding his hearers and readers that YHWH is the great liberator, the writer says, “Know therefore, that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a

thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands” (Deut. 7:9). What does it mean to “know” God?

The Hebrew word translated as know, *yada*, has the connotation of becoming acquainted with another through personal and relational knowledge (*yada*, n.d.). It also involves the sense of “both seeing and knowing,” or, in other words, understanding someone by means of the senses (*yada*, n.d., para. 1). This is why in the great Shema, the people are instructed to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength. In knowing God, Israel as a people (and, by implication, its individual members) will become like God. The nation will be faithful to God, will keep Covenant with God, and follow God’s commands, decrees, and laws. Thus, the passage indicates that the people of God have an experiential relationship with God and that this relationship is at the heart of being “in” the chosen community.

Conversely, verse 10 suggests that elements of hating God might include ignoring the reality of God’s existence; refusing to enter into Covenant; or, once a Covenant vow has been taken, failing to adhere to Covenant obligations. As noted above, in breaking Covenant, the blessings of YHWH’s presence, protection, and provision are forfeited. Is the entire nation then liable to be destroyed or is the LORD’s hatred limited to the household or the individual who breaks covenant? Clements (1998) observes “the warning is couched in the singular form, indicating that it envisaged that it would be individuals who might turn away from their privileged status, without the entire nation’s falling away and being destroyed as a result” (p. 350). We can remain on solid exegetical ground by saying that the community of faith plays a role in forming both the individual follower and the whole people of God as both keep the law and maintain faithfulness to YHWH.

To sum up, the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4 and the Great Commandment of Deuteronomy 6:5 may hold the key to unlocking the process by which an Israelite entered into the people of God. To love the LORD with one’s heart is to know the LORD and to experience the LORD’s character as redeemer, protector and provider. To love the LORD with one’s soul is to accept God’s lordship and to submit to God’s desire that Israel be a nation of holy persons who worship and serve God alone. To love the LORD with one’s strength is to acknowledge that the LORD has initiated Covenant, has set its terms, and that the LORD alone has the power to change those terms. The nation, and everyone in it, in turn gives the LORD their love, loyalty and obedience, which is proven through remembering and following the law. It is the Covenant, anchored in God’s unexplainable love that has the ultimate goal of redeeming and forming a people instructed by the Lord (Miller, 1990, p. 9).

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Exegetical Conclusions: Forgiveness:

Psalm 32; 1 Kings 8:27-53; Matthew 18:21-35; Colossians 3:12-17

Passage #1: Psalm 32

Psalm 32 is the second of the Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). These eleven verses reveal a pattern in responding to forgiveness, an act of love and mercy that God initiates. First, the penitent acknowledges their sin, propensity to wrong, and necessity of God's forgiveness; next, the sinner agrees that their actions are rebellion against God; sin is confessed; trust is placed in God's desire and ability to forgive; and forgiveness is accepted (Life Application Bible, 2005, p. 855).

The psalm begins with a recurrence of the word blessed that describes the relationship between the person and God as one where sins are covered, not seen, and not part of God's sight (vv. 1, 2). Further, the blessed individual's sins are not counted against her or him (Hebrew: avon) and is free from guilt caused by sin (avon, n.d.). This seems to imply that there is a legal and relational dimension to forgiveness. To be forgiven is to be released from judgment and the obligation to make amends or restitution to God. Not only is the blessed person not hampered by a debt of sin, she or he lacks deceit (Hebrew: remiyah) and makes no attempt to hide their true nature from God (remiyah, n.d.).

Verses three through five contrast the narrator (the psalmist David?) and the blessed person. The implication in these three verses is that a blessed person does keep silent, but confesses her or his transgressions to the Lord. There also is a movement from effect to cause (substantiation). The psalmist's refusal to acknowledge his sin has led to difficulty in mind (and spirit?). His bones are wasting away, his strength is sapped, and God's hand feels heavy against him.

Health is a prevailing metaphor in these verses. Unconfessed wrongs lead to sickness and death, leading one to ask if this metaphor is to be understood spiritually as well. In turn, declaring that one has committed wrong leads to the forgiveness of guilt. The repetition of *Selah* in verses four and five serve as a pregnant pause, prompting the listener/reader to consider the import of what has been said to this point.

In verse six, the psalmist implores the listener/reader to seek God while he may be found. Are we to understand that forgiveness is not always available? Will there be a time when God no longer forgives? The seventh verse outlines the benefits of forgiveness: God's presence, protection, and deliverance (realities intimately tied to blessing), further implying that sin's guilt and a refusal to seek forgiveness separates a person from God. The positive tone of verse seven suggests that forgiveness provides a measure of assurance that one is in right relationship with God.

Verses eight, nine, and ten seem to signal a shift in voice, apparently from the psalmist to God, and function as something of an interlude. God does more than protect and deliver; he offers instruction and counsel. God admonishes the psalmist (and by extension, the listener/reader) not to be like the horse or mule that are trained through control and correction. God appears to prefer a master/apprentice relationship of learning and guidance. Verse 10 extends this contrast, focusing on the wicked versus those who trust in God. The wicked receive woes, while those who trust in God experience God's unfailing love. Forgiveness, then, is an expression of God's love. Forgiveness can impart joy, an antidote to the heavy hand of conviction felt in verse four.

The eleventh verse returns to the psalmist's voice, where we read that forgiveness imparts righteousness in God's sight (again, both a legal and a relational standing). Free from sin's guilt, the blessed person enjoys God's loving presence. In light of this incredible mercy and love, the only acceptable response is to rejoice and sing, the opposite of keeping silent and groaning (cf. v. 3).

In addition to being a penitential psalm focusing on confession, forgiveness, and restoration, Psalm 32 is described as a Maskil. Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas (2000, p. 517) note that maskil comes from the root *sakal*, a teaching or instruction. What the reader learns from the Psalm is that forgiveness is inextricably bound to God's character and God's Covenant with Israel. "To live in peace with God and one's fellow man...is the essence of the Torah and it is not grounded in any other principle" (Torrance, 1986, p. 53, n. 8). Confession, forgiveness, repentance and worship solely are not individual; they bind the person to the larger community and to God.

The great lesson in reading Psalm 32 is recognizing that "God *wants* to forgive sinners. Forgiveness has always been a part of his loving nature" ("Life Application Study Bible, 2005, [Psalm] 32:1, 2, p. 855). These verses underscore not only the unconditional nature and totality of God's forgiveness, but also God's gracious act of removing the stain of sin from the individual's conscience. Moreover, God keeps no record of rightly confessed sin. Sin is removed from God's presence and is not remembered. Just as God actively chooses to forget wrongs committed against God's person and character, those who trust God and receive the benefits of God's forgiveness are to extend the same unfailing love and mercy to others.

Passage #2: 1 Kings 8:27-53

This passage from 1 Kings is set within King Solomon's larger prayer dedicating the first Temple in Jerusalem to YHWH as Israel's sovereign protector, defender, and sustainer. As the Ark of the Covenant, the seat of God's presence, was placed in the Holy of Holies, the Lord's Spirit filled the Temple, a visible re-ratification of the covenant between YHWH and Israel (Cf. 1 Ki. 8:1-9, 21). This covenant, however, was more than a legal contract; it is a relational "covenant of love" (1 Ki. 8:23) wherein Israel, in loving

obedience to the Lord, continues wholeheartedly in God's ways, careful that their words and deeds reflected God's glory (1 Ki. 8:23, 25).

