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A STRATEGY TO REENGINEER THE META CHURCH STRUCTURE OF  
WASHINGTON CATHEDRAL TO BETTER INCARNATE THE GOSPEL

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

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MARCH 2009



## ABSTRACT

### **A Strategy to Reengineer the Meta Church Structure of Washington Cathedral to Better Incarnate the Gospel**

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2009

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The goal of this study was to assist Washington Cathedral in overcoming institutional entropy by presenting a strategy to systematically change the meta church's incarnational organizations through a methodical, cathedral-wide process learned from the collaborative method displayed in the book of Acts.

It is argued that the book of Acts presents an ever-growing and ever-changing model of the church. Accordingly, to overcome institutional entropy and resistance to change within an organization, continual growth and change are necessary for every healthy church. A fresh study of the church in Acts reveals a collaborative method that leadership can use to respond to conflict and resistance with positive change. Such a collaborative method has been designed for the meta church at Washington Cathedral, which is made up of home churches called Tiny Little Churches; diverse cultural congregations; and five nonprofit foundations ministering to the hurts of the world in the name of Jesus. To implement this method, a systematic, cathedral-wide plan for a yearly reengineering of ministries has been designed and is presented in this paper.

Additionally, to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural context of Washington Cathedral, a careful demographic study of the area was completed and is presented in this paper. This study included interviews with demographers, pastors of the

largest churches in the area, and political leaders of King County and the city of Redmond. Also included is an analysis of how the high-tech culture of this area impacted the creation of the meta church.

This study presents a biblically sound and culturally relevant strategy that can be presented to the leadership of Washington Cathedral for continually improving the design of the meta church. It provides a plan to develop leadership that fulfills the mission of the meta church. The paper reflects careful study based upon Acts, and establishes and communicates information necessary to deepen the commitment of Washington Cathedral to its unique calling.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, DMin

Words: 345

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## PREFACE

In Acts we see a church that transcends so many of the false polarities of our own time and experience....Here we see the church advancing the ministry of Jesus, doing what he did, saying what he said, disturbing and delighting a world that is both sorely in need of the gospel and yet resistant to it....If part of the book of Acts is that it transcends false dichotomies to offer a fuller vision of the church, it also offers particular gifts and challenges to distinct expressions of the contemporary church in North America.<sup>i</sup>

A common goal of churches throughout history is to move closer to the ideals expressed in the growing and changing community of Christ-followers found in the book of Acts. Many who become involved in a local church hope that they are participating in a better representation of the church, as God intended it to be. In contrast, this paper represents a viewpoint that no one model of the church is so perfect that it applies to every culture and every situation. The meta church model followed by Washington Cathedral is not the only way, but it has proven fruitful and is just a part of the greater mosaic of the Kingdom of God.

When Washington Cathedral was invited to join the Leadership Network, we were asked to identify with one of the following labels of church models: Multi-Site Church, Externally Focused Church, Generous Church, Health Care Initiative Church, Marketplace Church, Recovery Ministry Church and others. After considering the labels, we discovered that all of them applied to Washington Cathedral and that one label could not fully describe the unique journey that we have been following. The list of models

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<sup>i</sup> Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 5.

goes on beyond the Leadership Network and may be necessary in helping to define the church, not only to other churches but to the culture with which they interact. Words such as seeker-sensitive, purpose-driven, emerging church, charismatic, word of faith, and even evangelical mega church all help people to identify a church in the marketplace of ideas.

It is essential for Washington Cathedral to communicate its unique model of Christian community to new attendees, new staff, volunteer leaders, local government, and its surrounding community. The establishing of brand identity is an important component of growing churches, which today function somewhat as nonprofit businesses in our culture.<sup>ii</sup> At Washington Cathedral, the term *meta church*<sup>iii</sup> was used at first simply to distinguish it from mega churches because of the mistrust many people in the Pacific Northwest have exhibited toward the term *mega church*, interpreting it as a distasteful expression of manufactured modernity. In our context, the negative associations with *mega church* have caused us to distance ourselves as much as possible from a competitive corporate model for churches. Although we believe God has designed the

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<sup>ii</sup> ‘Brand Mania’ is by no means limited to business, either. When *The New York Times* asked the official exorcist of the Cathedral of Notre Dame a few years ago why he was drawing customers from all over France when they could be exorcised just as well at their local churches, Father Claude Nicolas answered this way: “Evidently, they think Notre Dame is better. Of course, it has a certain brand name.” David F. D’Alessandro with Michael Owens, *Brand Warfare: 10 Rules for Building the Killer Brand: Lessons for New and Old Economy Players* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 13.

<sup>iii</sup> Meta Church – *meta* is a *Koine* Greek term which has become popular, referring to metabiology, metaprograming, metaphysics, etc. It means literally beyond or transcending. It was used prominently by Dr. Carl George to describe a decentralized organization, which transcended the mega church model. We use the term to describe a complex group of living organizations grouped together as a nonhierarchical church where decentralization of power and innovation are essential. The church organization takes the form God allows it to take within the culture in which it finds its context. Its focus is on the evolving organism of the church rather than the organization of an institution.

church to constantly grow, Washington Cathedral does not feel that becoming a mega church is a part of our calling for existence.

In 1984, Washington Cathedral began from nothing. Today it is an institution, but our hope is that it will follow the path of the community in the book of Acts, and continue growing and evolving in an organic way. It is a core belief of the entire leadership team of Washington Cathedral that the church is a living organism created by God, who began to work before we did and will continue to work long after we cease. God changes Washington Cathedral constantly; it is not an organization selling a commodity or service but a living part of the Kingdom of God. Throughout the book of Acts one sees the church as more than an institution. Institutions are created by, run by, and controlled by people. However, Paul and Barnabas found themselves turning churches over to the Lord and trusting him, rather than themselves, to be in control of the organization. Their role was simply to recognize where God was moving and to join in a partnership with something they could never control. At Lystra and Derbe, “Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church. With prayer and fasting, they turned the elders over to the care of the Lord, in whom they had put their trust” (Acts 14:23 NLT). This same attitude is present at the end of Acts in the tone and manner of Paul’s charge to the elders of Ephesus. “So guard yourselves and God’s people. Feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders” (Acts 20:28).

It may have seemed like a little thing to turn churches over to the Lord, because, of course, people will also be involved in their leadership. Yet, I think the inclusion of this point and attitude in the text has profound implications. The Hasidic Jewish

philosopher Martin Buber put out a warning about synthetic relationships in his famous work, *I and Thou*. His thoughts apply to all relationships but especially resonate with the corporate institutional nature of modern leadership in the church. What would the result be if a husband came to believe that he owned his wife as a commodity? What damage would be done to the personality of a child who was talked about and thought of as a commodity owned and controlled by a parent? Similarly, what would happen to a church if it were thought of as an institution under the control of a CEO or a board of financially powerful elders? What would happen if the language of salvation and discipleship were used in a way that it became so hollow, so manufactured, so modernized that it became manipulative? What kind of mass-produced competitive pressures are put on churches, pastors, families, and communities because of the competitive commodification of the church and its central product line salvation? This paper is not just about the model of meta church seen in the book of Acts, but is also written to be used as a tool to help Washington Cathedral resist the forces of institutional entropy which can paralyze any organization. Martin Buber said,

I do not accept any absolute formulas for living. No preconceived code can see ahead to everything that can happen in a man's life. As we live, we grow and our beliefs change. They must change. So I think we should live with constant discovery. We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living. We should stake our whole existence on our willingness to explore and experience.<sup>iv</sup>

This quote from Buber lays a foundation for understanding the cultural context of the meta church as it is expressed at Washington Cathedral—we must live in constant change and new discovery. In the Pacific Northwest, outsiders to organized religion and

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<sup>iv</sup> Aubrey Hodes, trans., *Encounter with Martin Buber: Collected Writings* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 69.

the people of Washington Cathedral, who all come from this population, share a basic mistrust of institutions.

Washington Cathedral is so diverse that many do not know about our internal organizational structure. The concept of team leadership is foreign to many who come from a culture of hierarchy and blind authority. For example, they may not know that our Lead Pastor and Chief Cultural Architect, Rey Diaz, is only twenty-seven years old and lives in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, ministering to the families living in the city dump. His life is a reminder to everyone that we are a servant church. Those who attend Washington Cathedral may know that Pastor Linda Skinner is the Chief Operations Officer, or that Dr. Dale White is the new Cathedral Canon, but it is not essential that they know who founded the church or who presently serves as the Senior Pastor. What is important is that they journey with Jesus and become part of a “Tiny Little Church”<sup>v</sup> in which they share each others’ burdens and reach out to others outside of the church.

Even though the congregation of Washington Cathedral tends to mistrust institutions, the leaders are aware that institutions are a necessary element in society. The leadership innovation team believes that institutions and organizational studies are only a snapshot of the Kingdom of God, which can never be completely defined or controlled. It is because of this belief that “out-of-the-box” thinking is absolutely essential to the body of Christ, especially when a church defines itself as a meta church. Institutions are not lifeless things. They are full of living, dynamic relationships. Buber was correct in

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<sup>v</sup> “Tiny Little Church” is a name used for the variety of home churches at Washington Cathedral which meet at businesses, restaurants, homes, and rented facilities. Each church has a lay pastor, apprentice pastor, and host. Every Tiny Little Church is evangelistic, teamwork-minded, discipleship-oriented, and servant-hearted, having an on-going “Good Samaritan project” ministering to the community outside of the church.

saying, “That institutions yield no public life is felt by more and more human beings, to their sorrow: This is the source of the distress and search of our age.”<sup>vi</sup> An example of how damaging it is to see the church only as a corporate institution was revealed as I was attempting to help another church resolve a deep-seated conflict. I asked an angry board member if we could look more deeply at this conflict. He and the pastor with whom he was in a dispute had been friends for over thirty-five years. I pointed out to him that their lives, successes, and failures were intertwined. The elder, whom I had known and respected for many years, looked at me and seemed to be fighting back his hurt and anger as he said, “I have never been friends with my pastor.” I know and respect both of these men and would strongly argue that these words were not true. I believe that this misrepresentation of their relationship came from an angst that represented a viewpoint often held by the outside community—that the mega church is merely an institution with corporate roles to play in a competitive success-or-failure-story. This example shows how unsafe the church can become when the relational viewpoint is not given enough importance. Washington Cathedral is not alone in its basic mistrust of cold institutionalism, and the role that this forces us to play is at the heart of Washington Cathedral’s identity.

In transcribed conversations about Acts with Dr. Robert Wall, Professor of Christian Scriptures at Seattle Pacific University, he points out that the book of Acts breaks the mold of many modern views of the church. “In Acts we see a church that

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<sup>vi</sup> Martin Buber and Walter Kaufmann, *I and Thou* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1970), 94.

transcends so many of the false polarities and dichotomies of our own time and experience.”<sup>vii</sup> He goes on:

If part of the gift of the book of Acts is that it transcends false dichotomies to offer a fuller vision of the church, it also offers particular gifts and challenges to distinct expressions of the contemporary church in North America. Acts will problematize, or challenge, the specific ways that the various forms of the contemporary church—such as mainline Christians, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Roman Catholics—have understood faith and church. All of these embodiments of the contemporary church in North America will find their faith and life deepened and guided in well-defined ways by the richness of Acts.<sup>viii</sup>

One of the defining aspects of the structure of Washington Cathedral has been its goal to emulate the organic nature of the church in the book of Acts. Dr. Wall continues:

In contrast to this overemphasis on what *we* are to do, to think, to feel, or to believe, Acts places a clear and significant emphasis on the *divine* initiative, on revelation, on God’s grace, and God’s unexpected intrusions. The God of Acts is an active God, a God who will direct the church. This is not a God who, having set the world and church in motion, has retired to Florida and left us in charge.<sup>ix</sup>

The organic nature of Washington Cathedral can be seen throughout its history, and, as in the story of every organic church, there is a divine initiative before anyone can see it.

God is working in the church beyond what anyone can understand, and the Kingdom of God will continue long after everyone is gone.

Any dream that truly comes from God will be too great for one generation. That is the story read in the long metanarrative of the Scriptures. Abraham was given a dream to build a nation that would number as the stars in heaven. He saw only one child, a miracle child, and then he handed off the dream. Moses held a dream that he could not claim as

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<sup>vii</sup> Robinson and Wall, *Called to Be Church*, 5.

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

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

his own; it had come to him generations ago. He was never allowed to enter the Promised Land, so he passed the dream off to Joshua.

Washington Cathedral's history started at least two generations before its actual beginning when a disillusioned veteran of World War I, Reverend Floyd White, had a dream. He was called to become a country pastor and serve people during the Great Depression. He continued to minister to tiny little churches in small rural settings in which there were so few people that his Methodist church had to function as an interdenominational church and all-around community center. Since it was not possible to create several denominational churches, they had to agree to disagree about many aspects of faith and life. Reverend White was a pastor in thirteen different churches in the Northwest, and, in fifty-five years of ministry, he developed much of the theology and vision of building a great caring network like the church in Acts. This vision was of a church that, by being gracious followers of Jesus, would reach people through serving them with no expectation of return.<sup>x</sup>

Five of Reverend White's eight boys became pastors, serving in similarly strategic ways throughout the country in the United Methodist Church, the Church of God, the United Pentecostal Church, and an interdenominational Community Church. His fourth son, Dr. Dale White, was called fifty years ago to start an interdenominational Community Church, the Cathedral of Joy, in a rural southeastern Washington area called the Tri-Cities. Many of the theological ideals of the meta church such as friendship-

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<sup>x</sup> Tim White, *To Dreamers Long Forgotten: A New Kind of Christian from an Old Kind of Pattern* (Redmond, WA: Cathedral Resources, 1998), 146.

evangelism and a basic commitment to the poor and the hurting were developed at the Cathedral of Joy.<sup>xi</sup>

The original concept of the meta church has been exceeded at Washington Cathedral. From where I stand, we have some of the noblest Christ-followers in the world, including almost two hundred leaders, many of whom have opened themselves up to Jesus for the first time at Washington Cathedral and now pastor others in the style of Reverend Floyd White. In the winter of 2004, Washington Cathedral hosted a leadership rally which three thousand people attended. After the meeting, I received a phone call informing me that an automobile with six of our Tiny Little Church pastors had been hit by a drunk driver as they were making their way home from the meeting.<sup>xii</sup> The victims of the accident had been taken to Harborview Hospital, the top trauma center in the Pacific Northwest. I rushed to the hospital, and, as I waited in the triage center for information on the condition of our pastors, a sheriff's deputy burst through the door yelling, "Six pastors from Washington Cathedral have just been killed by a drunk driver!" There were forty long minutes for me to think through the list of one hundred-ninety pastors in our church and wonder which life-long friends I had lost. This was a transformative night as it dawned on me how important the relational aspect of Washington Cathedral had become. I would not trade one of those life-long friends for any level of institutional success.

