The Great Banquet Retreat as a Strategy to Transform Northminster Presbyterian Church

Doug Hucke

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin

Part of the Missions and World Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/4

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Theology at Digital Commons @ Fuller. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Fuller. For more information, please contact archives@fuller.edu.
Please HONOR the copyright of these documents by not retransmitting or making any additional copies in any form. We appreciate your respectful cooperation.

Theological Research Exchange Network (TREN)
P.O. Box 30183
Portland, Oregon 97294
USA
Website: www.tren.com
E-mail: rwjones@tren.com
Phone# 1-800-334-8736
THE GREAT BANQUET RETREAT AS A STRATEGY TO TRANSFORM NORTHCROFT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

DOUG HUCKE
MARCH 2008
The Great Banquet Retreat as a Strategy to Transform
Northminster Presbyterian Church
Doug Hucke
Doctor of Ministry
2008
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

The purpose of this ministry focus paper is to present a culturally appropriate and
theologically informed strategy to renew Northminster Presbyterian Church by
incorporating the Great Banquet (a Presbyterian adaptation of the Cursillo Model renewal
weekend) into the life and ministry of the church. The Great Banquet is a seventy-two-
hour structured retreat, beginning Thursday evening and ending Sunday evening. The
Great Banquet also includes a time of preparation and follow-up that are critically
important.

North American culture is transitioning from modernity to postmodernity. The
transition to postmodernity is not complete, and Americans find themselves in a
transitional stage with a great deal of stress and uncertainty. Church renewal is very
difficult in this time of transition. The Great Banquet is a ministry tool that is uniquely
effective in renewal in this transitional time.

This paper contains three major parts. The first part explores the history, values,
and congregational culture of Northminster Presbyterian Church. This section then
explores the larger cultural context of Northminster. North American culture is
dominated by the change from modernism to postmodernism. Northminster Presbyterian
finds itself in a liminal state of transition between modernity and postmodernity. The
congregation is made up of people who are influenced by modernity, postmodernity, and
both.
The second part explores the biblical and theological foundations for renewal. It begins with a theological assessment of modernity and postmodernity. The changing nature of individualism, reason, truth, and metanarrative are assessed theologically and biblically. An ecclesiology is established that addresses the issues raised by the transformation of our culture. Seven principles for renewal in a transitional time are described.

The third part provides a history of the Great Banquet movement from its Cursillo roots. It also describes the content and process of the Great Banquet. The Great Banquet is evaluated against the principles of renewal established in part two. Finally a strategy of implementation at Northminster is described. This strategy includes an evaluation of the ministry at Northminster.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, DMin

Words: 347
## CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................................................. 1

### PART ONE
**CONTEXT FOR MINISTRY**

#### Chapter

1. **THE CONTEXT AND HEART OF NORTHMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN** .............................................. 10

2. **THE LARGER CULTURAL CONTEXT: POSTMODERNISM** ........................................... 26

### PART TWO
**FOUNDATIONS OF THEOLOGY FOR MINISTRY**

3. **THEOLOGICAL AND CONTEXTUAL ASSESSMENT** ....................................................... 52

4. **RENEWAL IN A TIME OF TRANSITION** ............................................................................ 84

### PART THREE
**STRATEGY FOR MINISTRY: THE GREAT BANQUET**

5. **THE GREAT BANQUET** .................................................................................................. 116

6. **THE GREAT BANQUET AS A RENEWAL TOOL** ......................................................... 150

**CONCLUSION** ..................................................................................................................... 173

**APPENDICES** .................................................................................................................... 175

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** .................................................................................................................. 193
INTRODUCTION

Mainline churches are in trouble. They have seen steady decline in both membership and influence since the 1960s. The numbers tell the story. In 1960 14.4 percent of all Americans were members of a mainline church.\(^1\) In 2000 that number stands at only 7.4 percent.\(^2\) As a percentage of the total population, membership in mainline churches is half what it was forty years ago. This is even more depressing when one considers the total population has grown from 179 million people to nearly 300 million during the same time period. Mainline denominations are also slipping in significance within Protestantism. In 1960, mainline denominations represented 40 percent of all American Protestants. Today that number is 12 percent.\(^3\)

As a mainline denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has also experienced significant decline over the last forty years. In 1965 there were 4.3 million Presbyterians in the United States, but by the end of 2005 there were 2.3 million. If membership decline were to continue at the current rate – an average of forty-nine thousand members have left every year since 1965 – the PCUSA would cease to exist by the year 2053. The

\(^1\) Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 25. In this paper, the term “Mainline” refers to established denominations, including American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church (USA), Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church of America, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

\(^2\) Ibid.

losses have been steady and fairly consistent. For a couple of years the decline seemed to slow. Denominational officials spun that as a sign of good news among a sea of bleak statistics. For example, in 2001 almost 150,000 people joined Presbyterian congregations. Despite 150,000 new people, the denomination still suffered a net loss of 31,549. Yet, in a denomination starved for good news, one denominational official spun the 2001 results saying it was “a good indication that Presbyterians are committed to evangelism and discipleship.”4 The good news does not balance the bad.

Most observers agree the mainline church in America is ailing, but not everyone agrees on the prognosis. Some see certain death while others see hope. For example, Mike Regele interprets the decline as the dying of the institutional church. In his book, *Death of the Church*, he writes, “Like a patient who faces a terminal disease, we must embrace the inevitable. The historic institutional church in America is passing into history.”5 This is a common, but not unanimous, view among observers. Some, like Eddie Gibbs, take a different view. In his book *ChurchNext*, he writes: “Our approach is based on the premise that God hasn’t given up on denominations, for in the overall scheme of things, it is the denominational churches that make up by far the greatest segment of world Christianity. It is hard to imagine that they are all destined for the scrap heap.”6 The prognosis might vary, but the diagnosis is sure: the institutional

---


5 Mike Regele and Mark Schulz, *Death of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 238.

Yet there is reason to hope. Not every mainline church is at death’s door. There are healthy, growing congregations in the midst of so many declining congregations. This work will argue that healthy and effective ministry is possible for mainline churches, even in an age of massive cultural change and denominational decline.

Northminster Presbyterian Church is a healthy, vibrant congregation. Northminster is in the uncommon position of being a growing congregation in a declining denomination. However, the same basic elements of decline are present at Northminster. Northminster is a mainline denominational church that shares much with other congregations that are shrinking. Northminster is in a fast growing area, and its growth is due, in large part, to its demographic location. Northminster is a very healthy congregation, but, if it were located somewhere else, it might be struggling like other mainline congregations.

How does the leadership of Northminster Presbyterian keep the church from struggling like other mainline congregations? How do we continue to promote growth and renewal? The key is in how we respond to the problems facing mainline churches. Ronald Heifetz says leadership is about the response to problems or challenges. The key is to diagnose the problem correctly. He addresses two kinds of problems: technical and adaptive. Technical problems are those that can be addressed with existing, known tools. We already know how to solve technical problems. Adaptive problems are those that require new insight and vision. Adaptive problems require a shift in our mindset and way

---

of thinking. The problem is that we in mainline churches have approached the changing culture as a technical problem. Instead of adapting to our changed culture, we attempt technical solutions that are ineffective. We assume we have the knowledge to address the problem of decline, and so we work as though nothing has changed, but everything has changed.

North American culture has changed immensely. In fact, the last forty years have experienced one of the largest cultural shifts the world has ever known. Modernity was shaped by a whole set of ideas and presuppositions about knowledge, truth, and meaning. These ideas and presuppositions came about with the Enlightenment emphasis on rationalism and objective truth. Craig Van Gelder writes, “Modernity is the story of this struggle to create society on the bases of objective scientific truth and the construct of autonomous self.” Those ideas and presuppositions are fading away. They no longer shape the western world as they once did. Mainline Christianity was spawned in age called modernism.

We are now moving into a new cultural paradigm that has yet to be fully formed. We cannot yet say for sure what this new world is going to be like, but we know it will be very different from the old one. Hence we use the term postmodernism to describe the

---

8 Heifetz, Leadership without Easy Answers, 87.


10 Guder and Barrett, Missional Church, 38.
new paradigm. The cultural assumptions and norms that once guided everyone’s thinking are changing. The problem is that the church continues to operate based on the old rules. The obvious result is glaring ineffectiveness and ineptitude in reaching the culture. Mainline churches neither speak the language nor think in the same terms as the culture around them. This creates a great deal of stress and tension in the church.

To make matters worse, the church has become accustomed to being at the center of society in the western world. Christendom is a thing of the past. The culture is no longer Christian, if it ever was, and mainline denominations no longer hold positions of authority within the culture. They have been moved to the margins of society and are no longer the univocal voice of moral authority. This is especially difficult for the Presbyterian Church (USA), which has been center stage since the inception of the United States. The Church has been pushed to the margins, but it keeps trying to return to the center of society. People are left with the sense that the Church is outdated and irrelevant.

The stress in local congregations is compounded by the presence of people who retain the views of modernity together with those who view the world through a postmodern lens. Consequently, there are differing opinions on what the Church should be doing. Moderns want to return to the glory days of Christendom. Postmoderns have no such nostalgia. They would willingly throw out all the old Christendom language and practices and start over, but moderns are not so willing to let go. These opposing

---

11 Loren B. Mead and Alban Institute, The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the
perspectives result in opposing purposes that work against the peace and mission of a church.

This shift in cultures presents a great challenge to renewing congregations. Some might say it represents impossibility. The worldviews of moderns and postmoderns are diametrically opposed. If they cannot agree on the mission of the Church, they certainly cannot agree on methodology of ministry. That is probably an overstatement of the reality of a mainline congregation. Northminster Presbyterian certainly has its share of moderns and postmoderns and yet manages to function as a healthy, growing congregation. The key is to develop and incorporate spiritual renewal into the life and work of the Church that bridges the gap between modern and postmodern. It is essential to develop ministry that can minister to all people as it relies on the Holy Spirit.

We must begin by defining the mission of the Church, which requires a new understanding of ecclesiology as an ecclesiology shaped by Christendom is no longer appropriate. We must also redefine leadership as the meeting of adaptive challenges; managers meet technical problems. Mainline churches have relied on managers in adaptive situations and not leaders. Leaders must lead congregations in developing ministry that meets those adaptive challenges.

One ministry that can be quite effective in meeting adaptive challenges is the Great Banquet. The Great Banquet is a seventy-two-hour structured retreat, beginning Thursday evening and ending Sunday evening. Participants live and study together in a

worshipful time of singing, prayer, and discussion. The Great Banquet experience is patterned after a “Cursillo model” renewal weekend developed by Roman Catholics in Spain in the 1940s. A “Cursillo” is essentially a three-day course in Christianity including fifteen talks, worship experiences, and community building. “Cursillo de Christianidad means ‘little course in Christianity.’” Our purpose is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Great Banquet as a tool of renewal in this time of great cultural change. The Great Banquet is not a “program” to correct all the problems in the Church. It is a structured movement that invites the Holy Spirit to come and work. The Great Banquet works with people from diverse ideological and cultural backgrounds, and it does so because it creates space and time for the Spirit to work.

Northminster Presbyterian Church is employing the Great Banquet. In the work that follows, the case is made that the Great Banquet is a culturally appropriate ministry for a culture caught in the stress of transition. The first section will describe the history, values, culture, and health of Northminster as a congregation. The scope will then widen to the larger cultural context. It will explore the seismic shift from modernism to postmodernism and its implications for congregations. This section will establish the need for church renewal at Northminster. The second section will explore the biblical and theological foundations for effective renewal in the Church. This will include a theological assessment of the shift towards postmodernity. Here an ecclesiology will be described from an evangelical and Reformed perspective. Principles for ministry will be

---

12 Stephen D. Bryant, What Is Emmaus? The Emmaus Library (Nashville: Upper Room Books,
established that guide the implementation and development of ministry. This paper is using a “principle approach” to ministry, not a “model approach.” The principles will be established first, and then the Great Banquet will be implemented and adapted based on those principles. The final section will describe the Great Banquet in detail. It will be assessed against the principles established in the second section. A strategy for implementing the Great Banquet will be described.

God’s dream for the Church has not ended simply because we are experiencing a massive shift in culture. God still longs for the Church to be his hands and feet in the world. That is still possible for the mainline church, but it will require a great deal of adaptive work. The Great Banquet is a vehicle that can provide a platform for adaptive mission.
PART ONE

CONTEXT FOR MINISTRY
CHAPTER 1
THE CONTEXT AND HEART OF NORTHMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN

The following project provides a strategy to transform Northminster Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois. Northminster is a member of the Presbyterian Church (USA) denomination. An effective strategy must begin with the context of the church including the city of Peoria, the history of the church, its demographics, and the core values of the congregation.

Peoria, Illinois

Peoria is a small city in central Illinois, halfway between Chicago and St. Louis, Missouri. The city is the center of a tri-county metropolitan area of nearly 350,000 residents, though the city itself has about 113,000 residents.\(^1\) Peoria has a number of amenities associated with cities many times its size: one of the oldest symphony orchestras in the country, multiple community theater programs for children and adults, a thriving civic opera and ballet company, minor league hockey and arena football teams, and a league-winning baseball team with a new downtown stadium. Peoria is home to Bradley University and Illinois Central College. The Peoria Civic Center presents sporting events, concerts, family shows, and seasonal attractions.

Peoria is also home to the Caterpillar Corporation, the world’s largest
manufacturer of mining and construction equipment and diesel engines. Caterpillar is by far the largest single employer in the Peoria area with nearly seventeen thousand employees. The actual number of Caterpillar employees was once much larger, but diversification and moving productions operations overseas has left Peoria with a largely white-collar base of operations. When one considers the subcontractors and businesses that depend on Caterpillar, the number of people who work for Caterpillar is much larger. The economy of the region is very dependent on Caterpillar.

The healthcare industry – with three local hospitals and a medical school affiliated with the University of Illinois – is the second largest employer. Peoria is the medical center for central Illinois. Other notable employers include L.R. Nelson (lawn sprinkling equipment), Komatsu (mining equipment), Keystone Consolidated Industries (steel), Maui Jim (sunglasses), Advanced Technology Services (information technology), and a federal agricultural research lab.

A Brief History of Northminster Presbyterian

---

Northminster is the product of two churches (Alta Presbyterian and Kellar Presbyterian) that merged in 1969. At that time, they were two struggling, rural churches north of Peoria. They would not remain rural, however, as Peoria grew up around Northminster. In fact, north Peoria would soon become one of the fastest growing areas in Illinois.

In the early 1990s, Northminster made a strategic decision to relocate further north, in the heart of the fastest growing area in Peoria. This relocation was necessary because the church had outgrown its facility and was landlocked. No further expansions were possible. In order to continue growing, Northminster had to relocate. In 1996, Northminster relocated and took on the characteristics of a New Church Development (NCD). It essentially became a new church plant. Relocating helped this mainline church become open to the benefits of change. Change became acceptable, and even welcome, within the culture of Northminster. Since then, it has doubled in size, increasing from a congregation of just over three hundred to over six hundred. Worship attendance has roughly doubled over the same period.\(^2\)

Northminster has enjoyed stable pastoral leadership since its merger in 1969. Rev. Orville Roth was pastor during the church merger. Dr. Roane Deckert became pastor of the church in 1974 and served for twenty-seven years until his retirement 2001. He had a successful ministry at Northminster, and the people who know Deckert think highly of him. Deckert was named as pastor emeritus in 2004. In September of 2003,

\(^2\) See Appendix A.
Northminster called me as its next senior pastor.

**Demographics**

In 2004, a Percept demographic study was done which shows the area near the church is expected to grow between 20 and 24 percent.³ New subdivisions to be built over the next five years are expected to bring more than eighteen thousand new residents to the area by the end of 2009. All of this population growth certainly paints a promising picture for Northminster.

Northminster Presbyterian is an affluent congregation in a relatively wealthy area. The two main employers in the Peoria area include medicine (doctors, nurses, and hospital staff) and the Caterpillar Corporation. Thirty percent of our church families depend on Caterpillar for their livelihood in mostly white collar jobs. In our area, nearly 77 percent of all workers are white collar.⁴ Northminster also has a large number of medical professionals as part of the church. Similar people surround us, so the average household income is much higher than the national average. We are located in an area where household income is between $75,000 and $156,791.⁵ It should be noted that Northminster is embedded in an area where the lifestyle segment can be characterized as suburban mid-life families.⁶ People in the area are also better educated than the national

---


⁴ *Ministry Area Profile 2004*.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.
average. Northminster is a young congregation with a median age of about 38, which is slightly younger than our surrounding area (39.7 years).\textsuperscript{7}

Northminster has placed a great value on children and youth and has budgeted according to those values. We have hired an ordained pastor with the primary responsibility of youth ministry, and we have also hired a children’s ministry coordinator in the last year. Northminster also operates the Northminster Learning Center, one of the top pre-school programs in the region. The reputation of the Learning Center is so good there has been a waiting list for three years to get children into the program. One of the reasons for the waiting list was a lack of space. All of the growth over the last ten years has resulted in an outgrown church facility.

Based on the above description, one could come to the conclusion that Northminster Presbyterian has things well in hand and that there are no challenges. This is not true, but it is a common impression people have of the church. While Northminster is not declining in terms of attendance or membership, it does share a lot of the same theological and cultural assumptions that lead to decline elsewhere. Mainline churches often neglect the spiritual development of their members. Northminster must develop an intentional path of spiritual development that helps people experience the Holy Spirit and the Christian community in a profound way.

Northminster is a wealthy, well-educated, and career-minded congregation of overachievers. The benefit of that is that we possess a lot of talent for ministry and

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
leadership. The drawback is that people characteristically have priorities other than ministry. With so much time dedicated to jobs and careers, only the highest priorities receive any time at the end of the week. Careerism is an idol for many.

Materialism is another idol. Incomes are high in our church and area because the accumulation of wealth is a high priority. With so much wealth comes a consumer mentality as well. People are used to paying for goods and services and shop for churches like they would for any other product. A large part of our growth (but not all) comes from new residents or people transferring from other local churches. Those who move here usually do so for career reasons. People are usually being transferred in or out by their companies. Growth is not coming through evangelism by, and large. In fact, a study was done of the Northminster membership rolls, and 57% of members are new within the last five years. The upside is that all this change fosters a church culture conducive to change. Northminster is probably typical in terms of involvement in the life and work of the church. The church experiences the 20-80 rule where 20% of the people do 80% of the “work.” Participation in ministry is not a universally shared expectation. While there are opportunities for training and equipping in small groups, youth, children, and discipleship, it is not an expectation shared by everyone. A good example might be outreach. Northminster continues to grow, but that probably has more to do with demographics than intentions. A few years ago, we took part in a US Congregation Life Survey. In the category of “sharing faith,” Northminster had a below average response for “involvement in outreach or evangelistic activities” and “inviting people to
worship.” In fact, Northminster was even below the Presbyterian average.

The Congregational Health of Northminster Presbyterian

This work will use Natural Church Development as the tool to assess congregational health. Natural Church Development is an approach to church growth that views the church as a living, organic body. The healthier a church is, the more likely it will grow. This is a principle-based approach to church growth and not a model (or imitation) approach to church growth. Based upon their research and theological reflection, Christian Schwarz and his team of researchers have come upon eight ingredients or characteristics necessary for a church to be healthy. These eight characteristics include empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships.

In 2004, Northminster took the Natural Church Development Survey that measures church health in each of these eight areas and provides an overall score. That year, Northminster’s average “Quality Index” score on the survey was a 58. Of the eight qualities measured, our lowest score was in “need-based evangelism” where we scored a 44. At that time, it was safe to say our growth resulted more from population

---

8 US Congregational Life Survey (Louisville: US Congregations, 2002). See Appendix C.
10 Schwarz, Natural Church Development, 20.
11 See Appendix D.
growth than from the ministry of the congregation. Northminster took the Natural Church Development survey again in the spring of 2007. The results showed significant improvement over three years. The average score went from a 58 in 2004 to a 74 in 2007. This is outstanding improvement. Need-oriented evangelism saw the biggest jump, 31 points. Part of the explanation might be the increased awareness of evangelism after the 2004 survey. Another factor was two Great Banquet weekends that were held just prior to taking the survey. At least half a dozen people became Christians on these weekends, and there was a heightened awareness and excitement over evangelism.

Natural Church Development holds that all eight qualities must all be above a 65 – known as the “65 hypothesis” – for a church to demonstrate a commitment to church growth. If all eight categories score above 65, there is, according to NCD research, a 99.4% chance the church will be growing and thriving. In 2007, Northminster scored about 65 in all eight index measurements, indicating a healthy congregation. Growing membership and attendance figures support the “65 hypothesis” of church growth.

**Core Values of Northminster Presbyterian**

Northminster has always benefited from proactive leadership. Long-range studies were conducted in 1991 and 2000. By October 2003, it was clear the time had come for a new long-range study. The driving force for a new plan was the lack of space in our

---

12 See Appendix E.
current facility due to growth in programs and people. Previous long-range studies
focused on expansion of the facility. This time, the Session decided to do a broader
analysis of the church values and ministry and then make recommendations based upon
core values.

The Session began by forming the long-range planning team. The criteria for
selection of team members included great commitment to the church and active
participation. We also wanted some diversity so we intentionally included people from
different age groups and ministry areas.

The process undertaken by the long-range planning team essentially amounted to
answering three questions: first, where are we? second, where are we going? and third,
how will we get there? The team was asked to envision the church we believe God is
calling us to be. This was a much more holistic approach as opposed to concentrating
strictly on one area of the church (e.g. the physical plant).

The team began by discussing the current mission and vision statements of the
church which were established in 2000:

The Vision of Northminster Presbyterian Church is to be a Christ-
centered Community doing God's Work in the World.

Our Mission is to reach out and embrace others with God's Love.

The Great Purpose Christ has given us is expressed in the Great
Commandment, to love God wholeheartedly while loving neighbors as
ourselves, and in the Great Commission, to reach out and make disciples.

We concluded these statements were still appropriate. Based upon those
statements and our own sense of God’s leading, we established a vision. Once we had a
vision for what we could become, we began to work backward and answer the question, “How will we get there?” In August of 2004 the congregation approved a long range planning report. This report lists identified core values and makes a series of recommendations. In answering this question we identified eight core ministry values we believe must be addressed for Northminster to reach its potential. These are a combination of both strengths and weaknesses. We believed we need to emphasize our strengths, but we could not ignore our weaknesses. The values established in the long-range planning report include the following.\textsuperscript{14}

**Children and Youth**

One of the more successful ministries of Northminster is the Northminster Learning Center (NLC). The NLC is on the cutting edge in early childhood education. As mentioned above, there has been a waiting list to get in due to space limitations. The completion of the expanded facility made the expansion of current programs possible, along with the start of a kindergarten. There are no intentions of moving past kindergarten into parochial school.

The children’s ministry at Northminster continues to grow as our congregation and surrounding community grow. Vacation Bible school is a thriving outreach to children and families. The 2004 program enrolled 315 children from 213 families. Of these families, 27 percent were from the Northminster membership. Thus, 155 families

\textsuperscript{14} See *Northminster Presbyterian Church: Long Range Planning Report* (Peoria: Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2004), 5-20.
came from outside the church family. In 2005, Vacation Bible School saw 365 children from 220 families. In 2006, the number grew to 400 children from nearly 240 families. This ministry is led by a group of leaders who begin the planning process six months in advance. The role of the children’s ministry director is to support and equip this team, not replace them.

In 2004, our Wednesday evening’s children’s program (Pioneer Clubs) saw between twenty and forty children on a sporadic basis. Under the leadership of the children’s ministry director, that program has changed curriculum (Faithweaver) and recruited and trained new leaders. Now it sees fifty to seventy children on a much more stable basis. The key has been the equipping of a volunteer team to staff the ministry. Sunday School has also seen similar growth.

Youth ministry is also valued a great deal at Northminster. The church has a long history of employing youth directors. However, the job description and expectations of youth directors have changed over the years. When I arrived at Northminster, the church was without a youth director, so we immediately began the search for a replacement. We were not looking for an ordained person, but we hired a young woman (Stacia Thetard) who was in the ordination process within the Presbyterian Church (USA). She is now an ordained associate pastor of our church (which makes three ordained pastors on staff). The number of youth on our roles at Northminster is approximately one hundred students. Currently, our Sunday evening youth programs draw over fifty teenagers on a weekly basis.
Communication, Evangelism, and Outreach

Northminster has always had problems in the area of communication, yet the long-range planning team understood the importance of communication in the church. Lack of a system, or in Northminster’s case – a fragmented system, results in communication difficulties that fail to get information to those who need it. Our present system of providing information to families and friends of Northminster is often inadequate. As the church grows, the need to improve communication grows.

Northminster has done a fairly good job of outreach, but there is a lot of room for improvement. We believe we are known as a “friendly” and “welcoming” church. However, the church runs the risk of becoming too comfortable with growth. The team identified Northminster as a “magnet” church because of existing worshippers and the growth around us. Northminster has a lot of children that provide a certain amount of energy and zeal. The Session and the long-range planning team recognize the difference between outreach (which is all-inclusive) and evangelism (which targets pre-Christians or un-churched). While we need to do a better job of outreach we also need to do a better job of evangelism. The 2004 Natural Church Development Survey lists evangelism as the weakest point. That area has improved by thirty-one points since 2004.

Gift–Oriented Ministry and Equipping

Northminster values volunteerism and the inclusion of all members in ministry. However, we do not do a good job of matching people with their spiritual gifts. The 2004 Natural Church Development Survey revealed that one of our weakest areas was “Gift
Oriented Ministry.” Without a current plan or educational program, we believe we are weak, both in the identification of spiritual gifts and the employment of identified gifts.

Most of Northminster’s members cannot identify their spiritual gifts. There are a lot of new programs, requiring more people to use their spiritual gifts. To meet this need, we have begun the Christian Life Series, which is a set of three courses designed to equip and prepare people for membership and ministry. One of the courses uses the Lifekeys material to help people explore their spiritual gifts and calling.¹⁵ David Stark, one of the authors, came to Northminster to lead a weekend seminar. Now the church is leading the course. As a result, the quality index score in “Gift Oriented Ministry” improved by twenty-seven points.

Empowering is a strength area for Northminster. The church is moving away from a hierarchical structure of governance and ministry. The Session has created a permission-giving atmosphere for ministry teams and committees. The nominating process is healthy and works well for our church. However, leadership and co-leadership positions are at times difficult to fill or fill properly. Leadership identification/selection needs significant increased support in the equipping process through intentional development and training of lay leaders. We need to engage, educate, and equip more of our congregation for participation in ministry. While many people participate in ministry, we can do a much better job of equipping.

Small Group Ministry

Over the last couple of years, we have seen a large increase in the number of active members participating in small groups. In January of 2004, the whole church studied the *Purpose Driven Life*, and that sparked a surge of interest in adults and youth who wanted to further explore biblical principles and ideas. Groups called Discovery Groups were formed to study that book together. Many of those Discovery Groups continue to meet. Outside of the Discovery Groups, there are a number of diverse, small groups (i.e. Presbyterian Women, men’s, couples, book studies, Bethel series, and Great Banquet reunion groups).

The emphasis on small groups was evident in 2002 when the church hired an associate pastor (Mike Shirey) as the associate pastor of small groups. A ministry team was formed called *Community Building*, and it is their mission to involve people in small groups of some kind. Presently 57 percent of the congregation is involved in a small group of some kind.