Verse 27 begins with Solomon's plea to that the Lord will be merciful to Israel, acknowledging God's right to rule over the nation. Solomon may have been king, the literal and figurative "Son of David," but he stewarded Israel as a trust from YHWH, seen in Solomon's frequent use of the phrase "your servant" (vv. 28, 29, 30). Verse 30 includes an interesting statement: "When you hear, forgive." Is this a recognition that the people will fail to keep covenant with the Lord?

As part of his dedicatory prayer, Solomon outlines situations when the Lord will be asked to extend forgiveness to the people. The first was when an Israelite injured or wronged a fellow Israelite and there was a lack of evidence. The suspected offender to take an oath in the Temple where the person invoked blessings and curses and called upon God to judge their guilt or innocence (Vannoy, 1985, [1 Kings] 8:32, p. 487). Other instances included national military defeat (v. 32); drought, famine, or plague (v. 37); mistreating God-fearing Gentiles who came to the Temple to worship (vv. 41-43); and sin so great it would lead to captivity, exile, and physical and spiritual separation from YHWH and the Promised Land.

On behalf of the nation, Solomon asked the Lord to hear and act; to hear, forgive, and act; to hear and to do; to hear and to uphold causes; and to maintain open eyes and listening ears (vv. 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 45, 52). In this recurring prayerful refrain, the king appealed to God's name; God's covenant; God's Land; and God's people. Forgiveness was the only effective means of removing personal, communal, and national guilt, and Solomon begged those who heard his prayer to follow a pattern of confession (Hebrew: *yadah*) and making supplication. In confessing sin, persons and the nation accepted their guilt and agreed with accusations of wrongdoing (*yadah*, n.d.). Making supplication involved both the will and actions where God was asked to extend mercy (*chanan*, n.d.). In forgiving the people/nation (v. 30) God pardoned their sin; extended mercy; and acted with gentleness toward Israel (*calach*, n.d.). Again, we see in the Old Testament that forgiveness involves right legal/judicial and relational standing with God.

Perhaps to guide persons to seek forgiveness and restoration, Solomon asked God to make "each one aware of his own heart" (v. 38). Reminiscent of David's words in Psalm 32:6 to pray to the Lord while the Lord may be found, verse 38 sheds light on an important aspect of wrongdoing against God. Individual relationships with God affect the Covenant which, in turn, affects the community. Sin does not occur in a vacuum or without consequences (consider Cain in Gen. 4:8-16; Lamech in Gen. 4:23-34; Korah's rebellion in Num. 16; and Achan's sin in Josh. 7:10-26).

Forgiveness is a means to a spiritual and physical end: "So that they [the people of Israel] will fear you all the time they live in the land" (2 Ki. 8:40). Whether an editorial comment inserted by the writer of 1 Kings or a reflection of his incomparable wisdom, Solomon understood that unconfessed and unchecked sin placed the entire nation in

great danger. “On the basis of Lev. 26:33-35; Deut. 28:64-68; 30:1-5 Solomon knew that stubborn disobedience would lead to exile from the Promised Land” (Vannoy, 1985, [1 Kings] 8:46, p. 488).

It is helpful to see Solomon’s petitions to YHWH with the backdrop of the Temple as a visible symbol of the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants. YHWH promised to provide Israel a perpetual line of rulers from David’s family as long as the king and the nation lived in obedience to the covenant (Cf. 2 Sam. 7:29). The monarchy’s strength was proportional to the king’s (and by extension, the people’s) dependence upon God. Israel, as a nation of tribes, clans, and families, was to obey the Laws of Moses, being careful to follow the statutes, laws, commands, and decrees (Lev. 25:18, 26:3; Deut. 26:16-19). This obedience was to be a witness to the other nations of the near east, with Israel as a “light to the nations,” (Isa. 49:6) the redeemed people set apart for a special relationship with YHWH (cf. Deut. 4:5-8, 35-40; 5:1-5a; 9:4-6).

Passage #3: Matthew 18:21-35

Matthew 18:21-35 reflects one of the aims of the first Gospel: to present Jesus as the Master Teacher, “God’s *Wisdom itself*” (Schenck, 2009, p. 160). Jesus uses the occasion of Peter’s question on forgiveness, “How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?” (Matt. 18:21b) to enlarge the concept of forgiveness from a legal transaction to an act of lovingkindness. In the context of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, Jesus expanded an understanding of forgiveness from pardon to purity and from fracture to fellowship.

Jesus answered Peter’s question by multiplying the disciple’s initial response of “up to seven times?” (v. 21) to seventy-seven times (the NIV textual note indicates that seventy times seven also may be a proper translation). Whether we are commanded to forgive an offender seventy seven times or 490 times is not the point. Jesus is not putting a numerical value on absolving blame. Rather, he is saying that forgiveness is an act one does innumerable times (Earle, 1985, [Matthew] 18:22, p. 1468).

To drive his point home, Jesus the Sage illuminated his statement with a parable centering on a king, two servants, and two debts, the first astronomical and the second reasonable. The parable roughly can be divided into three scenes: conflict between the Master and the first servant (vv. 23-27); conflict between the forgiven servant and his debtor (vv. 28-31); and the final confrontation between the Master and the forgiven, yet unmerciful servant.

Scene one begins with Jesus’s statement, “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants” (v. 23). In the course of reconciling his ledger, the king identified a servant owing 10,000 gold talents (an impossible sum to repay by any historical or contemporary measure). As there was no hope of the servant ever meeting his obligation, the Master ordered the servant and his family to be enslaved, and all of the servant’s household goods sold to make restitution. The servant

asked for patience and received pity and release from the debt, as well as his and his family's freedom.

The Greek verb translated as forgive in verses 21, 27, 32, and 35 is ἀφιημι/aphiemi. Within the context of the passage, forgiveness connotes letting go of or giving up a debt by not demanding repayment; remitting a debt; and absorbing the loss of what rightfully is yours (ἀφιημι/aphiemi, n.d.). While the thought of condemning an individual and his entire family to servitude to pay a debt horrifies most Westerners, the Master was within his legal and covenantal rights. The Mosaic Law allowed for individuals to sell themselves as slaves to meet financial obligations (cf. Ex. 21:2). However, the law specified that the term of servitude was to be six years, after which the person was to be freed and any property confiscated restored in the celebration of Jubilee. Youngblood and Kaiser (1985) note: "The Lord's servants are not to be *anyone's* perpetual slaves," whether indentured to a Jewish or Gentile master ([Exodus] 21:2, p. 117, emphasis added). Matthew's Jewish audience (Schenck, 2009, p. 166) likely would not have been shocked at the thought of a fellow Israelite being sold into slavery, but at the Master's audacity in canceling the debt in the first place!