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<sup>xi</sup> Sara Schilling, "Pastor at Cathedral of Joy Stepping Down after 50 Years," *Tri-City Herald*, February 18, 2008.

<sup>xii</sup> Nancy Jo King, *No Not Me*, <http://nonotme.org/larry2html@2005notme.org> (accessed January 12, 2008).

The meta church at Washington Cathedral has been the lifelong project for me, my wife Jackie, our children, and more close friends than I can count. The depth of love and gratitude that I owe to these people is impossible for me to describe. The twelve congregational worship services, which are soon to become fifteen, all provide very personal experiences with the power of the Kingdom of God. Each congregation is different, but they also have many similarities, such as the weekly celebration of the Eucharist. Almost every week, people who have never attended church come for the first time. Miracles, signs, and wonders take place every single week, but they are probably not what most people think of in classic charismatic terms; they are experienced in a very quiet way, not bringing attention to them at all. Every worship service is followed by a large family dinner where the poor and rich, young and old, atheist and fundamentalist sit down and enjoy “*koinonia*” or communion with God and humanity in the same way that they experienced it in the church of Acts.

This paper is an attempt to describe the miracle of the meta church in theological terms and to challenge it to overcome institutional entropy by continuing to innovate. It comes out of the battlefield of just completing a major building program and facing all the challenges of a major recession. As well, the paper has for its roots a history of twenty-four and one-half years of building this church from zero membership to a number that is beyond many of the dreams with which it began.

## INTRODUCTION

For the last thirty-five years, my wife Jackie and I have had the opportunity to ask vital questions about the church that we wanted to launch in the Pacific Northwest, and to continue coming back to the book of Acts with those questions. One of the themes in Acts which continued to demand our attention was the *already not yet*<sup>1</sup> nature of the Kingdom of God. We have attempted to weave this theme into the fabric of the community we are building—a community that would be alive, constantly changing, growing, and working in cooperation with Kingdom forces instead of trying to control them. In 1984 when the church officially began in Redmond, Washington, many of these ideas were already deeply rooted, both through the planting of spiritual mentors and through experimentations in other ministry projects. As I have seen this community grow and change over the years, like a living organism, I can think of no better term to describe it than *meta church*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *already not yet* phrase is used to describe the Kingdom of God as present, active, and indicative. It invades the present with the work of Christ, continues with power in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, and will inevitably be consummated in the future eschatological event as God wraps up time and takes final leadership. Dr. Ladd and C. H. Dodd refer to the Kingdom of God in this sense. Dallas Willard teaches on the *already not yet* Kingdom of God, and it has become a popular phrase with several emerging church writers today. One such use of the *already not yet* phrase for the Kingdom of God is in the reference by Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee, *The Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 71.

<sup>2</sup> “Meta church” is a term used by Washington Cathedral to describe itself and by the community to distinguish it from the popular reference mega (for large) church, and it is a ministry that city zoning can embrace. Washington Cathedral’s innovation team developed the idea of a non-hierarchical church where decentralization of power and innovation is valued as essential. Each varied ministry takes a living aspect of the expression of the Kingdom of God in a form that is fruitful in the soil of its particular culture. The attempted focus is on the ever-changing living organism rather than the unchanging institutional nature of

In 1992, Carl F. George said, “The term *Meta-Church*, . . . signifies both a *change of mind* about how ministry is to be done and a *change of form* in the infrastructure of the church.”<sup>3</sup> The church began with a new form and a different structure than I had seen previously. Yet, in the thirty-five years since the dream of the church took hold, it has continued to develop and change, mandating a meta approach once more. To assist Washington Cathedral in overcoming institutional entropy,<sup>4</sup> this paper presents a strategy to systematically change the meta church’s incarnational<sup>5</sup> organizations through a methodical, cathedral-wide process learned from the collaborative method<sup>6</sup> displayed in the book of Acts.

The term *meta church* was used to describe Washington Cathedral from its beginnings in the 1980s. In fact, more than one city official has claimed to have invented

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the local church. We simply define a meta church as a church which is not a mega church but a group of culturally varied congregations combined together as one family with one dream that can only be fulfilled by our differences combined together as a fulfillment of the priestly prayer of Jesus Christ (John 17:20-23).

<sup>3</sup> Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 57.

<sup>4</sup> Entropy is the second law of thermodynamics. After subatomic theory, it is described as the transfer of useful energy to useless energy. What was once thought of as the inevitable degrading of organization into disorganization now is understood in much more complex ways applying to a variety of fields of study, including the death of institutions.

<sup>5</sup> “Incarnational is defined in relation to mission as the followers of Jesus similarly embodying the culture and life of a host culture in order to reach that group of people with Jesus’ love. We also use the term to describe the missionary act of going to a target people group as opposed to merely making the invitation for unbelievers to come to our cultural group (the church) in order to hear the Gospel.” Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 228.

<sup>6</sup> The collaborative method is a formalized, teamwork methodology that was taught to Washington Cathedral by founding elder, psychiatrist, Dr. Ray Vath.

the concept of *meta church* as an alternative to the idea of the mega church.<sup>7</sup> At first, the term *meta* was used by Washington Cathedral to say that we were doing something very different from the mega church movement. (See Appendix A.) We, the leadership of Washington Cathedral, were great believers in the mega church movement, but as we reengineered the ministry of Washington Cathedral yearly, we grew more and more convinced that this was not and had never been our calling. For twenty-four years we have chosen to refer to ourselves as a meta church rather than mega, or even evangelical, emerging, or interdenominational. The response of the surrounding community has been wonderful as they began to understand the ideas and ideals of our church community.

When we began, the term *meta* was being used regularly by the high-tech audience that made up our area. The entrepreneurial souls, who were some of our first converts, saw the nonhierarchical organization in the book of Acts and demanded the collaborative method, which was seldom seen as valuable in the church, and they expected annual reengineering.<sup>8</sup> In their world of technology, if a business did not constantly change, it would die, and they saw the church as an institution under the same pressure.

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<sup>7</sup> Transcribed interviews with signed permission to quote were conducted with many area leaders, pastors and local city and government officials. More information from these interviews will be brought forth in this study.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Hammer and James Champy, *Re-engineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for Business Revolution – Forget What You Know about How Business Should Work – Most of It Is Wrong!* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993).

In 1989, at a breaking-the-eight-hundred-barrier class, Carl George used the term *meta church* to describe Washington Cathedral, and it stuck.<sup>9</sup> It had even more meaning when the City of Redmond approved of the term. City officials liked the fact that our buildings and grounds are used seven days a week with multiple services instead of cramming everyone in only on weekends. However, they were concerned about how many people would gather on our campus for major holiday events such as Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day. In long interviews with the leadership of Redmond and King County,<sup>10</sup> the leaders explained their objections to the concept of the mega church, pushing us towards a meta church concept.

At Washington Cathedral, the leadership defines our meta church as a collection of unique and diverse communities, each reaching a diverse culture united by one dream—to build a great caring network. Currently, this dream expresses itself in twelve diverse congregations, hundreds of home churches, which we call Tiny Little Churches, and five 501(c)(3) organizations, each with its own board of directors.

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<sup>9</sup> Carl F. George was the first to call Washington Cathedral a meta church at a breaking-the-800-barrier seminar in 1989. I conducted a follow-up telephone interview with him in 2008. He uses the term to describe churches that follow David Yongji Cho's model in Seoul, Korea, and the American version established by my friend, Dr. Dale Galloway at New Hope Community Church (which used to be the shining example of a meta church until Dr. Galloway took a teaching position at Asbury Seminary).

<sup>10</sup> Washington Cathedral is at the entry point to the City of Redmond and Redmond is under the jurisdiction of King County. So, when Washington Cathedral expanded the state highway in front of the property, the State of Washington, King County, and the City of Redmond each had to give their authorization.

## Defining Terms

Every organization has its own vernacular, as does the leadership of Washington Cathedral.<sup>11</sup> *Cathedral*, a name often associated with Catholic churches, has a personal history in our meta church tradition. My grandfather, who planted the seeds of a new way of ministering, called his church The Cathedral of the Rockies. My father also started a church, calling it The Cathedral of Joy. When my wife Jackie and I received the vision to spend our lives building a network of diverse country<sup>12</sup> congregations in Washington State, it just seemed natural to call it Washington Cathedral. *Cathedral*<sup>13</sup> in the Latin refers to the chair of the professor or bishop and describes a church which is the center hub of a network of churches. In this paradigm, I, as the senior pastor, see myself as a pastor to pastors. This is the way Jackie and I have always seen the church and why taking the name *cathedral* is essential to our vision. Some visitors who see the beauty of our structures surmise that the name *cathedral* is in the tradition of the beautiful cathedrals built by the Catholic Church, but to us, *cathedral* does not refer to our buildings; it refers to the vision of ministry.

Another term often spoken by the leadership of Washington Cathedral is *incarnational* ministry. While much of church growth is either biological or transfer

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<sup>11</sup> “This is a play in which we are invited to become actors ourselves. The stage opens up and we discover we’re in the middle of the action.” N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone Part 1* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>12</sup> We use the term *country* because of our romanticized experience of life-long relationships that take place in rural country churches where the friendships are so authentic and deep that they truly are a light on the hill and the best hope to minister to the greatest hurts of the community.

<sup>13</sup> *English-Latin: Latin-English Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., n.d.), s.v. “cathedral.”

growth, 89 percent of our church community came from a nonchurched background. Our method of evangelism is very different from many others. The leadership of Washington Cathedral describes our strategy as *incarnational*, which is a very popular term today. It means *in the flesh* and refers to Christians acting as the flesh of Jesus Christ in their communities. Michel Frost and Alan Hirsch contrast this term with churches whose strategies are attractional.<sup>14</sup> Attractional churches try to persuade people to leave their culture and come to a new culture within the church. In this sense they become extractional. Incarnational ministry means the people become the church to reach into their targeted culture. This is one of the reasons that we have hundreds of ministries. Each ministry is the individual dream of a church member who has invented a new way to reach his or her unique community.

As part of a servant church, the leadership of Washington Cathedral defines our ministry this way: finding ways to love with no expectation of return other than the opportunity to see Jesus in the eyes of the hurting. Jesus performed a lot of miracles in the Gospels, but the miracle of his love from the cross is what transformed his essential followers.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps, some of the other followers who disappeared at the crucifixion were just a crowd waiting to be impressed with a show.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come*, 228.

<sup>15</sup> Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ—it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives with me, the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me.” All Scripture quotations are taken from the Today’s New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 8:18-21: “When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money and said, ‘Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit,’ Peter answered, ‘May your money perish with you, because you

Finally, the leadership of Washington Cathedral see the church as an organism more than an organization. We believe only God can create a Christian and only God can build a church. Our job is to see where the living organism exists and wants to grow and to remember that no human can own it or control it.

### **Aim**

The aim of this paper is to develop a strategy for continual improvement through a cathedral-wide process learned from the collaboration method displayed in the book of Acts. Stanley Grenz points out in his book *Renewing the Center* that this process of change in the church is not always favorable. Grenz says, “Some churches are restructuring congregational life in a manner that, perhaps even unbeknown to them, takes its cue more from the nation’s business schools than from the Bible.”<sup>17</sup> This paper represents an attempt to thoughtfully avoid cultural syncretism (borrowing from worldly philosophy without thought of its biblical truthfulness), yet, at the same, time learn from Acts how to appropriately share the good news of the Kingdom of God within the wide variety of cultures in which Washington Cathedral is planted.

As we codify this dynamic view of the church, this new study will help Washington Cathedral continue to think outside of what is traditionally considered the institutional church. When people think of institutions, they often think of impersonal organizations. Maybe Emerson said it best when he said, “I am ashamed to think how

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thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.”

<sup>17</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era: Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 20.

easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions.”<sup>18</sup>

However, institutions are not all bad. Where would civilization be without the institutions of marriage, government, or the church? At the same time, though, where would a marriage, government, or church be if each never changed and grew to face continuing challenges? This paper will present a plan to help the institution of the local church at Washington Cathedral to continue evolving to meet the challenges of today and become all it was envisioned to be when it was first inspired by the book of Acts.

### **The Challenge**

Every pastor knows well the difficulty of bringing about continual change and growth in the local church institution. This paper summarizes the challenge and lends it the name *institutional entropy*. When the inevitability of entropy begins to rob an institution of its ability to be personal, to change, and to grow, it begins to die. The idea of institutional entropy makes the point that entropy, from the second law of thermodynamics, also applies to institutions.<sup>19</sup> The second law of thermodynamics has existed since the French mathematician, Lazare Carnot discovered it in 1803, but there continue to be significant changes in understanding the meaning of its process. All organizations decay into disorder with time. The idea of entropy began with the measurement of heat change in a closed system. The end of the universe can be predicted

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<sup>18</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson's Essays: First Series* (New York: William L. Allison Company, 1900), 58.