Worship

Internal surveys have been conducted on the subject of worship. It was discovered that Northminster generally had a fairly specific expectation of what worship should be. It included a high-quality music program; a pastor who preaches biblically based and intellectually challenging sermons; and a blended service that incorporated

---

elements of the traditional but was not afraid of including contemporary, progressive portions. In essence, members wanted worship to be a joyful experience in praise of a living God. Indications from these surveys show that Northminster is succeeding in making worship a strength of the church. The Natural Church Development Survey revealed worship as a strength in both 2004 and 2007. Currently, there are two identical worship services on a Sunday morning. The worship style is blended, mixing traditional and contemporary music and elements in our worship. The vast majority of people are comfortable with this blended style of worship.

However, the Long Range Planning Report recommended exploring the idea of adding another worship service to promote growth. This was not to be a blended service but either contemporary or traditional. A team was formed to explore the idea. Using Charles Arn’s book *How to Start a New Service* as a guide, they explored the purpose and strategy of a new service. The team decided to pursue a new service in order to reach unchurched people. They concluded a more contemporary service would best serve this purpose. Currently there are no concrete plans for a new service, but, with attendance reaching 80 percent capacity, the time for concrete plans is coming soon.

**Long Range Planning Implementation**

In August 2004, the congregation approved the Long Range Planning Report. It

---

17 See Appendix E.

made a number of recommendations regarding plant, personnel, and programs. The decision was made to undergo a capital campaign and expand the facility.\(^\text{19}\) The first phase (called Priority 1) cost $2.8 million dollars. The capital campaign raised pledges for about $1.5 million, but the decision was made to go ahead with the project, using commercial borrowing to make up the difference. Northminster owns a lot of land in our fast-growing area. The strategy is to sell some of the land to pay off the debt, and then use proceeds to complete further phases of the long-range expansion.

There were also recommendations about hiring a youth pastor and a children’s ministry director. These people were hired in anticipation of future growth.\(^\text{20}\) It also recognized the future need for more support staff.

The Long Range Planning Report also made recommendations regarding programming. The report recommended the continued development of the Christian Life Series and Lifekeys. The Northminster Learning Center was encouraged to expand with a kindergarten and programs for parents. Finally, the Long Range Planning Team recommended bringing the Great Banquet to Northminster. The first men’s and women’s weekends were in April 2007. All of the recommendations of the Long Range Planning Report have been implemented.

This work will focus on the Great Banquet as it adds to the life and mission of Northminster Presbyterian. However, the Great Banquet is not just another “program.”

\(^{19}\) Long Range Planning Report, 22-23.

Northminster is operating out of a principle-based approach, not a model-based approach. The goal is to establish principles for ministry that are theologically and culturally appropriate. The Great Banquet will then be assessed and implemented according to those principles. First, though, it is necessary to widen the lens and look at the wider cultural context.
CHAPTER 2

THE LARGER CULTURAL CONTEXT: POSTMODERNISM

Once upon a time in the Western world, the Church was central to culture. It held center stage in society. This is no longer true. In this paper, the term “Christendom” refers to the union of secular power and the Church that existed for much of Western history.¹ During Christendom, the Church was the dominant player in determining cultural morality and characteristics, but now it is on the outside looking in. The Western world has pushed the Church to the margins of society where it is less important to culture.

Culture

The Church has always struggled with the culture around it. How should the Church respond to its cultural context? An important book on Church and culture was H. Richard Niebuhr’s book Christ and Culture.² Is the Church outside of culture or a part of culture? Niebuhr treated the Church as separate from culture. He described five possible types of relationships between Christ (the Church as the body of Christ) and culture: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ in paradox with

¹This union can be formal as in Europe or assumed as in North America. See Guder and Barrett, Missional Church, 4.
culture, and Christ transforming culture. Niebuhr sees various Christian traditions as adopting one of the typologies, but he clearly opts for “Christ transforming culture” as the best choice.\(^3\) While Niebuhr raised the discussion of culture to a whole new theological plane, it was clearly a product of its time. He wrote from a Christendom mindset. As Leonard Sweet observes, “Niebuhr failed to consider what the relationship of Christ and culture might look like from outside Christendom, a world where the church had – at the time of his writing – a much more preferred place at the table.”\(^4\) Niebuhr clearly saw culture as something distinct from the Church and that the Church itself was not part of the culture. Consequently, the book has suffered a lot of criticism.\(^5\) Critics generally oppose his closed typology, but they also tend to reject the dualism of Christ and culture as if the Kingdom of God and culture are separate, even competing, concepts.

There seems to be a distinct separateness, though, between the Kingdom of God and Western culture. The struggle for the Church has always been to relate to culture. The Church is certainly a culture within a wider culture. Cross-cultural study was once

---

\(^3\)See Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 53.


the domain of foreign missionaries, but now the Western Church is beginning to realize that cross-cultural study is important for the Church in its own homeland. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger observe, “There is now a growing realization that churches in the West face a missional challenge, one that is increasingly cross-cultural in nature.”

Church renewal requires an understanding and engagement with culture. This paper will describe the Great Banquet as a spiritual development tool at Northminster. We must understand our culture if we are going to use the Great Banquet to renew Northminster Presbyterian. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, Jesus is the Lord of everything, including culture. If Jesus is Lord of all, then he must be Lord of culture as well. Paul describes the Lordship of Jesus Christ in Colossians 1:15-17

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col 1:15-17).

Classically, culture was understood as the “customs and rituals of a particular group.” Even that understanding of culture is changing as the world changes. Postmodern thinkers now “view culture as a shorthand way of talking about the shared dimension of meaning making.” Culture is certainly one of the things “on earth” that

---


8 Ibid., 138.
was created and is sustained by Jesus Christ. To follow Jesus Christ as Lord requires us to think about our cultural context.

Second, Jesus came to this earth in the midst of a cultural context. In the incarnation, Christ the creator became part of the creation. As John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). As he dwelt among humanity he took on a language and thought forms of humanity. He was a practicing Jew in a country where the dominant religion was Judaism. If the Church is to be “incarnational,” it must follow the example of Christ.

Lastly, it has always been good missiological practice to study and understand the culture where one is serving. Craig Van Gelder writes, “The Gospel is always conveyed through the medium of culture.”9 The church must study its context carefully if it is to communicate the Gospel well. This is called contextualization. When missionaries go to another culture, they become students of that culture. Now we must become students of our own changing culture. The Church is realizing that, to minister in its own local and regional context, it must approach the task as cross-cultural missionaries.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the wider cultural context. We must begin by understanding the fluid, dynamic nature of culture that is ever changing. Culture moves and evolves as it reacts within itself. Groups of people tend to react to other groups of people, thus changing the characteristics of culture. Culture is reactive.
We can see the reactionary nature within generations. In 1991, William Strauss and Neil Howe published a history of generational activity. This history is marked by a constant interplay between a dominant generation and a recessive generation. A generation is a group of people (roughly born within twenty-two years of each other) that develop a “peer personality.” The personality of one generation often reacts to the personality of the preceding generation. There are “dominant” and “recessive” generations that react to each other in a cyclical pattern. “History shapes generations” but “generations shape history” as well.

It is common for pastors and churches to strategize and target their ministries at “peer personalities” of generations. For example, some churches will design worship services to meet the felt needs of a particular generation. Baby Boomers tend to prefer and appreciate free and open expression during worship while seniors tend to appreciate form and standardization. These kinds of insights are certainly useful, but one needs to keep the bigger picture in mind: generations react to previous generations. Generational interplay is representative of the larger dynamics at work in culture. As Gibbs and Bolger put it, “Generational issues are imbedded in the much deeper cultural and

---

9 Guder and Barrett, Missional Church, 18.
11 Ibid., 76.
12 For example see Leith Anderson, Dying for Change (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1990), 61-109, Regele and Schulz, Death of the Church, 27-37.
philosophical shift from modernity to postmodernity.”¹⁴ It is this “deeper cultural and philosophical shift” that is the issue. This shift to postmodernism represents a reaction to modernism, just as modernism reacted to pre-modernism.

Western history can be divided into three basic periods: premodernity, modernity and postmodernity. There is no exact point that demarcates one period from another. These periods tend to blend and flow into each other. As D. A. Carson, a postmodern critic, says, “Historical movements are invariably messy.”¹⁵ The shift from modernity to postmodernity is the heart of this chapter, but the discussion must begin with a description of the shift from premodernity to modernity.

Premodernity basically includes antiquity up to the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Society would typically be rural and agricultural. There was “one central belief system” in premodern societies.¹⁶ People knew and understood a central story or religious belief system that gave meaning to the rest of society. This belief system was guarded by those in power because they were charged with maintaining the status quo. Around the time of the Enlightenment, all of this began to change and the change was massive. This represents the first major shift from premodernity to modernity. N. T. Wright claims, “The European Enlightenment at the intellectual level, and the Industrial Revolution at the social, produced enormous changes in how society

---

¹⁴ Gibbs and Bolger, Emerging Churches, 22.
¹⁵ D. A. Carson, Becoming Conversant with Emergent: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 92.
¹⁶ Regele and Schulz, Death of the Church, 59.
worked, literally and metaphorically, and in how people thought.”17

In premodernity, knowledge was revealed knowledge. This would be the core issue to which the Enlightenment would react. Modernism rejected revelation in favor of reason as the basis for all knowledge. Scott Smith notes that in modernity, “No longer was there a perceived need for special revelation from the Bible to give us universal truths.”18 It is the epistemology change that usually gets the most attention in the Church. However, David Wells argues that the “modernization,” made possible by the Industrial Revolution, was even more significant than the philosophical change. “It is because of modernization and not really because of the Enlightenment, that the West has moved from being premodern to being modern in its organization.”19 This is an interesting point, but it should be acknowledged that modernization was only possible because reason became the foundation of knowledge. The Scientific Revolution which made modernization possible is a product of the Enlightenment and modernity. The intellectual change brought on the social change, but both were necessary to transition to modernism.

The second major shift in the Western world is away from modernity to postmodernity. This, too, represents a reaction; as Stanley Grenz points out, “Postmodernism represents a rejection of the Enlightenment project and the foundational

19 Wells, Above All Earthly Powers, 31.
assumptions upon which it was built.”20 The term postmodern was originally used in the art world. Edie Gibbs writes, “It appears that the term postmodern was first coined by Frederico de Onis in the 1930s but did not achieve prominence until it was used to describe reactive tendencies to modernism in art and literature in the 1960s and in architecture in the 1970s.”21 Words like postmodern and postmodernity are difficult to define and have been used to refer to a lot of different things. Carson is certainly right when he observes that “‘postmodernism’ has become a buzzword that some love and some repudiate.”22 Defining postmodernity is notoriously difficult. In their book, *Beyond Foundationalism*, Stanley Grenz and John Franke make this point:

> A precise understanding of postmodernity is notoriously difficult to pin down. Despite the fact that there is no consensus concerning the meaning of the term, it has become almost commonplace to refer to the contemporary cultural situation as postmodern.23

People who study our culture tend to see the word postmodernism operating on two levels: one has to do with style and the other has to do with substance. Since postmodernism began with art some people think of postmodernity as expressive individualism or a lifestyle. Eventually the word would invade academic circles and ultimately became a cultural descriptor.24 Postmodernity also represents a philosophical

---


22 Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 75.


and intellectual reaction to the tenets of modernity. Wells tried to distinguish between these two meanings by using “postmodernism” (the intellectual formation of postmodern ideas) versus “postmodernity” (the popular expression of those postmodern ideas). This distinction in terms is more confusing than helpful. Scott Smith writes about “street” postmodernism versus “academic” postmodernism. By this, he distinguishes between postmodernity as ideas versus postmodernity as style. Interestingly, those who advance postmodern ideas are often the people who dislike the term “postmodern” because it has become associated with style. “One of the problems with the rising currency of the expression ‘postmodern ministry’ in evangelical churches is that it often refers more to style than substance.” Consequently, proponents of postmodernism are often those who dislike using the word “postmodern” because it is associated with a style. Postmoderns such as Brian McLaren, Erwin McManus, and Jacques Derrida all struggle with the word.

Postmodernity, as the prefix post suggests, comes after modernity, but this new cultural reality has yet to take shape. It is not clear what our culture is becoming, only that it is no longer determined by modernity. Craig Van Gelder describes the shift, “No fully descriptive word has emerged for what the culture is becoming. We only have a

25 Wells, Above All Earthly Powers, 64.
27 See Sweet and Crouch, Church in Emerging Culture, 56, 58, 66.
word that indicates what it appears to be moving away from.” Not only is postmodernity no longer modernity, it is a reaction against modernity.

Each period is essentially a response to, and even a reaction against, the previous period. The current massive shift in culture is towards postmodernism. However, we are not completely there. Modernity may be on life support but it is not completely dead. There are people and institutions that still adhere to the assumptions of modernism. However, a growing number of people and institutions are in some phase of leaving modernism behind. As a consequence, there are moderns and postmoderns who live and work together. As Gibbs and Bolger put it, “Within culture today, both modernity and postmodernity exist side by side.” This makes for an incredibly complex cultural context for Northminster Presbyterian (or any church) to fulfill its mission. Misreading the culture increases the possibility of failure. Therefore, it is essential we develop a broad understanding of modernity and postmodernity.

“Foundational Issues”

The shift to postmodernity is a very complex change because it influences so many areas of our culture. There are “academic” and “street” level postmodernism, but the “academic” postmodernism touches on so many philosophical ideas that one could just pick any one of a myriad of ideas to begin describing the change. However, the best starting point is epistemology. Epistemology has to do with the study and grounds for

knowledge. How do we know what we know? Carson recognizes epistemology as the starting place. “One cannot escape the primacy of epistemology in the turn to the postmodern.”

Epistemology is at the heart of this change, everything else is correlated to epistemology. This discussion will, therefore, present epistemology first and then address correlative issues second.

Fundamentally, postmodernism represents a change in epistemology. To understand the change, one must first understand modern epistemology. Philosophers generally point to René Descartes (1596-1650) as the progenitor of modern epistemology. Descartes attempted to construct a system of true knowledge based on human reason alone. This was a break from the past. Knowledge in premodernism was thought to be revealed from God through Scriptures and established by the authority of the Church. Instead of beginning with God, as premoderns did, Descartes began with the person asking the questions. His famous dictum is: “I think, therefore I am” (*cogito, ergo sum*). Descartes began with the person, the “I” as the basis for all knowledge. He felt human reason alone to be the grounds for true knowledge, but that reason must be guided by rational thought processes. “He sought passionately for a firm foundation for knowledge, something that no rational personal could doubt, and for a way of building systematically on that foundation by means of clear and distinct ideas, words, and

---


concepts whose meaning was determinate.”32 He believed in achieving a way of thinking to discover truth that relied on method. “He insisted upon the necessity of method, upon systematic and orderly thinking.”33 This systematic thinking was made up of principles of intuition and deduction. Based upon these principles, one could establish foundations for knowledge apart from revelation and authority.

The philosophers and theologians often use the metaphor of a building to describe the epistemology of modernism.34 Knowledge is built on a sure foundation, and reasoning is the foundation upon which everything else rests. Most philosophers generally refer to this as “foundationalism.” Postmodern theologians Grenz and Franke are worth quoting here:

The goal of the foundationalist agenda is the discovery of an approach to knowledge that will provide rational human beings with absolute, incontestable certainty regarding the truthfulness of their beliefs. According to foundationalism, the acquisition of knowledge ought to proceed in a manner somewhat similar to the construction of a building. Knowledge is built on a sure foundation.35

The metaphor of a building was useful for foundationalism. Reason was the foundation for all knowledge, and everything one learns or knows is based upon that foundation. The goal was a foundation of beliefs that could not be called into question.

34 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism, 30.
35 Ibid., 23.
This would make it possible to know with “bombproof certainty.”36 If one could know something with certainty, one could arrive at truth. One of the great assumptions of modernity was that truth was knowable. According to Nancey Murphy, foundationalism requires two criteria: first, a “class of beliefs that are somehow immune from challenge; and, second, the assumption that all reasoning within the system proceeds in one direction only – from that set of special, indubitable beliefs to others, but not the reverse.”37 Grenz and Franke put it this way: “Reasoning moves in only one direction – from bottom up, that is, from basic beliefs or first principles to resultant conclusions.”38 In other words, there was the indubitable belief that was the underpinning of the modern way of thinking, and that indubitable belief was the establishment principle of all other knowledge. Classical Cartesian (a term used to describe thought in line with René Descartes)39 foundationalism found indubitable belief in human reason.

In modernity, those things that can be known are know through reason and rational thought. Only those things that can be measured are known for certain. The scientific method and the scientific revolution sprang to life through foundationalism and Cartesian insistence on systematic thinking.40

Enlightenment thinkers would apply the same systematic methodology to all...

36 Regele and Schulz, Death of the Church, 63. See also Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 64.
38 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism, 30.
39 See Carson, Becoming Conversant, 93.
40 Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 66.
disciplines of knowledge. Foundationalism has had an incredibly powerful influence on the Church and theology in the west. Modernity saw a rise in skepticism regarding Christianity which considered it myth and superstition. The Church is a product of its culture and assumed the foundationalist agenda. One might say the Church capitulated to modernity and tried to incorporate the foundationalist mindset. Crystal Downing writes, “It is therefore ironic that during the reign of modernism, many Christians moved into the Enlightenment house, aligning foundational truth not with a personal God, manifest in Christ and revealed through the Scriptures, but with impersonal self-evident universals.” 41 Both liberal and conservative theologians responded in their own way to this skepticism. They have each in turn created their own version of foundationalism, which has resulted in much debate and division in the Church.

Foundationalist thinkers went beyond reason to include other criteria as foundational to the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Conservative theologians followed John Lock and Thomas Reid. 42 They searched for a foundation that could withstand the onslaught of David Hume and others. According to Grenze and Franke, “Conservatives came to conclude that this invulnerable foundation lay in an error-free Bible, which they viewed as the storehouse for divine revelation.” 43 Scripture provided the solid foundation upon which the theologian could construct an edifice-like systematic

41 Downing, How Postmodernism Serves My Faith, 102.
42 See Raschke, The Next Reformation, 28-29.
43 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism, 34. Nancey Murphy makes the same point in Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism, 15.
theology. Consequently, Scripture came under the reasoned attack of the historical-critical method. If Scripture is to serve at all, it must be the repository of something more basic, less prone to rationalist attack." Liberal foundationalist theologians found that “something more basic” in experience. This type of foundationalism finds its roots in Friederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who “put forward the view that the essence of religion (of all religion, not just Christianity) is a certain sort of feeling or awareness.” Theologians like Schleiermacher adopted the foundationalist mindset but changed the criteria to religious experience. “At the heart of liberalism was the innovative relocation of the locus of theological authority away from traditional sources such as Bible and church, and toward a supposedly universal reality – religious experience.” The foundation could not be moved or removed, or knowledge itself would not stand. The foundation was simply found in something else: experience. A good example of this was recently found on a Presbyterian pastor’s blog. The Reverend John Schuck wrote about his basis for knowing:

And the bottom line for me is I really don’t care what the Bible or Reformed Theology says about this or that if its opinion on this or that is presumptuous enough to tell me how to live my life. I can make my own decisions. This means that if even 500 verses of the Bible and if Jesus himself proclaimed on the Mount of Transfiguration and if Jesus appeared to me on my back deck in the glory of his resuscitated corpse and stated to me as clearly as the four p.m. sun is hot, that homoerotic love is a sin and that if I support gays and lesbians in their

---

44 See also Regele and Schulz, *Death of the Church*, 64.
45 Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 22.
46 Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 22. See also Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 33.
47 Ibid., 59.
relationships I would join them in the fires of hell, I would look him in his piercing eyes and say (if I had the courage of my convictions), “fine then. Send me to hell. You are wrong, Jesus.” Why because I know Tony and Mike. Because I know dozens of other couples and individuals and I know who they are and that what they do is good and sacred as what anyone else does.  

The foundation of Shuck’s knowledge about right and wrong with respect to homosexuality is not Scripture or Reformed theology but experiential knowledge of a homosexual couple. Ultimately, the division within the Presbyterian denomination is a result of the different forms of foundationalism. Within classical Protestant liberalism, experiential foundationalism has found a home. Grenz and Franke observe: “Although propounded in an increasingly subtle and complex fashion, the experience-based approach to theology that is characteristic of liberalism continued to dominate mainline theology throughout the twentieth century.”

The Church in America continues to operate on foundationalist principles. Certainly postmodernism has made its way into the Church, but foundationalism continues to hold firm. Leonard Sweet is certainly right when he says, “In the midst of one of the great transitions in history – from modern to postmodern – Christian churches are owned lock, stock and barrel by modernity.” On the conservative side of the Church, there is biblical foundationalism, while the liberal side of the Church uses experience as the foundation. However, both sides are thoroughly foundationalist and

---

49 Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism, 36.
thoroughly modern.

Postmodernism is critical and suspicious of foundationalism. For postmoderns, the Cartesian agenda has not passed the test of time. Nancey Murphy writes, “Descartes’ strategy has been rejected by most philosophers simply because, in the passage of time, it has turned out that what is indubitable in one intellectual context is all too questionable in another.”

Modernity classified knowledge into superior and inferior types. The superior types were those that were reasoned and rational and could be tested. These superior types laid the foundations for a “worldview.” The inferior types of knowledge, things like emotions, added to that worldview when they were in accord, but were discounted if they were not. Postmoderns reject the notion of superior or base types of knowledge.

Postmoderns rejected foundationalist epistemology and looked for a replacement. Postmoderns tended to go on towards a pragmatic view of knowledge or a coherentist view of knowledge. Pragmatists follow Richard Rorty, who believes we cannot speak of the truth of something in and of itself. Pragmatists hold to a nonessential view of truth and knowledge which means something has no meaning apart from other things. We do not measure an idea against some truth that is essential to the thing alone.

Coherentists also see knowledge as interconnected, not hierarchical. Each belief is supported by its connection to another belief, and altogether they make up a whole.

---

51 Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 91.
52 See Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 38.
The image here is not one of a building but of a “web of belief.” Following W. V. O. Quine, this view of epistemology is called “holism.” “Holism means that each belief is supported by its ties to its neighboring beliefs and, ultimately, to the whole.” Knowledge is thought of as a holistic system which flows in every direction. In Cartesian epistemology, knowledge flows up from the base, but in holism knowledge flows in every direction as beliefs are connected to each other.

Essentially, the transition from modernity to postmodernity begins with a change in epistemology. How do we know what we know, and can we be sure? Modernity gave us foundationalism, which found a home in the Church even if the foundations are in dispute. In fact, the major conflict in the Church today is due in large part to the differing opinions as to what is the foundation for our beliefs. Postmodern epistemology rejects foundationalism and looks for a more holistic view of knowledge. This rejection of modern epistemology is neither complete nor unanimous. Currently, there are differences as to foundations of knowledge and whether or not a foundation exists at all. Modern epistemology has unraveled, and so have our notions of truth.

**Whatever Happened to Truth?**

The debate over epistemology has bearing on one’s understanding of truth. This is critically important for theology and ministry. It would be safe to say this is the central issue in the debate between moderns and postmoderns. However, in order to understand

---

53 Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 94.
the issue, it would be good to begin with the developments of modernity’s understanding of truth.

In the premodern context, truth was bound up in the authority of the Catholic Church. “Truth” was revealed in authoritative traditions. People were expected to conform to the authoritative version of the “truth.” “The notion of reflecting on the ‘truthfulness of the central story’ is unheard of.”\footnote{Regele and Schulz, \textit{Death of the Church}, 59.} It was just assumed. Since the Church was the authority and caretaker of truth, there was no such thing as the separation of church and state. In fact, the Church held center stage in society and was the legitimizer of government.

This would begin to unravel with the Renaissance in the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries. “Perhaps we could say the Renaissance was a grandmother of modernity, and the Enlightenment was its true mother.”\footnote{Grenz, \textit{A Primer on Postmodernism}, 60.} The idea of truth was shaped by the intellectual and philosophical values associated with the Enlightenment, or Age of Reason. As Crystal Downing writes, “The edifice of Enlightenment truth was thus constructed on a foundation of empirical stones mortared together with reason.”\footnote{Downing, \textit{Reason's Relativist}, 231.} Before the Enlightenment, intellectual activity was dominated by the Church and theologians like Augustine and Aquinas. Intellectual activity depended on revelation. The Enlightenment removed God from the center of human inquiry and put humanity there. Enlightenment thinkers appealed to human reason instead of the revelation of pre-
modern thinkers. Modernity was a reaction against pre-modernity and its dependence upon revelation. Descartes rejected the “role of traditional authority – the authority of the author – and replaced it with the modern notion of indubitable beliefs available to each individual.” This presupposition became the driving principle behind modernity. Authority was not the foundation of knowledge; reason was. “Reason replaced revelation as the arbiter of truth.”

Modernity made certain assumptions about truth: truth existed, it was possible to know truth; and truth was true for everyone. These assumptions were made with philosophical and religious truth as well as scientific and mathematical truth. At the height of modernity, the study of theology was thought to be a science. Truth, by its very nature, was an objective reality. Propositions were thought to be true if they corresponded with reality “out there.” This is called the correspondence theory of truth. According to Grenz, “The modern epistemological project is grounded in the correspondence theory of truth.”

Postmoderns reject the correspondence theory of truth. Friederich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is very influential here. He rejects the notion that there is anything “out

---

58 Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 12.
60 See Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 37.
there."[62] If there is nothing there, then objective truth is impossible. People create their own world, and there is nothing outside of that world. According to Nietzsche, truth is a fiction we create based upon our perspective.

Postmodern knowledge is understood as a web rather than a foundation; truth is a related web of beliefs. According to George Lindbeck, “Utterances are intrasytemically true when they cohere with the total relevant context.”[63] Truth is contextual in postmodernity. It depends on the vantage point, or perspective, of the one speaking. Postmoderns believe it is impossible to shed our own perspective when talking about truth. Our personal convictions and commitments shape and color our understanding of truth. Therefore, they replace objective knowledge with subjective knowledge.

The concern for many Christian thinkers is the propensity of postmodernism towards relativism. In fact, when postmodernism is critiqued by Christian thinkers, this is often the point of attack. Some would argue, though, that there is a difference between the recognition of relativity of perspective and thoroughgoing relativism that denies any truth can be known.

**The Grand Story**

Postmoderns have essentially abandoned the illusive search for truth. Hard postmodernists (to use Carson’s term) do not believe in the idea of objective or absolute truth. “Postmodernism has tossed aside objective truth, at least as it has been classically

---

[62] Nietzsche was a nihilist as he denied any objective grounds for truth or morality.

[63] Quoted in Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 100.
understood. Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty stand against what has for centuries been the reigning epistemological principle – the corresponding theory of truth (the belief that truth consists of the correspondence of propositions with the world ‘out there’).”64

Since there is nothing “out there” (or we have no ability to know it), then there really is no point in searching for a truth that can provide meaning. Accompanying the quest for truth was the quest for the “the big story” or the “grand narrative” that would tie all of the social and political structures of humanity together in a perceivable whole. In premodernity, that grand story was provided by the Church and Christian religion. This continued into modernity even though it came under attack. In fact, a number of alternatives were provided. Communism and fascism were two examples of attempts at a grand metanarrative for humanity during the modern age. As Mike Regele writes: “Marxism/Leninism can only be understood as an attempt to write such a super story putting every detail and every person in a nice, neat and tidy place.”65

The creation of these “grand metanarratives” resulted in war, carnage, and destruction. This was clear in the case of communism and fascism, but postmoderns would also cite Christianity as an example. It is no surprise, then, that postmoderns reacted against the idea of an overarching grand story that provided framework and meaning to all of our lives. The thinker most influential in this reaction was French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard was the first philosopher to use the term

---

65 Regele and Schulz, *Death of the Church*, 68.
“postmodern,” but he did so in response to the idea of metanarratives. He famously wrote, “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity towards metanarratives.” For Lyotard, metanarratives are distinctly modern because they claim reason alone is enough to substantiate their truth claims. Each of the metanarratives appeals to reason to demonstrate its validity. “As such, modern legitimation has recourse to a universal criterion: reason – a (supposedly) universal stamp of legitimation.” Since the foundation of reason has fallen, it can no longer support a metanarrative. Lyotard argues that people have ceased to believe that narratives of religion or communism are adequate to contain everyone. There is too much diversity, incompatibility, too many beliefs and desires, and for that reason postmodernity is characterized by an abundance of “micronarratives.”