Verses 28-31 suggest that the meeting between the two servants was not random, but calculated. The servant who had been released from his debt and the threat of slavery sought out another servant who owed him roughly three months' wages (cf. Matt. 20:1-16). The mercy the first servant received was discarded in favor of violence. If the other servant could not repay his debt in currency, he would pay with his life. Ironically, these are the same terms the Master imposed on the servant owing him 10,000 talents. Using the same words the first servant said to the Master, the second servant asked for patience to repay his obligation, only to be thrown into prison. Evidently, the confrontation was witnessed by other servants, who reported what had happened to the Master.

In the third and final scene (vv. 32-35), the Master castigated the servant for not extending mercy to his fellow debtor. Interestingly, the amount of the first servant's debt was not repeated. Instead, the emphasis was placed on the Master having modeled a behavior that the servant ignored. Verse 34 tells us that in anger, the Master turned the unmerciful servant over to jailers to be tortured. Perhaps the Master felt that the unmerciful servant's actions were so egregious that the law, which allowed slavery, would merit extralegal punishment? Keener (1993) notes,

"Jewish law did not permit torture, but Jewish people knew that Gentile kings (as well as Herod) practiced it. Because this servant had fallen from political favor, he would have no allies who would dare come to his aid; and even if he had, given the sum he owed...he would never be released." (p. 96)

Jesus' description of torture has a point – being forgiven should cause a person to see the weight of their debt and the depth of mercy and grace in cancelling that debt.

The similarities of this passage to other texts within the gospel indicates that Matthew expected his readers/listeners to connect this parable with other sayings of Jesus. Those reading or listening to these words might have remembered the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus declared that those who are merciful to others will experience mercy themselves (Matt. 5:7). In the kingdom of heaven, greatness, power, and authority comes from practicing Jesus's moral and ethical demands and teaching others to do so as well.

It is likely that Matthew also wished his readers/listeners to link the Master's settlement of the first servant's debt with Jesus's admonition to settle matters with adversaries quickly, lest one be taken to court and imprisoned (Matt. 5:25-26). The gospel writer may also have intended for his audience to understand verse 35 in the context of Jesus's model prayer to his followers (Matt. 5:12-15) and the relationship between forgiving others and receiving God's forgiveness.

More than the political images this parable may have aroused in Matthew's readers/listeners, the passage suggests there are physical and spiritual effects of unforgiveness. The unmerciful servant was separated from his family and had no means of livelihood. The text seems to indicate that those who refuse to extend forgiveness and mercy are separated spiritually from God. That Jesus ends the parable with a statement that links forgiveness with heart attitude supports this contention (cf. Matt. 15:18-19). Those separated from God due to spiritual impurity had no fellowship with God, much like the unmerciful servant forfeited the Master's protection and provision.

Matthew's construction of the original Greek within this passage is intentional. Incorporating ἀφιημι/aphiemi throughout the narrative implies absolute, complete, and unconditional forgiveness in terms of scope and opportunity. Not to forgive, when it is in one's power to do so is sin and, if verse 35 is to be taken to its farthest extent, rebellion against the heavenly Father. We are left to consider the passage's contention that a relationship with God cannot be restored while unforgiveness remains.

Passage #4: Colossians 3:12-17

Colossians 3:12 begins with "therefore," indicating causation (a movement from cause to effect). By commanding the Colossian believers to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, Paul appealed to the community's sense of honor, esteeming the congregation for reflecting the image of Christ, their creator (Col. 3:10; cf. Keener, 1993, p. 579). These characteristics were not to be simple outward adornments, but interpersonal virtues meant to be lived out in community.

In verse 13, Paul gives a second command. The Colossian Christians are to bear with each other and forgive grievances within the church. In the honor and shame dynamic common to the Hellenistic-Roman world (Schenck, 2009, pp. 90, 94) acting virtuously commended the entire community in the eyes of the larger culture. The Colossian church was to model forgiveness as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved (v. 12).

More importantly, the congregation was to forgive others because the Lord had forgiven them. Jesus's forgiveness was the ideal, the model, the standard for Christ's followers in Colossae. The opening section ends with verse 14, where Paul again commands his readers/listeners to cover these virtues with love, which would bind the church together in perfect unity, allowing the Colossian Christians to show their unbelieving neighbors a new and different way of life.

Paul spoke of the effects of this "Christian life" beginning in verse 15: Christ's peace was to rule in each person's heart. This peace was "literally to 'function like an umpire' in all human relationships" (Hawthorne & Wallis, 1985, [Colossians] 3:15, p. 1817) and serve as a filter for decision making, helping believers to discern what is good, right, and true. In addition, the Word of Christ (v. 16) was to live and move in the community to influence persons for the common good (ενοικεω/enoikeo, n.d.). The gospel message was the supreme change agent among the Colossian believers, the vehicle for discipleship, training, and spiritual growth. The Apostle ends his description of a vital, living faith in Christ with these words "whatever you do," (v. 17). The Colossians were to live out Christian virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, crowning them with forgiveness and love in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul's concern that the Colossian Christians live virtuous lives is all the more important when one considers first century Colossae's deep religious divisions. Keener (1993) notes that the city was home to groups known for "charismatic, frenzied religious practices," ascetics, mystics, followers of mystery religions, apocalypticists waiting intensely for the world's immanent end, and "rather unorthodox Christian groups" (p. 569). In the opening chapters of his epistle, the Apostle points to Christ's supremacy over all other religious leaders, systems, and practices (cf. Col. 1:15-17, 28; 2:8-22). Jesus is the personification of Wisdom, the unmatched cosmic redeemer, the exact image and authentic representation of God to humankind (Keener, 1993, p. 572). Human-centered religions, understood by the Colossians to mean ascetics who pursued altered states of consciousness to receive divine revelation and charismatic who claimed to have visions of and communication with angels, were to be avoided, not commended (Keener, 1993, p. 577).

There is a tendency to read the New Testament through a Western lens of radical individualism that is at odds with the group ethic and communal bonds of the Hellenistic Roman world. Identity, personhood, and destiny were not personal concepts, but group dynamics influenced by ethnicity, family, gender, social relationships, and religious beliefs (Schenck, 2009, pp. 54, 90-93). Paul's use of ἀνεχῶ in verse 13 is pointed: individual Christians *and the church* are commanded to pardon others' slights and wrongdoing (emphasis added). Forgiveness is both individual and communal, and it may be that Paul understood the church to dispense forgiveness, rather than persons.

Believers in Jesus are to endure a person's actions and opinions – their deeds and their words – calmly, even when conflict and tension from other religious groups threatened

to tear the church apart (*ανεχω/anecho*, n.d.). The word Paul chose to convey forgiveness, *χαριζομαι/charizomai* (a form related to *χαρις*, grace or gift) indicated that the Apostle expected Christians to pardon both the person and their actions as a free, underserved pardon (Morris, 1993, p. 311) they received from God. And, this forgiveness was to be ongoing, continual, not withheld, but extended to believer and non-believer alike. Morris (1993) sums a Christian understanding of pardon this way: “Forgiveness reveals something about the character of God...a God who pardons, not a grim tyrant... [and] points to the establishment of a warm personal relationship with the forgiving God” (pp. 312-313).

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From Passover to Eucharist: A Brief Biblical Theology of the Lord's Supper

Question: What role does Holy Communion play in shaping members and congregations into more faithful Christians? Can the Eucharist be presented in ways that foster deeper individual and corporate spiritual formation?