<sup>19</sup> Barry Keating and Mary Ann Keating, “Institutional Entropy,” *Public Choice*, no. 21 (March 1975): 105-106.

mathematically based upon a formula.<sup>20</sup> Later, the concept was applied to the life and death of institutions. The understanding of institutional entropy<sup>21</sup> is impacting our concepts of the dynamics of organizations and teams.<sup>22</sup> For example, Margaret J. Wheatley discusses this in depth in her book, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. She explains: “In classical thermodynamics, equilibrium is the end state in the evolution of closed systems, the point at which the system has exhausted all of its capacity for change, done its work, and dissipated its productive capacity into useless entropy.”<sup>23</sup>

It is absolutely essential to fashion a strategy to overcome institutional entropy at Washington Cathedral by establishing a continual process for reengineering.<sup>24</sup> However,

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<sup>20</sup> Arthur W. Wiggins, *The Joy of Physics* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), 186. (Entropy Formula)  $S = -k_B \sum_i p_i \ln p_i$  There are other formulas by Shannon, Boltzmann, and Von Neumann, but the end of the universe is predicted to be  $10^{14}$  years in the future based upon  $10^{10}$  years as current age of the universe.

<sup>21</sup> This challenge of seeing the church as a human organization, and the achievement of excellence through corporate style leadership is contrasted with the book of Acts idea of the church and the Kingdom of God as outside the control of humanity and best left in the control of God by constant revival of that organization through collaborative, spirit-led innovation. Eugene Peterson paraphrases James 1:26-27 and illustrates the need for this concept when he says, “Anyone who sets himself up as ‘religious’ by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.”

<sup>22</sup> “Remarking on the profound nature of the second law, astronomer Arthur Eddington once said, “The law that entropy always increases holds, I think, the supreme position among the laws of Nature. . . . if your theory is found to be against the second law of thermodynamics, I can give you no hope; there is nothing for it but to collapse in deepest humiliation.” Michio Kaku, *Physics of the Impossible: A Scientific Exploration into the World of Phasers, Force Fields, Teleportation, and Time Travel* (New York: Doubleday Broadway Publishing Group, 2008), 266.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Brett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 76.

<sup>24</sup> Reengineer is a common term used in the information age to describe the collaborative process established for innovation, including redesign and change. Bill Gates with Collins Hemingway, *Management at the Speed of Thought* (New York: Warner Books, 1999), 295-316.

the point will be made that, in a diverse church, chaos is not our enemy, but each challenge brings with it the opportunity for creative innovation. Wheatley's advice applies to any organization. "It is both sad and ironic that we have treated organizations like machines, acting as though they were dead when all this time they have been living, open systems capable of self-renewal."<sup>25</sup>

Progress toward collaboration still remains as Washington Cathedral's greatest challenge. The difficulty is for people to keep a deferential attitude toward the Kingdom of God. As a church family, this is difficult, and, to a leader of such a church, maintaining this attitude gives new meaning to the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:24 (NIV). "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." I experience the adventure of taking up my cross as I wrestle with our church community over incarnational issues, and I know that their wrestling match is no less than mine. As an imperfect human being, I, along with others in the church, would like more control, and we all tend to resist change when we do not fully understand the redemptive journey in which God is leading us. To work collaboratively with people with whom we have nothing in common, except Jesus Christ, is the greatest challenge of the meta church.

How would Jesus treat the diversity of his family? Only the Spirit of Jesus could take Hellenistic people, Pharisees, Sadducees, Samaritans, broken and failed disciples of Jesus, slaves, and Roman soldiers and infuse them with Pentecost and use not only their cultural differences but also their personal differences to understand the power of his grace and empower the church to be much more than a static human organization or

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<sup>25</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 76.

material institution.<sup>26</sup> The meta church at Washington Cathedral is committed to be this kind of expression of the Kingdom of God.<sup>27</sup> In an age of polarization and fragmentation, the meta church provides a platform that could bring such a diverse population together. This paper provides a coaching model for the people in this growing meta church, Washington Cathedral, and it allows for a more comprehensive study of what has taken place and of the possibilities that are waiting around the corner. Moreover, this study becomes a plan to allow continued innovation to battle the institutional entropy that soon takes hold of any movement.

### **Outline of Project**

Part One discusses in detail the context of Washington Cathedral.<sup>28</sup> Chapter 1 of this ministry-focus paper details the development of the meta church at Washington Cathedral. Chapter 2 discusses the definition of the incarnational gospel at Washington Cathedral, which is an important coaching device for demonstrating to those within and those outside the church the focus of its servant ministries. Chapter 3 discusses the

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<sup>26</sup> “By learning to live deeply in two or more cultures, people learn to construct meta cultural grids, or analytical frameworks that are outside any specific culture.” Paul G. Hiebert, G. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 23.

<sup>27</sup> See the organizational synergy chart in the Appendix.

<sup>28</sup> Senior pastors of the largest churches in the area were interviewed in depth to get input on the cultural context of this church by those with different theological emphasis. Leaders of local government were interviewed at length to understand their perspective of what they would like to see from the church in this community. Three statistical studies were done on Washington Cathedral. For one of these studies, Washington Cathedral was interviewed in a beta study for “Reveal” (Willow Creek’s Spiritual Life Survey, 2007). (See Appendix B.) Natural Church Development (Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* [Carol Stream IL: Church Smart Resources, 1996]) led a study of the multiple congregations and nonprofit foundations which make up Washington Cathedral. A statistical study was done by the staff of Washington Cathedral. Leading religious demographers from the Pacific Northwest were interviewed, and the issues of studying the context of Washington Cathedral were discussed.

history of the collaborative method, specifically addressing problems faced by teamwork methodology and the training of leaders in this new approach to the church. Contrasts will be drawn between the concepts of mega church and meta church and the teamwork approach. The demand for teamwork and the collaborative method is the central obstacle to most individuals who decide not to be a part of Washington Cathedral.

Part 2 lays the biblical foundations from the book of Acts to understand this view of the church by presenting a strategy to change systematically the meta church's incarnational organizations through a methodical, cathedral-wide process. This effort is in cooperation with the community and is not intended as a method for church growth or conversion of people. In fact, the theology of the salvific process plays an essential role in the strategy of the meta church and will be discussed in detail in this study to overcome institutional entropy in the church.

The ecclesiology of an evolving, decentralized organization is established within the book of Acts. This leads to theological issues behind church leadership in Acts. Leading scholars on the book of Acts are interviewed, and continuing communication with them pursued as this study is performed, using a fresh hermeneutic.<sup>29</sup> The study

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<sup>29</sup> This hermeneutic may be best described as a counter-enlightenment approach to Acts, which interprets the text within a culturally heterogeneous community. Without disregarding the Enlightenment, a new look at missteps taken in Enlightenment hermeneutics is represented in the tradition of anti-Christian Isaiah Berlin and even in Christian philosopher Alister McGrath. Insightful understanding to this approach can be seen in books such as *Understanding Folk Religion* by Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiéno, as well as *Acts: Introduction to Epistolary Literature Romans and 1 Corinthians*, vol. 10 of the *New Interpreter's Bible*, by Robert W. Wall, J. Paul Sampley, and N. Thomas Wright (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002). This method will make ecclesiology in the book of Acts come alive in a fresh way applying to a flat world as envisioned by Thomas Friedman. This allows for a church which can allow both modernist and postmodernist to happily experience creative conflict in a dialogue of hope. Counter-Enlightenment hermeneutics do not necessarily bind epistemology to the phenomenology of post modernity, allowing for this uneasy coalition. Theodore Adorno was author of two works that had a major impact on the leadership of Washington Cathedral, *Industry of Culture* (New York: Rutledge, 1991) and *Minima Moralia*:

presents the importance of understanding the simple complexity of an organization, which is really a living organism. This perspective of the church in Acts comes from a unique hermeneutical methodology, and its implications will be discussed in detail. This counter-enlightenment approach works well in a multicultural setting where diverse dialogue and a sense of community are major goals.

Continuing in Part Two, important developing issues will be explored, such as the good news of the Kingdom of God<sup>30</sup> and its implications for the collaborative method, discipleship, the handling of conflict through councils, and continual reengineering. These will all be clarified as essential to the meta church. Chapter 6 discusses eight measurable variables<sup>31</sup> that every ministry uses to evaluate itself within the reengineering process. These variables have proven to be effective for evaluating fruitfulness in every area of the meta church at Washington Cathedral.

Part Three covers evaluation, reengineering, and leadership formation. The confidence continually to contextualize the gospel within the variety of cultures that

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*Reflections from Damaged Life* (London, UK: Verso, 1984), both critiquing post modernity and representing a counter-enlightenment viewpoint. Isaiah Berlin was an Oxford professor who witnessed two revolutions in Russia and taught on the history of ideas, presents in his book *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (London, UK: Pimlico, 2003) a basic mistrust of the conclusions of the enlightenment without questioning the power of the enlightenment.

<sup>30</sup> “What is it that is missing in our deformed condition? From a biblical perspective, there can be no doubt that it is the appropriate relation to the spiritual Kingdom of God that is the missing ‘nutriment’ in the human system. Without it our life is left mutilated, stunted, weakened, and deformed in various stages of disintegration and corruption.” Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 65.

<sup>31</sup> Empowering leadership, loving relationships, passionate spirituality, holistic small groups, inspiring worship, need-oriented evangelism, gift-oriented ministry, and functional structures. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*.

make up the meta church of Washington Cathedral is rooted in a non-manipulative approach.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The nonmanipulative approach views the salvific process as primarily an act of God. This trust in God allows the ministry to serve people regardless of their theology or worldview. It creates life-long friendships rather than clients or targets.

## PART ONE:

### THE CONTEXT OF WASHINGTON CATHEDRAL

The good news of Jesus Christ is coming alive in the greater Seattle/Tacoma/Everett/Bellevue metropolitan area<sup>1</sup> as Washington Cathedral engages its cultural setting. A fresh study of the meta church as portrayed in the book of Acts is an important step towards the goal to incarnate the good news of Jesus Christ. The data from this study is also meant to be a communication tool for helping people both within and outside the church to understand the uniqueness of what God is doing in this area as it relates to the greater Kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Seattle/Tacoma/Everett/Bellevue is a reference often used in studies of this contiguous metropolitan area which includes areas east of Puget Sound and all around Lake Washington. These are only the major cities, but the area also includes cities such as Redmond, Washington and many other large areas within King, Snohomish and Pierce Counties. Washington Cathedral has home churches and members in each of these areas. Redmond, Seattle, and Bellevue are all located in King County.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE META CHURCH AT WASHINGTON CATHEDRAL

The methodology of the meta church at Washington Cathedral has been formed by the faith, gifts, ideals, and open hearts of many individuals. In the early years, a wide variety of people came to Washington Cathedral, such as advertising executives, marketing vice presidents, atheistic professors, the wife of the most famous rabbi in the area, Muslims newly emigrating from other nations, policemen in uniform, leaders of organized crime, presidents and executive vice-presidents of Fortune Five Hundred companies, homeless people, prostitutes, and Vietnam War veterans. It seemed that people came from everywhere to invest their ideals and pour their hearts and lives into this church for unchurched people.<sup>1</sup> When Washington Cathedral began, the Pacific Northwest was believed to be the most unchurched area in the United States.<sup>2</sup> In fact, consistently 89 percent of those joining the church came from an unchurched background.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Growth Statistics kept by the church can be seen in the Appendix C.

<sup>2</sup> Clark S. Judge, *The Book of American Rankings* (New York: Facts on File, 1979), 48.

<sup>3</sup> These statistics have remained consistent from the beginning of the church to the present.

The dream of a meta church took hold in my heart at a young age and was influenced by my mentors.<sup>4</sup> As a naive seventeen-year-old, I climbed a ten-thousand-foot peak in the Wallowa Mountains, requested a filling of the Holy Spirit, and received a vision that proved to be a major impetus for the formation of Washington Cathedral—a church that would reach unchurched people and would be a pacesetting, great-caring network with country-style<sup>5</sup> community churches. I left, confident that God had already begun to prepare the leaders for this task.

Two years after Washington Cathedral began, psychiatrist Ray Vath, MD, joined the church, saying that he had been preparing all his life to help build this pacesetting, great, caring network. Dr. Vath pioneered the collaborative method as a method of leadership for several organizations.<sup>6</sup> He consulted for business leaders such as the Nordstrom family and was chairman of the board of the Christian Relief Organization Mercy Corps International,<sup>7</sup> which he had begun with founding President Dan O’Neil, former California Governor Ronald Reagan, and Pat Boone. He served as a consultant for Youth with a Mission and Catholic Family Services and later was one of only seven

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout the years the meta church concept has been mentored to me by Rev. Floyd White, Dr. Dale White, Dr. George Eldon Ladd, John Wimber, Dr. Robert Schuller, Dr. Dale Galloway, Dr. Bruce Larson, Dr. Fulton Buntain, Dr. Raymond Vath, and a host of business leaders at Washington Cathedral.

<sup>5</sup> *Country-style* means the church would have a small, hometown feeling, in which people would watch out for their neighbors, deliver food when there was an illness or new baby, get together for a sense of community, and live a life of Integrity Publishers and be God-honoring seven days a week, not just on Sunday. The church would focus on life-long friendships, be multigenerational, and each lay pastor would be regarded with the same dignity and respect as was my grandfather, Rev. Floyd White, a Methodist country church pastor.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond E. Vath, MD, *Counseling Those with Eating Disorders: Resources for Christian Counseling*, ed. Gary R. Collins (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> MercyCorps, [http://www.mercycorps.org/hk/management\\_e.php](http://www.mercycorps.org/hk/management_e.php) (accessed February 6, 2008).

alumni of the University of Washington Medical School to receive a humanitarian award. Dr. Vath mentored me in this book of Acts' approach to leadership. One experience, when he was the Chairman of the Board for Mercy Corps International, illustrates the collaborative method that is essential to the meta church at Washington Cathedral. Dr. Vath recently retold the story in an interview.