However, one should not get the mistaken notion that Lyotard or postmodernity is anti-narrative. In fact it is just the opposite; postmodernity believes that all knowledge is grounded in narrative. We all know and understand from the perspective of our own stories, but there is no overarching narrative that is determinative for everyone. In this way, postmodernism recognizes our pluralistic culture.

**Individualism: The Sum Total**

---

66 Ibid.


68 Ibid., 67.
Modern individualism is a creation of the Enlightenment. As Rodney Clapp writes, “The individual was invented by a succession of Enlightenment thinkers and became, in its most extreme but perhaps its most widespread interpretations, a view of the self as ‘a single atomic, isolate, bounded by the skin, its chief value residing precisely in some core of individuality, of difference.”69 Descartes believed the dictum, “I think; therefore, I am.”70 The “I” was an autonomous, rational being who was the determiner of his or her own identity and destiny.71 This changed the way people were thought to relate to society. In essence, modernity believes humanity is the measure of all things and that people can fully understand the world through science and reason.

With the emphasis on self, the world found modernism lacking. It does not do justice to the complexity of meaning. Nor does the self provide meaning. Since truth and meaning are relative to each person, there is no grand scheme or story that holds us all together. “Gone as well was old allegiance to a common source of authority and commonly regarded and respected wielder of legitimate power.”72 Each individual must create his or her own meaning and purpose for life for there is nothing substantial to hold us together. As the center dissolves, we become a society of clusters, a pluralism of cultures. Diversity and multiculturalism are important values in a postmodern culture.

69 Clapp, A Peculiar People, 90.
70 See Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 64. Grenz believed it was Immanuel Kant’s philosophy that paved the way for “radical individualism,” see A Primer on Postmodernism, 80.
71 Guder and Barrett, Missional Church, 20, 23.
Community is also an important value to postmoderns. In modernity, the individual was the final arbiter of knowledge and truth using reason. Postmoderns would argue that a person’s understanding comes from his or her context. Therefore, we interpret the world (and texts like Scripture) from a particular context, not a general, comprehensive one. Modernity created radical, autonomous individualism.

Conclusion

The western world is currently experiencing a massive cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity. The key to understanding this change is epistemology. All of the changes that coincide with postmodernity ultimately find their roots in epistemology. Changes dealt with in this chapter include foundationalism, our understanding of truth, the disappearance of metanarratives, and radical individualism. These changes have a bearing on Peoria, Illinois, and Northminster Presbyterian Church.

This chapter described the shift towards postmodernism. The next chapter will theologically assess the issues described in this chapter. Postmodernity has brought some new opportunities for the Church, but it has also brought some challenges. Church renewal requires a cogent understanding of culture. Because our culture is shifting towards postmodernism, a theological assessment of the issues is absolutely necessary.

---

PART TWO

FOUNDATIONS OF THEOLOGY FOR MINISTRY
CHAPTER 3
THEOLOGICAL AND CONTEXTUAL ASSESSMENT

We live in a world that is changing profoundly. “The foundations of the modern world are collapsing, and we are entering a postmodern world.”¹ The principles developed during the Enlightenment form the foundations of modernity. Those foundations are crumbling away, but they have not disappeared completely. As N. T. Wright says, “We live at the overlap of several huge cultural waves.”² We live in a slip of time defined by change. These changes are complex and diverse and anything but uniform across Western culture. Some regions or cities experience these massive cultural changes to different degrees and at different rates. For example, New York City is probably more at home with postmodernism than Peoria, Illinois.

While Western culture undergoes these massive paradigm shifts, we do so with numerous misunderstandings and imprecise terms. The words modern and postmodern mean different things to different people. The break between modernity and postmodernity is also very gradual and hazy. As James Smith puts it, “Postmodernity does not make a clean break from modernism. There are both continuities and


discontinuities between modernity and postmodernity.” Critics of postmodernity see so much continuity they argue postmodernity is nothing more than the latest version, or rendition of modernity. For example, Thomas Oden believes postmodern philosophers “are not postmodern but ultramodern. In another sense they are reactionary, in that they are reverting once again to the radical skepticism of the Enlightenment.” Andy Crouch also suggests “ultramodernism” is a better term since he believes postmodernism is really a development of modernism. Some critics see postmodernity as a radical new form of modernity. That may or may not be correct, but we are certainly in unchartered waters. Critics do not deny the existence of postmodernity. Philosophers and theologians may see postmodernity as a threat or an opportunity, but no one denies the reality. The western world is clearly undergoing a complex change. The question is how should we respond? More specifically, how should Northminster Presbyterian Church respond?

When the subject of postmodernity is raised, people tend to respond to it in one of two ways. Some will react against it as if it represented some virulent form of heresy. Others will accept postmodernism unquestioned because it has a faddish popular feel to it. They receive things like deconstruction as a thinned out version of autonomous individualism so rooted in modern liberalism. Both reactions are extreme and ultimately unhelpful to the Church and its mission. Should we embrace or battle these paradigm

4 Thomas C. Oden, Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 42.
shifts? How should we, the Church in general and Northminster in specific, respond? This is the primary question this chapter seeks to answer.

The goal of this chapter is to assess these changes philosophically, socially, and theologically. It will then move on to “situate” Northminster Presbyterian in this sea of complexity. “Situatedness” refers to the postmodern idea that our placement in location and time affects the way we see things. The Church is made up of people who understand truth and reality through culturally conditioned lenses. Ultimately Northminster must understand its “mission field” to use the tools of the Great Banquet effectively. To do so, we will examine and assess the issues surrounding epistemology, truth (and relativism), the loss of metanarrative, and individualism. Northminster has been strongly influenced by modernity and postmodernity. This creates a certain amount of tension within the body. This tension is also exacerbated by the marginalization of the Church in society due to the waning influence of Christendom.

**The Church’s One Foundation**

The first line of Samuel J. Stone’s classic hymn reads: “The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; she is his new creation, by water and the word.” This hymn became very popular, probably in part because it tapped into one of the cherished metaphors of modernity, that of a building. Enlightenment principles based

---


upon reason were thought to provide the foundation upon which everything else was built. Postmodernity rightly questions the epistemological foundations of the Enlightenment.

Crystal Downing takes the metaphor of a building and accurately describes the effects of modern foundationalism when she writes:

The edifice of Enlightenment truth was thus constructed on a foundation of empirical stones mortared together with reason. Though its seventeenth-century architects kept Christ as a cornerstone, builders in the eighteenth century spread the mortar of reason over the cornerstone, covering Jesus up. Remodelers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries chipped away at the cornerstone, eventually prying Christ out of the foundation altogether.8

Downing’s use of the modernist metaphor is clever but also a bit extreme. It is not so easy to say modernity has chipped Christ away from being the foundation of the Church. Yet there is no question the Church has capitulated its mission and message to modernity. Modernist epistemology has not been good to the Church because it has diminished faith. The Enlightenment insistence on objective knowledge has made faith subjective and, therefore, incapable of providing universal significance. The myth of objectivity acted as the armor of modernity to protect the principles of the Enlightenment.

The first person to throw a chink in the armor of modernity was a scientist turned philosopher named Michael Polanyi.9 Polanyi was trained as a doctor, chemist, and

---


physicist, but by the 1930s his interest went beyond strictly scientific work. The philosophy of epistemology became his great interest. Many have recognized Polanyi as an important thinker who helped the transition away from the grip of Enlightenment assumptions about epistemology. In his magnum opus, his book *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi basically critiqued the idea of objectivity in epistemology. He wanted to “show that complete objectivity as usually attributed to the exact sciences is a delusion and is in fact a false ideal.”¹⁰

In modernity, objectivity meant to be personally separated from knowledge and the process to obtain knowledge. Descartes attempted to create a distinction between the subject studying and the object being studied. For centuries, the western world followed the assumption that there was a difference between objective knowledge and subjective experiences. Polanyi believed human beings all make “commitments” in order to understand. These commitments are influenced by beliefs, practices, traditions, and values. Polanyi used the phrase “personal knowledge” (hence the title of his book) to define knowledge that transcended the false dichotomy of objective and subjective.

Lesslie Newbigin, following Polanyi writes:

> What seems to have happened in our culture is a falling apart, a disconnection between the subjective and objective poles. We have on the one hand the idea, or shall I call it the illusion, of a kind of objectively which is not possible, of a kind of knowledge of what we call the “facts,” which involves no personal commitment, no risk of being wrong, something which we have merely to accept without question; and on the other hand a range of beliefs which are purely subjective, which are, as we say, “true for me,” are “what I feel,” but

---

which are a matter of personal and private choice.\textsuperscript{11}
Pure objectivity is an “illusion” that deceives the modern world. All knowing
requires what Polanyi calls a “personal commitment.” Personal commitment begins with
a belief that a person commits to via verification and validation. Polanyi explains:

This distinction establishes the conception of the personal, which is
neither subjective nor objective. In so far as the personal submits to requirements
acknowledged by itself as independent of itself, it is not subjective; but in so far
as it is an action guided by an individual’s passion, it is not objective either. It
transcends the disjunction between subjective and objective.\textsuperscript{12}

Polanyi sees “personal knowledge” as transcendent because it reflects the reality
of knowing in that we subscribe to certain norms, practices, and methods (Polanyi was a
scientist) but we cannot divorce our own beliefs, intuitions, and commitments. One
cannot separate the subject from the object in epistemology. The notion that one can be
objective in the sense that one can dispassionately account for all empirical data is an
illusion. One cannot be an uninterested bystander and discover anything. In fact, people
know because they exert judgments upon their observations. Those judgments are
shaped by everything that person believes. “Personal knowledge” is therefore more
holistic because it engages all of a human being’s capacity to know and understand.

This includes things that cannot be communicated or expressed, which Polanyi
calls “tacit knowledge.” Tacit knowledge guides and influences one’s thinking, but the
person cannot express it. His point is that people know far more than they are able to

\textsuperscript{11} Lesslie Newbigin, \textit{The Gospel in a Pluralist Society} (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans,
1989), 23. He also makes a similar point in Lesslie Newbigin, \textit{Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and

\textsuperscript{12} Polanyi, \textit{Personal Knowledge}, 300.
formally express and communicate. Lesslie Newbigin, in his book *Proper Confidence*, cites a couple of examples. First is a boy who rides a bicycle by subconsciously adhering to the laws of physics. Second, Newbigin says he can, “recognize my wife’s face in a crowd of a thousand people, but I could not explicitly state the exact geometrical patterns of her features which enable me to do so.”¹³ Both of these are examples of tacit knowledge. Modernity would equate tacit knowledge with subjectivity because it is inherent in the subject who knows. However, it is neither inferior knowledge nor relative, as is usually implied with subjectivity. In attempting to summarize the significance of Polanyi, Mike Regele writes, “All knowledge has a ‘tacit’ (implicit) aspect because each one of us brings something to the knowledge event. There to assume we can even observe and object with perfect objectivity is false.”¹⁴

Even more important for this discussion is the emphasis Polanyi places on “belief.” If reason was the right way to discover objective knowledge (and truth) as the Enlightenment taught, then belief was unnecessary. As Carson says, “‘Faith’ was merely a privatized opinion.”¹⁵ Faith for the modernist is really a matter of subjective desire to appropriate the popular beliefs of a religious tradition. However, for Polanyi, personal knowledge begins with belief. As a scientist, Polanyi was thinking of scientific discoveries that begin with a belief of the scientist that requires verification and


¹⁴ Regele and Schulz, *Death of the Church*, 66.

validation through a process. Without belief, the scientific method would not be possible, but neither would knowledge in any area. Belief is the a priori starting point. Polanyi recognizes the fact that in “scientism”16 a dichotomy arose between knowing and believing. “All belief was reduced to the status of subjectivity: to that of an imperfection by which knowledge fell short of universality.”17 Since belief was subjective, it was inferior to objective knowledge. Polanyi argued against a misguided understanding of objectivity. “Personal knowledge” transcends objectivity and it begins with belief. He then goes on to make an incredible statement: “We must now recognize belief once more as the source of all knowledge.”18 This statement must sound like an anathema to Enlightenment ears because it turns the knowledge-faith dichotomy inside out. Polanyi admits he is returning to Augustine’s credo ut intelligam (I believe in order to know).19 This is a reversion of sorts to pre-modernity, but this a key to understanding our proper response to postmodernity. In a way, postmodernity is giving us a fresh opportunity to do evangelism and apologetics. During modernity, the goal was always to “understand in order to believe.” As a result, apologetics was about “proving” the faith through rational means, which is a capitulation to the idea that “objective facts” are superior to belief commitments. This is a form of reductionism that must be rejected completely.

Echoes of Polanyi can be found in postmodern thinkers like Jacques Derrida.

---

16 See Bosch, Transforming Mission, 353.
17 Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, 266.
18 Ibid.
19 Newbigin, Proper Confidence, 9. See also Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, 266.
Derrida’s attack on modernism is against “logocentrism” the idea that philosophy is centered in reason (from the Greek word *logos*). “Derrida’s primary goal is to divest us of logocentrism by showing the impossibility of drawing a clear line between reality and our linguistic representations.”\(^{20}\) Derrida’s primary contribution is “deconstruction,” a term he coined in 1967. The idea is that one uses language to construct meaning, but a poststructuralist would say one cannot stand outside of one’s language in order to be objective. Everything is conditioned by situatedness. Derrida was a poststructuralist but took it further. He was concerned about the way language “perpetuates certain binary oppositions in Western culture, like white versus black.”\(^{21}\) These binaries lead to hierarchies where one term became superior to another, for example, white over black, reason over believe, objective over subjective. Derrida wanted to level the playing field so to speak. “Derrida sought to ‘deconstruct’ these binaries – take them apart – by calling into question the clear distinction between them.”\(^{22}\) Derrida deconstructed the binary of reason and faith. He also deconstructed the objective/subjective binary. For Derrida, people interpret all things. They are subjective in the sense that they are subjected to their language, which shapes the way they see things. His controversial quote is that “There is nothing outside the text.” However, James Smith explains the line in his book *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism*, “When Derrida claims that there is nothing outside the text, he means there is no reality that is not always already interpreted


through the mediating lens of language.”23 In other words, all of life must be interpreted to be experienced, and objectivity would require one to step outside of one’s life, oneself, and that is not possible.

Postmoderns rightly criticize the epistemology of modernity. So what lessons can be learned from this criticism? There are a number of important considerations for a Church attempting renewal and effective witness in our complex world. First, the Church should applaud the tearing down of the knowledge-belief binary. Michael Polanyi is extremely influential in this regard. Polanyi argued that knowledge began with belief and was impossible without it. This is an important correction to the Enlightenment’s mistaken notion that one needs to understand before one can believe. The return to Augustine’s insistence that one believes before understanding resonates with a postmodern culture because it is reflective of humanity.

A related correction is the decline of the public fact vs. private value hierarchy. Leslie Newbigin writes, “It is at this point that we touch the central core of our culture, which is an ideal of knowledge of what are called ‘the facts,’ a knowledge that is supposed to be quite independent of the personal commitment of the knower.”24 Facts are held to be universal and therefore superior to individually held values. “We have again come, from another angle, to the cleavage running through our culture between the private and the public worlds, a public world interpreted in terms of efficient causes and a

22 Ibid., 128., 131.
private world in which purpose and therefore value judgments still have a place.”25

Value judgments (including faith judgments) are banned from the public square because they have less public value than the “facts” that are scientifically or rationally derived.

Second, we must also applaud the breakdown of the “objective-subjective binary.” Polanyi argued persuasively that objectivity is a myth. All people begin with their beliefs and bring their “tacit knowledge” in their “personal knowledge.” Carson, a critic of postmodernism and emerging churches, even concedes this is a benefit of postmodern theology. “Postmodernism has been open to thinking about nonlinear and methodologically unrigorous factors in human knowing.”26 This is another way of saying human knowledge is also informed by things other than rationality and reason. It has also been informed by things such as culture and language. “Personal knowledge” transcends the objective-subjective dichotomy and in doing so relieves objectivity of the weight it cannot bear. We do not need to be enslaved to distorted or unrealistic expectations regarding objectivity.

Carson also makes an interesting distinction between “hard” and “soft” postmodernists.27 Hard postmodernist believe human beings cannot know anything objectively because one cannot get outside of oneself for an omniscient perspective. This

24 Newbigin, Foolishness to the Greeks, 76.
25 Ibid., 79. See also Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, 158.
26 Carson, Becoming Conversant, 103.
27 See Ibid., 104-106.
is the idea behind Derrida’s famous statement, “there is nothing outside the text.” By that, he meant everything one believes is an interpretation offered from one’s finite perspectives. Soft postmodernists, according to Carson are those who would agree we are finite and cannot get an objective viewpoint, yet we can know some things. They may be interpretations, but they may also be right interpretations. Based on these definitions, Carson concludes that everyone is a soft postmodernist. “After all, almost everyone today is a soft postmodern in the sense that all of us recognize that personal and social dimensions play their part in how and why scientists approach certain questions and the way they do.”28 Carson is certainly correct in pointing out that everyone has a tendency to appreciate the subjective nature of knowledge.

Critics of postmodern Christians often find greatest fault with the rejection of objectivity because it seems to pose a threat to the notion of truth. R. Scott Smith, for example, believes Descartes’ desire for absolute foundationalism is not realistic.29 Smith rightly points out the need for humility. He argues for a more modest form of foundationalism where knowledge does not need to be “bombproof” but requires only a “preponderance of the evidence.”30 Probability is a different thing from objectivity. One cannot argue for objective knowledge based on probability. Smith goes on to describe a scale of certainty, but this still avoids the issue. The problem Smith and Carson share is a fear that the loss of objectivity means a loss of truth and a rise of relativism. This is not

28 Carson, Becoming Conversant, 108.
what postmoderns argue. They simply want to say that our view of truth is always shaped by our “personal knowledge.”

However, Carson is certainly right in pointing out that one’s “personal knowledge” is shaped by one’s sinfulness. In his book The Gagging of God, Carson writes: “This sinfulness has so deeply warped our personalities that, though none of us is as evil as we might be, no part of personality is unaffected. Our choices, our judgments, our reasoning, our hopes, our affections—all are warped by this corrosive rebellion.”

From a Christian perspective, we must agree that our ability to interpret and know is irreducibly influenced by our own sinful nature. It shapes our interpretations and our situatedness.

Third, the Church needs to reject the narrow individualism of Enlightenment epistemology. Descartes emphasized the human potential to know, separate from any authoritative traditions. He was reacting against the premodern understanding that we know because God (or some other authority like the Church) has revealed something. The dictum *cogito ergo sum*—“I think, there I am”—set the stage for the Enlightenment’s insistence on the individual. “Descartes himself ended by defining the human being as a thinking substance and the human person as an autonomous rational subject.”

However, as Polanyi and others have convincingly shown, there is no knowing apart from community. What we know we learned from others in a cultural context. To

---

30 Ibid., 115.
presuppose epistemological autonomy is absurd.

However, it is equally absurd to assume postmodernity has moved beyond autonomous individualism. Carson argues that postmodernism (both hard and soft) begins with the finite “I” of the individual.33 Wells agrees with Carson when he writes, “There are important threads of continuity between modernity and postmodernity and not least among these is the fact that at the center of both is the autonomous self, despite all the postmodern chatter about the importance of community.”34 In this respect, there is continuity between modernity and postmodernity. This is why some critics consider postmodernity nothing more than a development of modernity. Postmodern epistemology is essentially individualized in the sense that the beliefs about what one can know or not know are measured by an individual’s perspective and assessment. Postmoderns do not like to speak about a worldview, but that is essentially what it comes down to – postmoderns have a worldview, and that is as rooted in individualism as is a modern’s. Ministry in a postmodern context is going to resemble ministry in a modern context in that the starting point will be individualism. This has not substantially changed even though the western world is becoming postmodern.

Fourth, we must also object to the presupposition that knowledge is inherently good. After two World Wars, A Cold War, and genetic engineering, we are beginning to question the inherent goodness of knowledge. Modernity believed that knowledge was

---

good because it led inevitably to “progress.” As Diogenes Allen says, “Modern Science and technology so improved life that they led to a belief in progress, and in time to a belief in inevitable progress.”

Clearly the Enlightenment brought us the scientific method and consequent advances in science. The advances can be used for good, but they can also be used for evil. Grenz writes, “We believe that the human problem is a matter not merely of ignorance but also of a misdirected will.” The will is “misdirected” because of the sinful nature of humanity. Goodness is a function of the will not a function of knowledge since knowledge serves the will.

The main issue for philosophers is the Enlightenment dependence on reason as the foundation for human knowledge. However, for mainline churches like Northminster, there are other kinds of foundationalism that also must be addressed. As mentioned in chapter 2, Enlightenment foundationalism resulted in a rise in skepticism towards the Christian faith. The Church responded largely by adapting foundationalism to meet the rise in skepticism. Liberals responded with experiential foundationalism, and conservatives responded with biblical foundationalism. Denominations like the Presbyterian Church (USA) are conflicted largely because opponents cannot agree to a particular form of foundationalism. We talk past each other because the appeals to the Bible or experience carry little weight with the other side. While the conflict is often in the denominational governing bodies, it can work its way into a local congregation like

---


Northminster Presbyterian.

The experiential foundationalism of liberal Christianity will be addressed first. As mentioned before, Nancey Murphy says there are two criteria to foundationalism: criteria immune from challenge and reasoning that proceeds in only one direction.\(^{37}\) For experiential foundationalists it is ultimately a religious experience that is determinative for them. Since experience must be universal to serve as a foundation, that means that all religious experiences are foundational regardless of the religion. According to Grenz and Franke, “Liberal theologians assumed – and sought to discern – a single, universal, foundational religious experience that supposedly lay beneath the plethora of religious experiences found in the various religious traditions.”\(^{38}\) This leads to a sort of universalism that has historically been untenable for the Church. The most glaring problem with this type of approach is that experience is notoriously subjective and influenced by all sorts of variables. “Personal knowledge” is largely shaped and influence by experiences, but it is anything but universal. There is no such thing as a generic religious experience even within a specific religious tradition. While everyone has experiences (and in that sense it is universal) these experiences do not provide a foundation because they are unique to each person. While one must agree that everyone comes to knowing through his or her own lens, this is not determinative for all. While


\(^{37}\) Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 13, 23.

experience is certainly a part of the puzzle, it clearly fails to provide a universal foundation. However, experience will play a huge role in any effective ministry in this age of liminality. Some people will lay more emphasis on it than others, but it must be considered.

Experiential foundationalism certainly exists at Northminster Presbyterian Church because it is common in our culture. Northminster is not a liberal church, but this sense of experience as a validating or establishing religious truth also exists among a broad cross section of our congregation.

The other form of foundationalism found in the Church today is a form of scriptural foundationalism. “Conservatives came to conclude that this invulnerable foundation lay in an error-free Bible, which they viewed as the storehouse for divine revelation.”39 While liberals deny Scripture is foundational for theology, conservatives use Scripture in that way. As Murphy points out, “Notice that these liberals do not deny a role for Scripture in theology; they merely deny that it is the foundation for theology.”40 The understanding here for the Scripture foundationalists is that God has revealed himself in the propositions of the Bible. The goal of the Christian is to study the Bible as a compendium of truth to arrive at universal truth.

The problem with this approach is that we cannot deny people come to Scripture with culturally and uniquely preconceived ideas. Scripture cannot be read objectively as

---

39 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 34.
40 Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 24.
we all bring our own “personal knowledge” to the text.

Another problem is the tendency to turn the Bible into an idol. The Bible itself points to Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. In Ephesians 2:19-20 Paul writes, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”

Jesus Christ is the foundation for the Church not Scripture. Scripture is the medium the Holy Spirit uses to reveal Jesus to us, but it is Jesus we worship. As such, truth is personal more than it is propositional. A related problem we need to be very aware of in ministering in our context is the tendency to use biblical language and extra-biblical language (such as “receiving Jesus into our hearts”) as gate-keeper language. This language is meant to differentiate between people who are “in the know” versus those who are not. Ministry in our context means we speak broadly enough to allow people to situate themselves. This does not mean we cannot use the language of our community (either Northminster Presbyterian or the Great Banquet communities) but that we do not use language as a test to ascertain the validity of someone’s faith or experience.

Postmodern anti-foundationalism would do away with all modernist foundationalism. This Christians can support, but we need to be careful here and not leave the impression that human beings can avoid any and all foundationalism. For the
Church, our foundation is Jesus Christ revealed to us in Scripture through the Holy Spirit. Crystal Downing writes, “Postmodern antifoundationalism, in contrast, allows for revelation as a ‘foundational belief’ for people of faith.”

The Church cannot reject all foundationalism in that such rejection also rejects Jesus Christ the cornerstone (Eph 2: 19-20; 1 Pet 2: 4-8; Acts 4: 11-12). This means we hold to the position that there is something “out there” and that something is God. It is through faith that we know God. Therefore, we need to be clear that this is a statement of faith.

**Objective Truth and Relativism**

The conservative and liberal foundationalism in the Church have also taken different approaches to the notion of truth and relativism. Whereas conservatives tend to defend notions of objective truth, liberals are less likely to do so. The liberal belief in experiential foundationalism paves the way for a more pluralistic outlook on truth. Truth is experienced or interpreted and therefore open to differing interpretations. Thus, within the Church the disagreement over which epistemological foundation should reign has also led to different understandings of truth.

In the previous chapter, the “correspondence theory of truth” was described as the hallmark of modernity. Modernists believe that propositions that reflect this something “out there” are objectively true. That is, the truthfulness of the proposition is not dependent upon the subjectivity of the knower, but, as has been argued, it is impossible to divorce the subjectivity of the knower from the knowledge itself. The understanding and
expression of truth is relative to each observer. Craig Van Gelder makes a necessary distinction when he writes, “This recognition of a relativity of perspective is not the same thing as a thoroughgoing relativism that denies that any truth can be known.” It is that “thoroughgoing relativism” that we must reject. We must disagree with those postmodernists who believe relativity extends beyond our perceptions of truth to its essence: there is no absolute truth because truth is relative to the community or group in which we participate. We can agree with postmodernists only so far as our understanding of truth is seen from a subjective perspective. This is not to deny the existence of truth itself. Grame Codrington writes:

> The most common caricature of postmodernism is that it is a complete denial of truth, thus relativizing everything. Postmodern people, however, do not deny that there is truth and objective reality. What they question is ability to distinguish truth from nontruth.