Old Testament Theologies of the Passover: Covenant, Liberation, Remembrance, and Atonement

The larger Old Testament witness identifies the Passover with Covenant and remembrance. Exodus' Passover Narrative (Exod. 12:12-28) centers the sacrificial meal, the painting of the doorposts, and the order for the children of Israel to remain inside their homes as the climax of the central event in the nation's history. While the Passover rightly can be seen as the catalyst for the people's flight into the wilderness, Witherington (2007) observes that the Lord used the Passover to protect the chosen nation. "The blood of the Passover lamb on the door symbolized...protection from divine judgment" (Witherington, 2007, p. 3). Twice in Exodus's opening chapters (2:24 and 6:15) the writer noted that the catalyst for Israel's liberation was the Covenant between YHWH and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Abrahamic Covenant, sealed with the shed blood of animals and birds and witnessed by YHWH (Gen. 15:9, 17-20), bound the Lord to honor the promise of providing a lineal and territorial inheritance to Abraham's descendants. After making Covenant with the Israelites and reaffirming the giving of the Promised Land (Ex. 34:10-18), the Lord commanded Moses not to ally with Canaan's pagan nations. Moses was to ensure pagan idols were removed and to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Ironically, the Exodus generation's rebellion, seen in its disregard for the Lord's protection, provision, and presence in the wilderness, resulted in their deaths in the Sinai desert. The first post-Exodus Passover was celebrated at Gilgal, following the invasion of the Promised Land, when the nation no longer received manna and "ate the produce of Canaan" (Josh. 5:12).

Passover celebrations, while re-enacting the Exodus and reaffirming the Mosaic Covenant, also came to embody purity and holiness. Numbers 9 restricted those traveling or who came into contact with the dead from partaking in the feast with the larger community. In Deuteronomy 16:2, 6, the people are forbidden to hold gatherings anywhere "but the place the Lord will choose as the dwelling for his Name" (New International Version). Harris and Youngblood comment, "Sacrifices were to be offered at an approved sanctuary, which would symbolize both God's holiness and his compassion. They were to be controlled by the priests, who by care and instruction would preserve them in purity and carefully teach their meaning to the people" (1985, p. 145).

Passover, much like the other great Hebrew festivals - Sukkot, the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles; Shavout, the Feast of Weeks; and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement -

served to reinforce national identity and to bind the community to each other and to a physical place. This transition can be seen in the kingdom-wide Passover festivals under Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30) and Josiah (2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 30). These great feasts were held in the Jerusalem Temple, a practice that appears to have been reinstated following the return from Exile (Ezra 6:19-22) and became normative by the time of Jesus' ministry. Exodus, entrance into the Promised Land, and exile caused the Passover to be observed as a once and future event. "The Jews...viewed the Passover meal as an anticipation of the Messianic Banquet when God's will would be finally accomplished through the coming of the Messiah" (Staples, 1991, p. 245).

The final dimension of the Passover seen in the Old Testament is that of atonement. With the development of the priestly and sacrificial systems, the High Priest served as mediator and intercessor between God and people. Leviticus 16 narrates the atonement made by the High Priest for himself, his household, and the nation. One goat was to be sacrificed as a sin offering (16:9). The scapegoat (16:10) was sent into the wilderness to atone for Israel's rebellion and uncleanness before the Lord (16:16). Witherington cautions that "later Jewish and Christian ideas amalgamated this story with ideas about the scapegoat's providing substitutionary remedy" (2007, p. 3). However, by Jesus' time, Hebrew theology seems to have incorporated atonement and substitution into the Passover observance (Cf. Heb. 7:11-26, 10:1-14, 18).

New Testament Voices: Transformed Traditions and a Coming Kingdom

The synoptic gospels present the Last Supper/Lord's Supper in terms of covenant (Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20) and kingdom (Matt. 26:29; Mk. 14:25; Lk. 22:16). The Matthean account links the meal with forgiveness, while both Matthew and Luke describe the meal shared between Jesus and his disciples as a Passover. Matthew (26:28), Mark (14:24), and Luke (22:20) each use the image of Jesus' blood being "poured out" as an offering that not only covers but also makes satisfaction for sin. Stein (1992) declares "the Last Supper was not a Passover meal" (p. 446), while at the same time noting that John's story (Jn. 13:18-30) "ties the death of Jesus closely with the Passover" (p. 447). The fourth gospel's depiction of Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29b) and its use of "flesh and blood" imagery (Jn. 6:48-56) builds upon the theme of sacrificial atonement.

Of the three synoptic narratives, only Luke uses the words "new covenant," which may be an allusion to Jeremiah 31:31-34. Here, the prophet announced a new covenant between YHWH and those who place faith in the Lord. YHWH would be the God of all the families of Israel (returning the Passover from a national festival to a family ceremony?). God's followers would be able to keep the covenant and will know God intimately and personally. Most importantly, the new covenant would forgive wickedness and do away with sin. This seems to indicate that the third gospel writer viewed the Last Supper not in terms of Moses' covenant, but Jeremiah's.

Passover images in the synoptics, then, merge atonement, covenant, and propitiation. Christ has fulfilled covenant promises; has remained faithful to His

people; has restored the relationship between God and humanity; and emerged victorious over His enemies through His resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:5-10) This reality leads to the sense of thanksgiving and remembrance in the Pauline description of the Lord's Supper found in 1 Corinthians 11 (Marshall, 1993, p. 570). The Eucharist serves as a memorial in which believers remember the benefits of Christ's sacrifice and are empowered to serve community, congregation, and family in love. Jesus' disciples are place others' needs before their own and live with spirits of generous self-giving (Rom. 12:1-8; 2Cor. 5:11-21; Phil. 2:1-11). Christian congregations are to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). By welcoming those of all economic, political, and social levels and inviting them to participate in the Eucharist, the new covenant would form a new people living in anxious expectation of the Messianic Kingdom (Marshall, 1993, p. 572).

Of all the kingdom images found in the New Testament - Kingdom of God; Kingdom of Heaven; Kingdom of this World; eternal reign; glory; inheritance; justice; nations; powers and principalities; and righteousness and peace, among others - perhaps none is more "pregnant with possibilities" than that of the Messianic banquet. Isaiah 25 recounts a banquet hosted by the Lord for all who find refuge in God (Isa. 25:4, 6-7). At this banquet, those who dine will experience the fullness of their salvation. God and people will be separated no longer. Death and disgrace will be banished from the Lord's presence. Israel's restoration will come not just with a righteous ruler, but with abundant crops, food, rain, and provision (Isa. 49:8-12, 55:1-3; Ezek. 34:25-31). For the gospel writers, the miracles of turning water into wine (Jn. 2); feeding thousands of men, women, and children (Matt. 14:13-21, 15:29-39; Mk. 6:32-34; 7:31-37; Lk. 5:1-11, 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-13) and securing an abundance of fish (Jn. 21:1-9) were evidence that Jesus was Messiah, the restorer of all things.