For example, when I was Chairman of the Board of Mercy Corps, we had an opportunity to meet with Dr. Ferrar, head of the Jordanian Center for Islamic Studies, in Jordan. He was telling us about the Muslim faith and how they have many different denominations also. When he was all done, I said, "Dr. Ferrar, I have got to ask you a question. I'll never have an opportunity like this again in my lifetime. Is it possible that Allah of the Muslim world and Yahweh of the Jews and God of the Christians – is all the same being?" He said, "Of course the God of Abraham." I said, "I thought you might say that. Is it possible we may conceptualize him with slight differences?" He said, "This is obviously true." I asked, "Is it possible that none of us are totally accurate in how we conceptualize any God?" He said, "How can the human mind grasp infinity?" That was a wise answer. I said, "But what we do know about him, how must he feel when he sees his children killing one another? I just came from a Jewish community, we're here with you in the Muslim community and we are Christians, is there some way we can all work together to bring peace to the Middle East?"<sup>8</sup>

In 1987, at a seminar on "Breaking the Eight Hundred Barrier," speaker Dr. Carl F. George described Washington Cathedral as a meta church.<sup>9</sup> This was not a new term to our church leadership. It was often used by the core of Washington Cathedral, many of whom considered themselves part of the high-tech culture. Bill Gates said, "The entrepreneurial mind-set continues to thrive at Microsoft because one of our major goals is to reinvent ourselves – we have to make sure that we are the ones replacing our

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<sup>8</sup> Ray Vath, MD, interview by the author, May 7, 2008, recorded and typed with signed permission to quote.

<sup>9</sup> Carl F. George, *How to Break Growth Barriers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993).

products instead of someone else.”<sup>10</sup> Several high-tech companies in the area were building businesses in which their survival depended on innovation and an inventive horizontal organization. As with those high-tech companies, Washington Cathedral finds itself to be in perpetual need of being innovative, consistently evaluating and changing as our diverse church culture requires.

During a telephone interview in April 2008, George discussed the concept of meta church. He agreed that the meta church concept had come to mean something very different at Washington Cathedral from the way it had appeared in his first books. He reported that most senior pastors are only able to think in terms of current, regimented models of other churches, and it is difficult for them to think in terms of the creativity and innovation needed for the meta church concept to work.<sup>11</sup>

### **Sociological Demographic Study**

The unique demographics of the area in which Washington Cathedral has been planted have contributed to the meta strategy of reaching unchurched cultures. For example, there were 1,097 churches in King County the last time they were counted in the year 2000.<sup>12</sup> “According to the Landscape Survey, more than one in six Americans

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<sup>10</sup> Janet Lowe, *Bill Gates Speaks 1998* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998), 69.

<sup>10</sup> Carl George, interview by the author, April 16, 2008, recorded and typed with signed permission to quote.

<sup>11</sup> Carl George, interview by the author, April 16, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Dale Jones, *et al.*, *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States* (Nashville, TN: Glenmary Research Center, 2000), 489.

(16.1%) is not currently affiliated with any particular religious group.”<sup>13</sup> And according to the *American Religious Identification Survey* in 2001, Washington State was by far the highest in the nation with 25 percent of respondents saying that their religious preference was none. The next closest are Oregon at 21 percent and Vermont at 22 percent.<sup>14</sup> This statistic includes those who call themselves atheists, agnostics, and choose the space labeled “unaffiliated.” Patricia Killen points out in her book *The None Zone*:

Throughout the region’s history individuals have joined, dropped out, and switched organizational affiliation. While this practice is not unique to the Pacific Northwest, it has been more common here and historically has had a greater impact because of the small population within religious organizations. In many ways the same is true of religious institutions. The environment that renders them weak also provides impetus for innovation and experimentation.<sup>15</sup>

*USA Today* came to Washington Cathedral on Super Bowl Sunday, 2002, to do an article on the fact that no other area in the nation compared to Washington State in the number of people who were becoming nonreligious. The reporter interviewed Washington Cathedral’s Chief Operations Officer, Rev. Linda Skinner, who was preaching at the services that week.

Washington Cathedral, a thriving 2,000 member evangelical Christian church nestled into a valley in Redmond, Washington, buzzes with ministries for every niche group and social need. Associate pastor Linda Skinner, 53, quips, “We are not organized religion; we’re disorganized religion. We like to say we’re interdenominational, since non-denominational sounds so anti. The drum set, the video screen, the glass wall of the sanctuary facing a man-made waterfall

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<sup>13</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *US Religious Landscape Survey 2008*, Pew Research Center, 20, Washington, DC, [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org) (accessed May 28, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Barry Kosmin, Egon Mayer and Ariela Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey, 2001* (New York: The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2001), 41.

<sup>15</sup> Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark Silk, eds. *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone* (Walnut Creek: CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 17-18.

cascading into a baptismal pool and an altar engraved with ‘God is Love’ make it inviting for worshipers to pick up a latte at the church coffee bar and tote their cup on in for a rousing round of praising Jesus.”<sup>16</sup>

In this brief interview, the reporter Cathy Grossman did not even scratch the surface of why those who designate themselves as affiliated with no religion come to Washington Cathedral. We are grateful for the opportunity to have God use this meta church to make an impact on that “no religion” group of people.

In a later article published in 2006, *USA Today* discusses the discrepancies in research material about how secularized the United States is becoming: “By contrast, the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) asked 50,000 people, ‘What is your religious identity, if any?’ And found the percentage of those who listed ‘none’ had increased from 8% in 1990 to 14% in 2001.”<sup>17</sup>

The increase in non religious people was discovered to make fruitful soil to begin a fledgling church. In September of 1984, Washington Cathedral began as a home church, which grew into a public worship service by October. The average weekly attendance the first year was forty-five, and the church income was nine thousand dollars. Washington Cathedral incorporated with the State of Washington in the spring of 1986. Its budget year ends on July 1, and the 2008 budget was somewhere over four million dollars.<sup>18</sup> Currently, 3,448 families identify Washington Cathedral as their home

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<sup>16</sup> Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Charting the Unchurched in America,” *USA Today* February 3, 2002 <http://www.usatoday.com/life/2002/2002-03-07-no-religion.htm> (accessed May 13, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> *USA Today*, posted September 12, 2006 [http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2006-09-12-secular-unaffiliated\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2006-09-12-secular-unaffiliated_x.htm) (accessed May 5, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Information from Washington Cathedral Financial Committee made up of four elders who are CPAs.

church.<sup>19</sup> The Seattle business milieu has a fast growing population, which cares about innovation due to the large number of businesses in the area.

In 2007, the Seattle, Tacoma, and Bellevue Metro area was estimated to have 2,126,000 people.<sup>20</sup> Seattle, Tacoma, and Bellevue Metro areas are all located in King County, and Washington Cathedral is within five minutes driving time of Snohomish country. Rural Snohomish County is the fastest growing area in the region. The slogan on the Washington State International Trade and Economic Development web page is, “Innovation is in our Nature.”<sup>21</sup> This group points out that King County is the largest business center in both the State of Washington and the Pacific Northwest, with cutting-edge companies and a pride in its spirit of business innovation. It also has roughly 76,677 businesses, including nine Fortune Five Hundred companies.<sup>22</sup>

While new wealth in King County is constantly breaking records, this is also an area with tremendous change and challenge. The county is increasing in racial diversity. For King County as a whole, the Hispanic/Latino population grew the fastest of any ethnicity. The percentage of King County residents who are immigrants increased

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<sup>19</sup> Information from People Driven Software, Valerie Montemayor, Director of Evangelistic Data for Washington Cathedral.

<sup>20</sup> US Census Bureau, “King County Washington,” 3, <http://www.fedstats.gov/qf/states/53/53033.html> (accessed April 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Washington State International Trade and Economic Development, Tom Flavin President and CEO, 1, [http://www.choosewashington.com/counties/Detail.asp?country\\_id=53](http://www.choosewashington.com/counties/Detail.asp?country_id=53) (accessed May 5, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

substantially, from 9.3 percent in 1990 to 15.4 percent in 2000.<sup>23</sup> This represents the need for multicultural congregations in King County. Even in the midst of wealth, 10 percent of adults in King County said they had run out of food during the past year.<sup>24</sup> Many families do not have the time or motivation to help their children keep up with their schoolwork. This represents a huge loss of potential to our society, which Washington Cathedral is seeking to address by offering an after-school program, providing tutors and study-skills classes.

Health is a tremendous issue in King County as people live a frenzied pace, which comes with being employed in this area. Adults across King County reported more stress in 2001 than they did in 1999.<sup>25</sup> In December 2008, Washington Cathedral moved into a twenty-million-dollar ReCreation Center. It will be the first of many that we plan to build to better address the needs of the community. So much more needs to be done to incarnate the good news of Jesus Christ in the Pacific Northwest as we discover how

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<sup>23</sup> “Communities Count 2005: A Report on the Strength of King County’s Communities,” Epidemiology, Planning, and Evaluation Unit, Public Health, Seattle King County, 3, [www.communitiescount.org](http://www.communitiescount.org) (accessed June 2, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7. King County food banks served 111,470 households between July 2003 and June 2004. Nearly fifty thousand children under the age of eighteen in King County were living in poverty in 2004. This number has jumped by approximately ten thousand children since 1999. Many low-income individuals and families have a hard time finding apartments or houses that they can afford to rent. A family earning less than \$30,200 a year cannot afford the average King County rent of \$804. There is great poverty and homelessness in the midst of every neighborhood.

<sup>25</sup> “Communities Count 2005,” 12. “Over half of King County residents are overweight or obese. About half of adults (55%) report that they exercise moderately about 30 minutes a day, five times a week (the recommended level of physical activity). Binge drinking is higher among young adults and men. The percentage of adults without any health insurance is at an all-time high since 1991. Within King County, 15.5% of adults are uninsured, up from approximately 11 percent in 2000.”

systematically to change the meta church through a cathedral-wide process using the collaborative method hidden in the book of Acts.<sup>26</sup>

### **A Description of Washington Cathedral and a Definition of the Meta Church in an Irreligious Culture**

For the entire pastoral staff, the board of directors, all the lay pastors, the ecclesiastical council, and the presidents of all five Round Table organizations of Washington Cathedral, “meta church” is more than a model of a church<sup>27</sup> or even a way of analysis. It has a very specific meaning, with many implications associated with the book of Acts. The concept of a meta church came to be associated with a church that was made up of cell congregations and celebrations, which are the larger gathering, or worship service. Most of the theological responses to the idea of meta church are found in the early 1990s. In July of 1995, in *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, an opinion is given regarding the meta church. The criticism of the meta church approach is qualified by an endnote statement signifying the importance of this theory of the church in the 1990s.

On 9 January 1995, therefore, the faculty asked its department of systematic theology to provide the assistance desired in this case as speedily yet precisely as possible (*of determining the value of meta church as speedily and precisely as possible*).<sup>28</sup> The department of theology refers only to Carl George’s theory and defines it in the McGavran-Wagner “Church Growth Movement.” They refer to meta in light of growth theory. C. Peter Wagner’s forward states that in George’s book (*Prepare your Church for the Future*) “meta may well be the most significant step forward in church growth theory and practice since Donald

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<sup>26</sup> “King County Equity and Social Justice Initiative: Working toward Fairness and Opportunity for All,” King County 2008, 7, <http://www.kingcounty.gov/equity> (accessed June 2, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix D for a diagram of the church model and Appendix E for the organizational chart.

<sup>28</sup> “The Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology on ‘Meta-Church,’” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 59, no. 3, 224.

McGavran wrote the basic textbook, *Understanding Church Growth* in 1970” (George, 9). What is meant by the term meta-church? George explains: “This new label allows for greater numbers, but its deepest focus is on change: pastors changing their minds about how ministry is to be done, and churches changing their organizational form in order to be free from size constraints” (George, 51).<sup>29</sup>

The Southern Baptists show a very different view of meta church in their literature. Roger Finke wrote an article titled “The Quiet Transformation: Changes in Size and Leadership of Southern Baptist Churches,” in September of 1994. He concludes that the Southern Baptist denomination in the United States is undergoing a change not only in size but in style of leadership and organization. He says, “This principle is evident in the growing number of large churches using the ‘meta-church’ organizational design. This design stresses that the fundamental building block of the church should be small, lay-led, home-based groups—even when the membership exceeds 10,000.”<sup>30</sup>

Other dissertations on the meta church vary from F. O. Bahr’s in 1997 for Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, “Developing Small Group Ministry at a Lutheran Church in metro Milwaukee by Adapting the Meta-church Model,” to T. R. Griffin’s in 1994 for the Moody Bible Institute titled “A Meta-church Model for Grace Church of Anaheim, California.” Similar projects have also been written for Fuller Theological Seminary in 1998 by H. G. Kim, for Trinity Evangelical Divinity School by M. R. Coutts in 1994, for Mid America Baptist Seminary in 1993 by K. W. Clayton, and for Dallas Theological Seminary by L. C. Stauff in 1995. One of the best was “Cell-Based Ministry: A Positive Factor for Church Growth in Latin America,” by Joel Comiskey, presented to Fuller

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<sup>29</sup> “The Opinion,” 219.

<sup>30</sup> Roger Finke, “The Quiet Transformation: Changes in Size and Leadership of Southern Baptist Churches,” *Review of Religious Research* 36, no. 1 (September 1994): 9.