Friederich Nietzsche famously argued, “All that exists consists of interpretations.” Nietzsche, a nihilist, believed truth to be “an error,” but he led the way to some very influential postmodern thinkers like Jacques Derrida. Derrida said there is “nothing outside the text,” which means everything must be interpreted to be experienced. To this sense we can agree with Derrida. However, we cannot go so far as to agree with Nietzsche that truth is an error. There is something “out there.”

---

postmodernists (to again borrow Carson’s phrase) go too far in saying that there is nothing out there.

The problem may lie with the word “objective” as in “objective truth.” People like Wells and Carson use the word to refer to absolute truth – that which is true for everyone regardless of experience or interpretation. James K. A. Smith responds to Carson by saying he, “conflates truth with objectivity: for Carson, one can only be said to know ‘truly’ if one knows ‘objectively.’” For Carson, if something is true it is objective and not a matter of interpretation. This is evident in his description of a soft postmodernist: “A soft postmodernist would be much more careful, insisting that we may indeed know some objective truth, but never exhaustively or omnisciently, and that we can never make a final break with realism if we hold that there is a God “out there” who has made himself know to us in history.”

The problem is with the word “objective.” This was the reason Michael Polanyi began his book *Personal Knowledge* by reconsidering and reworking the idea of “objective truth.” Polanyi was addressing the scientific world when he argued that personal knowledge is always at work in discovery, but his point is also applicable to theological considerations of truth.

The word “absolute” is also problematic because it implies superiority of one
perspective over another. “Absolute” is used as an antithesis to “relativism.” Relativism implies truth is subject to a person’s perspective, or “perspectivalism” as Wells uses the term. The assumption is that someone can hold absolute truth as opposed to others who relativize truth. This is a real stumbling block for postmodernists. Brian McLaren, for example, writes, “Most modern people love to relativize the viewpoints of others against the unquestioned superiority of their own modern viewpoint.” The problem for moderns is that people hold their perspective to be absolute truth, and relativism is a weakness for everyone else. Certainly, we must all be humble about our viewpoints, but, more than that, we must recognize that the truth we experience is dependent upon our own personal knowledge.

Therefore, the Church needs a better term to help us describe “truth.” Maybe “transcendent truth” is a better phrase to discuss the truth of God. God is certainly “out there” as he is transcendent, but our knowledge of him is dependent upon our interpretations of Scripture and our experience of the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge the existence of God as revealed to us in Scripture and through the Holy Spirit, but this is a faith statement. It can never be proven “objectively true.”

Crystal Downing provides a metaphor that is exceedingly helpful here. Downing, a postmodern, describes language as being constructed through culture and language. Taking the idea of “construction” as a metaphor she asks the reader to imagine writing

down all the statements that influence his or her thinking, those reiterated by parents and others, and write them down on a piece of construction paper. “In your mind, roll the paper into a tube, with the writing on the inside, and tape it upright onto a piece of cardboard, so it looks like a tower.” 51 Then we are to imagine ourselves inside the tower, surrounded by the statements of our parents. Then imagine the tube is clear so that you can see other larger towers. The idea is that we are inside a series of towers that appear as concentric circles. The words or statements closest to us have the most influence, but we see through all of these transparent towers and are shaped to some degree by the words and statements in proportion to their proximity. For example, a statement from our parents will have more impact than a statement from a past professor. Our Christian faith is one such tower that encapsulates us. Our perspective is influenced, and even determined by the towers we occupy. Our view of God and transcendent truth is obscured and hazy because of the towers. The Apostle Paul certainly recognizes this when he writes: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). We see the transcendent dimly but we also hold to the hope that one day our towers will vanish and we will encounter the transcendent “face to face.”

This does not negate an absolute truth, or a transcendent truth; it simply means everyone views that transcendent truth from the perspective of one’s tower. While

---


people can move around in towers, they are ultimately trapped in towers of language and experience. Yet, there is a God above all these towers, even different religious towers. Downing is somewhat provocative when she says, “If we conceptualize a God who transcends all towers of discourse, it implies that the same God can be seen from within the towers of all religions – as long as the people inside them choose to look up, seeking to know the one God who is above all language.”\textsuperscript{52} This does not mean that all religions are equal because Christianity is the only one that teaches God came down by becoming incarnate. Postmoderns are often accused of being relativists because pluralism, rightly or wrongly, leads people to believe there are different truths. There are not different truths only different perspectives on transcendent truth. The one perspective we do not have is from above all the towers. We are not able to rise above our own tower and make pronouncements about what is true and what is not. Those “thoroughgoing relativists” who say “all religions are equally true” are making statements they do not have the vantage point to make.

Downing argues that we are all relativists of one sort or another. After a complex discussion of different kinds of relativism, she opts for the notion of “building relativism.”\textsuperscript{53} Building is an idea that works with our towers. The building relativist seeks not only to build up the tower towards the transcendent but also bridges between other towers. Therefore, our understanding of transcendent truth is enhanced within

\textsuperscript{52} Downing, \textit{How Postmodernism Serves My Faith}, 176.

community. We learn about the transcendent, not as isolated individuals but from other people in their towers as we are all looking up. Downing also argues that truth is relational; whereas, modernity argues that truth is propositional.\textsuperscript{54} Truth is relational in the sense that we know truth out of relationships with others. It is also relational in the sense that the God who is “transcendent truth” is a person. “Truth is relational, involving persons, human and divine, communing and communicating in dynamic interaction.”\textsuperscript{55}

In John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” It is this truth that can set us free, not a proposition that is true (John 8:32).

This is a helpful metaphor because it recognizes the fact that people at Northminster Presbyterian and the people who might attend a Great Banquet come inside their own towers. The Great Banquet provides a community and a process to develop people spiritually and move them towards renewal. Everyone will have his or her own starting place. People cannot escape their towers or rise above them, but they see the world, and God, through these towers. It is also helpful because we experience the God who is “out there” through community. Looking up through our own individual tower provides a very limited and, at times, misleading view of God. This paper is arguing for a position between the hard postmoderns who hold for thorough relativism and the modernist who believes we can know objective truth. I agree with Allen, who, though he uses different terminology, is making the same point when he writes, “All that we are

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 204.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 205.
entitled to infer from the general fact that all knowledge is socially mediated is that some intermediate position between extremes of naïve realism and relativity is correct.”56

The Grand Story Retold

Hard postmoderns would deny the existence of transcendent truth, and this has a more disturbing implication. If there is no transcendent truth, then there cannot possibly be any ultimate meaning. In fact, hard postmodernists would argue there is no unifying thing called reality, only interpretations. All worldviews are essentially interpretations competing for power. In the last chapter it was discovered that Jean-Francois Lyotard’s reaction against metanarratives was an important idea for postmodernity. Lyotard argued that modernity could not establish a metanarrative, or a Grand Story, large enough to provide meaning for everyone. As James A. K. Smith writes of Lyotard, “There can be no appeal to a higher court that would transcend a historical context or a language game, no neutral observer or “God’s eye view” that can legitimate or justify one paradigm or moral language game above another.”57 This is consistent with the discussion of relativism using Downing’s metaphor of towers. A person cannot rise above his or her tower and say that one paradigm or metanarrative is absolutely right for all. However, neither can anyone rise above the tower and say that a metanarrative does not exist at all. To do so (as Lyotard does) is to make the same mistake. Christianity can agree with postmoderns that modernity failed in its attempt to use reason to establish one

56 Allen, Christian Belief in Postmodern World, 135.
57 Smith, Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? 69.
metanarrative. However, reason is not all. Grenz, a postmodern Christian thinker, rejects Lyotard’s conclusions when he writes, “To put this in another way, we might say that because of our faith in Christ, we cannot totally affirm the central tenet of postmodernism as defined by Lyotard – the rejection of the metanarrative.”

People may have their own towers, but that does not mean there is not something above, a God who is transcendent. We believe there is a single metanarrative that provides meaning and purpose to all of humanity. It is found in God’s initiative towards us in creation, restoration, and reconciliation. In short, the Grand Story is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The goal of the Church is to connect people with this metanarrative, not to frame the Gospel as one story among many stories. As Allen says so well, “We cannot relinquish the claim that Christ is the savior of the world. If Christ were our savior only, he would be a parochial god, and that for Christians is impossible.” If Jesus were only the God of a local narrative – that of the Christians – he would indeed be a “parochial God.” Serving a “parochial God” would render the Church and its mission inept and pointless.

**Individualism versus Community**

We Americans think of ourselves as atomistic, independent people determining our own identities. As shown in the previous chapter, this notion of individualism was a product of the Enlightenment. Pre-Enlightenment, premodern people did not share this

---

understanding of the individual. Biblical scholar Bruce Malina describes the premodern world of the New Testament when he writes, “The first-century Mediterranean person did not share or comprehend our idea of an ‘individual’ at all.”60 People thought of themselves in relation to others in their social background. Malina continues, “If our sort of individualism leads us to perceive ourselves as unique because we are set apart from other unique and set-apart beings, then the first-century person would perceive himself as unique because he was set within other like beings within unique and distinctive groups.”61 Because the modern notions of individualism began with the Enlightenment, Malina must certainly be correct. Therefore, the New Testament presents a picture of people in relationship with one another, not as isolated, atomistic individuals set apart from others.

Postmoderns have rightly revealed the shortcomings of our radical individualism, but, in denouncing the excesses of radical individualism, postmoderns often oversimplify the situation. For example, Tony Jones, in his book Postmodern Youth Ministry, contrasts the modern emphasis on individualism against the postmodern emphasis on the communal when he writes, “For the greater part of the history of mankind, we have been living in community – making decisions with, sharing resources with, and staying committed to others. Postmoderns are returning to community and family, albeit in

untraditional ways such as cohousing.” Reading this comment leads one to think postmodernity is a return to the community centered living of premodernity. This is not exactly the case.

James Smith makes a similar charge when he writes,

Within the matrix of a modern Christianity, the base “ingredient” is the individual, the church, then, is simply a collection of individuals. Conceiving of Christian faith as a private affair between the individual and God – a matter of asking Jesus to ‘Come into my heart’ – modern evangelicalism finds it hard to articulate just how or why the church has any role to play other than providing a place to fellowship with other individuals who have a private relationship with God.

Smith goes on then to describe a notion of the Church not as a “collection of individuals” but as a community in the postmodern mindset. However, has postmodernity really risen above modernity’s focus on the individual? Are emerging churches really all about community, or are they collections of individuals?

Postmodernity has stopped valuing radical individualism and rediscovered community, but this does not mean individualism has gone away. It has merely shifted. As postmodern thinker Brian McLaren writes, “But our individualism has become unbalanced, and we have lost the realization of how connected we are. As we cross the postmodern border, we still see individuals as important, but we don’t see them as isolated monads anymore.” We must rejoice in the renewed emphasis on community

---


63 Smith, Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? 29.

64 McLaren, New Kind of Christian, 100.
for God created us to be in community. During modernity, Americans came to believe strongly that we rely on ourselves for all things. Robert Bellah and his associates call this “utilitarian individualism.” Of course this is a myth and always has been. Allen says it well: “We are not self-sufficient. To find a full life we need to be in community.”

Community is a postmodern value we must uphold, but this does not somehow mean postmodernism has done away with individualism. In fact, individualism has become even more radical in postmodernity despite the emphasis on community. Wells is particularly insightful here. He writes, “The autonomy of the individual that the enlightenment championed has, in postmodern spirituality, been retained, but also radicalized.” This is so because religion and spirituality were privatized during modernity. Postmodern individualism could pick and choose ideas from the plurality of religions with no thought to truth. Postmodern individualism “raids” religions for whatever works for that individual. This is what Robert Bellah calls “expressive individualism.” Postmodernity as a style has found a home in expressive individualism.

---


66 Allen, Christian Belief in Postmodern World, 106.

67 Wells, Above All Earthly Powers, 115.

68 Ibid., 115, 154.

69 Bellah, Habits of the Heart, 33. See also Carson, The Gagging of God, 48.
The starting point for postmodernity is the same as modernity: the individual. We all have single occupancy towers. During premodernity, epistemology was revealed from God and God was the starting point. This is not true for postmodernity which shares the same fundamental weakness of modernity: “it begins with the “I,” the finite self.” The finite self is the starting point for both moderns and postmoderns. Postmoderns recognize the longing for community, but they do so from the perspective of individualism. The postmodern may not feel trapped inside his or her tower, but that person is trapped nonetheless. The Church cannot do renewal by holding up community as a value and devaluing individualism. The best strategy is to help people experience community, and, through experiencing it, they will learn to value it. However, we must recognize the fact that people in our context will all begin with themselves. The difference is that postmoderns hold community as a stated value (as opposed to a real value) whereas moderns cling to an unhealthy notion of radical individualism. However, renewal takes place within community. The Great Banquet creates a sense of community that fosters renewal.

Conclusion

This chapter has assessed postmodernity in a number of key areas including foundationalism and epistemology, objective truth and relativism, the loss of metanarrative, and the changes in individualism. This assessment has resulted in a mixed bag of things to applaud and things we must reject. Christians can applaud the loss of

---

70 Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 122.
foundationalism and a more realistic understanding of epistemology. There is an absolute truth “out there” because God exists, but understanding and experience are subjective. Knowledge may be relative to our “situatedness,” but this does not support a thoroughgoing relativism. Thoroughgoing relativism must be rejected. There is a grand metanarrative for all of humanity despite the hard postmodern rejection of all metanarratives. Lastly, the Church should applaud the increased awareness and emphasis placed on community by postmodernism. However, the Church must also recognize the fact that postmodernity is just as individualized as modernity.

The goal was not to argue either for modernity or postmodernity, but only to gain an understanding of our cultural context.71 There are those who buy into postmodernity completely, and there are those who see it as a threat to traditional Christianity. The perspective of this paper is that it is simply the changing world in which God has called Northminster Presbyterian Church to minister. The shift to postmodernity is one of the largest changes the Western world has ever known, so we must understand it. However, the picture is further complicated because the shift is not complete. We live and do mission in a context that is profoundly divided and full of tension.

CHAPTER 4

RENEWAL IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

This paper has discussed the shift from modernity to postmodernity. One might ask why such a lengthy discussion was necessary. After all, the average person at Northminster Presbyterian is not well versed in the intricacies of epistemology or deconstruction philosophy. While the average person cannot articulate postmodern ideas, though, those ideas have been integrated into our culture and thinking. People may not be able to explain the struggle they have with relativism or individualism, but it is there. This is as true for people within Northminster as it is in our larger context of Peoria, Illinois. If Northminster is going to minister to and with these people, we must understand the struggles they have. An understanding of the transition from modernity to postmodernity is also important because the transition is incomplete. Postmodernism is only a transitional step before something else. Modernism is vanishing, but that something “else” has not fully developed.

Postmodernism and Post-Christendom

Postmodernism has profoundly affected the culture, which means it has also had a profound impact on the Church. The term used to denote this change is post-Christendom. It is easy to confuse post-modernism and post-Christendom because they are often used together, but they mean different things. They are related as
postmodernism brought about the fall of Christendom, but they refer to different experiences.

Most scholars would associate the rise of Christendom with the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312 A.D. By the end of the fourth century, Christianity had become the official state religion. The merger between Christianity and the Roman Empire formed Christendom. In Europe, that meant Christianity became the official state religion in each country. In America, the situation is a little different because of the separation of church and state. Some refer to this as the disestablishment of religion in America. In *The Missional Church*, Craig Van Gelder makes an interesting distinction: “Constantinianism is used to describe the legal establishment of the Christian church by the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century.”¹ There is no “Constantinianism” in America, but Americans experience “functional Christendom” because the Church was disestablished, yet it continued to function as the established Church. In other terms, in Europe, Christianity was adopted as the official state religion while, in America, Christianity was *assumed* to be the state religion. In Christendom the assumption was that all citizens (except Jews) were Christians by birth. Religion and politics were intertwined and there was (at least at one time) no distinction between secular and sacred. The world was divided between Christendom and heathens. Ecclesiastical structures mirrored their secular counterparts. The result was a hierarchical diocesan and parish arrangement supported by the state. The *Christendom mindset* (the Church is at the

center of culture) has dominated the Western world. At the center, it supposedly exercised a top-down influence on the character and direction of culture.

Modernism led to the downfall of Christendom. Postmodernism privatized and individualized the Christian faith. It was removed from the public sector and replaced with the autonomous, rational mind. The Church has been marginalized to the periphery of social interaction and moral discourse. Postmoderns are by nature “decentered” and are uncomfortable with one religion holding dominance, preferring a pluralistic vision instead. The evidence of Christendom’s decline is overwhelming. In Europe, church attendance is miniscule. One British commentator put it like this:

Indeed, the decline of Christianity - not just in Britain but right across Europe - stands out as one of the most remarkable phenomena of our times. There was a time when Europe would justly refer to itself as “Christendom.” …Now it is we who are the heathens.²

In America, mainline denominations have experienced steady and steep decline since the 1960s. The Presbyterian Church (USA), for example, has lost on average fifty thousand members per year since 1966.³ In reality, culture ceased listening to institutional religion a long time ago. This has brought a great deal of tension and despair to churches and denominations. The Church must learn how to operate from the


margins of society rather than the center. Specifically, Northminster must learn to operate from the margins.

**Responding to Postmodernism and Post-Christendom**

Postmodernism and the fall of Christendom are immense changes for the Western world. These changes have created massive amounts of confusion and tension within culture. Alan Roxburgh’s little book *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality* is tremendously helpful for understanding these enormous transitions.

Roxburgh uses the term *liminality* to describe the process of transition for a group or individual. Liminality is the conscious awareness that a group has changed so much it has disappeared or ceased having influence because it no longer operates under the same social conditions or expectations. Liminality occurs during three phases: separation, liminality, and reintegration. “In the separation phase the subjects going through the rite of passage are detached from their established, embedded roles.” Here the things that have shaped life and meaning have been disconnected. The liminal phase is the phase of marginalization or disestablishment. Roxburgh argues that the Church is currently in the state of liminality. The final phase is reintegration where the subject undergoing the

---


5 Roxburgh, *Liminality*, 27.
change is reintegrated into its context with a new identity. This phase is only possible after the liminal stage is accepted and dealt with.

The Church finds itself in the midst of two different, but related, liminal changes: the end of Christendom and the transition to postmodernity. “The first relates to the long-term change in relationship between the church and modern culture resulting in the effective end of Christendom.”6 “The second and more significant liminality is connected to the more fundamental transition from modernity to postmodernity.”7 The onset of postmodernism and the decline of Christendom combine to create a great deal of stress, uncertainty, and confusion for the Church. The old rules do not apply, and no one seems to agree on the new rules.

In *Crossing the Bridge*, Roxburgh says there are two elements to liminality: the external event and the inner response to the new situation.8 The movement of the Church away from the center of culture is the external event. The inner response of the Church has been to restore the Church to the center of society. “The church does not like being marginalized and seeks to restore itself to the center.”9 Signs of marginalization are membership loss and attendance decline. Some see membership and attendance numbers as the issue, and so they develop “market” approaches. Pastors and church leaders “resort to marketing strategies in place of missionary insights in their attempts to

---

7 Ibid.
8 Roxburgh and Regele, *Crossing the Bridge*, 47.
reach out to a population that is becoming increasingly distant from the church.”

We develop all sorts of strategies and techniques for drawing people “back” to the Church, but all of this is really nothing more than an attempt to restore the Church to the center of society. It is an attempt to restore Christendom. This is a futile endeavor, though, since a center no longer exists.

In attempting to restore itself to the center, churches will do what they know how to do. They will rely on methodologies and tools that have worked in the past. This is reminiscent of what Ronald Heifetz calls treating “adaptive problems” as “technical problems.” Heifetz writes, “These problems are technical because the necessary knowledge about them already has been digested and put in the form of a legitimized set of know organizational procedures guiding what to do and role authorizations guiding who should do it.”

The problem for the Church is that legitimacy and roles have been disestablished in liminality. In other words the old rules no longer apply, so approaching the marginalization of the Church as a technical problem is completely ineffective. The Church cannot just do things the way it has always done them, even if it tries harder, and expect different results. For Roxburgh, “The continued assumption of cultural symbols of power and success will only produce an inauthentic church with little gospel, much religion, and no mission.”

---

10 Gibbs, ChurchNext, 36.
11 Heifetz, Leadership without the Easy Answers, 73. Christian Schwarz uses the term technocratic thinking. See Schwarz, Natural Church Development, 6-7.
12 Roxburgh, Liminality, 47.
There is another response that errs in the opposite direction. Some approach our liminal state as a technical problem, which denies the reality of massive cultural change; others seek to abandon everything. The tendency on the part of some is to completely reject all traditions and insights from the past and completely embrace an unknown future. Some in the emergent church movement are attempting to do this very thing. They see the institutional church as a relic of Christendom and try to jettison every hint of that church. Emergent churches adapt to postmodernism by assuming a completed transition to postmodernity. In this way they are certainly ahead of the curve, but it is not a good plan in Peoria, Illinois. Northminster Presbyterian could not be an emerging church. Emergent churches are most successful as new churches following charismatic leaders. Northminster is an established church that reflects its Reformed, Presbyterian and evangelical traditions. There is a lot of continuity with the past. Attempting to become a completely postmodern church would alienate the moderns and those with a modernist mindset in the church. The result would be the destruction of Northminster Presbyterian Church. The influential missiologist David Bosch encourages a balanced approach when he writes, “Some tried to oppose or at least neutralize the changes that seem to be irrupting all around them; others tended to overreact, to make a clean break with the past and deny continuity with their ancestry.” It would be wiser for Northminster to become a “postmodern sensitive” church, but live in the tension it finds

---

Another possible response is to adopt some kind of postmodern ministry within the church. For example, a church could start a postmodern congregation with its own worship service in the same facility. The danger with this approach is that it often attempts to deal with postmodernism as a style and does not address the underlying issues. Carl Raschke expresses the concern well:

One of the problems with the rising currency of the expression “postmodern ministry” in evangelical churches is that it often refers more to style than to substance. Postmodern ministry is a meaningless construct if it signifies little more that featuring youthful worship leaders with earrings and nose piercings who wear baggy pants on stage and dim the lights in the fellowship hall in order to replicate a coffeehouse ambience. That is simply one more up-to-date, flamboyant example of the Christ of culture.14

Some churches have tried to create postmodern churches within an existing church, but there are problems here in sharing leadership. Most pastors are trained to do ministry in a single way and cannot adapt. Dan Kimball says, “The church-within-a-church in America does not work because the senior pastor cannot handle a congregation in a church that may do things differently. It totally goes against how senior pastors have been trained to think of a church and their role as a senior pastor.”15 It would also be difficult for people in a church to relate to a very different congregation in their midst. One must remember how significant the differences are between a modernist mindset and postmodernist mindset.

---

15 Quoted in Gibbs and Bolger, Emerging Churches, 40.
How should Northminster Presbyterian respond to the dual liminality of postmodernism and the end of Christendom? Certainly we must adapt, but we need to be clear about what we are adapting to. We must adapt to the state of liminality we currently experience. We are not adapting to postmodernity. This is the key distinction in all of this: we are adapting to the stressful phase of liminality, not modernity or postmodernity. We are in a transition between the two, and that is where we need to begin. Our context is neither fully modern nor postmodern; it is one of transition.

Northminster Presbyterian must remember that both moderns and postmoderns exist in the congregation. The Church has people shaped by modernity next to people shaped by postmodernity. Both exist side by side. In fact, most Christians probably share assumptions of both modernity and postmodernity. This liminal stage of transition is difficult, and Northminster needs some freedom to experiment and work out the implications. We in the Church need to be clear about the continuity and the discontinuity. We need to be able to address the concerns of both moderns and postmoderns because both are present in our church and in our ministry area. The Great Banquet is a unique tool that provides an opportunity to renew Northminster Presbyterian in this stressful phase of liminality. In order to establish why this is true, we need to think theologically about the Church and establish some principles that will be important in church renewal.

Church as a Reflection of the Trinity
Christendom has profoundly influenced the way we think about Church. The nature and mission of the Church were adapted to fit the Christendom context, and the decline of Christendom changes that context. The change in context requires a theological reevaluation of the nature and mission of the Church as the nature and mission of the Church flow out of the nature and mission of God.

This process begins with a rediscovery of a Trinitarian understanding of God. The doctrine of the Trinity was essentially cast aside during the Enlightenment. The Trinitarian understanding of God was always assumed before modernity as part of revealed truth. It was forged at church councils as a true characterization of what the revealed word taught about God. However, as has already been discussed, modernity rejected revelation as a foundation for knowledge and assumed reason as the only acceptable basis for knowing. “Because the basis for the traditional understanding of the Trinity lay in divine revelation and church tradition rather than in universal reason, the doctrine was cast aside as a relic of a superstitious and uninformed past.”¹⁶ The Trinity is mysterious and beyond our comprehension. Modernity was always uncomfortable with mystery. Consequently, modernity sought to push mystery aside in favor of rational and scientific explanations. Furthermore, modernity valued individual autonomy. Consequently the relational nature of the Trinity was ignored in favor of understanding the individuals within the Trinity.

What modern Christians have done is emphasize the substance (Latin: *substantia*)

---

over relationality of the persons of the Trinity. With the postmodern de-emphasis on autonomous individuality and reason, the relational nature of God is coming back into view. God is relational in his own being as the three persons of the Trinity are in relationship to one another. “Perhaps the single most significant development in the contemporary renaissance of Trinitarian theology has been the emphasis on relationality.” ¹⁷ The ultimate basis of postmodern theology flows not from our understanding of substance, but from our understanding of divine relationship.

The nature of God is relational in the sense that the persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in relationship with each other. The Trinity is not a collection of autonomous individuals. Rather it is individuals so closely and intimately connected they are one. These relationships form the basis of community within the Godhead. John of Damascus coined the term *perichoresis* to describe this understanding of the Trinity. Presbyterian theologian Shirley Guthrie explains the etymology of the word: “*Peri* (as in perimeter) means ‘around.’ *Choresis* literally means dancing (as in the choreography of a ballet).” ¹⁸ Hence we have an image of Father, Son and Holy Spirit moving in choreographed steps. It is a dynamic image of persons unified in community. “And “personal means by definition *inter*-personal; one cannot be truly personal alone but only in relation to other persons.” ¹⁹ The church “bears the stamp of this eternal

---


¹⁹ Ibid.
community. "20 If the nature of the Trinity is relational then the nature of the Church should also be relational.

The Organic Church

This Trinitarian understanding of God reshapes an understanding of the nature of the Church, as well. The Church is the body of Christ who is the head (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 4:15; 5:23). We have Paul’s use of an organic metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” The context of Paul’s words means Christ is the head of the Church. The Church is a body with many members. This is an organic understanding of the Church in relationship. In community, the Church is made up of many people joined in relationship. However, it is not just the relationships between members; it is the relationships between members and Christ the head. Greg Ogden says, “For Paul ‘the body of Christ’ is not just a metaphor or helpful word picture, but points to the reality that Jesus dwells among his people and give his life to them.”21 The Church is the living, breathing presence of Christ in the world. As Christ dwells in the Christian via relationship, so we dwell in the world via relationship.

The Church was created and organized by God in his image (Latin: imago dei). Scripture consistently uses organic metaphors to describe the Church. For example, one

20 Guder and Barrett, Missional Church, 82.

reads about the lilies of the field (Matt 6:28), the vine and the branches (John 15: 1-11),
the growth of mustard seeds (Luke 13:19 and elsewhere), the tree and its fruit (Matt
12:33), the laws of sowing and reaping (Matt 6:26; Gal 6:7-8). The Church is an
organism more than an institution. One cannot deny the Church operates socially and
legally as an institution, but it is not created and organized by human beings.