Throughout the ancient Near East, offering hospitality and welcome confirmed social status; bound families, clans, tribes, and associations together; reflected shared beliefs; and served as physical symbols of community (Witherington, 2007, pp. 11-12). The gospel accounts reflect this in their stories of Jesus eating with those on his society's outskirts (Matt. 9:11, 11:19; Mk. 2:15-17; Jn. 2:1-11); in the ways Jesus reinterpreted custom (Matt. 15:1-6; Mk. 7:2-5; Lk. 5:28-20, 14:1-14; 18:37-54); and in the manner that Jesus extended the kingdom to children, to the disabled, the disadvantaged, and the powerless (Matt. 18:1-5, 19:14, 22:2-14; Mk. 9:36-37, 10:13-16; Lk. 9:47-48, 14:6-24, 18:15-17). Wainwright (as cited in Staples, 1991, p. 244) interprets the Lord's Supper as preparation for the Kingdom banquet. The Eucharist declares the community's expectation of Christ's return and represents the first fruits of the Kingdom. The post-resurrection meals Jesus shared with the Disciples (Lk. 24:30-32, 41-43; Jn. 21:10-14; Acts 1:4-9) and the Lord's Supper point to the Eschaton and the Kingdom coming to earth as it is in heaven (Rev. 3:20, 19:7, 9).

Discerning a Kingdom Trajectory

In its earliest form, the Passover was a family rite shared among close family members and those lacking the means to provide their own lamb (Jacobs, Kutsch,

Geffen, & Kanof, 2007, p. 678; Witherington, 2007, p. 7). This has a number of implications for contemporary Christian approaches to sharing and teaching the Eucharist. One can argue that the scriptures place the family within and alongside the church. Faithful practice, then, involves giving and receiving the Supper elements not as individuals, but as a community of faith centered in Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and return. Though Paul commanded the Corinthians to celebrate the Eucharist in remembrance of the Lord, a mark of the new covenant, and as a proclamation of the Lord's death and future return, the Supper is more than a memorial. Through the Eucharist, Christians place ourselves into "the ancient story so much that it is and becomes once again [our] own story, [our] own trial and triumph" (Witherington, 2007, p. 10). Somber reflection can (must?) give way to relief from struggle and joyous victory. How might congregations change if the Eucharist was presented not as ceremony but as celebration?

Further, do Christians come to the Lord's Supper as beloved invited guests? Are we drawn to a meal of simple elements that challenge to take on the character of our host, the crucified, risen, ascended Lord? Viewing Holy Communion through this lens has much potential to foster lasting growth and positive change in believers' actions, behaviors, and faith. The possibility of change is amplified when the Lord's Supper is recognized not only as a means of grace, but as physical and spiritual reminders of believers' freedom in Christ. Both Passover and Eucharist frame liberation in a past, present, and future dynamic. It is a redemptive event that remembers Israel's rescue from Pharaoh's oppression and humanity's rescue from sin and death. It is a present reality that calls to mind divine presence, protection, provision, and release from the alienation and brokenness that seem part and parcel of human life. And, it anticipates the future fulfillment of Jesus' Messianic kingdom, where all things will be made right and God will dwell with humanity, as it was in the beginning (Gen. 2:15; Rev. 21:3).

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A Brief Theology of Suffering

Evil does not exist; there are only persons, actions, and inactions. What we view as evil or suffering is the result of accumulated bad, poor, or wrong choices and the inaction of making good choices (Kinnard, n.d.). Each creature or force in the universe has the will/ability to make their own choices, whether good, bad, or indifferent. Ultimately, the “weight” of these choices affects the world and all in it through karma, “the fundamental and universal law of cause and effect” (Kinnard, n.d.). The actions of divine beings (gods, demons, and other spirit forms) also affect the visible and invisible dimensions to human life, since the permanent self is immortal and transcends physical forms. This is a short summary of a Metaphysical or “New Age” understanding of suffering that is common to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism (Kinnard, n.d.).

Evil exists due to the outworking of life governed by evolution and natural selection. This argument does not differentiate between natural evil (“Acts of God” or suffering caused by processes in the natural world) and moral evil (suffering brought about as a result of human action or inaction). Suffering can be understood as part of the circle of life, as in removing the weak and diseased from animal, human, and plant populations or to extend, hoard, or preserve limited resources. Frisby (2011, Answering the argument discussion section) notes that this viewpoint “depends on death, destruction, and violence of the strong against the weak.” Ironically, the emphasis on nature means that in order to determine standards of fairness or justice in the face of suffering, those holding to this viewpoint must “assume the reality of some extra-natural (or supernatural) standard by which to make their judgment” (Keller, as cited in Frisby, 2011, Answering the argument discussion section).

The presence of evil and suffering in the world proves God does not exist. If God does exist, God is NOT omniscient, omnipresent, and morally perfect. Most philosophers group these arguments into concepts called Atheological arguments. Their basis lies in the premise that God’s existence is incompatible with the reality of suffering and evil, due to both evidence and experience. At its heart, this argument contends that an all-powerful and morally perfect God is obligated to use power to do good, i.e., prevent suffering and evil from occurring. Since evil exists in the world, God either does not exist, or if God does exist, God’s power is limited (Tooley, 2012).

God permits suffering and evil to preserve free will. Humankind was created as free moral agents. To be totally free, persons must have the capability to choose evil and to commit evil acts. This freedom is tied intimately to moral significance and value. Alvin Plantinga contends that the Free Will Argument answers questions related to suffering from nature and from persons since “all of the world’s evils have their source in moral evil...the sin of Adam and Eve...a common Jewish and Christian response to

the challenges posed by natural evil” (Beebe, n.d., An Objection: Free Will and Natural Evil discussion section). The main arguments against a Free Will Defense involve whether or not one can or should intervene in acts seen as evil on the basis of moral judgments. Plantinga sees the importance of the Free Will Argument in that it allows for uncoerced loving relationship between humankind and God.

God is justified in permitting evil for a “morally sufficient reason” such as soul-making, salvation, or sanctification (Theodicy). This argument allows God to be omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good and exist in a universe where evil occurs (Beebe, n.d.). One facet of this argument says that God is justified in permitting evil and suffering to bring about a greater good or higher purpose. One example is that, in suffering, persons develop “traits of character- such as patience and courage – by struggling against obstacles” (Tooley, 2012, Abstract Versus Concrete Formulations, para. 2). The philosopher John Hick points to Theodicy, his belief that God is justified in allowing evil so that people “can undergo spiritual growth that will ultimately fit them for communion with God” (Hick, as cited in Tooley, 2012, Soul-Making Theodicy discussion section, para. 1). Eleonore Stump also uses Theodicy to justify evil and suffering as means of leading persons to salvation and sanctification, what she calls humanity’s “best hope” (Stump, as cited in Beebe, n.d., Other Responses to the Logical Problem of Evil discussion section).