Theological Seminary in June of 1997. In this work, Comiskey notes the evolving understanding of the meta church. He points out that, originally, he had been impacted by Dale Galloway from New Hope Community Church and saw the meta church as an application of the cell-based church.<sup>31</sup> In 1995, Carl George redefined the meta model and, instead of promoting the model, he now talks about using this model as a way of analyzing one's church.<sup>32</sup>

Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church in Seattle has had one of the fastest growing churches in the Pacific Northwest, focused primarily on young adults. His organization is very hierarchical by design, but he has been one of the best church planters in the nation. "We've planted churches . . . we've planted over one hundred churches," said Pastor Mark. My response in a January 15, 2008, interview was, "In this area—here?" Pastor Mark replied, "Some in the area, others around the country. I think we're tied for the number-one church-planting church in America. So we were sending people out and planting, but it didn't cure our capacity issues."<sup>33</sup>

Mark concludes his book by comparing larger churches to small churches and says, "Larger churches tend to present clear, authoritative teaching from scripture, while

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<sup>31</sup> Dale E. Galloway, *20-20 Vision: How to Create a Successful Church with Lay Pastors and Cell Groups* (Portland, OR: Scott Publishing Company, 1986).

<sup>32</sup> Joel Comiskey, "Cell-Based Ministry: A Positive Factor for Church Growth in Latin America" (PhD diss. in Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary), 72. See Appendix A of this paper for a comparison of the cell and meta church models.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church, interview by the author, January 15, 2008, recorded and typed with signed permission to quote.

theological pluralism tends to thrive in smaller churches.”<sup>34</sup> After the interview, Mars Hill began to advertise that they are also a meta church and even obtained the rights to *meta church* in the definition on Wikipedia. They truly are a meta church in that they reach a variety of cultures in a variety of ways and represent a very important voice in the diverse conversation that has always made up Christianity.

### **Decentralized Empowerment: Growing from One to Thirty-Four Hundred Congregant Families**

One of the most difficult demands of building a church in the culture of the Northwest is the demand of unchurched people requiring the church to be a more horizontal structure. While much is written about this in management literature, authoritarian approaches to leadership have flourished in large churches, and true teamwork methodology is difficult to put in action without imploding into anarchy. In fact, the Marxist philosopher Alain Badiou proposes in his book *Meta Politics* that political philosophy and organizational hierarchy must be thrown out. He is a radical Marxist who hopes that the meta approach sets Marxism free from Stalinism, but his critique of Western Society is that the pluralism of the food court and modern shopping malls disguises the hostility between different groups in our society. The radical Badiou reflects the new intellectual dominating the culture of the Pacific Northwest when he says, “Every consensual vision of politics will be opposed. An event is never shared,

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church (The Leadership Network Innovation)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 196.

even if the truth we gather from it is universal.”<sup>35</sup> James K. Wellman Jr. discussed the strong Marxist history of the Pacific Northwest, which erupted in riots in downtown Seattle during the great depression. His comments about his new book *Evangelicals versus Liberals* (which had just been accepted for publication) were quite revealing and apply to the innovative attitudes of all the churches in the area.

Obviously, I can't speak globally so much. I can talk about this region in particular. I studied twenty-four evangelical churches that are all fast growing. I probably could have used your church as well, and then compared them to liberal churches, and I think this region has some distinctives. One of the distinctives is a libertarian spirit. Now some people say this region is liberal. I would say its more libertarian.<sup>36</sup>

Dr. Joe Fuiten was the first pastor that I met after moving to Redmond, and we have been friends for twenty-four years. His church is the largest Assembly of God church in the United States in terms of budget and is a hierarchical organization, so, in an interview, I asked him about his management style with the independent people of the Pacific Northwest. I asked, “You must have excellent mid-level managers. How does your relationship with your mid-level managers work?” Fuiten answered:

So with the branch churches, I don't run those. I'm interested in thinking about who they are and letting them do what they do and be who they are. I don't want to try to manage that too tightly. I want independence. I want an entrepreneurial spirit out there so you definitely want people kind of doing their own things within a prescribed set of rules. Because of our diverse ministries, we refer to ministries as “cathedral ministries” which is an unusual concept for the Assembly of God.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (New York: Verso, 2005), 25.

<sup>36</sup> James K. Wellman, Jr., interview by the author, February 11, 2008, recorded and manuscript typed with permission to quote given and signed.

<sup>37</sup> Joe Fuiten, interview by the author, February 13, 2008, recorded and manuscript typed with permission to quote given and signed.

It became essential for many churches in our area to find another term besides mega church because this concept was opposed in the communities in which we lived. Rosemarie Ives, the former mayor of Redmond, led the council to adopt a size limitation for churches everywhere but the warehouse district, where struggling Overlake Christian Church is now located with a sanctuary that seats five thousand people. The maximum recommended size for a church in Redmond is a 750-seat sanctuary with parking limited to help control large events. Throughout the years of wrestling with the city of Redmond over zoning issues limiting churches, our building task force developed friendships with the mayor and many of the planners. In hearing how a meta church tries to decentralize instead of reaching mass audiences at a few services, Ives told me that she feels like the City of Redmond invented the meta church.

We realized if we experienced a major earthquake we (the city of Redmond) are only going to be able to respond to 10%. Oh my God! Who's going to help in this? And it doesn't take too much, you sort of say in the same breath—schools and churches. There were people saying we want to start a meta church here. There is something about being together in the service of this community and let's do something great for kids. It sort of happened, not very intentional on my part.<sup>38</sup>

Ron Simms is the King County Executive and former candidate for Governor. He grew up as a preacher's son in Eastern Washington, and he was the one who helped me in 1987 when the county was trying to downzone our fifteen acres.<sup>39</sup> We spent an hour and a half in his office talking about why the county had issues with mega churches. My

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<sup>38</sup> Rosemarie Ives, former mayor of Redmond Washington, interview by the author, April 30, 2008, recorded interview manuscript typed with signed permission to quote.

<sup>39</sup> He has been highly criticized by the religious community because he tried to pass a law that no new church could be larger than five thousand square feet (ten thousand square feet if it included a school).

question was, “What are some of your concerns about mega churches in the community?”

Executive Simms responded:

My father was a pastor of small church. He saw the church as being refreshed when they worked in the community. And then if church was going to spend money, it needed to spend money away from the church, not on itself. What happens with larger churches, my father used to critique them, is that it’s really hard to maintain a sense of community. It’s really hard for people to have a sense of personalization. I think large churches are not even aware of domestic violence and that it exists in their church. And then they (large churches) do not have the resources to minister even to the people in the church because they are paying for the music and the building. There are people who are sick who are never visited by their churches. When a person says, “I am a Christian and I never have doubts” – I say, “You have to be kidding.” I knew of a church that kept adding extra services and focused on helping as many people as they could and I thought now that is the way a church should be.

My response was, “That is the way we define a meta church.” He responded:

Well if you don’t organize like that then the church defeats itself. My thought is that the church should be directed out toward people because I think the ministry is stronger if we can meet people’s needs, whether emotional needs, housing needs, spiritual needs, but meet those needs. If you don’t organize for that, the mega church defeats itself.

My response was, “As you know, I have friendships with most of the mega church pastors in our area. What would you want me to tell them for you?” Executive Simms answered, “Find Christ... I’m not being flippant. By the way, what happened to the transitional housing that you were going to build on your campus?” My response was, “We applied for permits with the City of Redmond and they turned us down. They were afraid of the kind of people it would bring into the neighborhoods.” His response, “Did Moses let Pharaoh tell him what to do?”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ron Simms, King County Executive, interview by the author, February 19, 2008, recorded interview manuscript typed with signed permission to quote.

In an interview with the new Mayor of Redmond, John Marchione, I asked, “What is the role of the church in working with the city to answer the needs of our community?” Mayor Marchione answered:

I would like to see us work together in several areas. One is providing space for bringing the community together. We don't have enough third space as you are building in your new recreation center. I think we are both in that business. There are several areas of human services. The city can't provide for all the needs of our community. There's a misunderstanding in the city of Redmond that we don't have a need for human services. For example, one area where we have a great need is mental health services. We have chosen not to get involved in those services, but to help others fulfill those needs. The psychiatric center that you are building fills a tremendous need and we are willing to help in further ways to make that happen.

Then I asked, “What would the process look like if Washington Cathedral did a better job of working collaboratively with the City of Redmond in the development of the rest of our campus?” Mayor Marchione answered:

Well, I know you are investing a lot in the highway and the sidewalks and that this has been a long process for you to get through. I fired my budget director the first day I took office and that sent a message out to the rest of the staff that we were going to do business differently now. You do have the ten-acre master plan that we've already approved. But we need to work collaboratively on the other five acres. Why don't you sponsor a big community meeting at your grand opening, but make sure it is not on a Sunday so it doesn't seem religious. The whole community is excited about the opening of this fabulous recreation center. Just make sure that it does not look like a religious event.<sup>41</sup>

I interviewed retiring Pastor Fulton Buntain from Life Center Assembly of God Church, which was at one time the largest Assembly of God Church in the United States. He has recently retired and turned over the senior leadership of his church to my friend

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<sup>41</sup> John Marchione, Mayor of Redmond, interview by the author, March 19, 2008, recorded interview manuscript typed with signed permission to quote.

Dean Curry, who grew up in that church. My question was, “What do you think is the future of the mega church?” Pastor Buntain’s response:

We have watched churches grow so far and fast in our lifetime. I can’t say that they won’t survive, but the seeds of destruction are within it. And as I see it—I don’t really know what a mega church is anymore, but I don’t consider our church a mega church. (They have a forty-acre campus with kindergarten-through-twelve school system and two large retirement homes and a sanctuary that seats two thousand people.) We just have a couple thousand people. And I would not be the guy that would support building it any bigger. People right now are paying three dollars a gallon. People are going to think twice about traveling long distances to go to church. We had a church—you know I am connected with the Assembly of God—we had a church in Florida that sat ten thousand and as time went by, the leadership changed. And the church sits pretty empty. I think a mega church would be a church that has ten worship services.<sup>42</sup>

With all of these factors in mind, the need is apparent for the meta church model that Washington Cathedral strives to continue developing. We must meet people where their needs are, be personal, and offer them the hope that they so desperately need in this complex world.

### **The High-Tech Culture and Its Request for a Nonhierarchical Church**

In our community, *meta organizations* have been a standard practice in the developing of software. Teams with a great amount of power and freedom to innovate are given such freedom because they are overseen by a metaprogrammer. Many of the members of Washington Cathedral, who come from this high-tech culture, saw the meta organization in the book of Acts. Therefore, they expected something similar for Washington Cathedral.

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<sup>42</sup> Fulton Buntain, Pastor Emeritus, Christian Life Center, interview by the author, March 4, 2008, recorded interview manuscript typed with signed permission to quote.

Washington Cathedral was established in the birthplace of many Fortune Five Hundred high-tech companies, and many of their founders have influenced Washington Cathedral. It would be easy to see this concept of meta church as classic syncretism, which might be true if it were not for the book of Acts. The church in Acts represents empowering innovation and affirming each contributor's giftedness long before the new organization styles of modern companies. Robert Wall says, "Acts was written in response to a theological crisis. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that every NT book is occasioned by a theological crisis—a confusion over or misappropriation of some core conviction of God's Word that threatens to subvert the audience's Christian formation and witness."<sup>43</sup>

For many of the strongest corporations in the world, innovation is absolutely essential. When faced with crisis, companies and churches innovate or die. Bill Gates said, in an interview with the Harvard Business School in 1991, "Despite the fact that we've been successful financially, there's an ongoing need to anticipate where this industry is going and to be at the forefront of changing the products. And this is every bit as challenging as it's ever been—and perhaps more so."<sup>44</sup> A later Harvard analysis points to the central issue of innovation in a meta organization:

As Microsoft grew, its organizational subunits had become larger. The Office Business Unit, for example, had grown in revenues from \$100 million in 1988 to \$400 million in 1990. In an effort to retain the benefits of smaller organizations,

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<sup>43</sup> Wall, Sampley, and Wright, "Introduction to Epistolary Literature Romans and 1 Corinthians," in *Acts - First Corinthians*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Philip Rosenweig, "Bill Gates and the Management of Microsoft," *Harvard Business Review* (July 8, 1993): 1.

Jeff Raikes,<sup>45</sup> manager of the Office Business Unit, divided his unit into three subunits, each of which would be responsible for program management, project management, and so forth. Further subdivisions were anticipated, as well. Yet the desire to retain small working units ran headlong into the need to coordinate product development across organizational units. Mike Maples noted the conflict: “I’m going to keep subdividing Business Units. I think that communication and development work are so much more efficient—maybe by orders of magnitude—in small teams than in big teams.”<sup>46</sup>

### **The Challenge of a Diverse Organization Wrestling to Work Symbiotically**

Charles Simonyi is a billionaire programmer who designed Microsoft Office. He was quoted in *Technology Review*, published by MIT, as saying, “Anything you can do I can do Meta.”<sup>47</sup> Simonyi (an atheist) was called by Bill Gates the greatest programmer of all time. He wrote his doctoral dissertation at Stanford University on meta programming and the idea that programming working at its best needs a matrix structure in which cross-pollination of ideas takes place between innovative groups. It needs worker bees, which help create the innovative dynamic, but it also needs a meta programmer, who helps the organization to work together synergistically. This meta programmer, thought to someday become a computer itself, will coordinate everyone so that they work together and not against each other. The meta programmer keeps it simple and the whole process organic.

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<sup>45</sup> Jeff Raikes is a former attendee of Washington Cathedral and soon to be named new president of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

<sup>46</sup> Rosenweig, “Bill Gates and the Management of Microsoft,” 11.

<sup>47</sup> Scott Rosenberg, “Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Meta,” *Technology Review* (January/February 2007): 1.