The problem came with the institutionalization of the Church. During
Christendom, the Church mirrored secular institutions. As the Church became an
institution, its organic nature was diminished or ignored. The Church became identified
with a building, a permanent structure in a place. The Church became less a people and
more a place.

Popular grammar captures it well: you “go to church” much the same way you
might go to a store. You “attend a church” the way you attend a school or theater.
You “belong to a church” as you would a service club with its programs and
activities.

As opposed to a living, dynamic, moving community, the Church became a dead,
static building. We do not think of the Church as a living organism or as a dynamic body
that is ever evolving and ever changing in its cultural context. We think of it as static and
never moving or changing.

In his book The New Reformation, Greg Ogden makes a helpful distinction
between “institution” and “institutionalism.” An institution describes the reality of the

---

22 Schwarz, Natural Church Development, 8.
23 Guder and Barrett, Missional Church, 80.
existence of a congregation. Institutionalism, however, describes an inorganic and lifeless structure, not the body of Christ. With the onset of post-Christendom, the institutional church has experienced significant decline. The desire to preserve the institution has been the result. Maintaining the institutional church under threat has taken away from representing the reign of God in the world. It is when Christians act as God’s agents in the world that the organic body of Christ will grow. In an institutional mindset, we want to “build” the Church back up. Consequently, we attempt to engineer growth, or, in Christian Schwarz’s terminology, we resort to “technocratic” thinking. Technocratic thinking sees decline as a “technical problem” (to use Heifetz’s term) that can be corrected using known methodologies. Technocratic thinking addresses the institutional needs of a church and ignores the organic nature of the Church. Such thinking is concerned with the preservation of the institution, not the Kingdom of God.

Institutional thinking influences the Church negatively in at least two other ways. First, the understanding of church membership has suffered greatly. The term “member” comes from the biblical idea of a “member” of the body. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:27). This is an organic idea, but it has evolved into something else. Darrell Guder talks about the “Gospel reductionism” where the Gospel is primarily about an individual’s salvation. Membership then becomes a function of salvation. “Thus the focus of membership shifted from the mission of

25 Schwarz, Natural Church Development, 88.
Christ’s body, the church, to the issue of one’s salvation.” As the Church became an institution like any civic institution, membership became membership in a voluntary organization like Rotary and ceased being organic. Guder notes, “It is more difficult to become a member of many service clubs than to join most Protestant congregations.” Membership became nominal and lost its meaning. Renewal is not about recruiting members; it is about making disciples and connecting them to the living body of Christ.

The Church cannot be viewed as a static club with people in (members) or out (the unsaved). We need a more dynamic model. We could think of the Church as a centered set of people instead of a bounded set of people. The bounded set is the institutional model where people are bound to the institution via their membership. Official membership represents the boundary: members are in and non-members are out. People are less willing to join institutions anymore so the bounded set idea becomes less and less meaningful. A contextually more appropriate model can be found in the centered set. “The centered-set organization invites people to enter on a journey toward a set of values and commitments.” The center has an identity and people are encouraged to associate themselves with that identity, but the invitation is to a journey not membership. In a centered model, the goal is not to get people to sign on the dotted line of membership or to get their certificate of transfer from another institution. It is to

---

become part of a movement.

Second, the institutional thinking of Christendom has fostered a division between laity and clergy within the Church. Because the Church mirrored secular organizational structures, it became a hierarchical organization. Hierarchical organization led to a hierarchy of people within the body of Christ with the ordained clergy at the top and the “laity” at the bottom. The leadership of the Church must address this inequality in order to experience authentic renewal.

The Church as Mission

Christendom was never good for the Church. Those who saw the institutionalizing of the Church as a victory would argue that the system allowed the lordship of Christ to be exercised over every aspect of society. Institutionalizing of the Church certainly failed in bringing the universal lordship of Christ over society. Richard Niebuhr argued for the “gospel transforming culture,” but one could argue that culture has transformed the Church. We have organized ourselves according to hierarchical, secular patterns, and our hierarchy has led to inequality among people in the Church. The world has set the agenda for the Church. Mission meant evangelism in “heathen” lands outside of Christendom. George Hunsberger makes the point, “Discipleship has

been absorbed into citizenship.”

The rite of passage into good citizenship was baptism into the Church.

The root problem is that Christendom makes no distinction between the world and the Church. Jesus clearly recognized a difference, though. In John 17, he prayed for his disciples saying:

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world (John 17:14-18).

The Church is in the world, but it is not the equal of the world. Instead, the Church is sent into the world (verse 18) as the instrument of God, sharing Christ’s mission. The world is the mission field for the body of Christ. To equate the two meant replacing the real purpose of the Church with a political substitute. We should not be surprised at the death of the Christendom Church since it was robbed of purpose. The mission of the Church is to represent the reign of God in the world, but the Church and the reign of God are not the same thing. George Hunsberger is worth quoting here again: “The church has often presumed that the reign of God is within the church. The two have been regarded as synonyms. In this view, the church totally encompasses the divine reign.”

The Church is not separate from the Kingdom of God; it represents the Kingdom

---

30 Guder and Barrett, *Missional Church*, 78.
to the world. There is a real danger in equating the two. As Ray Anderson points out:

“The temptation for the church has always been to identify its own existence and institutional life with the Kingdom of God. When that occurs, the existence of the church tends to take priority over the mission of the Kingdom of God.”

This is where mainline churches find themselves today. The institutional church has developed a mindset of self-preservation and maintenance. As the numbers continue to decline, the focus and motivation of leaders is to reverse the decline. The underlying motivation is the preservation of the institution and the restoration of the center. This becomes increasingly difficult to do in a culture that is anti-institutional.

Ray Anderson reminds readers that, “All ministry is first of all God’s ministry.”

It is God who takes the initiative. For example, God took the initiative in creation (Gen 1-2); in establishing a nation (Gen 12); and in establishing the Church (Acts 2; Eph 1:3-10). God took the initiative to send Jesus Christ in order to reconcile the world (John 3:16-17; 2 Cor 5:19). The sending of Jesus provides the model for our ministry. Jesus establishes this foundation in John 17:18 when he prays, “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” Anderson wants to “show how the sending of Jesus into the world constituted the basis for all ministry. As Jesus was sent into the

---

33 Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry*, 5, see also p. 9.
34 See also John 20:21.
world, so too are Christians sent as a continuation of the ministry of Christ.⁴³⁵ The word for “sent” in John 17:18 is ἀποστέλλω from which the word apostolic comes. The Church is apostolic in a dual sense. First, it is founded on the teaching and ministry of the original apostles. Second, those in the Church are sent as Jesus was sent.⁴³⁶

During Christendom, being apostolic meant “sending” missionaries to places outside of Christendom. Christendom was thought to be the equivalent of the Kingdom, so to be apostolic people had to be sent to somewhere the Kingdom was not. The result was that the Church became a sending institution. A more biblical view would be to see the Church as the body of Christ continuing his mission. As Paul Stevens puts it, “The church is not the sending agency; it is the sent agency.”⁴³⁷ It is far more appropriate to think of the Church as God’s instrument of mission, rather than the senders of missionaries. Mainline churches must rediscover the missional nature of the Church itself.⁴³⁸ Darryl Guder, one of the leading thinkers in the missional movement, writes:

> It has taken us decades to realize mission is not just a program of the church. It defines the church as God’s sent people. Either we are defined by mission, or we reduce the scope of the Gospel and the mandate of the church. Thus our challenge today is to move from the church with mission to missional church.⁴³⁹

The missional church movement is suggesting we recover the central purpose of

---


⁴³⁶ Anderson makes the unique observation that Christ was the first “apostle” because God took the initiative in “sending” him. See *The Soul of Ministry*, 149.


⁴³⁸ Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 52.

the Church. This is not the creation of a new purpose, but the rediscovery of our original purpose. Church renewal is only possible when the Church is apostolic. The Church can only be renewed when it is being missional. It requires a rediscovery of the Great Commission.

The Great Commission, as it is called, can be found in Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18-20).

To be apostolic is to be sent. The “Go” in Matthew 28:19 is a difficult verb to translate. The word poreuqen.tej is a participle which some suggest should be read as circumstantial: “while you are going.” Others see this participle as having the force of an imperative or command: “Go!” Either way, it reflects a missional understanding of the Church. Either we in the Church are “going” and making disciples, which assumes we are faithful as we have been sent (John 20:21), or the imperatival force of “Go” is another example of the missional imperative. The Christendom response to the Great Commission was to send people overseas or to other continents to fulfill the mandate. While this is certainly valid as we are to be witnesses in “to the ends of the earth,” we are also supposed to be witnesses at home (“Jerusalem” in Acts 1:8). We must “go” right

---

40 There are other “commissions” (Mark 16:15-17, Luke 24:47-48 and Acts 1:8), but I would argue for the primacy of the Matthean commission.


where we are, as well. Likewise, this mandate is the responsibility of all Christians, not just the institutional church. We are all charged with representing the Kingdom of God where we live and work. “The church exists to be a catalyst for the Kingdom. In other words, it doesn’t just exist for its own aggrandizement. It exists for the benefit of the kingdom of God, something bigger than itself.”

The Great Commission establishes the focus of the Church’s mission: making disciples (Matt 29:19). The Church’s agenda has been confused by competing visions and ideologies in the Christendom context. In a post-Christendom world, we must be clear about the agenda. The motivation and the goal of the Church in ministry can be confusing and varied. Often the Church wants to meet needs in a very needy world, but Christ has laid for us the foundation of mission. Ray Anderson wrote: “His ministry is first of all directed to God and not the world. The needs of the world are recognized and brought into this ministry, but they do not set the agenda.” God has set the agenda in the Great Commission. Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. By making disciples we share in Christ’s ministry and represent the Kingdom of God to the world. The ministry of the body of Christ is ultimately about making disciples. The Great Banquet must be first and foremost a tool for making disciples.

---


44 Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry*, 82.
What, then, is a disciple? The Greek word usually translated as “disciple” is maqht,h,j which essentially means a learner or student.\(^{(45)}\) In the ancient world, one who was a pupil was one who attached himself to a teacher. From a teacher, a disciple was expected to gain practical and theoretical knowledge. This general sense extends into the New Testament with the disciples of John the Baptist (Matt 11:2 and parallels; John 1:35-37), Moses (John 9:28), and the Pharisees (Matt 22:16; Mark 2:18).\(^{(46)}\) In the rabbinic or Greek models, disciples were supposed to become masters at some point and receive disciples themselves. This was not the expectation with Jesus’ disciples. There was never any suggestion that they receive disciples themselves.\(^{(47)}\) They were expected to be Christ’s witnesses (Acts 1:8).

A precise understanding of the word “disciple” (maqht,h,j) in Scripture is difficult because it takes on different nuances. For example, disciples are described as students as seen above. However, in some passages it seems that discipleship is limited to those who are seriously committed to Jesus Christ (e.g. Luke 14:25-33; Matt 19:16-22). Michael Wilkins, in his book *Following the Master*, sees the growth of Christianity in the New Testament—what he calls “the Jesus Movement”—to have occurred in five stages.\(^{(48)}\) Discipleship begins with conversion but it also begins a lifelong process. It is critical to

\(^{(45)}\) For a thorough discussion of maqht in Ancient Greece, see Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 72-79.


\(^{(48)}\) See Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 101-119, for discussion of all five stages.
understand discipleship and disciple-making as a process rather than an event (i.e. a decision to be born again). We are to go into the world and make disciples, not simply get converts. Eddie Gibbs makes the point, “Within the evangelical tradition there has been an undue emphasis on the conversion event, to the neglect of an understanding of conversion as a lifelong process.”\textsuperscript{49} The biblical mandate to make disciples is larger than just recording conversions. Therefore, I would define a disciple as one who has responded to God’s grace and offer of salvation and thus commits himself or herself to a life-long process of following Jesus. Discipleship is a process. The Great Commission should be understood in the broader sense of disciple making not in the narrow sense of evangelism.

This also affects of the way we think about evangelism. The Church entrenched in modernity begins with the “message.” The message of the Gospel is clearly and rationally presented in propositions. The recipient then decides for the Gospel and believes and then engages in learning more about the faith and the Bible. While this is still an effective model for people shaped by the assumptions of modernity, it is less effective with postmodern people. Post-modern evangelism begins with “relationship.” The postmodern person is less interested in propositional truth than spirituality being lived out. This person will be invited by a friend into a community of connected people with a willingness to tell their stories of faith. As they experience the power of the Spirit being worked out in community, they will make a commitment and enter into a life-long

\textsuperscript{49} Gibbs, \textit{ChurchNext}, 231.
process of following Jesus. With respect to evangelism, Edie Gibbs writes, “A sense of belonging places seekers in the position of observer-participants so that they can learn what the gospel is all about.” Modernity put the emphasis on believing first, then belonging, but for most people this is no longer true. Most people need to belong before they can believe.

**One People, One Ministry**

The Church finds its nature and mission in the Trinitarian image of God. In the *perichoretic* Church there is equality without subordination. Unfortunately, that is not how the Church functions in Christendom. In Christendom, there is a subordination of the laity to the clergy. Institutionalism leads to hierarchy of people and ministries. “Institutionalism equates the ministry of the church primarily with its ordained leadership.” This dominance of the Church by clergy can also be called “clericalism.” Those outside the class of clergy were there to be ministered to or support the “ministers” in their ministry. Charles Van Engen calls this “Santa’s Helpers Syndrome” where the clergy are Santa and the laity are the little elves helping Santa out. Ministry belongs to all in the body of Christ.

Likewise, the *perichoretic* Church finds its unity through diversity. While each person of the Trinity performs different functions, they are a unity. The Apostle Paul

50 Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 199.
51 Ogden, *The New Reformation*, 47.
makes this same point when he describes the organic church in 1 Corinthians 12:12: *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.* There are many members and none is less important in the body. This is true with respect to ministry. The ministry of the clergy is not the most important ministry in the Church. Perichoretic ministry is shared ministry done for God.

This is a particularly difficult concept for those in the Reformed tradition. John Calvin saw the “priesthood of all believers” through covenant eyes. He saw the character of the priesthood in the Old Covenant transferring to the New Covenant. The “priesthood of all believers” was a concept brought back to life by the reformers; unfortunately mainline Presbyterians followed Calvin and reverted to a bifurcated people of God as in the Old Testament. The emphasis on preaching and the ministry of the sacraments became marks of the true Church. These marks were also reserved for the ordained, which left nothing else for the rest of the body.53

All the people of God are called to represent the reign of God in the world, to serve (Eph 4:1), and to be servants/ministers (Luke 22:27; Acts 19:22). All are empowered and gifted for ministry (1 Cor 12:7).

Alan Roxburgh introduces another term that helps describe the desired outcome. He uses the term *communitas* to describe what happens to a group of people who enter

---

into a liminal place of marginality.\textsuperscript{54} In liminality, the traditional lines of authority no longer function and hierarchies are leveled. According to Roxburgh, “Egalitarianism and comradeship replace professional stratification and specialized authority.”\textsuperscript{55} If the Great Banquet is to be useful in renewing Northminster in this time of liminality, people must experience \textit{communitas}. Hierarchies must be minimized and collegiality brought to a level of equality. This is a reflection of the \textit{perichoretic} nature of the Triune God

**Leadership in a Time of Liminality**

A missional church that makes disciples will require a new kind of leadership. Here one follows the lead of Greg Ogden in \textit{The New Reformation}, who calls for a paradigm shift from a dependency model for clergy to an equipping model.\textsuperscript{56} In the dependency model, the real ministry (preaching and sacraments rightly administered) are the domain of clergy, and the rest of the Church is dependent upon the clergy. Instead, the biblical model for pastors is one of equipping. This is seen clearly in Ephesians 4:

> The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ (Eph 4:11-13).

The gifts to pastors and teachers are to equip the saints for the work of ministry. That not only speaks to the inclusive nature of ministry, it describes the nature of pastors.

\textsuperscript{54} Roxburgh borrows both the terms \textit{liminality} and \textit{communitas} from Victor Turner. See Roxburgh and Regele, \textit{Crossing the Bridge}, 80.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{56} Ogden, \textit{The New Reformation}, 85.
and teachers. Empowerment for ministry is the function of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7). Equipping is the function of pastors and teachers. As Ray Anderson points out, empowering precedes equipping. This signals a radical rethinking of ministry in the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom. The ministry of clergy is to be the equippers of others for ministry. The focus for clergy must be on building up strong people for ministry instead of strong ministries for people.

Renewal Principles in a Time of Liminality

The purpose of this section is to summarize some of the key points that have been made so far, but also to lay some groundwork for going forward. The next two chapters will describe the Great Banquet and its implementation as a renewal tool. The principles discussed in this section are not meant to be hard and fast rules for ministry. This is not establishing a litmus test, but rather principles that must be considered when doing missional renewal in a context of liminality. In the complex movement towards postmodernity, there are some things that should be retained and some things that should be appropriated.

First, individualism is the starting point for both moderns and postmoderns. As has been shown, postmoderns value community, but they still begin with the finite “I.” Modernists still value radical individualism even though it is unrealistic and unbiblical. Anything within the Church, including the Great Banquet, will be evaluated on the basis of the individual. Some will want to see proof that it is useful for their lives (utilitarian

---

individualism). Some people will be look for support and an opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and struggles (expressive individualism).

Second, the Church must somehow create community. However, one must understand that the value of community is more caught than taught. Both moderns and postmoderns need to experience belonging. For the postmodern, belonging may even take priority over believing, but it also needs to be clear that belonging is not used in the sense of formal membership in the church. The goal is to make disciples not Church members. Disciples join the movement and mission of Christ’s body. Disciples begin or continue a journey that began at conversion but always includes being a functional, serving member of the body. Community exists only when people are part of the mission of the Church.

Third, all ministry is relational. Ministry is relational because it is a reflection of the image of God (latin: *imago Dei*), which is relational. Ministry within the body is perichoretic, which involves a synchronized movement of all the members. These members are relational not only within the community but also in the world at large. George Cladis writes, “This concept of the perichoretic fellowship of God enabled in the church runs contrary to the rugged individualism valued in Western society.” Ministry should flow out of relationships. Ministry should be conducted through relationships of teams. Transformative ministry in a time of transition will best be done through the efforts of teams who work together. This is shared ministry, not a new version of
“Santa’s little helper syndrome.”

Fourth, renewal requires the empowerment of all God’s people for ministry, one people with one ministry. Many members must come to realize that they have ownership and responsibility for the mission. This will be difficult for many who are used to hiring people to do their work rather than doing it themselves. Some feel the pastors are hired to do the ministry of the Church. Pastors must empower people for ministry and then equip them for ministry. The elimination of hierarchy and a caste system within the Church begins with the clergy themselves. Currently, Northminster has three ordained pastors and a number of program staff. The equipping model must become the expectation for our pastors and leaders. We are successful in ministry only if others are successful. Equipping ministry includes preaching and teaching, but it also means giving away the ministry. It means creating a trusting and permission-giving atmosphere.

Fifth, the importance of narrative and storytelling must be reintroduced into the life and work of the Church. This does not mean the art form of storytelling, but providing people the opportunity to tell their stories. People are impacted by hearing the stories of others. While there are still modernists among us who think in terms of propositional theology, most people are impacted by story. Brian McClaren talks about his own journey when he writes, “First, I had to be ‘depropositionalized.’” Rather than seeing the gospel as propositions, mechanisms, abstractions, or universal concepts, I

---

58 George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 114.
came to see the Gospel as narrative, a story.”⁵⁹ As America transitions to a postmodern culture, “story” becomes far more important. We need to learn how to share our stories of faith. Propositional truth will become secondary to personal truth. The emphasis will be less on the content of the message than on exploring the web of relationships and fostering honest sharing within those webs of relationships. We are not inviting people to a place (a “come” structure). We are inviting people into a relationship with Jesus Christ and a relationship with one another.

Sixth, the emphasis on narrative does not diminish the role for didactic instruction. In fact, post-Christendom age people are much more biblically illiterate. This is not talking about teaching systematic theology or a type of foundationalism, but rather about leading people to an encounter with the written word of God which has the power to change lives. “Through its continuing encounter with the biblical word, the congregation experiences the conversion which is the result of the ‘transformation of the mind’ (Rom. 12:2).”⁶⁰ Biblical and catechistic instruction is indispensible to any renewal effort and, in a time of liminality, this is especially crucial.⁶¹ The basic message of the Gospel will continue to fade in postmodernity as culture becomes more pluralistic and less biblically literate. The Gospel will literally be news to people once again.

Seventh, it is also critical for people to experience God through the Holy Spirit. It has often been said that Protestants have ignored the third member of the Trinity because

⁵⁹ Sweet and Crouch, The Church in Emerging Culture, 198.
⁶⁰ Guder, The Continuing Conversion of the Church, 160.
they do not like mystery. Presbyterians like things done “decently and in order,” but the Spirit often refuses to act in an orderly way. The tendency is to stand back and observe worship from an outsider’s safe perspective. This is probably the reason church sanctuaries fill from the back forward. In the back, people can be more observers and less participants. Michael Polanyi writes about the distinction between observation and experience: “Proximity to God is not an observation, for it overwhelms and pervades the worshippers. An observer must be relatively detached from that which he observes, and a religious experience transforms the worshipper.”\(^{62}\) What we need is more “religious experience that transforms.” We have created an institutional world of observers and have thus quenched the Holy Spirit. Renewal requires the dramatic presence and work of the Spirit. Again, this flows out of an understanding of the Trinity, but it also speaks to a rising desire for experiential faith.

**Conclusion**

So far, this paper has explored the move towards postmodernism and the fall of Christendom. These are related but separate realities created a time of transition, liminality for the Church. This paper proposes an approach to church renewal in this time of liminality. It now turns to one possible tool that can help bring renewal in this difficult time of transition, the Great Banquet.

The next chapter will provide a basic background to the Great Banquet. First, a


history will be described from the inception of the Cursillo movement in Spain to the Great Banquet in Peoria, Illinois. Second, the content and process of the Great Banquet will be described. The Great Banquet is an intentional process that follows the Cursillo model. This process is particularly well suited to making disciples in an age of liminality, so a good working knowledge of the process is important.
PART THREE

STRATEGY FOR THE MINISTRY: THE GREAT BANQUET
CHAPTER 5

THE GREAT BANQUET

Northminster Presbyterian Church finds itself in an interesting situation. It is a growing church in a growing suburb of Peoria. Northminster is also a very healthy congregation according to the results of its Natural Church Development survey.\(^1\) The growth of the church and the healthy indicators need to be seen in context, though. The seeds for decline are present in our context. If Northminster clings to a modernist agenda and assumes everything is fine with Christendom, decline is inevitable. On the other hand, if Northminster buys into a postmodern, emergent model of ministry, the church will destroy itself because it will cease to be relevant for much of its congregation. Northminster, like our culture, is in a state of transition, or liminality, even if all the indicators are currently positive. The stress still exists in the church. Tension also exists as to what kind of church this should be and what people the church should be reaching. So far, leadership has relied on our own well-educated and professional congregation to attract similar people. What Northminster needs in this time of liminality is spiritual renewal brought on by the Holy Spirit.

\(^1\) See Appendix E.
The Great Banquet, a seventy-two-hour structured retreat, has a lot of potential as a tool God might use to renew Northminster Presbyterian. The Great Banquet is not a technique to attract new members. The Great Banquet is a retreat that employs many of the principles outlined in the previous chapter and can model these principles for the whole congregation. The most important quality of the Great Banquet is that it begins and ends with the Holy Spirit. This paper will explore how this is so, but it must first present some basic information about the Cursillo model and its history. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief history of the movement and then describe the model itself. The goal is to describe this well enough so that someone who has never been on a weekend might be able to glimpse it. However, this is difficult to do. The only way to truly understand the process described in these pages is to experience it.

The Cursillo Model

The Great Banquet is a Cursillo modeled weekend (pronounced “koor-see-yo”). The term Cursillo means “course,” as in a “short course of Christianity.” The model is a seventy-two-hour experience that leads participants through a process including fifteen “talks” given by ordained clergy and laypeople. Intermixed with these fifteen talks are small-group discussion, worship times, and other events that add to the experience.

The Great Banquet is a Presbyterian form of this Cursillo model.² This chapter provides a historical overview, but, for now, one needs to understand that most of the

² There is also a Presbyterian Cursillo, which is different than the Great Banquet. This will be addressed at the end of the history section.
denominations within Christianity have some form of a Cursillo model. The basic form is the Roman Catholic Cursillo. The Episcopal Church runs the National Episcopal Cursillo. For the Methodists, it is the Walk to Emmaus. For Lutherans it is the *Via De Cristo* (which is Spanish for the “way of Christ”). There is a non-denominational form known as *Tres Dias* (which means “three days”). There is also a form of the ministry used in prisons called the *Kairos Ministry*. All of these movements are essentially the same, but the imagery and the language changes. Jack Pitzer is the principal author of the Great Banquet, and he likes to use the analogy of ice cream. He says all of these movements are just different flavors of ice cream: they might taste different but they are still ice cream.

There are men’s weekends and women’s weekends. Great Banquets weekends are for people of the same gender for a number of reasons. Practically, people are housed dormitory style, and there are not usually enough showers for both genders. More importantly, though, participants are often uncomfortable sharing when people of the opposite sex are present. The struggles people have are often more common to a gender (e.g. struggles with pornography for men) so it is the policy of Cursillo model weekends to separate genders.

In the Great Banquet movement, participants are called “guests,” as in guests to a banquet. In the Cursillo, participants are known as cursillistas. Sometimes a cursillista can also be referred to as a pilgrim, which hearkens back to the pilgrimage preparation roots of Cursillo. The Walk to Emmaus generally refers to participants as pilgrims, which is in keeping with their imagery from Luke 24.
From Cursillo to Great Banquet: A History

The Great Banquet movement is shaped by its history. Cursillo was begun by Roman Catholics in Spain in the 1940s. It was born in a political climate that was hostile to the Roman Catholic Church. Spain in the 1930s had an anti-Christian and anti-Catholic government which encouraged atheism and was also anticlerical in the sense that religious clerics were the focus of much persecution. Culturally, the country was spilt between the left and the right. On the left were the communist and socialist revolutionaries, and on the right were the traditional, conservative forces of the bourgeoisie and the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually, the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 and lasted until 1939.3

There was a group known as the Young Men’s Catholic Action made up of devout Catholics who wanted to show Spain that the Church was alive and well even in the midst of religious persecution. They decided to try and stimulate the faith in young people through a great pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James at Compostela in 1937. The Civil War prevented any pilgrimage, but it eventually took place in 1948. Nearly seventy thousand young men participated.4

The key idea was to prepare these people for the pilgrimage, so they were introduced to courses for that purpose. “The Cursillo movement was born on the Island of Mallorca when Cursillos were given to Pilgrim Scouts and Pilgrim Captains in

---


4
preparation for the Pilgrimage to Compostela, scheduled by Catholic Action for 1948.”

The pilgrims were prepared for their journey through a series of classes or courses that lasted seven days. As the beginning of the Cursillo movement, “the pilgrimage set a tone.”

The idea of pilgrimage is embedded in the Cursillo movement. The word “movement” implies the idea of going to a pilgrimage. In the beginning, the use of pilgrimage began with a literal pilgrimage; whereas, today, the Christian life is often seen as a journey or a pilgrimage, implying a spiritual process. The idea of process and spiritual journey are very much at home in the Cursillo model, and the pilgrimage mystique has always played an important role in the Cursillo movement.