God permits, allows, and uses evil to display God’s glory, transcendence, and sovereignty and to reverse humanity’s fall and redeem the entire created order. This view can include, or be argued separately from theologies of hope and the cross (Plantinga, n.d., p. 6), such as those of Martin Luther, Gustaf Aulen, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, among others. An additional aspect is wrapped up in the Incarnation, where Christ is seen as the God who suffers with and for humanity, enduring abandonment and being forsaken to accomplish atonement and redemption. The resurrection unites the cross’s brutality with the empty tomb’s power. Death has been conquered, and when the kingdom of heaven comes in its fullness, there will be an end to pain, misery, and suffering. The Glory Defense includes a deep element of mystery, incomprehension, and the unknown. Alvin Plantinga points to this understanding of suffering and evil as the outworking of the Great Commandment. For reasons humanity may not or cannot understand, evil and suffering are part of life to fashion “creatures who conform to the divine law to love God above all and their neighbor as themselves” (Plantinga, n.d., p. 5).

Where I “Fit” Along This Spectrum

Alvin Plantinga (n.d.) makes a distinction between suffering and evil, where suffering is “pain or discomfort...disappointment...and awareness of the suffering of others” and evil encompasses moral wrong, vicious acts, and distorted character (p. 2). In Plantinga’s

definition, I “suffer” due to sickness, the cares of this world, and various emotional and existential hurts, but I have not experienced true evil. At this point in my Christian journey, I have feet in two pools: the Free Will and Divine Glory Defenses. I hold on to Free Will tenaciously because I cannot comprehend any reality where God is the author or cause of evil. A God who permits evil to permit true freedom and ultimately to point to God’s redemptive acts in history is at least, in part, understandable to me. At the same time, the Divine Glory Defense allows me to “push the mystery button” with intellectual honesty and to claim the very human answer that “I don’t know.” There are times of suffering and deep pain that this is the only answer I can give.

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The Social Gospel
(The Missional Church)

Of all the factors associated with the Social Gospel Movement, it fascinates me that many of the issues its leaders and participants focused on – concentration of wealth in the hands of a few; America’s fondness for excess materialism; immigrant, minority, and women’s rights; and “social problems such as dinking, prostitution, and slavery” (Bateman, n.d., para. 7) – impact the United States as much today as they did in the years between 1865 and 1918.

In many ways, late nineteenth and early twentieth century social gospellers led the first “purpose-driven churches.” They tenaciously held to pro-family, pro-community positions out of a desire to end suffering and improve society individually and collectively. Whether behind the pulpit, sitting in the pew, or shouting in an organized demonstration, persons promoting the Social Gospel often did so from a strongly Biblical basis. They focused on Jesus’ moral and ethical principles to promote an ideal Christian society, having concluded that the Kingdom of God was meant to be experienced on earth as it is in heaven (Latourette, 1999, pp. 1166, 1263).

Just as we struggle to define exactly what a “Missional Church approach” is or involves, the Social Gospel does not fit into a box neatly. Rather than a monolithic, one-size fits all means for community improvement, the Social Gospel was a network of persons, groups, and movements that worked for the common good in ways as unique and similar as their individual contexts (“What Is the Social Gospel?” n.d., p. xvii). If economic, ethnic, and social equality was an ideal rather than reality, social gospellers continued to seek equality of opportunity for those negatively affected by post-Civil War America’s industrial expansion. They worked to end labor laws that favored employers

over workers and exploited women, children, and the uneducated. And, they sought to eliminate the emotional, physical, and spiritual problems that accompanied cities' unprecedented growth from the early 1870s to the mid-1920s (Bateman, n.d.; "What is the Social Gospel?" n.d.).

While many conservative Christians label the Social Gospel Movement as theologically liberal, from its earliest days, evangelicals helped lead the movement (Bateman, n.d., para. 11). Social Gospel supporters saw humanity's potential for great good – as well as its penchant for incalculable evil. The movement was activist, political, and led largely by laypersons convinced that how people lived reflected what they believed. No less an authority than Walter Rauschenbusch declared "right life [is] the true worship of God" (Rauschenbusch, as cited in "Martin Luther King, Jr.," n.d. para. 2).

As American society began to promote the idea of one's religious faith as a personal and private matter (Bateman, n.d., para. 10), persons involved in the Social Gospel Movement refused to separate the secular and the sacred. This conviction caused many to be considered radical and dangerous by their ultraconservative, fundamentalist peers. It was not enough to change the United States one person at a time; community transformation was required to make a lasting difference.

Paragraph identifying and elaborating on what you most agree with

In all honesty, I am not in complete agreement with any of Dr. Bence's statements. The one I come closest to agreeing with is statement six. I believe that the Church, as God's gathered people, has a mandate to make disciples. At the same time, disciples can be formed through justice and mercy in the same ways they are formed

through mentoring, preaching, and teaching. Splitting the Great Commandment and the Great Commission into two distinct commandments often is a way of favoring discipleship that focuses on lifeboat salvation, often through saying the sinner's prayer or "scaring the hell out of people," to use a common Christian cliché. Too often, evangelism is truncated to helping someone to "punch their ticket" to heaven, and then doing nothing to teach them about what it means to live in God's Kingdom, which already is in our midst but has not yet arrived in its fullness. Finally, Jesus said that the second commandment *is like* the first and that *all of the law and the prophets* hang on both commandments (emphasis added, cf. Matt. 22:34-40, New International Version). We cannot separate loving God and our neighbors from doing justice and loving mercy. If we truly believe this, we would do better to hang millstones around our necks and throw ourselves into the sea (see Mk. 9:38-42).

Paragraph elaborating on what you most disagree (least agree) with

I find myself in least agreement with statement four, "the way to transform society is to transform individual lives" (Bence, 2011, p. 2). The more I learn of Scripture, the more I see that Western Christianity, with its myopic focus on the individual, has lost a sense of the Church as God's gathered people who share in the sacraments and receive and discern the word together as sisters and brothers. Further, American Protestantism would do well to consider the implications of Roman Catholic teaching of the Church as the repository of faith.

In a real sense, both the Old Testament (in Exodus and Deuteronomy, among other places) and the New Testament (in Paul's letters to churches that were never smaller than cities or urban areas) make the audacious claim that individual persons

begin a relationship with God in and through the holy nation, the ecclesia, the called out ones. One important legacy of the early American Social Gospel movement is their emphasis on community as a catalyst for changed lives. To echo Bradley Bateman's words, "the Social Gospellers believed that if American society were shown the sins of industrialism, they would repent and build a more just social order" (Bateman, n.d., para. 16). One individual in society certainly can make a difference on a small scale, but a group of committed individuals can create a movement that brings about massive transformation.

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Pilgram Marpeck, *On the Inner Church*
(Christian Worship)

Pilgram Marpeck (d. 1556) emerged as a leading voice among German Anabaptists in the mid-sixteenth century to the extent that the communities he pastored and advised became known as the “Brotherhood of Marpeck” (Hein & Klassen, n.d.). Marpeck’s skill as a theologian is seen in his “Baptism Booklet” (1542), the “Testament Explanation” and his “Answer” to Caspar von Schwenkfeld’s critique of the Baptism Booklet. Born in Tyrol, Austria to a prosperous family, Marpeck was educated in Rattenberg (Austria). He became a sought-after engineer and builder of public works and served as a member of Rattenberg’s inner and outer councils (city government) from 1523 to at least 1525 (Loserth, Wenger, Bender, & Boyd, n.d.).