For the meta church, the recognition of the abstract nature of the church is essential. The church goes beyond human description. The family of God is not owned by the local church. It cannot be fully defined by organizational charts. The meta programmer is always the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the organization of the church is always beyond human understanding, and it will always be transcended by a greater abstraction, which we refer to as the Kingdom of God. It takes the organizational and institutional form that culture allows it. It can meet under the streets of Rome or in the temples of the ancient gods once the emperor is converted. It can function as house churches in China, even when all the pastors are thrown into prison, or in mega churches that model themselves after a corporation. A church cannot long survive when a group of people think they own it, or can measure it, or that they have arrived at the pinnacle that is superior to every other form of the church. Leaders of Washington Cathedral often say, “If the senior pastor died, all the church buildings were burned down, and every other part of the meta church dissolved, we would go on meeting and experiencing the Kingdom of God until the Lord returns.”

## CHAPTER 2

### DEFINING THE INCARNATIONAL GOSPEL AT WASHINGTON CATHEDRAL

Allan Hirsch defines the popular term *incarnational* in a very simple way.

“Incarnational ministry means taking the church to the people, rather than bringing the people to the church.”<sup>1</sup> The charge of Washington Cathedral is that this concept be instilled in every leader of every ministry, but even that is not enough. It has to be taught to children in Sunday school and at home. It must be communicated to the community by having Tiny Little Church meetings at their places of work, hospitals, public spaces, and homes. Former missionary Lesslie Newbigin has impacted many current Christian theologians on the subject of reaching people immersed in culture with the gospel. Newbigin asked the question, “What would it mean if, instead of trying to explain the Gospel in terms of our modern scientific culture, we tried to explain our culture in terms of the Gospel?”<sup>2</sup>

When we started the church in 1984, we had one Tiny Little Church which met in our family’s home. Within the year, I was leading five of them in different homes throughout the metropolitan area. Soon there were Tiny Little Churches forming in very

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 135.

<sup>2</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 41.

distinct and different cultural niches. During this year, the first homeless person moved in with our family. Soon, every couch was taken and every bathroom was constantly in use. It was a tremendous crucible for our family, which did not have the gift of hospitality, and in fact cherished our privacy. It felt as if we were living in a fraternity rather than in a home. People were always coming and going, and they just walked right in. Tiny Little Churches were meeting upstairs and downstairs. We never knew who was coming for dinner, and the church was eating us out of house and home. Our kids grew used to walking into a room and seeing a group of people standing in a circle holding hands and praying, and we lost count of the times that people would come walking into our bedroom at the most inappropriate times. All of these trials were teaching us the meaning of incarnational ministry.

### **Washington Cathedral's Core Mission to Incarnate the Gospel**

“Today I will do whatever Jesus wants. And you will see that oneness. That surrender to God, to use you without consulting you. That accepting is a great sign of union with God. Holiness is that total surrender to God.”<sup>3</sup> Mother Teresa is a great hero, and she has inspired the core mission of our church to be followers of Jesus Christ and do the things that he would do. Jesus himself was God in the flesh. He said to his disciples, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” (Luke 24:38-39). His disciples needed to have him walk with them and pick them

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<sup>3</sup> Mother Teresa, *Jesus Is My All in All: Praying with the “Saint of Calcutta”* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 36.

up when they fell down. They wanted to test him and see how he reacted when they were at their worst. Mother Teresa's firsthand experience of the Kingdom of God became the philosophy of how to apply what we are learning in the Gospels and Acts.

Mother Teresa's faith vision revealed God's presence not only around her, but above all within her. God does not abide in some distant, inaccessible realm – we must not seek him outside of us, for he dwells in our inmost depths: “Behold, the kingdom of God *is in your midst*” (Lk 17:21). To find God, Mother Teresa invited us to look no further than our own heart, convinced that he and his love await us there: *Jesus in my heart, I believe in your tender love for me...* Because God dwells in our depths, conscious communion with him is more than a possibility; it is our baptismal birthright. We are never more authentically human, never more living our dignity as temples of the Almighty, than when communing with the God within.<sup>4</sup>

The first worship service at Washington Cathedral had eight people in attendance. During the service I explained the dream of building the greatest caring network in the world—a network of diverse country churches that would incarnate the gospel in different cultures and yet share one dream. I explained how we would build large nonprofit ministries that would reach out to the community and minister to their greatest hurts in the name of Jesus. I explained how someday we would have multiple campuses around our area and how we would build schools, farms, health care clinics, and churches and transform city dumps in the emerging world. Then a man named Ed Bishop raised his hand and interrupted my sermon. He asked me a devastating question: “How are you going to do all of this? What is your plan to get from here to there?” I said confidently, that I had written a paper on that very subject in seminary and it was 150 pages long. Then he said, “Well, why don't you tell us what it said?” I gulped and said, “All 150

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Langford, *Mother Teresa's Secret Fire: The Encounter That Changed Her Life and How It Can Transform Your Own* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2008), 178-179.

pages?” He said, “Yes.” Then it came to me, a simplifying phrase: “Care for the people you find and find people to care.” It became the transferable concept that transformed our church and translated into a dream coming true through this incarnational core value.

Win and Charles Arn point out the tendency of churches to shift their focus on themselves instead of those they are called to reach:

What was once the heartbeat of the entire church, particularly the early church, has diminished enormously as a priority in the minds of its members. What was once an important criterion for success has diminished to merely one item (and not a particularly important one) on the church’s busy agenda. Church activities have become increasingly inward-focused. Events planned, money raised and spent, roles and jobs created are conducted primarily as a service to members and for maintenance of the organization.<sup>5</sup>

Even a church which was founded on incarnational love is easily caught up in the pressure to institutionalize and close its doors to all the trouble it takes to love its community. The kind of love described by Boyd and modeled by Jesus does not come without the continuing miracle of Jesus in each person’s life. When this miracle does take place, it becomes the organizing principle for every ministry that develops in the various cultures that make up family, church, and community.

By living incarnationally we not only model the pattern of humanity set up in the Incarnation but also create space for mission to take place in organic ways. In this way mission becomes something that “fits” seamlessly into the ordinary rhythms of life, friendships, and community and is thus thoroughly contextualized.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples: Every Christian an Effective Witness through an Enabling Church*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1982, 1998), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 135.

### **Every Member a Servant, Seeking to Perform Random Acts of Kindness**

David Bosch's book *Transforming Mission* has helped many of the leaders at Washington Cathedral experience a paradigm shift in regards to the theology of mission and the church.

What amazes one again and again is the inclusiveness of Jesus' mission. It embraces both the poor and the rich, the oppressed and the oppressor, the sinners and the devout. His mission is one of dissolving alienation and breaking down walls of hostility, of crossing boundaries between individuals and groups. As God forgives us gratuitously, we are to forgive those who wrong us—up to seventy times seven times, which in fact means limitlessly, more often than we are able to count.<sup>7</sup>

David Bosch teaches that the church is a mission which never ends in the life of the church or the believer. This is the tradition of Washington Cathedral. Three generations ago, my grandfather, who was born in the 1890s, spent his life being a pastor to and loving people who hated pastors. He served in small valleys where there were often no more than a hundred people in the population. One sermon or one revival would not reach them. These mountain people did not want to hear words; they wanted to see someone walk the walk. This story, from a book about my grandfather's life, represents the concept to which we are committed at Washington Cathedral:

"I'm Reverend White from New Meadows Methodist Church." Bang, another shot was fired into the air. This time Floyd never flinched. He looked up into a face with blackened teeth, greasy, unkempt hair, and a long beard. "What do you want, Parson?" The man spat out the words. The pastor ignored the anger and said, "I want to visit with you. Do you have a cup of coffee?" "I can't stand churches and Christians, and I don't believe in God. And if you want my opinion of preachers...!" The bitterness just fumed from the man. "Now get out of here before I fill your rear end with rock salt," he yelled. "Well, you're going to have

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<sup>7</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 28.

to shoot me, because I'm not leaving until I get a cup of coffee. I know someone who is lonely and hurting when I see them, because I know what it feels like, and it's hell. You need a friend, and I'm going to be your friend," the minister preached. Floyd's words cut to the heart, and the man's eyes became moist as he said, "A cup of coffee sounds pretty good, I'll put on a pot."<sup>8</sup>

Again, Gregory Boyd puts into words what we mean at Washington Cathedral when we talk about incarnating the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Everything we are in Christ, and thus everything we are called to be in Christ, is summed up in the word love. The central defining truth of the believer is that in Christ God ascribed unsurpassable worth to us; though we did not deserve it. Hence, the central defining mark of Disciples of Christ is that they in turn ascribe unconditional worth to themselves and all others, knowing that Christ died for them as well. "We know love by this; that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."<sup>9</sup>

### **Looking for Ways to Serve People in our Community More Than to Convert Them**

"Jesus calls men, not to a new religion, but to life," wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>10</sup>

The understanding of Washington Cathedral about the salvific process sets the direction of our strategy. We believe that salvation is a sovereign act of God and that we cannot manipulate anyone into becoming a Christian. Our task is simply to be followers of Christ ourselves. We must learn to love and befriend Muslims, Jews, members of LDS, Buddhists, Atheists, Agnostics, postmodern skeptics, and busy modernist corporate types, along with former fundamentalist Christians with severe reservations about organized

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<sup>8</sup> White, *To Dreamers, Long Forgotten*, 110.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgment to the Love of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

religion. Alan Hirsh describes this challenge of the twenty-first-century church when he points out,

The missional-incarnational impulse requires that as missionaries to the West we seek to embed the Gospel and, by extension, the church in such a way that these become an actual organic element of the fabric of the host community. Whereas the missional impulse means that we will always take people groups seriously as distinct cultural systems, the incarnational impulse will require that we always take seriously the specific culture of a group of people—seriously enough to develop a community of faith that is both true to the Gospel and relevant to the culture it is seeking to evangelize. This is what is meant by contextualizing the Gospel and the church.<sup>11</sup>

It is essential to our identity and strategy that we come alongside the greatest needs of our community and enter into life-long friendships by building Tiny Little Churches that rally around some common cultural need. Therefore, a Tiny Little Church might be formed from a gamblers-anonymous group, a grief-recovery group, or an Arabic Christian group that feeds the hungry in impoverished Egypt.

### **Good Samaritan Projects and Addressing the Greatest Needs We Can Find**

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch explain a phenomenon that is going on in churches around the world:

But the practice of incarnational identification with a group of people should not be limited to work among the poor. We insist that in some ways it should apply to all forms of genuine mission whatever the context. Not only because it “works” but because it somehow reflects that primal act of identification that was an intrinsic part of Christ’s Incarnation. It is because of this that incarnational identification retains its inherent Gospel power to transform the myriad sub-cultural tribes that now face us in our task of mission in the west.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 140.

<sup>12</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come*, 38.

Every ministry of Washington Cathedral is made up of cells which we call Tiny Little Churches. Every Tiny Little Church prays together, studies God's word, and fellowships together. They reach people with the Good News of Jesus Christ and see miraculous answers to their prayers. Every Tiny Little Church has a Good Samaritan project—a hands-on project in which church members do something that Jesus would do. For example, they may fix things for a widow at her home, watch after a dementia care center, or befriend teenage street kids.

When they do these projects, they do not promote Washington Cathedral or their Tiny Little Church, and they do not tell the press. Some people do not even tell their children or their families. It is a secret between Jesus and them. For example, for the last twenty-four years at Christmas time, we have sent out three hundred people dressed up as Santa to impoverished families, hospitals, convalescent homes, jails, and adult group homes where they give away three thousand very nice teddy bears. During this same time of year, we give away about \$200,000 to other charities. Local newspapers have begged us to get this story, and we have refused. This forms the character of every Tiny Little Church and the followers of Jesus Christ who make them up. Boyd describes what we are trying to do in this quotation from his book *Repenting of Religion*:

Christians sometimes try to assess how they or others are doing on the basis of such things as how successfully they conquer a particular sin, how much prayer and Bible study they do, how regularly they attend and give to church, and so forth. But rarely do we honestly ask the question that Scripture places at the center of everything: Are we growing in our capacity to love all people? Do we have an increasing love for our sisters and brothers in Christ as well as for those for whom Christ died who are yet outside the church? Are we increasing in our

capacity to ascribe unsurpassable worth to people whom society judges to have no worth?<sup>13</sup>

### **Why We Expect to Live and Worship Together as Diverse Congregations**

Washington Cathedral desires to experience the miracle of Pentecost every week. People, who have very little in common, except their love for Jesus Christ, can learn to listen to one another if they listen to God first. The greater the diversity of the cultural worship style, the more our fellowship fulfills the high priestly prayer of Christ—that we should love one another just as Christ loved us. “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:22-23). This was the prayer of Jesus just before he was arrested and tortured to death, which makes this dream of complete unity even more obligatory for those who love him. Therefore, Washington Cathedral believes that we are fulfilling the desires of Jesus Christ when people of diversity love and respect one another by bringing their uniqueness for all to enjoy; and yet celebrate our commonality in the fact that, because of Jesus we love, respect and need one another.

Any congregation that desires significant evangelistic gains and membership growth in the church tomorrow will need to become effective at what we call target-group evangelism. This strategy identifies a specific segment of society (or people group) and then systematically researches, communicates with, and builds bridges to persons in that group.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Boyd, *Repenting of Religion*, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Win Arn and Charles Arn, *Catch the Age Wave: A Handbook for Effective Ministry with Senior Adults* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1999), 67.