In 1943, a “cursillo” took place and a man named Eduardo Bonnin was a participant. He was profoundly impacted and went on to play a key role in the development of the Cursillo Movement as we know it today. He wanted to open cursillos to everyone, not just young men preparing for literal pilgrimages. Bonnin also thought seven days was too long and so shorted it to three days, covering a weekend. After writing some of the first material to be used, Bonin and six others held the first weekend Cursillo on January 7-10, 1949, in Majorca. There was an intentional effort to reach those “faraway” from the faith through friendships. Relational ministry is a driving

---

5 *Resources: History of Cursillo*.
principle of Cursillo, and it emerged that first official weekend. Participants became
known as “cursillistas” (which means “students”) or “pilgrims.” These cursillistas were
taught relational ministry from the outset. The slogan was, “Make a friend, be a friend,
and bring a friend to Christ.”7 This philosophy continues today in the modern Cursillo
and Great Banquet movements.

At this point, it might be helpful to stop and ask a question: How could something
which was created during the age of modernity really be of any benefit to postmodern
people? If the first Cursillo took place in 1949, does that not suggest it will have all the
influences of modernity and be less than helpful to a church struggling with the transition
from modernity to postmodernity? It is important to consider the cultural context of
Spain in the 1940s. Ross Rohde argues that Spain was never really modern. He bases
this observation on the work of a Spanish sociologist, Francisco Andres Orizo, who
wrote:

And it is not a coincidence that many of these expressions that shatter the
preconceptions of modernity may have come upon the Spanish scene, when we
haven’t even completed the prescribed stages of the process of modernization.
We have become postmodern without having previously practiced modernism.8
Rohde concludes, “So Spain has jumped from a traditional (or premodern) worldview to
a postmodern worldview without having gone through modernity.”9 This means the

7 History of Cursillo.
1, 2007) Quoting Francisco Andres Orizo, Systems de valores en la Espana de los 90 (Madrid: Centro de
Investigaciones Socioloicas, 1996), 55-56.
9 Rohde, "The Gospel and Postmodernism."
The strategy and principles of the Cursillo model are not grounded in Enlightenment principles. The Cursillo model has its roots in a premodern worldview, not a modern worldview. The image of journey and pilgrimage comes from this premodern worldview. One can also see in it the dependence on relational ministry and instruction that assumes a revealed epistemology, not a reasoned epistemology. The content of the talks, for example, never try to reason or rationalize the faith. At first, this might seem like a glaring miscalculation, but, as the weekend proceeds, it becomes clear that it is part of the genius of the weekend. This paper will explore other examples of a premodern worldview that shapes the Cursillo model.

The Cursillo movement made it to America in 1957 when two Spanish pilots were training at Lackland Air Force Base in Waco, Texas. For the first four years, Cursillos were done in Spanish, but, eventually the material was translated into English, and the movement flourished. “The movement spread rapidly with the early centers carrying the Cursillo to nearby dioceses. As of 1981, almost all of the 160 dioceses in the United States had introduced the Cursillo Movement.”

Certain Episcopal dioceses were licensed by the Cursillo Movement to hold Episcopal Cursillos. An important step in bringing the Cursillo model to Protestantism began with the Methodist church in Peoria, Illinois, so Peoria holds an important place in the history of the Protestant Cursillo movement. Robert Wood was an associate pastor of First United Methodist Church in Peoria when he attended his Roman Catholic Cursillo.

---

10 *Cursillos in Christianity*, 8.
in 1974. It was held in the Newman Center on the Bradley University campus in Peoria. He writes, “The participants (called pilgrims) and the team that led us were a mixture of Catholics and Protestants of every stripe.”\textsuperscript{11} The governing body of Cursillo (called the National Secretariat) was uncomfortable with an ecumenical Cursillo, but Protestants came anyway. This became a huge movement within First United Methodist of Peoria. Maxie Dunnam and Danny Morris of The Upper Room came to Peoria and went through a Cursillo. They began the Upper Room Cursillo in Peoria. Through their Methodist influence and Upper Room Ministries, the Methodist involvement in Cursillo grew rapidly. Eventually, a split with the Catholic Cursillo occurred. According to Bob Wood, “In early 1981 the National Secretariat of the Catholic Cursillo in Dallas requested that we no longer use their copyrighted material and the Cursillo name on our ecumenical weekends.”\textsuperscript{12} This led the Board of Discipleship in the Methodist Church and the Upper Room Ministries to create the Walk to Emmaus using the imagery from Luke 24: 13-27. The Walk to Emmaus is a Cursillo model weekend that is expressed in Wesleyan language and thought. For example, the Walk to Emmaus changed the Cursillo talk entitled “Habitual Grace” to “Prevenient Grace.” The Walk to Emmaus was an ecumenical movement, but it was United Methodist. Eventually the Upper Room board that ran the movement began to insist on certain qualifications for spiritual directors. They had to be ordained pastors serving in local congregations. This put a


\textsuperscript{12} Wood, \textit{The Early History}, 21.
great strain in some areas where ordained clergy were not readily available.

In Madisonville, Kentucky, a group of people decided it was time to begin a new movement. The team of people who created the Great Banquet were active in the Walk to Emmaus movement. They believed the Upper Room was making it difficult for the Walk to Emmaus to be truly ecumenical. This team included Jack and Roberta Pitzer, Leighton Thomason, Susan Clayton, Nelda Sumer, Denise Spence, and Dorothy Sabel. The team spent a year and went back to the original Cursillo content and rewrote it using Presbyterian language and the image of the Great Banquet, which comes from the parable Jesus tells in Luke 14:16-23. This team did not just rework the Walk to Emmaus material. However, there was one unique concept to the Walk to Emmaus not in Cursillo, called the “Dying Moments Communion Service” which takes place on the second day of a weekend. The Great Banquet kept this event. The first weekends were held in September of 1991 in Madisonville, Kentucky. The Great Banquet would be Presbyterian in flavor, but it would not be operated from the Presbyterian denomination like Cursillo or Walk to Emmaus were operated from theirs. Instead, Lampstand Ministries was created as the independent governing organization to oversee the Great Banquet. Since no denomination controlled the material, it could be used by any denomination or Christian tradition. The goal was to remain independent of the PC (USA) denomination in order to remain ecumenical.

It should be noted there is an organization known as Presbyterian Cursillo which is operated by the National Secretariat of the Catholic Cursillo. This was an attempt to open the Cursillo movement to Presbyterians. There are problems within this movement,
including the use of Roman Catholic language, communion rules, and qualifications for spiritual directors. The purpose of this paper is not to compare and contrast these two versions of the Cursillo model, but to describe the Great Banquet as a tool for renewal in a time of transition.

Preparing for a Great Banquet (Precursillo)

The Great Banquet is really made up of three distinct stages. First, there is the time of preparation before the weekend. In the Roman Catholic Cursillo Movement, this is called Precursillo. The second stage is the three-day weekend itself. The third stage is Postcursillo, or what is metaphorically referred to as the “fourth day.” In general, the fourth day represents the rest of a person’s life after their Great Banquet weekend. To be more specific, the fourth day is really about continuing on as a disciple of Christ with respect to the Great Banquet community and reunion groups. All three stages must function well if the movement is to be successful.

The goal of the precursillo stage is to select and establish a Great Banquet team that will put on a weekend. Team is an important concept in the Great Banquet movement because it requires a great deal of coordinated work to host a weekend. There is one requirement of all team members and that is that they have to be part of the “Fourth Day Community.” In other words, team members must first attend a Cursillo model weekend. The Great Banquet is open to people who have attended any Cursillo model weekend that is faithful to the original design. Some caution will be exercised in
assigning people roles if they have not attended a Great Banquet because of the uniqueness of the Great Banquet. However, not attending the Great Banquet (versus another Cursillo model weekend) does not preclude someone from service.

The process begins with the community spiritual director. Every Great Banquet community has a community spiritual director. This is often a pastor who has provided some leadership to the movement. Within some movements like Cursillo, this role is described as a rector or a director. Essentially, though, there is a person who coordinates and provides for a specific movement in a specific place.

The community spiritual director will select the head spiritual director and the lay director for a weekend. The role of the head spiritual director is to provide spiritual leadership by serving as a guide to theological understanding. The exact roles of the head spiritual director are spelled out in Appendix F. There is a head spiritual director, but there will also be a number of assistant spiritual directors. Their role is to provide spiritual leadership and direction as well. During the weekend spiritual directors will provide the meditations during chapel services, and they will give the “grace” talks (more on this below). “The intention of spiritual direction is to engage an individual in conversation about God’s presence and calling in his or her life.” Spiritual directors are present for both team members and the guests. During the precursillo stage, they

---

13 See Appendix F for a full list of team member roles.
focus on the spiritual development and equipping of team members.

In the Cursillo and Walk to Emmaus movement, spiritual directors must be ordained clergy. In the Walk to Emmaus movement, this means a person must have completed a Master of Divinity degree and the process of ordination. People in training for ordained ministry are not allowed to serve as spiritual directors. Furthermore, in the Emmaus movement, clergy must be serving in local congregations to be considered for spiritual director roles. The qualifications of spiritual directors in the Great Banquet are more flexible. While every effort is made to include ordained clergy, especially for the head spiritual director, there is no standing rule that a spiritual director must be an ordained minister. This is a significant change from all other Cursillo model movements. In the Great Banquet, the required quality for a spiritual director is spiritual maturity. All of the weekends held at Northminster have included (and will continue to include) non-ordained spiritual directors.

Each weekend also has a lay director coordinating the weekend. The lay director plays a key role in the selection and recruiting of team members, as well coordinating and overseeing team meetings and the weekend itself. They make sure that all the team members have what they need to perform their roles and that the schedule is kept. Assistant lay directors help the lay director coordinate. On the weekend, they are the only people who wear watches. They keep the schedule and help shepherd people from one event to the next.

16 Gray, Spiritual Directors, 12.
The critical work of the Great Banquet takes place in discussion around tables. Every table at a Great Banquet will have at least two members of the team present, a table leader and an assistant table leader. Generally speaking, a table leader is responsible for the discussions that take place during the weekend. This includes fostering good group dynamics and listening to guests. Generally speaking, assistant table leaders will give talks, and sometimes table leaders will do this as well.

The team also requires a dedicated kitchen crew who plan, prepare, and serve meals. This is done onsite and requires a tremendous amount of work. A Great Banquet team also includes people who perform “agape” functions. “Agape” comes from the Greek word for love and is an important word in the Great Banquet lexicon. Agape is an expression of love that can take many forms, including cards and letters, small gifts, acts of service. These people meet the needs and desires of the guests. They do anything possible to make guests comfortable and relaxed so as to focus on the proceedings of the weekend. They distribute little gifts and letters, they stock the snack table, run to the store if someone needs something, and perform a lot of the behind-the-scenes work necessary for a successful weekend.

Finally, there is a music person who is responsible for all of the singing during the weekend. There are times of singing before every talk, in addition to other musical pieces that are part of the Cursillo tradition. For example, there is a song called “De Colores” (Spanish for “the colors”) that is sung before every meal as well as songs for grace. The music person begins by teaching the songs to the team during the precursillo stage.
A Great Banquet team includes twenty-six people. These people will sacrifice a lot of time and energy to make a weekend successful. They will also become a team as they work together and pray for one another.

The time leading up to a Great Banquet (precursillo) is a time of preparation. Preparation for the team takes place primarily through eight team meetings. Team meetings include a number of things, but, essentially, there is a time of worship and a time to preview talks. Before every team meeting, the Great Banquet community (including those not serving on the team) gather for a worship service. This includes singing, a message or sermon, and communion using a Great Banquet liturgy. Early on, the spiritual director will provide an orientation session for people who have never served on a team before. This orientation explains the basic process of the Great Banquet weekend and the strategy used.

The main purpose of the team meeting is for speakers to preview the talks. Everyone who is going to give a talk on the weekend (including clergy) must rehearse and preview that talk before the team. Each speaker is given an outline for the talk he or she has been asked to give. This outline includes basic points that must be included, but it is not a draft text. This allows each speaker the opportunity to shape the talk in his or her own way. The outlines always ask for speakers to share their story and an example from their own life. An example of an actual outline used by the Great Banquet (Talk #6 – Truth through Study) is included as Appendix H. The outlines ensure two things.

17 See Appendix G.
First, there must be adherence to the content. Every talk is part of a designed process that takes place over the entire weekend. Every talk adds to the whole experience, and so faithfulness to the basic content is imperative. Second, it is vitally important that people be encouraged to share a part of their lives in their talk. The inclusion of their “story” is by design and a powerful element of the Great Banquet experience.

Every talk begins with the unison reading of the Prayer to the Holy Spirit, a prayer that is original to the Cursillo movement. “The ‘Prayer to the Holy spirit’ is a centuries-old prayer paraphrase of Psalm 104:30, which celebrates God’s sovereignty over humanity and the Spirit’s recreative work in this world.” Every Cursillo model movement uses the Prayer to the Holy Spirit. This is part of the Cursillo tradition and a key element in the ministry. The prayer reads:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

After a team member rehearses his or her talk, the person leaves the room and the team discusses the talk. When the person comes back into the room, he or she is given feedback. The team checks for a number of things. First, the basic points of the outline must be covered. Second, the team checks the language to make sure people are saying what they mean. They also check for sensitivity against things like sexism, racism, and negative language directed at people or churches. Third, teams will always be listening
for personal reflection. What does the content of the talk have to do with the speaker’s life? What difference does it make for that person? Speakers must “include something of themselves” in their talks. Fourth, speakers are always checked for their time and clarity. If it is too long or too short they are asked to adjust. If something is unclear they are asked to clarify.

Generally two talks are previewed each team meeting. There are eight team meetings which provides for fifteen previews and an orientation session given by the spiritual director. When the team meeting ends, the team gathers in a circle and shares joys and concerns. This is incredibly important in bonding a team together. Team members share their lives, which brings them together. Sometimes team members are really struggling, and the team will rally around those persons and minister to them in a profound way. The team meeting is closed with prayer.

Another important aspect of the preparation stage is the sponsorship of guests for the upcoming Great Banquet weekend. It is an important feature of Cursillo model weekends that every participant have a sponsor. A sponsor begins by inviting someone to a Banquet. Usually the sponsor has a relationship with that person already. No one “signs up” or just comes to a Great Banquet. Sponsorship works out of a relational basis for the ministry. The role of the sponsor is to remove all the distractions and concerns that might interfere with the guest’s getting the most out of the Banquet experience. For example, a sponsor might provide meals for a family, or take care of children, or mow a

---

lawn for a guest while that person is away. A sponsor should drive the guest to and from the Banquet. If the sponsor is not part of the team for that weekend, there are other opportunities to support the guest throughout the weekend, including the sponsors’ hour, the Candlelight Service, and the Closing Service on Sunday evening. Perhaps the greatest role of the sponsor is prayer support for his or her guest. Sponsors are called to pray for their guests throughout the weekend. So, in preparation for a Great Banquet, the community looks to sponsor people.
The Great Banquet Weekend

The Great Banquet weekend runs from 7:00 P.M. Thursday evening until Sunday evening around 7:00 P.M. Sponsors bring their guests for registration where each guest will receive a name badge and a worship booklet which they are asked to keep with them at all times. “Sponsors’ hour” takes place in the Sanctuary. The guests and team members are called by name and leave for the conference room where they will spend the majority of the next three days. After all the guests and team members leave, the sponsors will remain behind for a time of prayer. At the end of the weekend, at a Cross Service on Sunday afternoon, each guest will receive a pendant necklace with a Great Banquet logo. Each one of the pendants represents a guest. The pendants are held by someone, usually the sponsor, the guest is prayed for by name, and then the pendant is hung on a large wooden cross. This cross will be hidden until the Cross Service on Sunday.

The Great Banquet weekend is really a process. Thursday evening prepares the guest for the three-day weekend. Most of the guests will be nervous and uncomfortable at the prospect of spending three whole days at a spiritual “retreat” sleeping dormitory style in a church. They often come guarded and tense. While the team tries to make everyone comfortable, this will take longer for some people than others. Thursday evening, the lay director will give an introduction to the weekend. During this introduction the lay director will do three important things. First, he or she will encourage everyone to participate and engage the process wholeheartedly. Guests are active participants and not passive receivers on the weekend.
Second, the lay director will ask everyone to remove their watches and put their cell phones away for the duration of the weekend. This is critically important and surprisingly difficult. The Great Banquet is a process, and nothing derails the process more than watching the clock. In order to be fully engaged, people must not be in position to measure thing chronologically. Assistant lay directors will wear watches and keep the group on time and make sure people get medicine and other needs that require timing. Third, at the end of the introduction, the lay director will call everyone to a time of silence that lasts for the rest of Thursday evening. This is also a critical part of the process. A Cursillo manual explains: “The silence of the Retreat helps the participants to take hold of themselves, to go inward, to encounter themselves, discovering that the rush of daily activities often impeded their finding themselves and hearing God’s voice”\(^{19}\) We Americans live in a message soaked, media driven culture. We receive thousands of messages every day. Asking people to be silent prepares the soul for the work of the Holy Spirit. A period of silence is a time to decompress in anticipation of messages that will be given during the weekend.

After the call to silence is given, the guests and team members move to the Sanctuary for a meditation given by the head spiritual director. There will be a number of meditations throughout the weekend, all given by spiritual directors. Each of the meditations is designed to support the basic thrust of the day. In this case, the meditation on Thursday night is called “Be Still and Know That I Am God,” which is based on

\(^{19}\) Gerald Hughes, *The Cursillo Movement's New Leaders' Manual in English* (Dallas: Office of
Psalm 46:10. All of the meditations on the weekend are already written and provided to the spiritual directors. Like the talks on the weekend, there are times for personal reflections and sharing of stories, but the content is laid out in advance. The essence of the Thursday meditation “Be Still” is that our lives are filled with “white noise” in our society that prevents us from hearing the Word of God. The Great Banquet attempts to eliminate the “white noise” so that a guest can hear the voice of God.

The lay director will then close the chapel time with prayers taken from the worship book handed out to every guest. The prayers are liturgical and responsive. Every chapel time will follow a similar pattern where lay directors lead the prayers and liturgy, and spiritual directors will give the meditations.

The heart of the Great Banquet takes place in the conference room where fifteen talks are given by team members, followed by group discussion at each of the tables. On Friday morning, the guests are assigned tables. A lot of thought goes into the table assignments. The goal is to diversify people at each table. They should not know each other very well so that they can engage in the process of community building. If a team member is a sponsor, he or she will not be at a table with the person sponsored. Friends are not generally assigned the same table. This may seem awkward for a ministry that purports to be relational by design, but the emphasis is on the process. Each table will stay together for the whole weekend, and, as such, they will become their own little community. They will share their lives and pray for each other. They may even disagree.

---

the National Secretariat, 1981), 28.
and get on each others’ nerves, but, by the end of the weekend, they will be a close group. For some, it will be the only taste of community they have ever experienced.

Each table will have two team members: the table leader and the assistant table leader. The table leader will always keep his back to each speaker, but the rest of the table will rotate with every new speaker. This allows the guests the best view of the speaker but also allows the table leader to observe the guests at his or her table. Every time a speaker gives a talk, the table will discuss that talk. The table leader is to keep people engaged without letting someone dominate. They will process that talk together. First, they will discuss it and then summarize the main points by making a poster of the talk, or they can write a skit or a song. Adults learn by discussing and doing. In this way, the basic points of the outline are reinforced, but this is done in community. At the end of the day, they will have a chance to share their posters or skits with everyone. This is called the “poster party” because it is usually fun and humorous. Thus, guests encounter the content of every talk in three ways. First, they hear the talk originally given. Second, they discuss the talk after the speaker finishes and do some activity to summarize. Third, at the end of the day on Friday and Saturday (this does not happen on Sunday), there is the “poster party” where every group presents a summary through their poster, skit, or song.

Depending upon the number of tables, the guests will hear the summary of each talk at least a few times. Consequently, the basic content of each talk is reinforced a number of times.

The fifteen talks are central to the Cursillo model in general, and the Great Banquet in specific. The basic flow and design of the talks has not changed since the
earliest Cursillos. In fact, the drafters of the Great Banquet went back to the original Cursillo talks in order to be good stewards of the Cursillo tradition. The flow of the talks is by design. The design is a process of thought and experience that brings the guest along. The guests are not aware of this as it happens, but it is there. Understanding the Great Banquet requires an explanation of the process.

There are fifteen talks over three days, which means five talks per day. Appendix I lists these talks in order and compares titles with Cursillo and Walk to Emmaus. Each day of the Banquet has a focus that leads people through a process. The first day is “know yourself.” The Second day is “know Jesus.” The third day is “know the world.” There is a theological progression from self knowledge and humanity’s need for God’s grace, to knowing Jesus who represents God’s offer of grace. On the last day, guests are prepared to go back into the world as fully committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

The first phase of the weekend is the preparation that takes place Thursday evening. Friday represents the second phase of the Great Banquet process. Cursillo refers to this as “proclamation” where the five talks of the day are “intended to present what is fundamental for being a Christian.”20 The Great Banquet describes this day as “know yourself.” All of the talks on this day encourage the guests to think about themselves and where they are in relationship with God. Table 1 below outlines the process for Friday.

Table 1 – First Day of Great Banquet
The first talk is called “Discovering Priorities.” Guests are encouraged to reflect on three questions: first, what do you think about? second, how do you spend your money? and, third, what do you do with your time? When they have reflected on these questions, the point is made that God may have different priorities. At the end of the weekend, these questions are raised again in the last talk called “Establishing Priorities.” However, in the last talk, they are modified to ask, “What are God’s priorities?” The assumption behind the inclusion of these questions between talk #1 and talk #15 is that the guests will have heard enough to know something of God’s priorities.

The other four talks on Friday also encourage the guests to think about themselves. “God’s gift of grace” explores the theological idea, but the guests are asked to consider where they are in relationship to God’s grace. This is the first of five “grace talks” given on the weekend. “Grace talks” are generally given by spiritual directors. The third talk is “The Ministry of all Believers,” which introduces the idea of service. The Cursillo focuses on “Laypersons in the Church” because, being Roman Catholic, it
assumes the priesthood. There remains a divide between clergy and laity in the Church and Great Banquet, but the point here is that each guest is asked to consider his or her ministry (or lack thereof). The guests are asked to “stand in the gap” for someone else.

It is interesting to point out here that the Great Banquet assumes some level of commitment and religious knowledge on the part of the guest. This is true of all the talks. One might wonder if that really is such a good starting point. After all, more and more people are unchurched and biblically illiterate. A modernist perspective would be to wipe the slate clean and work from the ground up in educating guests about the Church and their possible role in it. The modernist idea would be to educate people and then let them make a decision for themselves. The Great Banquet does not do this because the roots of this philosophy were not created during modernism. It does not follow the Enlightenment’s idea that one must know before believing. Instead of following this principle of the Enlightenment, it assumes a certain amount of knowledge and desire on behalf of each guest.

The two remaining talks on Friday also encourage the guests to “know themselves.” “Our Response to Grace” asks them to consider the response they have made in the past or should make. “The Way of Relationship” asks them to contemplate their relationships with others and their relationship with Jesus Christ.

The chapel meditations are part of the process as they reinforce the basic focus for each day. Friday is “know yourself” and the morning mediation is on the Prodigal Son from Luke 15:11-32. The meditation explains the parable and then asks guests
where they are in it. The point is that “all of us are somewhere in this story.”

Guests think about themselves in identifying which character of the parable they relate to.

On Saturday, the focus shifts from “know yourself” to “know Jesus.” Table 2 outlines the basic ingredients of Saturday. The day begins with a chapel service and a meditation that directs the guests’ attention to the person of Jesus. The title of the meditation is “Pictures of Jesus,” and it takes five stories from the Gospels to present pictures of Jesus. Guests are asked to imagine themselves in each of the stories.

All of the talks center on the theme of “knowing Jesus.” The first talk, “Truth through Study,” makes the basic point that we get to know Jesus through the study of Scripture and Christian material. A copy of this outline is included as an example. See Appendix H.

---

**Table 2 – Second Day of Great Banquet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Title/ Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00AM</td>
<td>Meditation #2</td>
<td>“Pictures of Jesus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:15AM</td>
<td>Talk #6</td>
<td>“Truth Through Study”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00AM</td>
<td>Talk #7</td>
<td>“Sacramental Grace”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45</td>
<td>Chapel</td>
<td>“Dying Moments Communion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00PM</td>
<td>Talk #8</td>
<td>“Life of Christian Action”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00PM</td>
<td>Talk #9</td>
<td>“Obstacles to Grace”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00PM</td>
<td>Talk #10</td>
<td>“Disciples”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30PM</td>
<td>Poster Party</td>
<td>Group Summaries of Talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00PM</td>
<td>Chapel</td>
<td>Candlelight Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


22 A copy of this outline is included as an example. See Appendix H.
but the talks come alive with the speaker sharing his or her testimony and witness.

The “Sacramental Grace” talk is usually given by the head spiritual director, who is generally an ordained pastor. The assumption is that “Sacramental Grace” is the most “theological” of all the talks and requires someone with theological training. In the original Cursillo, this talk was centered around a discussion of the seven sacraments recognized in the Roman Catholic Church. However, Protestants only recognize communion and baptism as sacraments. Walk to Emmaus (Methodist) and the Great Banquet (Presbyterian) adapted this talk by saying that all churches basically experience the other five “sacraments” even though they are not called sacraments. For example, Protestants still practice confirmation and perform weddings. Naturally, baptism and communion receive the most attention.

When this talk ends, the whole group is led to sanctuary for a unique experience called the “Dying Moments Communion” service. This originated, not with Cursillo, but with Walk to Emmaus, and the Great Banquet includes this service. “Dying Moments” are those times in our lives when we experience the feeling or reality of death. A “dying moment” is an experience of loss. The phrase is explained in the “Sacramental Grace” talk before the “Dying Moments Communion” service. The sacrament of communion represents Jesus’ “dying moment.” During the “Dying Moments Communion” service, people come to the communion table, take a piece of bread, hold it up, and declare a “dying moment” in their lives. The piece of bread comes to represent that “dying moment.” They lay the piece of bread back on a plate in an act of offering it to God. They then return to their seats. The whole group will come up again and receive
communion intinction style. When a guest eats the bread, he or she is consuming the “dying moment” of someone else. In this way, guests symbolically carry each other’s burdens in a profound way. This is an incredibly powerful experience for many people. People name things that have power over them and then release them spiritually. It is also a very real experience of community. Again, this is something better experienced that explained, but it should be pointed out that the “Dying Moments Communion” service is powerful because the process prepares people for it. By now, guests have heard seven talks in which team members share their own struggles, their own dying moments. Most of those talks have been centered on the theme of “know yourself.” Then they encounter Jesus in the “know Jesus” phrase. They have also become accustomed, and, it is to be hoped, comfortable with the chapel experiences. By this time, they are not concerned about what is going on in chapel, so they can concentrate on the event itself. The “Dying Moments Communion” service would not be nearly as powerful if it were done earlier in the weekend.