Raised Roman Catholic, Pilgram Marpeck first converted to Lutheranism. By 1528, he guided an Anabaptist congregation in Strasbourg, Germany following his exile from Tyrol and Rattenberg. Periods of tolerance (largely due to Marpeck’s unusual skill as an engineer and urban planner) followed by times of exile (he was forced to leave Strasbourg in 1532) marked much of his later life. Marpeck traveled to Austria, Moravia, and Switzerland before returning to Augsburg, Germany, where he lived from 1544 to his death in 1556 (Loserth, Wenger, Bender, & Boyd, n.d.).

Anabaptism is noted for its insistence on adult baptism, a memorialist interpretation of the Lord’s Supper, and a commitment to pacifism (though some early Anabaptist groups advocated the use of force against secular authorities). The movement centered on completing the reformation of the church, expressed most strongly in congregational autonomy and a complete separation of church and state

(Dyck, 2005, p. 304). Anabaptist worship gatherings (some of which lasted for days) consisted of reading and discussing Scripture, lengthy periods of corporate prayer, and holding property in common. Disciplined community life (Klaassen & Klassen, 2008, p. 152) was instituted to meet members' emotional, physical, and spiritual needs, and collections were taken to assist those imprisoned for holding Anabaptist convictions.

Pilgram Marpeck “On the Inner Church”

Ironically, it was Marpeck's views on the relationship between church and state and not his views on Baptism and the Lord's Supper that drew him into conflict with South Germany's Catholic and Lutheran populations. Both Roman Catholicism and German Lutheranism strongly held to Magisterial Reformation views that bound civil and church authority as one. From the time of Constantine, secular rulers had viewed themselves as *custodes fidei*, “guardians of the faith” (Frend, 2005, p. 7060), to the extent that the church was seen as serving the state, not vice versa. Marpeck countered that Scripture clearly showed that the Kingdom of Heaven is not of this world (John 18:36-39). Thus, “no true Christian dare have authority over cities, countries, and people (as earthly rulers), nor exercise defense or use force, since this belongs to the earthly and temporal rulers” (Loserth, Wegner, Bender, & Boyd, n.d.).

Marpeck did not deny the legitimacy of civil government (a charge often leveled at Anabaptist groups). Rather, he contended that Christian believers have no Biblical sanction to hold secular office. This was not a rejection of Martin Luther's Two Kingdoms doctrine, but a reform of it. Just as the church is not commissioned to exercise political power, the state has no warrant to regulate worship, compel church membership, or exact taxes to finance state-supported religious bodies.

These views aroused the suspicions of Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran groups within the Holy Roman Empire. Intense persecution came when Anabaptist followers of Melchior Hoffman, taking their leader's belief in Christ's imminent return to the extreme, attempted in to seize Amsterdam (May 1530) and Munster (1534-1535) in preparation for the parousia. These acts were "in large part responsible for the centuries-long designation of Anabaptism as violent and revolutionary" (Dyck, 2005, p. 304). Those communities Pilgram Marpeck led embraced a nonviolent pacifism.

Through his letters, Marpeck encouraged his followers "to be a light before the world...and [testify] in love shown toward the neighbor" as "debtors...obligated by love...who love and seek Christ from the heart" (Klaasen & Klassen, 1999, p. 422, 426). Luther claimed that the Christian life engaged the Two Kingdoms of Law and Gospel simultaneously. Marpeck, holding to the conviction that church and world are two distinct entities, spoke of the Inner Church and Outer Church. The Inner Church, "the dwelling of God the Father and His Christ...in our hearts...is the place of worship in spirit and in truth, and in the fellowship of the saints." The Outer Church is made manifest in acts of love, kindness, and mercy shown to one's neighbors...[in] forgiveness of sin and the improvement of the external man, teaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper" (Klassen and Klaassen, 1999, p. 420, 421, 422). True worship, then, was a comingling of rigorous discipleship, high moral standards, deep piety, and a willingness to suffer persecution unto death. As the text of Marpeck's letter notes:

"I write...to ensure that those whom God the Father draws and gives to the son will be fulfilled...He will only lose the children of perdition. The children who are kept will often, because of the children of perdition, suffer great loss. It may even

seem that they come to destruction and fall victims to it. Yet, not one of them will be cast aside” (Klassen and Klaassen, 1999, p. 423).

For the Marpeck Brethren and other Anabaptist groups like the Hutterites and Swiss Brethren, true worship was a foretaste of spiritual power to those powerless on earth, a renewal of God’s faithfulness in the midst of evil and suffering. Slander, persecution, and martyrdom were marks of the true church and a co-witness to the reality of Christ’s life, death, resurrection and future return. The sheep before its shearers were silent, but after the suffering of their souls, those who persevered in the midst of torment saw the light of life and were satisfied (Cf. Isaiah 53:7-8, 11).

Conclusion

There has been tension with, and opposition to, secular authorities from the time the first groups of Jesus followers began worshiping Christ as Messiah and Lord. At various moments in history, churches and states have allied to achieve mutual objectives, from attempts at instituting uniformity by force to colonialism, human trafficking, and slavery. In this sense, those who have challenged Constantinianism (the union of church and state) are correct when they charge that “the Cross was conquered and forged to the sword” (Hinson, 2005, p. 1967). Alternately, Christian history is a history of worship built on corporate assembly, mission, and witness to the world apart from (and in spite of) secular interference. Anabaptist (and other) streams of thought challenge Christians to consider principles of social and economic justice, mercy, and love as the marks of faithful worship of the past, in the present, and to the future.

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**The Sermons of John Wesley (1872 Edition): Sermon 101: The Duty of
Constant Communion
(Congregational Spiritual Formation)**

Question: What role does Holy Communion play in shaping members and congregations into more faithful Christians? Can the Eucharist be presented in ways that foster deeper individual and corporate spiritual formation?

John Wesley's sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion* contends that Christians should receive the sacrament regularly on the basis of obedience to Christ's command; to receive forgiveness, grace, and mercy; to receive physical and spiritual strength; and to reflect apostolic practice (Wesley, n.d., para. 1-10). Through appeals to logic, reason, emotion, and compassion, Wesley sought to allay fears that constant communion would result in "eating and drinking unworthily," imperfect obedience and a lack of "reverence for the sacrament" (Wesley, n.d., para. 23, 27, 30, 33). The sermon also answered the charge that one should not take the Lord's Supper due to a lack of internal feeling or change, and that, at the time of the sermon's writing, the Church of England asked communicants to receive the sacrament "only three times a year" (Wesley, n.d., para. 37).

Wesley answered these objections first on "the plain command of Christ" (Wesley, n.d., para. 6). Holy Communion as a means of grace imparts forgiveness, strength to endure temptation, and the ability to love God and obey God's commands. For those who claimed an unworthiness to partake of the elements, Wesley noted that examining oneself, was only one aspect of preparing to receive Holy Communion. On

those occasions when habitual preparation was overlooked, or (in the case of the not yet converted), did not take place at all,

“This is no more than is required of any communicants; yea, of everyone that has a soul to be saved...keep his commandments...receive the promises...repent you truly of your sins past; have faith in Christ our Savior...amend your lives and be in charity with all men...All who are thus prepared may draw near without fear, and receive the sacrament to their comfort.” (Wesley, n.d., para. 29-31)

Obedience was to be chosen over doctrinal adherence and the state of one’s relationship with God was given preference over theology and doctrine.