Tiny Little Churches need to worship together and to be more than just a cell. So they form congregations which worship within their cultural context. Their worship might be liturgical or postmodern; it might be in Spanish or in Arabic. It may have a thousand people or just sixty who worship for thirty minutes as they try and find serenity. It might be a martial-arts and Christian-yoga congregation that worships through stretching and through speaking their praise to the creator with the sharing of testimonies and a ten-minute sermon about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. This congregation may be made up of people who would never be caught dead in a church but will listen to the words of Jesus in a dojo.<sup>15</sup>

All worship services are occasionally led by the senior pastor of Washington Cathedral. Each one celebrates Holy Communion every week, gives people an opportunity to accept or rededicate themselves to Jesus Christ and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, or just to pray with a pastor for healing, and every service has a family-style dinner after or before the service. Finally, every congregation is taught to respect the others because of Jesus Christ and to avoid the idea that they are superior because of their uniqueness.

Every congregation receives ministry from the five nonprofit foundations ministering to the basic needs of the church, and we all share the same dream to build the greatest caring network the world has ever seen—the local church. These foundations are

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<sup>15</sup> Dojo is a Japanese term which literally means “place of the Way.” Initially, Dojo were adjunct to temples. The term can refer to a formal training place for any of the Japanese *do* arts but typically it is considered the formal gathering place for students of a martial arts style to conduct training, examinations, and other related encounters, [www.reference.com/browse/Dojo](http://www.reference.com/browse/Dojo) (accessed January 15, 2009).

a way to minister to the needs of people regardless of whether they are members of our church or a part of the world community.

We ravish people with the kingdom when we proclaim (share its truth through preaching and teaching), manifest its reality (do the work of loving, healing, serving, through the power of the Holy Spirit), and teach (sharing how life in the kingdom works in everyday life). When people see and experience this, it melts their hearts and changes the belief systems that hold them captive.<sup>16</sup>

### **Five Nonprofit Foundations Based on the Mother Teresa Approach of Ministering with No Expectation of Return**

“All therapy can be considered an empowering act of love mediated through another person. Love as the motive power for change and growth is a means of grace.”<sup>17</sup>

Ray Anderson describes the healthy holistic blessings of living out the grace of Jesus Christ. The avenue for this kind of grace shown to the community finds expression through the five nonprofit foundations.

In 1987, Washington Cathedral formed five nonprofit foundations which would minister to the needs of the community. They were formed around state and IRS guidelines and are 501(c)(3) organizations. They have independent boards of directors, presidents, and executive directors who are not members of our church and may represent other viewpoints. They must respect what God is doing at this meta church, but we value their differences of opinion. They receive matching funding from Microsoft, Boeing, Starbucks, Amazon.com, and the United Way. They include The Health Resource Center,

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<sup>16</sup> Jan Johnson, Keith Matthews, and Dallas Willard, *Dallas Willard's Study Guide to The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 97.

<sup>17</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *Spiritual Caregiving as Secular Sacrament: A Practical Theology for Professional Caregivers* (London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), 143.

which is made up of physicians and which works towards emotional and physical health in our community, in other churches, and in Washington Cathedral; Project Transformation, which is focusing on the poorest of the poor in the world by building schools, churches, homes, medical clinics, and farms for those living in city dumps; Washington Seminary, which offers four Washington-State-approved Master's degrees; Build the Family, whose mission statement is "making the world a safer place for children" and which teaches parenting and marriage skills, and provides financial help to struggling families; and Excel Business Ministries, which helps people live by the ethics of Jesus Christ in their work lives. They are each built upon Tiny Little Churches and accomplish much more than the local church could ever accomplish on its own.

People feel safe knowing that we are not trying to take them from another church, faith, or philosophy or even trying to raise money from them. It has taken fourteen years for some people to trust that we really do sense the honor of Jesus Christ serving them in this way. They can work out in our pool; use our gymnasium, theatre, and counseling center; get medical help; or attend divorce recovery and never intend on coming to church. Mother Teresa summarized our feeling when she said, "Our works of charity are nothing but the overflow of our love of God from within. Therefore, the one who is most united to Him loves her neighbor most."<sup>18</sup>

These nonprofit foundations are not worshipping congregations but are expressions of the body of Christ which blur the lines between the church and the community, just as Jesus confused people because he was known as the friend of sinners and the great

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<sup>18</sup> Mother Teresa, *Jesus Is My All in All*, 43.

physician who did not ask people if they were going to give him something before he healed them. We have worked long and hard at developing this same reputation in our community because we are compelled by the love of Christ.

For people of the kingdom, participants in the triune fellowship, love and love alone is the bottom line. This is the only thing that gives value to anything we believe, say, or do. This is the reason the world exists, and this is the reason the church exists. Whatever music we play, sermons we preach, churches we build, people we impress, powers we display, stances we take, doctrines we teach, things we achieve—if believers are not growing in their motivation and ability to ascribe unsurpassable worth to people who have no apparent worth, we are just wasting time. We are not making true disciples. Indeed, we may actually be doing worse than this. For by engaging in all these wonderful activities without love—by making all this “religious noise”—we are actually providing a distracting counterfeit to the one thing that is needful. How easy it is to not notice that we are unloving when our religious activities are going so well! Our religious noise drowns out the cry of God’s heart.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Boyd, *Repenting of Religion*, 57.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE HISTORY OF THE COLLABORATIVE METHOD IN THE NORTHWEST MILIEU

I have fifty-three years of experience in the religious scene of the Pacific Northwest and during this time have heard stories about of the founding of Seattle First Presbyterian Church, University Presbyterian Church, Bellevue Presbyterian Church, and John Knox Presbyterian Church. The work of Rabbi Levine from Temple De Hirsch in bringing different religions together to help overcome religious stereotypes is part of the fabric of this area. Dr. Dale Turner and his column in the *Seattle Times* have had an important influence on the character of this region by establishing a value of respect for other religions. Dorothy Stimpson Bullitt was the matriarch of King Broadcasting, which aired the oldest religious program on television in the early eighties. It was called “The Eucharist,” and I had the privilege of being on this program twice where I learned a lot about this region’s very interesting religious history and about a culture that was looking for unique expressions of the church.

The defining feature of religion in the Pacific Northwest is that most of the population is “unchurched.” Fewer people in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska affiliate with a religious institution than in any other region of the United States. More people here claim “none” when asked their religious identification than in any other region of the United States. And, unlike any other region, the single largest segment of the Pacific Northwest’s population is composed of those who identify with a religious tradition but have no affiliation with a religious community. What’s more, this is not a late-breaking trend. The Pacific Northwest

has pretty much always been this way, to the longstanding frustration and bewilderment of its religious leaders.<sup>1</sup>

People outside the Pacific Northwest cannot comprehend an area where the vast majority of people just defy religious stereotypes that seem to work well in other areas of the country.

The Catholic Church sensed the uniqueness of this area and tried to reach out to different ethnic groups. They did this not just for church growth but because they believed that this made them more of the church that God intended them to be. I have had the privilege of meeting all three Archbishops, and, while they disagreed with each other in some areas, this reaching out has been an unbroken strategy they all felt that God led them to follow.

The Catholic Church is the largest religious body regionally and in each of the three states [Alaska, Oregon, and Washington]. It has more than kept pace with regional population increase, primarily through immigration from the East and Midwest, and a growing Hispanic presence. Native Americans, African Americans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Koreans add to the diversity of the Catholic population in the region.<sup>2</sup>

### **Describing Other Christian Movements That Have Passed on the Collaborative Method to Washington Cathedral**

Hartford Institute conducted a region-by-region hallmark study of religion in the United States. It was published as a series of books entitled *Religion by Region*. Each region's study began with the pre-line "Religion and Public Life." I had the opportunity to interview Patricia O'Connell Killen, Provost for Pacific Lutheran University in

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<sup>1</sup> Killen and Silk, eds., *The None Zone*, 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

Tacoma, who edited the book *Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*. I found Dr. Killen very knowledgeable about the history of the region and its demographics, which Washington Cathedral had been serving for the last twenty-four years. She suggested I interview James K. Wellman Jr., Assistant Professor of Western Religion in the Comparative Religion Program, Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. In both of these interviews, it was pointed out that the unique history and demographic of this area makes it a place that is fertile ground for a meta church.

Following World War II mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Reform and Conservative Jews cooperated on numerous fronts. One of the most intriguing joint religious efforts was the television show “Challenge” in Seattle. Originally conceived by Rabbi Raphael Levine of Seattle’s Temple De Hirsch in 1952, the program brought local Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Leaders together to talk about timely issues from a religious perspective. Levine believed that having representatives from different faith traditions speak about common problems would effectively undermine religious intolerance and bigotry. He also hoped that together religious leaders could make a significant impact on public discourse in the Seattle community.<sup>3</sup>

The first time I shared in a sermon the dream of building a massive waterfall at the head of the sanctuary, everyone laughed. We did not even have property, let alone the resolve to build such a pacesetting design for a sanctuary in an area where people seemed to love nature more than religion. After the service, an older lady stopped me at the door and she said, “Young man, you don’t know me but I want you to know that I believe in your dream.” I thanked her and dismissed her words as I reached out to shake the next person’s hand. She reached out and grabbed my hand as if she were insulted that I was not taking her seriously enough. She looked me in the eyes and said, “I really mean it.” I

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<sup>3</sup> Killen and Silk, eds., *The None Zone*, 63.

said, “Thank you” and tried to subtly free my hand. She said, “You remind me of another young man who came to this region with big dreams that made everyone laugh at him. He, like you, had more than his share of critics and he had his highs and lows and every dream he had came true and more!” I said, “Thank you. Who are you thinking of?” She smiled a big smile and said, “Rabbi Levine. Have you heard of him?” I said, “Yes, he was named Seattleite of the decade. But I did not have a chance to meet him before he was killed in a car accident. Did you know him well? I would have loved to meet him.” She smiled again, “Yes, I knew him very well.” I said, “Oh, did you work with him?” This time she smiled and a big tear rolled down her cheek, as she said, “I was his wife.” Dorothy Levine was a regular attendee in the early years and a big supporter of Washington Cathedral although she was a loyal reformed Jew. This was a confirmation of the dream and vision emerging from the culture in which Washington Cathedral was planted.

On Friday January 10, 2009, I sat at University Presbyterian church at the memorial service of my mentor of the last twenty-four years. I do not think I fully appreciated the role Bruce Larson played in the founding concepts of Washington Cathedral. I met Bruce in the 1970s at Fuller Theological Seminary when he came to speak at Bob Munger’s class, and he asked me about my dream of building a great caring network to reach out to unchurched people. The next time I saw him was when he came to my office without an appointment. When my assistant told me that Bruce Larson was here to see me, I thought she was joking. He told me that he loved Washington Cathedral and what we were doing here, and this began a long friendship that forever changed my

life. It was almost like a new birth experience in that I had never met anyone so personal, so vulnerable, and honest in all my life. Bruce introduced me to many people in the Seattle area and around the world. As I sat in the congregation during his memorial service, I looked around and saw all the people that Bruce went out of his way to disciple and mentor. He challenged me about my ideas of leadership and talked with me about the collaborative method; he called it *relational theology*.

When we operate within a framework of a relational theology, we see that the good news is relevant in two dimensions. First, there is the fact that in Jesus Christ we need no longer be strangers but can belong to a community of people who are seeking a birthright, a home, and relationships through God's love and grace. This changes our goals. We are not trying to make people "believe the right things" so much as enabling them to experience a relationship with God and with one another. Second, our ministry becomes different. We are no longer teachers, but those who through the rediscovery of the principles of relational theology enter into relationship with others and bring them to life.<sup>4</sup>

Bruce corrected me by challenging me to take care of my health, be more humble, be more kingdom-minded instead of just local-church focused, and he taught me about teamwork management. Everything was always in terms of relationships. "How much we need to discover the good news in Jesus Christ that we are no longer strangers from God or from one another, but a society of people living out a style of life in openness in our relationship to God and each other, and sharing a ministry to the world that becomes the mark of this gospel incarnated in us!"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Larson, *No Longer Strangers* (Waco, TX: Word Publishers 1985), 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

### **Defining the Collaborative Method at Washington Cathedral**

Two years after Washington Cathedral began, psychiatrist Ray Vath, MD,<sup>6</sup> joined the church, saying that he had been preparing all his life to help build this pacesetting, great, caring network. Dr. Vath had pioneered the collaborative method as a method of leadership for the church, or any organization for that matter,<sup>7</sup> and he insisted it be part of everything we do. He coined the term, preached about it, and taught a weekly Sunday seminar about how it means teamwork and respect for leadership—not just leadership that listens to God but also to how God is speaking through the people around the leaders.

It means honest conversations and conflict that does not avoid issues but resolves them with love, acceptance, and forgiveness. Dr. Vath launched the idea at Washington Cathedral with a course he called *The Circle of Friends*. Nearly one hundred people attended, and each one left ready to form a team and minister in his or her area of hurt and need.

### **The Conflict of Methodology at Washington Cathedral between the Mega Church and Meta Church Approaches**

The collaborative method sounds very strange compared to the roles of leadership often cast for the mega church, and it is not the position of Washington Cathedral that the age of the mega church is over. James K. Wellman Jr. has done extensive research on

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Raymond Vath was the Chairman of the Board of the Christian Relief Organization Mercy Corps International, which he began with founding President Dan O'Neil, former California Governor Ronald Reagan, and Pat Boone. He has served as a consultant for Youth with a Mission and Catholic Family Services and is one of only seven alumni of the University of Washington Medical School to receive a Humanitarian Award.

<sup>7</sup> Vath, *Counseling*.

evangelical mega churches in the Puget Sound area. He is Assistant Professor of Western Religion in the Comparative Religion Program, Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. He authored the third chapter in *The None Zone*: “The Churching of the Pacific Northwest: The Rise of Sectarian Entrepreneurs.” At the time I interviewed him for this paper, he had completed the manuscript of *Evangelicals vs. Liberals* and it had been accepted for publication. He points out that approximately 12 percent of the Pacific Northwest population are evangelical church members.<sup>8</sup> As one evangelical leader, Ray Bakke, says, “Kirkland, Washington [borders next to Redmond] is the Bible belt of the Pacific Northwest, with more than ten mega churches in this Eastside evangelical outpost.” (Washington Cathedral was included in that ten although we do not consider ourselves to be a mega church). While Wellman goes on to point out that Bakke’s statistics about the unchurched nature of the area are incorrect, Wellman does admit to the existence of prospering mega churches in this area.