There is another experience on Saturday that is just as profound, if not more so. It is called the “Candlelight Service.” While the guests are summarizing their talks Saturday evening, other members of the Fourth-Day Community gather for worship in the Sanctuary. They worship together (including word and sacrament) and pray for all of the guests and team by name. The lights are dimmed and everyone holds a candle. They sing a song, and guests are brought into the candlelit sanctuary and are received with hugs and other appropriate gestures of support and encouragement. The guests process to the front of the sanctuary where the head spiritual director explains what these people
have been doing in worship and prayer. The head spiritual director tells the guests that these people have come from far and wide to bring them “the light of the World,” at which the community members raise their candles. With candles raised, the community processes out. The guests and team sing the same song back to them as they leave. The guests are then left in the sanctuary for a time of prayer and reflection. They are encouraged to come to the front and kneel if they are able and to pray with one another. Spiritual directors remain in the room to offer “spiritual listening” as they are able. This is probably one of the most moving and profound moments in the weekend. People will often remember the Candlelight Service as one of the highlights of the whole experience.

Again, it is the process that prepares people for this event spiritually. They have thought long and hard about who they are and who Jesus Christ is. They have experienced community, some maybe for the first time in their lives, and then that experience is broadened for the first time to include the wider Fourth-Day community. Something as simple as a dark room with people holding candles can only have the impact it does if people are prepared for it. Doing a Candlelight Service on Thursday night would be meaningless because people are not prepared for it.
On Sunday, the focus shifts to “know the world.” See Table 3 for an overview of the events that take place on day 3. On Sunday, the idea of practical discipleship is introduced. In Roman Catholic Cursillo language, day two is called “conversion” and day three is called “insertion.”

Table 3 – Third Day of Great Banquet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Title/Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30AM</td>
<td>Meditation #3</td>
<td>“The Human Qualities of Jesus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:50AM</td>
<td>Talk #11</td>
<td>“Changing Our Environment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00AM</td>
<td>Talk #12</td>
<td>“A Life of Grace”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00AM</td>
<td>Talk #13</td>
<td>“The Body of Christ”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30PM</td>
<td>Talk #14</td>
<td>“Staying Power”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30PM</td>
<td>Talk #15</td>
<td>“Establishing Priorities”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30PM</td>
<td>Agape Letters</td>
<td>Guests/Team receive agape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:14PM</td>
<td>Cross Service</td>
<td>Guests receive crosses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00PM</td>
<td>Closing Service</td>
<td>Guests share their experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The idea is “insertion” back into the world as a committed disciple. The morning meditation, “The Human Qualities of Jesus,” focuses on the qualities of Jesus and how he operated in the world. The first talk, “Changing our Environments,” helps the guests begin to think about life beyond their Great Banquet. This talk speaks about how people live their lives and what things need to change. It also introduces the idea of ministry as everyone’s responsibility. “A Life of Grace” helps the guests see how to translate what they believe into how they live. Sanctification is the theological theme of this talk. The third talk is the “Body of Christ,” which focuses on Christian community and the Church. The Church is described organically as the body of

---

Christ, which is the change agent in the world. This leads to the next talk, which is called “Staying Power.” Here the point is that people will only continue as practicing disciples if they are connected to other power. “Staying power” emphasizes perseverance through relational accountability. It is here the idea of reunion groups is introduced. More will be said in the next section about reunion groups, but they are essentially weekly groups of people who have been through a Great Banquet or other Cursillo model weekend. The last talk of the weekend is “Establishing Priorities.” There the three questions from Talk #1 are reintroduced: what do you think about? how do you spend your money? and what do you do with your time? By now, the assumption is that people realize they need to change their priorities to be disciples of Christ. This talk emphasizes that the mission of the Great Banquet is “to know Jesus as Lord and Savior and to make Him known.”

After the last talk, the guests receive another act of agape. They receive letters and cards of encouragement and support from family, friends, coworkers, and Great Banquet team members. This, too, adds to the “know the world” theme in that it offers a sort of reality check for guests. The letters emphasize the love and goodwill others have for the guests. By this time, emotions are pretty raw, and reading the agape letters is an emotional experience for most people. Letters from spouses and family have an incredible impact on guests. This is especially true when people are unaware of the letters. Many guests will have written letters for others and know they will receive them at some point. It still has a powerful impact because they are prepared through the process. Contacting family and friends to write letters is part of the responsibilities of the sponsor.
After the letters are read, the guests are asked to consider two questions: “What has the Great Banquet meant to me?” and “What am I going to do about it?” They are not asked to talk about God, Christianity, or the Great Banquet in absolute, overarching propositions. They are asked to reflect on their experience and their resolutions. They will have the opportunity to share these thoughts in the closing service.

After reading their *agape* letters, the guests go to a cross service where they will receive a cross pendant from the lay director. The crosses have the inscription “Christ has chosen you” on them. When they receive the cross, the lay director says, “Christ has chosen you.” The response of the guest (if he or she feels led) is, “And I have chosen Christ.” The cross pendant is a symbol of the fact that they are now part of the Fourth-Day Community.

From there they will go into the sanctuary for the closing ceremony. People from the larger Fourth-Day Community are encouraged to come and be a part of the celebration. Guests are provided an opportunity to share their thoughts on the two questions raised earlier: “What has the Great Banquet meant to me?” and “What am I going to do about it?” This, too, can be an emotional time for many people. The service usually lasts a couple of hours because people often have a lot to share by this time. When the Closing Service is complete, the sponsors either take their guests home or provide transportation.

There is one final thing that should be said about the weekend itself. Since Cursillo was initially formed in Spain, there are a lot of Spanish phrases and terms (“Cursillo” itself being one). For example, before every meal on the weekend the guests
sing “De Colores” (Spanish for “the Colors”) which was written by Spanish cursillistas in the early days. When a speaker finishes a talk, he or she does so by saying, “De Colores.” Correspondence in the Fourth Day Community always ends with “De Colores.” “De Colores” refers to the colors of a rooster’s tail and how that reminded those first pilgrims about the hues of God’s grace. Consequently, the rooster is the universal symbol for Cursillo model weekends and has been retained in the Great Banquet. Every table during the weekend will have a rooster on it. Guests also sing grace before and after each meal. All of this shared language provides continuity with the past and the larger Cursillo model movement. The Great Banquet is not just a program in a church but part of a larger movement. Shared language also helps a community form. People who have been to a weekend know about the terminology because they have shared similar experiences. The language helps bond the community.

**After the Great Banquet Weekend (Postcursillo)**

The Great Banquet is three days long, and so the rest of guest’s life is referred to as the “Fourth Day.” The Roman Catholic Cursillo also uses the term “ultreya” (meaning “to the end”) to refer to Postcursillo. Reunion Groups are also called “Fourth-Day Groups” and they are a critical component to the Great Banquet movement. These small follow-up groups help guests translate and integrate the message conveyed at the Great Banquet into their daily lives. Follow-up is critically important to the ongoing spiritual formation of disciples. It is a goal of the Great Banquet to get every guest into a Reunion Group following the weekend experiences. There is an information meeting scheduled
after the weekend that is announced during Talk #14 “Staying Power.” At this information meeting, Fourth-Day groups are explained in more detail and then people are organized into groups. Groups are same gender for the same reason the Great Banquets are same gender.

It works best to keep groups small, between three and six people. With more than six people, the group will not have time to adequately share. Additionally, larger groups hinder honest sharing and openness. The goal of groups is to encourage people in their discipleship. That requires honesty and accountability. It is a continuation of the community experienced during the weekend. “If Christianity is not lived in community, it is not lived.”

Discipleship is a function of community and does not work with isolated, independent, individualism. Reunion Groups help guests live out the commitments they made during the weekend.

Every Reunion Group begins with the Prayer to the Holy Spirit. The group then decides how to spend the rest of their time. There is an order provided for Reunion Groups in the worship books they receive when they register for the weekend. Some groups follow this. Most groups will choose to study something together, often reading a Christian book. This is extremely common, probably because people today are often uninformed on Christian living and the Bible.

Members of the Fourth Day Community are also eligible to serve on Great

---

25 See Appendix J for the suggest order of a Reunion Group.
Banquet teams. People who have not been through a weekend are not allowed to serve. People find serving on a team very rewarding. For some, it can be just as powerful as being a guest, even if it is different. There are far more people willing to serve than there are openings, and some people will become very disappointed if they are not asked to serve on a team.

Reunion Groups and serving on a Great Banquet team are the two most important ways to remain connected after the weekend. However, there are other things people can do. First, they can sponsor future guests. The Great Banquet is self-perpetuating because people want their friends, family, coworkers, and others to have the same kind of powerful weekend they experienced. Second, they can help provide *agape*, such as treats and other small, encouraging tokens guests receive throughout their weekend. Third, they can come help serve a meal. Every meal requires a number of servers outside the kitchen team, and people sign up in advance to help. Finally, the Fourth-Day Community is encouraged to attend the “Candlelight Service” service on Saturday night and the Closing Service on Sunday evening. These are important events for the guests and affirming joyous occasions for those attending. There are lots of opportunities to stay connected and continue to grow as disciples.

**Conclusion**

The Great Banquet is more than a weekend experience. There is a three-month period of planning and preparation that takes place before the weekend (Precursillo).
There is also a lifetime of possibility for nurture and mission after the weekend (Postcursillo). The Great Banquet has its roots in the Cursillo movement, which began as training for pilgrims. The imagery is more metaphorical today, but the Great Banquet helps people continue on in their journey of faith. The Great Banquet is a movement more than it is a program.

The next chapter describes the plan and process of implementing the Great Banquet movement at Northminster Presbyterian Church. Years of preparation led up to the first weekends which took place in 2007. Those weekends have been evaluated by the team members, and the lessons learned have been documented. Chapter 6 will also evaluate the Great Banquet movement as a means to renewal in our changing culture. Northminster Presbyterian and Peoria, Illinois, are products of this changing culture. How does the Great Banquet address the major issues raised by postmodernity?
CHAPTER 6

THE GREAT BANQUET AS A RENEWAL TOOL

The driving contention of this paper is that Western culture is transitioning from modernity to postmodernity. The West is also transitioning to a post-Christendom society. In the case of the United States, “functional Christendom” no longer dominates the ecclesiastical landscape. Mainline churches were established during modernity and were created to reach that world. Since that world is changing dramatically, mainline churches now struggle to be relevant and effective. Since culture is changing, the Church must also change; however, this is a process and not something done overnight. If the transition is a process, there is a continuum between modernity and postmodernity, and people exist all along this continuum. There will be those who remain thoroughly entrenched in a rational, foundationalist worldview while there will also be those who are thoroughly relativistic and postmodern. Though it is impossible to quantify, most people probably share certain assumptions and presuppositions of both modernity and postmodernity. For example, they may cling to a certain kind of foundationalism but also buy into a soft, postmodernist understanding of perspectivalism. In other words, they may have a black and white opinion but understand why someone else is less black and white.
The people who are in transition themselves are the mission field of Northminster Presbyterian Church. Northminster is in the process of moving out of modernity, and it would be senseless to try and remain behind to minister to hard modernists. Churches that do this will eventually die because they will eventually become irrelevant. On the other hand, as this paper has argued, Northminster cannot become a postmodern or emergent church. Such a radical shift would also render the church irrelevant. The best approach is to become “postmodern sensitive.” This will allow Northminster to reach people in a transitioning culture.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the Great Banquet as a tool for renewal in this transitioning culture. This means the Great Banquet must be “postmodern sensitive,” having the ability to reach moderns, postmoderns, and people in between. It has been posited in this paper that the Great Banquet does possess a unique ability to reach people all along the continuum between modernity and postmodernity. The Great Banquet is a process approach to disciple making and spiritual formation that can reach people with radically different views of the world.

**The Mission of Northminster and the Great Banquet**

The mission statement of Northminster Presbyterian was provided in chapter 1:

The Great Purpose Christ has given us is expressed in the Great Commandment, to love God wholeheartedly while loving neighbors as ourselves, and in the Great Commission, to reach out and make disciples.

The ultimate mission of Northminster is to make disciples. As was shown in chapter 4, this mission statement grows out of Matthew 28: 18-20. The picture of
disciple making in the New Testament is one of a process. In Chapter 4, a disciple was defined as one who has responded to God’s grace and offer of salvation and thus commits himself or herself to a life-long process of following Jesus. As discipleship is a process, churches that make disciples must be process based. Conversion is only one point in the process of making disciples, albeit a very important point. However, conversion is not a one-time event but a life-time process. Church renewal is a byproduct of process-based disciple making. The premise here is that churches will be renewed as they engage in the process of disciple making.

Northminster clearly seeks to make disciples. In 2004 a long range planning report was published which emphasized the desire to make disciples. This report recommended bringing the Great Banquet to Northminster. The Great Banquet was not seen as the only adult discipleship tool but as one tool among many. The eventual goal was to have a self-sustaining and self-perpetuating Great Banquet community at Northminster Presbyterian. No date was target date was established.

**Implementing the Great Banquet at Northminster**

The decision to bring the Great Banquet to Northminster was made when the Session agreed to the long range planning report that made that recommendation. The first step in implementation was to acquaint the church with the ministry. I had been to a Great Banquet and had served on a couple of teams. We had a number of people who had been to Walk to Emmaus and Cursillo. We also had a couple of team members who
had served on Cursillo teams. Essentially, we had a very small amount of exposure to the Cursillo model weekends.

Therefore, as the senior pastor of Northminster, I began by asking the staff to attend a Great Banquet weekend. Being located in Peoria was an advantage with Cursillo and Walk to Emmaus having strong roots here, but the Peoria Great Banquet movement needed people to experience the Great Banquet. Fortunately, three of the people who worked on the team to write the Great Banquet had moved to Decatur, Illinois. Rev. Jack Pitzer was the head of the team and the lead author of the Great Banquet. He is the founder and president of Lampstand Ministries, the controlling board of the Great Banquet. He became the pastor of a Woodland Chapel Presbyterian Church in Decatur. Woodland Chapel became the home of the Lost Bridge Great Banquet Community. For Northminster, this meant that we had a great resource just a couple hours from Peoria.

In March 2005, Mike Shirey, the Associate Pastor at Northminster, went to his Great Banquet in Decatur. Eventually, all twelve of the church staff attended a Great Banquet, most in Decatur. As the senior pastor, I have initiated a requirement that all staff of the church must attend a Great Banquet or a Cursillo model weekend. The Great Banquet is a large endeavor and all of the staff will be involved to some degree. They cannot effectively support the effort if they have not experienced it.

Northminster also began to send church members to Decatur in 2005. The strategy was to send enough people to the Lost Bridge Great Banquet that Northminster could develop a pool of people to draw from when the time came to host our own
Banquets. This would require a fairly large number of people, so, for the next couple of years, the church continued to send people to Great Banquets in Decatur. Usually, there were groups going to both fall and spring Banquets.

Northminster also established a Great Banquet Ministry Team that would oversee the movement. That ministry team chose the name “Peoria Great Banquet.” We rejected the name “Northminster Great Banquet” because the movement was intended to be ecumenical. While team members mostly come from Northminster, the directors intentionally include people from other churches.

The Great Banquet Ministry Team eventually made the decision to schedule our first weekends. The Peoria Great Banquet Men’s #1 weekend was scheduled for April 19-22, 2007. The Peoria Great Banquet Women’s #2 weekend was scheduled for April 26-29, 2007. It is a Cursillo tradition to number weekends as they occur. In Peoria, the Roman Catholic Cursillo is now numbered over 1000. The first Peoria Great Banquet weekends took place with a great deal of assistance from the Lost Bridge Great Banquet Community. Peoria was viewed as a start-up community. Experienced people from the Great Banquet community in Decatur came to Peoria and showed us how to host a weekend. The spiritual director and lay director positions on the team were held by Decatur people for those first two weekends. The assistant directors were a mix of Decatur people and Northminster people. The idea was to give people from the Peoria community experience in these roles in anticipation of the next Great Banquet weekends. The first Great Banquet teams were composed of half Peoria people and half Decatur people. A team was twenty-six people, and exactly thirteen came from each community.
I am the Senior Pastor of Northminster, but I also am the initial catalyst for bring the Banquet to Peoria. By common agreement, I became the community spiritual director. I basically chose the first team members in conversation with the lay directors. People were chosen if we thought they would help perpetuate the movement in some way.

The guests were generally from the church, but not exclusively. People sponsored friends and relatives. The maximum number of guests on a weekend is thirty-six. This is not a function of space but a function of community size. Experience has shown that too many guests hinder the feel of connectedness and stifle open sharing. Thirty-six guests is the optimal number because tables are set at eight with six guests and two team members. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these tables form a small community in and of themselves. They will stay together for the entire weekend. The Men’s Great Banquet #1 had twenty guests for a total of forty-six people on the weekend. The Women’s Great Banquet #2 had thirty guests for a total of fifty-six on the weekend.

The next weekends (Men’s #3 and Women’s #4) were much more of a Peoria Community endeavor. However, we asked four very experienced team members from Decatur to join us on these teams. They did not fill any of the director roles, but took some of the more basic roles. They acted as a resource on the weekends offering their experience and advice to the Peoria Community. Normally, this is not done with a start up community; a new community is on its own after the first men’s and women’s weekends, but we had the advantage of only being a couple of hours away from Decatur.

After the first two weekends, the Great Banquet ministry team came back together to evaluate the meeting. The basic points of that meeting are included as Appendix K.
Most of the points made had to do with logistics and running a Great Banquet in the Northminster facility. However, some of the feedback was directed at process and community building. For example, there was a lot of feedback about the role of table leaders in creating an open atmosphere of trust and community at the tables. Some of the table leaders were not engaged with speakers, and some became argumentative with guests during discussions. The ministry team also decided an extra person was required to help with *agape* during the weekend. Most of the lessons were written down and communicated to the next directors. Most of the key positions on a weekend have manuals telling them where and when things need to occur. The manuals were changed as needed to reflect the evaluation.

**Assessment of the Great Banquet as a Renewal Tool**

Chapter 2 described the transition from modernity towards postmodernity. Chapter 3 provided a theological assessment of that transition. In chapter 4 was described the fall of Christendom and liminality. Liminality refers to the difficult shift from one paradigm to another. Western culture is currently experiencing this liminality as it shifts to postmodernity and post-Christendom. Church renewal in this state of liminality is a complicated matter because the culture is made up of moderns, postmoderns, and people who are influenced by both. In chapter 4 seven basic principles of church renewal were described. This section will evaluate the Great Banquet against these seven principles.

The first principle is that all people in Western culture operate out of an
individualistic mindset. This is true for moderns and postmoderns alike. However, postmoderns value community; whereas, moderns are more indifferent to it. Those influenced by postmodernism may find a path to believing by belonging first. This would not be true of moderns who feel the need to believe before they belong. However, everyone will approach the Great Banquet from an individualistic lens. To use Crystal Downing’s metaphor from chapter 3, everyone sees from the perspective of his or her own tower. People will want to know how they will benefit by being involved. What is in it for them? Our ministry area is “up and coming” professionals, generally over-achieving, busy people. To sacrifice three days to attend or support Great Banquet can be a difficult decision for many people, so they want to know it is worth their time. It is difficult to sponsor guests because we live a culture reluctant to make commitments. Appropriately, the Great Banquet imagery comes from Luke 14: 15-24, the parable in which people offer excuses for not coming to the Banquet. For example, one just bought a field and needs to go and see it (v. 18). Another bought five yoke of oxen and wants to try them (v. 19). The same tendency exists today: people find all sorts of excuses for not attending the Banquet.

Those who accept the invitation do so for personal reasons. The Great Banquet offers a ministry of Christian instruction. “Cursillo” means short course. In a culture that is less religiously or biblically informed, some people are attracted to the Great Banquet because they want to learn more. The Great Banquet certainly seeks to teach people about the Christian faith, but that teaching is more holistic than just attending fifteen “lectures.” It is an integrated and process approach to epistemology.
George Hunter, in his book *How to Reach Secular People*, talks about an “adoption process.” He describes it as the “process in stages by which people typically adapt to a new possibility.”¹ A modernist approach to evangelism and Christian formation would be to convince someone of the rightness of a particular viewpoint and then ask for a decision or a conversion. However, conversion is really a process that begins before faith and after a decision to follow Jesus takes place. The stages Hunter identifies include: first awareness, second relevance, third interest, fourth trial, fifth adoption, and sixth reinforcement. Each stage could be thought of as a “mini-conversion.” Guests who come to the Great Banquet are spiritually located in one of these six stages. For example, a secular non-Christian might come with an increased awareness of Jesus Christ and the gift of grace. That could be considered a “mini-conversion” because the person was not aware of that before. The Banquet also makes the case for relevance of the Christian faith but especially in asking searching questions about our priorities. This would be the “mini-conversion” during the stage of relevance. The interest stage “mini-conversion” might occur when someone who has no spiritual interest becomes more spiritually interested as the weekend goes on. So the stages might continue, ending with reinforcement of a new vision of faith and life. That faith might be reinforced during the weekend itself, or it might take place during a reunion group experience. The main point here, though, is that people generally learn about the faith through a process. This is especially true for postmoderns. However, there is room for

the modern person in the Great Banquet as one of those “mini-conversions” might actually involve a decision for Jesus Christ. All four of the Great Banquets hosted at Northminster have seen people become Christians and enter into the life-long process of following Jesus Christ. The Great Banquet does not count the number of people converting or coming to Christ, even though it happens frequently. The approach of the Great Banquet is not to get everyone to the same place, but to move everyone along in his or her spiritual process. To move people along, the Banquet begins by engaging people where they are in the process of spiritual formation. However, the goal is not to leave people as isolated individuals. Chapter 3 argued that people experience God through community.

The second principle for churches doing renewal in this time of liminality is the need to create community. People learn about God and experience God through the presence of others. Everyone comes to the Great Banquet with a different perspective. To use Crystal Downing’s metaphors of towers, everyone sees through his or her own tower.2 Looking at God through individualized towers leads to limited, and often misleading, views of God, but, when multiple perspectives are shared, an image of God becomes clearer. Perspectives are shared in a number of ways. First, each of the fifteen speakers has the opportunity to share something of his or her perspective. They have outlines that prescribe some propositional content which appeals to the moderns. That content is supplemented with a lot of subjective examples and stories. Guests hear how

2 See Downing, How Postmodernism Serves My Faith, 155.
some particular faith issue works (or does not work) in the speaker’s life.

Guests are also exposed to other perspectives through table discussions. After every talk, the table takes a moment of silent reflection and then spends time discussing the salient points of the talk. These conversations are the heart of the Great Banquet. They do at least two different things. First, they help people see the topic through different perspectives because people at the table will see things from different perspectives. Eddie Gibbs writes, “A sense of belonging places seekers in the position of observer-participants so that they can learn what the gospel is all about. They can observe at close quarters how it impacts the lives of individuals and shapes a community.” This is exactly what happens at a Great Banquet. People become observer-participants in an ongoing discussion about the Christian faith.

Second, the people sitting at a table actually create a small community. They spend most of the weekend together. They typically share a lot of their own lives and struggles. On Saturday, they will have the opportunity to go pray together in a room instead of doing a table discussion. After spending at least fifteen intense hours together over a seventy-two hour period, they become really close. Some guests have never experienced anything like the community that develops around tables. People strongly influenced by modernity may not come to a Banquet looking for community, but they experience it nonetheless. Postmoderns value community and they also experience it in a unique way.

---

3 Gibbs, ChurchNext, 199.
Being part of a Great Banquet team also teaches people how to be in community with one another. People love being part of a Great Banquet team, even if it is a lot of work. It is a unique opportunity within the church. Team members share the vision and purpose of the Great Banquet. They remember the significant weekend they had and want to recreate it for others. They work hard and sacrifice together, including eight team meetings and the weekend itself. Being part of a team requires them to be vulnerable and pray for each other.

Team members are part of the larger Great Banquet community, and guests become a part of that community during their weekend. They spend three intense days with forty to sixty other people. This sense of belonging is aided by the language and experiences they share through the Great Banquet. The Great Banquet has its own vocabulary, and people are bonded together when they can share the language. For example, “De Colores” is a common refrain on a weekend and after the Banquet. People who are part of the Great Banquet Community know instantly what “De Colores” means, but people who have not been to a banquet do not understand.

However, there are some concerns here. Some feel the Great Banquet (and other Cursillo model weekends) can create a “cult”-like sense of community. People who have not attended a Banquet can see the camaraderie and hear the language and feel like outsiders. When people talk about their experiences, they are reluctant to share everything. For example, they may not want to tell someone about the Dying Moments Communion Service and the Candlelight Service because they think it will have more impact if the prospective guest does not know about it. This secrecy can add to the
“cultic” opinions of some people. The Great Banquet has no secrets. We remind community members that people can ask anything they like and we must tell them the truth. However, it is probably true that any significant Christian community will be accused of secrecy and cult-like behavior. The first century church was certainly accused of it.

The Peoria Great Banquet Community is not limited to members of Northminster Presbyterian. Currently member so this community come from at least six other churches. Chapter 4 discussed the differences between a bounded set and a centered set. The Peoria Great Banquet represents a centered set, which is more appropriate in a time of liminality. People become part of a movement and not an institution.

As the Church is a reflection of the Trinity, it must be relational. The third principle of church renewal in this transitional period is relational ministry. The Great Banquet operates out of relationships and creates relationships. People come to be part of the Great Banquet Community because they are sponsored by a friend or relative. No one comes to be a guest outside the sponsorship model. Furthermore, the Great Banquet intentionally creates new relationships. Guests are assigned tables, which allow people to make new connections. Directors avoid putting friends and family members at the same table. The process of making new connections is an important aspect of community building.

One of the important features of the Great Banquet is the team-based approach to ministry. The Great Banquet is one ministry shared by clergy and laity. Members are empowered for ministry by the Holy Spirit. The Great Banquet is a model for the Church
because it provides opportunities for people to serve in all sorts of ways. Lay directors really make the weekends work; spiritual directors function as resources on the weekend; and, traditionally spiritual directors have been ordained clergy. This also represents a good model where the clergy are resources for the Church. The Holy Spirit empowers and then calls on the pastors and the team to equip people. One of the ways this works for a Great Banquet team is the spiritual director’s help in preparing lay people. Team members are given direction on a team, but they also care deeply about the ministry and the outcomes. People are equipped theologically through the content of the talks and devotions, and they are also equipped to give talks which include sharing their story. In these talks, people are encouraged to share their lives and Christian witness.

The Great Banquet has also made progress in breaking down the walls between clergy and laity. The Great Banquet provides an example for the Church in experiencing communitas. Alan Roxburgh uses this term to describe community in a time of liminality. In communitas, people are equal in ministry. Hierarchies and stratification of workers disappears into a more egalitarian environment. This happens in the Great Banquet, but not completely. The Great Banquet still uses “laity” language as in “lay director.” Cursillo and Walk to Emmaus both insist spiritual directors be ordained clergy. The Great Banquet has dropped this requirement. Rather, it looks for spiritual maturity and experience instead of an ordained credential. A pastor is still required for the weekend, but it is not because of “clericalism.” Pastors still play a big role in the

---

4 See Roxburgh and Regele, Crossing the Bridge, 80.
Great Banquet in equipping other team members. They also act as spiritual resources on the weekend. A weakness of the Banquet is the continued use of the word “lay.” “Program director” or “weekend director” would be more appropriate and would help alleviate the bifurcation of God’s people.

The fourth principle of renewal in this time of liminality is the use of narrative. Of course the Great Banquet is rooted in the Grand Narrative (or metanarrative) of the Gospel. Postmodern Christians like Brian McLaren are drawn to understanding Christianity as story. McLaren writes, “First, I had to be ‘depropositionalized.’ Rather than seeing the gospel as propositions, mechanisms, abstractions of universal concepts, I came to see the gospel as narrative, a story.”5 Most people, even hard modernists, appreciate stories, especially when they are sincere and poignant.