Obedience to Christ’s command extended to the realm of experience and feelings. If one “[has] not found the benefit...expected” (Wesley, n.d., para. 35), she or he should continue to receive the Eucharist as often as possible. The Eucharist was for Wesley both a sacrament and a spiritual Discipline, an outward sign of an inner reality. Whether or not one felt an inner change as a result of receiving the elements, “undoubtedly we shall find benefit sooner or later...We shall be insensibly strengthened, made more fit for the service of God, and more constant in it” (Wesley, n.d. para. 35). It is this understanding, the Eucharist as a means of grace, that Wesley appealed to when offering the sacrament to unconverted seekers, those with little faith, the discouraged, and children, women, and men who, in his time, had no connection to a Christian community.

Wesley’s desire that his followers receive Holy Communion as often as possible was missional means to a cultural end. From his open-air and chapel preaching to care for prisoners, the marginalized, and the oppressed, the “Methodist way” of society, class, and band meetings linked proclamation, personal and group accountability, and

pastoral care so that individuals could worship in their local parishes. Methodist worship often was held early in the morning, later in the evening, and at multiple times on the Lord's Day to reach laborers, industrial workers, servants, and those in poverty. These services provided identity, value, and a voice for those in eighteenth century Britain unable to attend traditional parish-based services. "His [Wesley's] purpose was to awaken and cultivate the faith of the masses" so that they could remain in proper fellowship with the Church of England, receive the sacraments there, and remain rooted to eighteenth century Anglican norms.

In 1789, near the close of his life (he died in 1791) Wesley consented to ordain ministers in his native England, having done so in 1784 for the American colonies; for Scotland in 1785; and for Ireland in 1786 (Vincitorio, 2006, p. 684). From 1789 forward, England's Methodist services included the Eucharist given by ordained pastors. Though Methodism had changed from an Anglican reform movement to an established denominational structure in the final years of his life, Wesley's sacramentalism did not change. "The Eucharist...is about transformation into the church" (Peterson, 2006, p. 2).

In *The Duty of Constant Communion*, Wesley appealed not only to culture, but to ecclesiology, history, missiology, and theology, as well. In looking to the past, Wesley noted that for "the first Christians...the Christian sacrifice was a constant part of the Lord's day service" (Wesley, n.d., para. 9). The Lord's Supper was seen as the pinnacle of worship and the ultimate purpose for Christian gatherings: "If any believer join in the prayers of the faithful, and go away without receiving the Lord's Supper, let him be excommunicated, as bringing confusion to the church of God" (Wesley, n.d., para. 9).

Theologically, partaking in the “blessed sacrament” reflects the aim and purpose of the Christian life.

“Namely, by being like him [God] in holiness...he has given us certain means of obtaining his help. One of these is the Lord’s Supper...that through this means we may be assisted to attain those blessings which he hath prepared for us; that we may obtain holiness on earth and everlasting glory in heaven.” (Wesley, n.d. para 18)

The Eucharist is at the sacramental center of Wesleyan theology. Receiving the elements in faith and trusting in God to justify, save, sanctify, and glorify the believer was, for Wesley, the chief means by which humanity recovers the holiness of God (Wesley, n.d., para. 18; Godbey, 2005, p. 4234; Peterson, 2006, p. 2). *The Duty of Constant Communion* reflected Wesley’s conviction that faith, working through grace offered in the Lord’s Supper, transformed character, changed behavior, and empowered reconciliation. Receiving the Eucharist assured one of her or his salvation and symbolized the Father’s promise of present and eternal life with Christ through the Holy Spirit’s power.

To a great degree, John Wesley was influenced by the European Pietist tradition, particularly the practices of Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) and F. A. Lampe (1683-1729). Spener and Lampe both saw Bible study, receiving the sacraments, and service to the church and the world as “the common responsibility of all Christians” (Gonzalez, 2010, loc. 3938). Doctrine was to serve faith, not the reverse. The pastor’s highest duty was to offer a practical theology, spoken and written in language common people were capable of understanding and putting into practice in their daily lives.

For the Methodists, as for Pietistic groups, participation was prized over dogmatism. In ways reminiscent of Spener's and Lampe's relations with German Lutheran and Reformed groups, Wesley (both practically and theologically) navigated a *via media* between Roman Catholicism's closed sacramentalism and the rigid memorialism of Baptist, Calvinistic, Puritan, and Reformed congregations (Gonzalez, 2010). While these groups barred non-members from partaking of the Lord's Supper, Methodist practice was to include all who wished to receive the sacrament. "‘Church or no church,’ he said, ‘we must attend to the saving of souls’" (Vincitorio, 2006, p. 684).

Though primarily an evangelist, administrator, and practical theologian, John Wesley was a man conversant with the Enlightenment thought of his day. Secular categories – logic, law, and psychology – were put to the churchman's service. Wesley no doubt would have agreed with Immanuel Kant, perhaps the Enlightenment's greatest philosopher, that individuals have a duty to act reasonably and respond to one's conscience, opinion, or conviction (Enlightenment, 2006, p. 590). Yet, vital, living Christian faith went beyond the Deism, rationalism, morality and "natural religion" espoused by Hume, Locke, Montesquieu, von Cherbury, and other thinkers of the Age of Reason (Enlightenment, 2006). For Wesley, morals were both personal and communal. Kant's categorical imperative could not be reduced to individual ethics, since the church is a gathering of God's people who are committed to care both for one another and for those around them.

The Industrial Revolution and the economic and social dislocation that resulted from it fragmented families, forced untold numbers of children into hard labor at early ages, and increased urban and rural poverty throughout Great Britain. Christian worship, particularly the Eucharist, was the means by which God provided "the food of

our souls...gives strength to perform our duty... [and] offers to endue your soul with new strength...We must never turn our backs on the feast which our Lord has prepared for us” (Wesley, n.d., para. 7, 8, 21). For Wesley, Holy Communion was more than a meal. The Eucharist was a means of grace from God to humanity; an avenue of repentance, forgiveness, and holy living; and it provided strength for changed individuals, families, and communities in the midst of brokenness and hardship.

John Wesley’s insistence on frequent communion challenges present day pastors and ministry leaders to consider the relationships between theology and practice. Will we substitute dogma for faith and orthodoxy for love? (Gonzalez, 2010, loc. 2650). Wesleyan Eucharistic Theology points to the Lord’s Supper both as a *way to faith* and a *confirmation of faith*. In encouraging all who attend worship to take part in the sacrament, regardless of church affiliation, the depth of their belief or how often they examine themselves, we proclaim that forgiveness and reconciliation are God’s greatest desires, not judgment, condemnation, and separation.

Removing barriers to the Lord’s Supper, rather than fencing the table, allows us to present an “attainable Gospel” to the world, a faith women and men can live out, not try to live up to. Perhaps it is time for evangelicals to move away from the sermon as the centerpiece of worship and build the foundation of our faith on the Eucharist, for if we “resolve and design to follow Christ, [we] are fit to approach the Lord’s table...it will not lessen...true religious reverence, but rather confirm and increase it” (Wesley, n.d. para. 31, 34).

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