The fifteen talks work together to present a holistic picture of the gospel. The content of the talks include propositions. There can be no escaping propositions. Postmoderns resist universalizing propositions that reduce faith to either-or statements, something either received or rejected, but the Great Banquet talks provide an opportunity for speakers to tell their stories as they relate to the larger story of the Gospel. Rodney Clapp writes, “Christians are called to live the story, not restate it in the form of universalized propositions.”6 Speakers are encouraged to talk about how they “live the story.” Every outline provides an opportunity to share personal stories or narratives.

---

This is one of the strengths of the Great Banquet. The talks are intentionally designed to provide a platform for sharing stories. Ben Campbell Johnson writes about the advantages of sharing stories:

Sharing narratives unites on several levels at once. On a cognitive level telling stories communicates knowledge of each other. On an affective level storytelling evokes feelings of caring. On the communal level sharing stories creates an entity larger than those who hold the conversation; it creates community.\(^7\)

All of these things become reality over a Great Banquet weekend. Guests learn about each other and Jesus through stories. Most of the stories are emotional and heartfelt, arousing empathy and caring. Sharing stories helps create community in a way most churches do not experience. Guests also receive the opportunity to share their stories at the closing ceremony.

The fifth principle of renewal for churches in a time of liminality is didactic instruction. At its core, the Great Banquet is an instruction ministry. This generally takes place through propositional teaching. While narrative is crucial to the success of the Great Banquet, that does not mean didactic teaching is absent. The stories are the muscle that hangs on a skeleton of didactic teaching. The sharing of stories brings the didactic teaching alive, but there is still basic instruction. Theological concepts like creation, sin, sacraments, and grace are all explained. In fact, the dimensions of God’s grace are covered in five talks. The content of these talks includes biblical and

---

\(^6\) Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 188.

\(^7\) Ben Campbell Johnson and Glenn McDonald, *Imagining a Church in the Spirit: A Task for Mainline Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 29.
theological teaching. In a post-Christendom age, this is absolutely critical, but it is not
done from an absolutist position. To use Downing’s metaphor of towers again, the
didactic teaching is not an attempt to rise above the towers and speak objectively about
God and reality. The Great Banquet assumes people come to the faith through subjective
knowledge. Truth is propositional, but it is also relational. The truth of the Gospel is
made real, not through reasoned argumentation, but through the sharing of subjective
experience.

The last principle of church renewal is probably the most important. The Holy
Spirit makes church renewal happen in any age, but especially in a time of liminality.
Church renewal cannot happen without the Holy Spirit. Church renewal cannot happen
without a lot of prayer. The tendency for moderns is to “engineer” renewal and church
growth. The Great Banquet is ultimately effective because of prayer support. The time
of preparation includes a lot of prayer. Before every team meeting, there is a time of
prayer. At the end of every team meeting there is a time of sharing joys and concerns and
prayer. The Prayer to the Holy Spirit is read in unison before every talk, both in team
meetings and the actual weekend itself. Every chapel time is filled with meditative
prayer. As modern Christianity tends to focus on prayer of supplication and petitions,
meditative prayer has largely been ignored, but postmodern people respond to meditative
prayer because it is a highly spiritual act. This is not to say there is not ample time for
prayers of petition on a weekend, but the Great Banquet also provides a lot of opportunity
for meditative prayer. There is a balance between supplication and meditation which is
particularly helpful in a time of transition from modernity to postmodernity.
Each table is also given the opportunity to do something special on the second day of the weekend. Table discussions take place after every talk, but tables are also given the opportunity to go and pray instead of summarizing a talk. A small room is set up with a lit candle that is away from the rest of the group. Guests take turns praying for each other. For many people, this is the first time they have ever prayed aloud. For some of them, it is really a stretching, challenging experience. It really taps into an experiential longing. It also draws people together as they pray aloud for each other. This is a significant community-building exercise.

The Great Banquet has a lot of prayer support. Every speaker is prayed for before and after speaking, and there is included the laying on of hands. This is called praying the speaker “in” and praying the speaker “out.” Most significant is the “72-hour prayer vigil.” During the preparation time for the weekend, people are enlisted to pray in half hour time slots. A chart is filled out where people sign up for these half-hour slots. There is at least one person praying for the Great Banquet at any given time during a weekend. They pray for the success of the weekend and for the guests by name. This is a profound example for the wider church. On Friday afternoon, the chart is shown to the guests. This is often a powerful realization for many guests. They are moved when they find out that people are praying for them twenty-four hours a day, even getting up in the middle of the night to pray.

Prayer is the most important element in church renewal. God responds to prayer. The Prayer to the Holy Spirit asks the Spirit to be present and at work, and the Spirit responds to the prayer and makes his presence very real. Prayer is woven throughout the
Great Banquet weekend becoming a powerful spiritual experience for many.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

Church renewal is dependent upon the Holy Spirit. It will not happen without the Spirit. The Great Banquet is a means of drawing people into God’s presence so that God can do a holy and mysterious work in them. This is difficult to achieve in any age, but it is especially difficult to achieve in an age of liminal transition. The Great Banquet is incredibly effective in leading people into God’s presence, but, like anything in mission and ministry, there are strengths and weakness. This section briefly highlights some of these strengths and weaknesses, beginning with the strengths.

First, the Great Banquet is a Cursillo model weekend, which means it provides a basic introduction into the Christian faith. In a post-Christendom age this is incredibly important. People no longer come to the Church with foundations in Bible or Christian theology. The Great Banquet is essentially an instructional ministry, but it is not one-dimensional. Instruction comes in didactic and experiential forms. It is broad enough to appeal to a wide spectrum of people.

Second, the Great Banquet is process oriented. It does not view discipleship as a single point in a continuum. It assumes that people come to their weekend from different points along the continuum. People have different perspectives and follow different spiritual paths. The weekend has a clear design to lead people from one stage to another. It begins Thursday evening with a time of silence and withdrawing from the world and then builds gradually through talks and meditations. Talks, meditations, and worship
experiences build on each other. The net effect is to lead people into the presence of God through relationships and community.

Third, the Great Banquet is a team-based ministry. The team comes together with a common purpose, and each person plays a role. Great Banquet weekends are intense and require a great deal of work. This would not be possible without a great deal of teamwork. Team members learn what it is like to achieve something significant and be a part of a group with a goal. Northminster has discovered that this spills over into the larger life of the church. The Great Banquet’s team-based approach is a model for the wider church in this way.

Fourth, the Great Banquet does a good job of equipping people for ministry. Team members stretch themselves in terms of their commitment because the Great Banquet places a lot of demands on them. Team members are also stretched beyond their comfort zones. People give talks about the Christian faith, and they are equipped to do that. People are provided an opportunity to share their own faith, which they might never receive otherwise.

Fifth, the Great Banquet is relational in its approach to ministry. It begins with relationship as people sponsor people. Relationships are built during the weekend. Relationships are nurtured in the Fourth Day community as people are encouraged in, and even held accountable for, continuing the process of discipleship they began during the retreat.

Sixth, the Great Banquet creates community. This happens in small, but significant ways. Community is created on a Great Banquet team. Community is created
during the weekend around tables. People learn, share and grow together. For some guests, this is their very first experience with intimate community. Community is also created in the wider Fourth Cay Community.

However, there are some weaknesses with the Great Banquet movement as well. Oftentimes the weaknesses grow out of the strengths. For example, the first strength is the profound sense of community that is created through the Great Banquet. As was described above, some people see that as an exclusive community, even taking on a “cultic” feel. In fact, one Cursillo booklet warns against the dangers of “cursillism.” “It is not unusually to find people who have been introduced to Christian virtues through a Cursillo – or at least brought back to awareness of them – who develop a strong but misguided affection for the instrument of the Cursillos.”8 Sometimes people make the Great Banquet their “church.” This defeats the purpose. The Great Banquet movements seek to draw people to Jesus Christ, which means being an active part of the church.

Second, the Great Banquet appeals to the individualism of moderns, postmoderns, and everyone in between. One of the points made in chapter 3 is that postmoderns are just as individualistic as moderns. People can view the Great Banquet as a tool that meets an individual’s spiritual needs and that is it. In this time of liminality, there is a great desire for “spirituality.” This “spirituality” must always be anchored in biblical and theological moorings. This is especially true for soft postmodernists who struggle with relativism. Guests must encounter the Jesus of the Bible and not an invented Jesus.
A third weakness is the continued bifurcation of God’s people. While the Great Banquet has made great strides in eradicating the clergy-laity distinctions, there is still room to go. For example, spiritual directors do not have to be clergy in the Great Banquet (as opposed to other Cursillo model weekends). However, the Great Banquet retains a lot of the clergy-laity language that is unhelpful. Everyone has a role and a calling in the body of Christ; none is more important than others.

Lastly, the Great Banquet is fairly new compared to other Cursillo model movements. Other movements have a lot of training material written and produced. Outside of the manuals, there is no training material available. Cursillo also offers training events and classes, but the Great Banquet has yet to develop any training. Most of the training and “know-how” is gained on the job. It was very helpful to have people from the Lost Bridge Great Banquet Movement help with the Peoria start-ups. Peoria team members learned a lot, but it is all experience based. The Peoria Great Banquet has learned a lot through hosting four weekends so far, but it would be helpful if the Great Banquet could do a better job of training team members.

Conclusion

Northminster Presbyterian Church seeks to make disciples for Jesus Christ. This has been the mission for the Church since Christ gave us the Great Commission. In some sense, the mission has never changed. However, the mission field has changed and is

---

changing immensely. Western culture finds itself in a time of transition. Fulfilling the Great Commission in this time of transition is complicated. There are no perfect programs or answers for the mainline church. Northminster must become postmodern sensitive if it is to fulfill its missional mandate in this complex time.

The Great Banquet movement is postmodern sensitive and can show the way. The Great Banquet is sensitive to both modern and postmodern individualism. It is a relational and process-based approach to disciple making. The Great Banquet provides an opportunity for people to share their stories and learn from one another. In this way, it is very experiential-based. The Great Banquet is a community that fosters a sense of community. It is also a team-based approach that helps reduce the unbiblical bifurcation of clergy and laity. Ultimately, though, the Great Banquet is successful in renewing Christians and churches because it is utterly dependent on prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that provides renewal.
CONCLUSION

North American culture is currently undergoing a seismic shift in culture. Modernity has held the Western world in its grip since the Enlightenment. Modernity brought many advances, but it also pushed Christianity to the margins of society. Before modernity, the Church held center stage in Western culture. This is no longer true, and Western culture has also transitioned away from Christendom. These separate but related events have created huge challenges for the Church. This is especially true for mainline churches that thrived during Christendom. The old ways of doing church no longer work. Churches feel the stress and tension as membership, attendance, and influence erode. To turn the tide, churches work harder but often fail to change their assumptions. They view the decline as a technical problem. Some churches attempt to throw out all the assumptions of modernity and try to start over. These are often called “emergent churches.” However, this is a difficult proposition for established churches where a large percentage of the congregation is still heavily influenced by modern assumptions.

There is no question culture is changing. This requires change on the part of the Church. If a church is going to experience renewal in a transitional culture, it must take an adaptive approach to the problem. This does not mean abandoning modernity for postmodernity. It means adapting to the transition between modernity and
postmodernity. Church renewal in this liminal transition means being “postmodern sensitive.”

The Great Banquet provides a model of ministry that is uniquely “postmodern sensitive.” The Great Banquet traces its roots to Cursillo. Cursillo was not conceived in modernity, but it was nurtured near the end of the modern period. Moderns, postmoderns, and people influenced by both can experience spiritual renewal at a Great Banquet weekend. As enough people experience personal renewal, it will spread to the larger congregation. The Great Banquet can serve as a catalyst for church renewal in liminality because it employs and models principles for ministry that are particularly effective for this transitional age.

Northminster Presbyterian is a vital and growing church with a bright future. This is true even if Northminster is a member of a mainline denomination. The future is not bright because it is Presbyterian nor because its demographics are so promising, nor because it is a young church, nor because of dynamic leadership. The future is bright because Northminster is willing to adapt to a changing culture. The mission to make disciples has not changed but the context has changed immensely. The Great Banquet provides a means for engaging this changing context.
APPENDIX C

QuickTime™ and a TIFF (LZW) decompressor are needed to see this picture.
QuickTime™ and a TIFF (LZW) decompressor are needed to see this picture.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Talk Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lay Director</td>
<td>Staying Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Lay Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Lay Director</td>
<td>Discovering Priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Director - Head</td>
<td>Sacramental Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Director</td>
<td>God's Gift of Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Director</td>
<td>Obstacles to Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Director</td>
<td>Our Response to Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Director</td>
<td>A Life of Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Establishing Priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>The Body of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Changing Our Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Disciples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>The Life of Christian Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>The Truth Through Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>The Way of Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Ministry of All Believers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table Leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table Leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table Leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table Leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table Leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen - Head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agape - Head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANNOUNCEMENTS

A COUPLE OF SONGS

Call to Worship
L: Come and worship; for all is now ready. The time to celebrate is here.
P: Let us celebrate then, not as though no change has taken place in our life, but with rejoicing for being saved to a new life!

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (UNISON)
Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and kindle in them the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CALL TO CONFESSION
L: If we claim to be sinless, we are self-deceived and strangers to the truth. If we confess our sins, God is just, and may be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every kind of wrong. Let us admit our sin before God, and ask for His forgiveness.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (Unison)
God of heaven and earth, God of flesh and spirit, the world is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers. What we excuse as merely human, You have condemned as sinful. We squirm at the description of our faults by prophets and apostles. We have not prepared to abandon our old ways. We prefer to hear what we already know than to think out something we have not heard before. Forgive our lack of vision and love, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON
L: Hear the Good News! God has shown us how much He loves us. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us.
P: We are now the people of God, who once were not; once outside God's mercy, now we have received mercy.
L: Friends, believe the Good News
P: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Amen.
SCRIPTURE READING

MESSAGE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

PRAYERS FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST
L: God of prophets and apostles, whose Spirit is working peace among us: You have called us to be Your holy people, and invited us to break bread in common faith. We thank You for every word or act that makes unity in the church; for open minds and hearts; for patient understanding. Above all, we thank You for Your Son, who prays for us; that we may be one in love toward each other, serving Him who is our head, Jesus, who is the Lord and Savior.
P: O Lord God: Your Son called disciples, and prayed for their unity. Forgive our divisions. Help us to confess our lack of love toward people whose worship and customs are different, or whose creeds conflict with what we believe. Forgive our arrogance that claims God’s truth; but will not listen or learn new ways. Heal broken fellowship in Your mercy, and draw the church together in one faith, loyal to one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer
Our Father in heaven, Holy be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today the bread we need. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us in the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are Yours now and forever. Amen.

Call to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
L: We gather around our Lord’s table in celebration of our new covenant with God.
P: Our feast of love is a banquet given by our Lord Jesus. It is His invitation of love that has brought us here.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

LITANY OF CONSECRATION
L: The Lord Jesus, on the night of His arrest, took bread and after giving thanks to God, broke it, and said: “This is my body which is for you; do this remembering me.”
P: We take this bread committed to Christ coming alive in us. Jesus said: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst.”
L: In the same way, He took the cup after supper, and said: “This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this remembering me.” Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you witness to the death of the Lord until He comes.
P: We take this cup committed to Christ coming alive in us. Jesus said: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Cut off from me you can do nothing.”

THE SACRAMENT SERVED AND RECEIVED

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (Unison)

Lord God, You are the Giver of Banquets. You open the eyes of the blind. You cause the lame to walk. You cause the dumb to speak, and You heal those who are maimed. We give thanks for Your feast that You share with us, because in it You share Yourself. You are our strength and shield, and we offer ourselves to You. Grant to us as we go from here that by faith and good example, we would walk in Your light. We pray in the name of Jesus our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Benediction

L: The world awaits – the world where you live and work, which is your special mission field. It awaits your word of hope, your smile of love, your touch of Jesus.

P: A person can find Him everywhere, and miss Him anywhere, out there. Let us leave this place resolving to guide people to Him, as He leads us.

L: Go in God’s strength to call back those who have turned away from God, and bring them to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

P: We will be a light to all who live in the shadows.

Announcements
APPENDIX H

The Truth Through Study

Talk Six

Overview, Purpose, and Approach to Presentation

The balanced Christian life is like a tripod: It stands on three legs. The “legs” of the Christian life are Relationship, Study and Action. Spiritual balance is possible only if these three legs are equal in length – that is, fully expressed in the life of a disciple of Jesus.

In The Way of Relationship we learned that the first and primary condition for experiencing the Christian life is the giving of our hearts to God. This means being willing to seek God’s will and to walk in God’s way in this world.

The Truth Through Study presents the primary means for growing in our commitment to God: thinking and learning about God’s action in this world through the gaining of knowledge and wisdom.

The Life of Christian Action, the third leg of what it means to follow Jesus, calls disciples to do God’s will and to make known the saving love and grace of Christ to others.

When these three areas are fully aligned toward the Lord, all of life begins to change. We experience ourselves moving toward God. Our priority for living is focused. The purpose of this talk is to explore the second area or realm of the balanced Christian life.

The speaker should not give the impression of having superior intelligence or insight. This talk concerns a kind of study that is practical and attainable by everyone. Rather than lecturing like a professor, it would be wiser for the speaker to imagine himself or herself as a carpenter who is taking time to explain his or her tools.

Scripture texts are provided as references and illustrations, and are not required parts of the talk.

Presentation (25-30 minutes)
What Do We Mean by Study?

Webster’s dictionary defines study as the act or process of acquiring, by one’s own efforts, knowledge of a particular subject.

Jesus declared that the greatest commandment is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.” (Luke 10:27). Study means learning to love God with your mind.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and prove what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

The word “transformed” comes from the same word as “metamorphosis.”

The renewing of our minds brings about a complete change of life.

The result is discernment: We are able to know God’s will for our lives.

Loving God with “all your mind” means:

- Using your mind creatively, as God intends
- Thinking seriously about your world in the light of God’s Word, the Bible
- Utilizing study to better understand the meaning of your personal experiences

Study is the key that unlocks intellectual growth in the Christian life. The study of Christianity turns out to be the study of life itself.

Principles of Study

*Study is a constant for every person.*

We study to improve our job skills; to improve the way our households are run; to understand new tax laws; to understand those around us. Life requires devotion to study in many realms and fields of thought.

Lampstand Ministries - Truth Through Study
Study is an integral part of the Christian life.

Just as a child’s clothes are no longer adequate for a grown person, a child’s understanding of God and his Word cannot sustain the spiritual needs of a growing adult Christian. Have you made a personal commitment to pursue an ever-growing understanding of the life of Jesus and the truths of Scripture, or are you relying on insights that you learned years ago?

Study sustains and grows our Christian experience.

Commitment to spiritual growth needs to be intentional, not haphazard.

Study is loving God with your mind.

If we offer our minds to God and seek truth from him in humility, we gain greater understanding of God’s ways. Study draws us closer to God.

Getting Beyond Our Excuses Not to Study

“I don’t have time to study.”

Exhaustion, work addiction, and sheer busyness have convinced many people that study is a luxury they cannot afford.

Nevertheless, we always find time for what we truly want to do. What are your priorities?

“I don’t know what to study.”

Seek the advice of your pastor or other church leaders.

Ask individuals whose spiritual lives you admire what they have been studying.

Visit a Christian bookstore and browse.

“I don’t like to read books.”

Lampstand Ministries - Truth Through Study
Consider tapes, CD's, video presentations, and DVD's. You can listen to audio versions of the Bible and many Christian books.

The Internet provides a wealth of study resources at no charge.

Conversations and small group discussions can be very effective.

“I don’t understand the Bible or how it applies to me.”

Commentaries, Bible encyclopedias, and a wide variety of other resources provide significant understanding.

Organized Bible studies and adult Sunday school classes provide insight and valuable opportunities to share with others.

The more we read the Bible, the more we find that the Bible “reads us” – just as if we were a book.

How Do I Get Started?

Every journey begins with a first step. We only need to take one step at a time.

Designate a regular study time and stick with it. Desire and obedience are key. Some will find that early mornings work best. Others will prefer just before bedtime. Still others study well on their lunch breaks.

Choose a daily devotional booklet with Scripture readings.

Choose to join a Sunday school class or regular Bible study.

Find a way of sharing what you study through conversation or writing. Let your experience of study change the way you live.

(Speaker’s Note: Share your own study practices and what discovering biblical truth has meant to you. You might identify particular books that have been helpful along the way. Mention the fact that a list of recommended books will be available to each guest at the end of the three days.)
Final Challenges

We don’t stop learning when we finish school.

All of life is an opportunity for growth – but we must not let the world determine how we are to grow.

We must be intentional in our desire to grow into the image of Christ.

We cannot be mature Christians – mature in our thinking and in our actions – if our spiritual growth stops at the end of childhood.

The call to every disciple of Jesus is to love God with all the heart, all the soul, all the strength, and all the mind.

*Are you loving God with your mind?*
APPENDIX I

Table 4 – Comparison of Cursillo Talks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participants</th>
<th>Cursillistas</th>
<th>Pilgrims</th>
<th>Guests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friday Day 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #1</td>
<td>Ideals</td>
<td>Priorities</td>
<td>Discovering Priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #2</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Prevenient Grace</td>
<td>God's Gift of Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #3</td>
<td>Laypersons in the church</td>
<td>Priesthood of all Believers</td>
<td>Ministry of all Believers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #4</td>
<td>Faith (originally &quot;Actual Grace&quot;)</td>
<td>Justifying Grace</td>
<td>Our Response to Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #5</td>
<td>Piety</td>
<td>Life of Piety</td>
<td>Way of Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday Day 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #6</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Growth Through Study</td>
<td>Truth Through Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #7</td>
<td>Sacraments</td>
<td>Means of Grace</td>
<td>Sacramental Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #8</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Christian Action</td>
<td>Life of Christian Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #9</td>
<td>Obstacles to a Life of Grace</td>
<td>Obstacles to Grace</td>
<td>Obstacles to Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #10</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>Disciples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday Day 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #11</td>
<td>Study and Evangelization of Environments</td>
<td>Changing our Environments</td>
<td>Changing Our Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #12</td>
<td>Christian Life</td>
<td>Sanctifying Grace</td>
<td>A Life of Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #13</td>
<td>Christian Community in Action</td>
<td>Body of Christ</td>
<td>The Body of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #14</td>
<td>Group Reunion</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Staying Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk #15</td>
<td>Ultreya</td>
<td>Fourth Day</td>
<td>Establishing Priorities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX J

Order of the Reunion Group

Prayer to the Holy Spirit
Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Worship: Share how you worshipped the Lord in the past week through morning devotions, prayer life, worship attendance, communion, and/or spiritual retreat.

Closest to Christ: At what moment this past week did you feel closest to Christ?

Study: What did you study this week to lead you closer to Christ?

Call to Discipleship: Review chances you had to share Christ with others.

Action: How were you Christ’s hands and feet in your environment?

Discipleship Denied: Missed or failed opportunities to share Christ with others.

Plan: Share your plans for worship, study and action for the coming week.

Prayers for Special Needs: Share your needs with your group, then join the group in praying for the needs of others.

Lord’s Prayer
Sponsors need to emphasize to spouses that letters are needed. Change Sponsor letter to include this.

Agape:
- Stack letters alphabetically by tables.
- Need bed chart for volunteers to find beds for agape gifts.

Newsletter: Karen will talk to Jennifer & Terry Towery.
- Be sure to include minutes/discussions from meetings
- Notify community of prayer charts, agape sign ups, candle light, closing, etc.
- Ask community to share information to other communities and give us names of contacts.

Toiletries by gym bathroom need to out of reach of children.

Facilities: Adam Curry will put together a booklet / checklist that describes set up and clean up. It will include photos and where to find items.

Possibly rent water cooler instead of always refilling coolers with ice and water bottles.

Recycling containers for cans and bottles

Kitchen
- Give them schedule so they can listen to talks if they’re available
- Be sure to notify them if running late or early for meals

Change master schedule for Sunday breakfast to be at 7:30

Closing: tables go up together and speak as the Spirit moves them

Team should arrive before 7:00 on Thursday night

Needs to be a group assigned to clean up Sunday night—should not include anyone on team

Needs to be a group assigned to move conference room from Fellowship Hall to NLC

Work on making kitchen quieter and move speakers to face the big screen. Use projector more and overhead less

Have someone in charge of sound

Only people allowed in conference room are the team and guests. No exceptions.

Include in packet: a list of people by table.

Be prepared to bring speakers to NLC in bad weather

Check all rooms for clocks: gym & prayer rooms

Volunteers are needed now to make shelves in 2nd story storage.

Be sure everyone knows we cannot meet upstairs!

Need different shower mats
Evaluation November 2007

- On Sunday, don’t have breaks during Sunday school breaks. Stress this at the team meetings.
- Remind team not to go see family before candlelight.
- Remind team to be an example
- Review guidelines for table leaders
- Meals: make menu and stick with it. Make guidelines – be specific.
- Have an extra Apage/kitchen person to run errands and facilitate communication.
- Get a community member to be in charge of getting volunteers for kitchen and agape.
- Get a community member to set-up on Wednesday, move things on Saturday night, and tear down on Sunday. They should also help take beds down on Sunday morning. A manual will be needed with photos.
- Make our own curtains to block off conference room and dining room.
- Have the cross ceremony in the dining room. Keep guests in the gym beforehand.
- When there is a transition point in the weekend, have table leaders look to see if their table is all present and determine who is absent.
- After talk #5, pray out speaker after Psalm 23 meditation.
- Combine some manuals. Have a unified schedule.
- Don’t end first talk with “De colores.”
- Guests who have a specific schedule for medications should get that to us before the weekend, so the Assistant LD can have it.
- Have back up activity during long break on Friday.
- Add dump truck to manual to Saturday.
- Spiritual directors sit in front of sanctuary after candle lighting. Table leaders can watch their tables to see who may need someone to pray with them.
- Have community person directing people to the correct bathrooms on Saturday night.
- Tell team that the Assistant LD is the only one to signal the theme song.
- Book table – add more specifics to agape manual.
- Spiritual director goes over content of packets.
- At closing ceremony, only guests speak.
- Introduce agape team members on Thursday night.
- Only team members can hear the talks, unless speaker has given permission for someone to listen. We may need to set up a specific room for this.
- Assistant LD should let spiritual directors know when it’s time to pray in and out speakers.


________. “Postmodern Christianity Understood as Story 2008.”


Vita Of

Douglas D. Hucke

Present Position:
Senior Pastor, Northminster Presbyterian Church
Peoria, IL

Personal Data:
Birthdate: November 25, 1961
Birthplace: Rushville, NE
Marital Status: Married to Deborah Hucke
2 children: Ian, Rebecca
Home Address: 5406 W. Briarstone Dr.
Peoria, IL 61615
Phones: Office: (309) 691-6322
Home: (309) 683-3785
Denomination: PCUSA
Ordained: March 1997

Education:
BSc Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, CO 1984
MDiv Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA 1993
ThM Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of
Christian Education, Richmond, VA 1998
DMin (cand) Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA 2008

Professional Experience:
9/03 to present Senior Pastor, Northminster Presbyterian Church
Peoria, IL
9/93 to 9/03 Senior Pastor, Huntingdon Valley Presbyterian Church
Huntingdon Valley, PA
9/93 to 6/96 Assistant Minister, Colinton Parish Church
Edinburgh, Scotland
2/91 to 9/93 College Ministry Intern, Glenkirk Presbyterian Church
Glendora, CA