There are recent demographic issues that challenge the future of mega churches, such as traffic congestion, city-council bias against zoning for mega churches, the cost of gasoline, and the inefficiency of being heavily involved in a church that one cannot get to easily during rush hour. Because of these challenges, many of the leaders of the mega church are thinking in terms of multiple campuses, multiple services, and multiple ministries. Therefore many of the mega churches in the Pacific Northwest are moving in the same meta direction as they face a similar cultural context. Scott Dudley, present

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<sup>8</sup> James K. Wellman, Jr., “The Churching of the Pacific Northwest: The Rise of Sectarian Entrepreneurs,” in *The None Zone*, ed. Killen and Silk, 85.

Senior Pastor of Bellevue Presbyterian church, said in an interview in 2008, “Before I got here, this church had some real similar problems when they built the sanctuary about zoning [sic]; and to date it’s the longest city council meeting in Bellevue’s history.”

These are exactly the types of challenges that helped Washington Cathedral to continue to think in terms of meta rather than mega. The impact of large services on city planning led communities to require a rethinking of the church.

### **Destructive Entropy Stemming from the Corporate Mega Church Model and Why Meta Churches May Be Even More Susceptible**

“Many Christians do not even think of him [Jesus] as one with reliable information about their lives. Consequently they do not become his students....What lies at the heart of the astonishing disregard of Jesus found in the moment-to-moment existence of multitudes of professing Christians is a simple *lack of respect for him*.”<sup>9</sup>

If Christians are losing their ability to listen for the will of Jesus Christ, then an atmosphere of great trust which allows the use of multiple gifts in the body soon disappears. When trust disappears, then rigid structure and institutionalism will soon replace it. At first, large rigid structures may appear as a vast improvement, but they also can become very resistant to change as they think conservatively about preserving what they have rather than a reckless abandon to pursue Kingdom goals. Institutional entropy is simply the result of our spiritual resistance to change. Unless we at Washington Cathedral think that we are already perfect and our church is excellent and will not

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<sup>9</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Essential Teaching on Discipleship* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, 2006), 18.

change, then we had better get used to the painful struggle of change. This is true for mega churches and meta churches; and in the Pacific Northwest, all churches large and small seem to be heading in a similar direction. Churches must respond to the requests of culture for collaboration or be isolated from the very culture they are trying to reach.

A recent interview with Pastor Casey Treat of Christian Faith Center demonstrates how mega and meta models have to deal with the challenge to change, or die. I asked, “How have you guys managed to change organizationally as you’ve grown? How big are you guys now?” He answered,

Our weekly attendance is a little over nine thousand. You know how church is; it depends on how you count. That’s with two sanctuaries and our staff is about 170 full-time. I think 70 of those are school because we have K through twelfth grade at the South church. At the north church we partner with Joe at Cedar Park, but we don’t pay their staff so we don’t really count those numbers.

“How important is the school system to your growth?” I inquired. He responded,

No, I think it has hindered [our growth] if anything. The school is [more of] an anchor [to develop the next generation of leadership] that you can’t measure than a force for church growth... We try to stay young. Stay young on the platform, stay young in our mentality, stay young in our philosophy, don’t get stuck, don’t get old... in every way. That’s not easy, I’m fifty-two now, Wendy’s fifty but our kids are twenty-two, twenty, and eighteen and we’re putting them in charge of things. I tell them, “You run the service and tell me what to do. Tell me if you want me to teach this week,” you know? Sometimes they make mistakes, but in general I think it’s worked for us to try to stay current and relevant. We’re the old timers now, bro.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Casey Treat, Christian Faith Center, interview by the author, February 20, 2008, recorded and typed with signed permission to quote.

### **Civil Wars and a Gospel Which Loses the Ability to Be Genuinely Incarnational When Entropy Is Left Unchallenged**

Why are Christians so obsessed with leadership? Everyone wants to be a chief...and no one wants to be an Indian. Just go to any Christian bookstore. There are piles of books on the topic of leadership. There's even a leadership Bible! Whatever happened to followership, servanthood, the greatest being the least, etc.? Some people use sarcasm and others shoot straight, but the message is the same: we need a new leadership paradigm. Our present model doesn't seem to have much in common with Scripture. It doesn't match Jesus Christ or any other biblical "great."<sup>11</sup>

A new model of leadership is emerging in churches around the world. For example, the teamwork leadership at Washington Cathedral is somewhat unique. At Washington Cathedral, the leadership of the senior pastor is similar to that of a quarterback. The quarterback's job is really very simple. It is not to win the game by himself, but to put the ball in the hands of the right people. So ministers, like quarterbacks, are people who empower others to do the work of ministry. As my friend Coach Don James (former national champion coach at the University of Washington) taught me, a good leader gives the credit to his players when things go right and takes the blame when things go wrong.

Living under the governance of heaven frees and empowers believers to love as God loves, but, outside the safety and sufficiency of heaven's rule, we are too frightened and angry to really love others, or even ourselves, and so we arrange dreary substitutes in the form of pleasures and loves of various kinds. A contemporary wording of Jesus' comparison of God's kind of love, *agape*, with what normally passes for love might be

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<sup>11</sup> Spencer Burke, *Making Sense of Church: Eavesdropping on Emerging Conversations about God, Community, and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 37-38.

something like this: “What’s so great if you love those who love you? Terrorists do that! If that’s all your ‘love’ amounts to, God certainly is not involved. Or suppose you are friendly to ‘our kind of people.’ Well, so is the Mafia” (Matt. 5:46-47)!<sup>12</sup> Several years ago, I attended a seminar at Eastside Foursquare Church in Bothell where three men, for whom I have the greatest respect and am thankful for their influence on my life, were teaching about leadership and the church. Each of them pointed out (and I summarize), “If you are a senior pastor and you want to call on the sick, do funerals, perform marriage counseling, disciple people one-on-one, and so on, you have an ego problem and should get out of the ministry and become a lay person. Senior pastors are not called to be shepherds; they are called to be ranchers.” I cannot tell you how discouraged I was after that seminar. We had thirty-four hundred families and I was still doing the same things I did when we had twenty. I talked with my dad and said, “Maybe I am not cut out for the ministry.” My dad (Dr. Dale White) said something very wise: “Modeling is the greatest form of multiplying leadership. People learn more from what is caught rather than what is taught. Ranchers can never produce shepherds, they can only produce cowboys. It takes a shepherd to teach shepherds to care for the sheep. That was Jesus’ way and it should be your way.” Within six months of the seminar, John Maxwell, Dale Galloway, and Doug Murren all left ministry in the local church. I still love and admire all three of these men, and they have taught American Christianity a lot for which we should be eternally grateful. However, on the issue of leadership, the meta church disagrees with the mega church. It is obvious that strong leadership gifts work very powerfully in the running of a

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<sup>12</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission*, 25.

mega church or multi-million dollar ministry. There is also room, though, in the providence of God for churches and pastors who choose a different journey. Washington Cathedral is a multi-million dollar ministry also, but I hire administrators to administrate and produce shepherds as I set the model by discipling others to care for the people they find and find people to care.

In qualification, we have a director of pastoral care who does far more pastoral care and leading others in pastoral care than I do. I still spend more time than I want in administration and making tough leadership calls. Just like the church in Acts, we still experience civil wars, leadership burnout, and conflict over power and control, and I have not been perfect as a shepherd.

Fulton Buntain has been the pastor of Life Center Church in Tacoma and a close friend for over twenty years. In an interview conducted in 2008, I asked him about the future of the mega church and how he handled conflict during his long ministry at one of the largest Assembly of God churches in the United States. Here is what he said:

I can't say that the mega church won't survive, but the seeds of destruction are within it. I don't consider our church a mega church—you know a couple thousand people. But they don't all come at once; we have many worship services. I would not be the guy that would support building a bigger sanctuary. But we have built a strong Spanish [speaking] congregation of seven hundred and a Ukrainian congregation. We have built a school with over twelve hundred students and two retirement facilities with 157 apartments on our campus and we have started over fifty-two mission stations around the world with hospitals modeled after the one started by my brother Mark, in Calcutta, India. You remember Mark don't you, Tim? With the mega church in the Northwest you get in trouble with the parking. The Northwest, we have lousy weather sometimes, people cannot walk for blocks after they park their cars. And the gas crunch is going to have a huge impact on the size of worship services. And then the mega church is so often tied to a personality. We had a church we are connected with

that built a sanctuary that would hold ten thousand people and after the leadership changed, they never could fill it up. It sits nearly empty today.

I also asked, “What about leadership style? How is that changing?” He responded, “One thing that is unique about my ministry here is that in fifty years I have never had a cross word at a board meeting! Never anything nasty, no bad words, never.” I asked, “And what is the reason for that do you think? He answered,

The reason for that, I’ve kidded about it through the years, I kid that I’m not well enough to have bad feelings go on in a board meeting. I would never... not me... I’m not cantankerous and I think your disposition is that way, and we go along to get along and if there’s any issue that the immediate meeting that we’re in can’t handle, let’s table it. The next month we’ll talk about it but in the meantime, I talk it over with my executive committee and we handle it together.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Buntain was obviously a master of working collaboratively through a lifetime of ministry, and he was well-suited upon retirement to look ahead and see the future of the mega church and how it must change.

The collaborative method is a very difficult way to lead, and it is not necessarily right in every situation for every senior pastor, but it is what God is doing at Washington Cathedral. If one is led to use the collaborative method, there will be accusations of weak leadership and perhaps more than a share of conflict and conflict resolution, but so it was in the book of Acts. The words of John Stott in the preface to his commentary on Acts are particularly inspiring:

The Acts is also important, however, for the contemporary inspiration which it bring us. Calvin called it “a kind of vast treasure.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones referred to it as “that most lyrical of books,” and added: “Live in that book, I exhort you: it is a tonic, the greatest tonic I know of in the realm of the Spirit.” It has, in fact, been

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<sup>13</sup> Dr. Fulton Buntain, retired senior pastor, Life Center in Tacoma, Washington, interviewed by the author, March 4, 2008, recorded and typed with signed permission to quote.

a salutary exercise for the Christian church of every century to compare itself with the church of the first, and to seek to recapture something of its confidence, enthusiasm, vision and power. At the same time, we must be realistic. There is a danger lest we romanticize the early church, speaking of it with bated breath as if it had no blemishes. For then we shall miss the rivalries, hypocrisies, immoralities and heresies which troubled the church then as now. Nevertheless, one thing is certain. Christ's church had been overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit, who thrust it out to witness.<sup>14</sup>

Paul and Barnabus had different leadership styles and God used them both. Surely God uses different leadership styles within different cultures. In the culture where Washington Cathedral has been planted, the collaborative method seems to be one that is extremely innovative and fruitful. I shall apply this method more specifically as we look at the reengineering process that will take place regularly throughout the various ministries of the Cathedral.

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<sup>14</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 6.

PART TWO:  
BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Every time a church studies the book of Acts, there is an opportunity for renewal. The meta church organizational model is established in this brief exegetical study of Acts. Renewal, for Washington Cathedral, will come when leaders are able to have a sound basis for communicating the ecclesiology of Washington Cathedral. This ecclesiology is based upon three essential elements: cells, which are referred to as Tiny Little Churches; diverse cultural congregations; and five nonprofit foundations serving the community and world. Theological issues which impact this meta church model will be developed from Acts. Finally, eight measurable variables for a healthy church will be derived from Acts, helping to establish a practical plan for regular reengineering of the various ministries and continual renewal which will help in overcoming institutional entropy within the church.

## CHAPTER 4

### ECCLESIOLOGY OF AN EVOLVING, DECENTRALIZED ORGANIZATION

Acts begins in the conventional way of second volumes in antiquity (vv. 1-2); Luke begins in the first person by sharply summarizing the content of his first volume for his reader, Theophilus. The latter's identity and role in the production of Acts remain unknown, though his name likely refers to an actual person rather than to a symbolic audience. In a single phrase, Luke reviews the storyline of the book (the Gospel of Luke) that he presumes Theophilus has already read: the good news of "all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning." He does not present the Acts of the Apostles, then, as a brand-new story to be read in isolation from what has come before it.<sup>1</sup>

Every time I open the book of Acts I can hardly contain my excitement because I know I am going to discover something new. I know that I will encounter ideas that will potentially transform my life, church, ministry, and world. Nevertheless, Acts should not be read in a vacuum in which the reader forgets the past and ignores the dynamics of a history with such idealistic interpretations. This sometimes leads in naïve directions. Today, Acts is interpreted within a history and within a culture. As it is studied we, as followers of Jesus Christ, wait and listen to experience the Kingdom of God and dance with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Every generation has had to experience this dance with God anew with the old rhythm coming down through history, but the dance partner is always new in every culture and every age.

Corporate reengineering experts of the late 1980s and 1990s Michael Hammer and James Champy (1993) sounded the alarm: the traditional ways of doing

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson and Wall, *Called to Be Church*, 30.

business for organizations today “Simply don’t work anymore. Suddenly, the world is a different place” (p. 17). Margaret Wheatley concurred, the old way of doing organizational business simply “does not work” (p. 25). And one of those things now rendered obsolete in organizational life, according to Hammer and Champy, is the old “pyramidal organizational structure.” It too simply does not work in our new culture.<sup>2</sup>

With the challenges in our world today, people are crying out for a new organizational structure from the church. They are looking for a structure that empowers ordinary people and allows them to experience extraordinary ministry. They are searching for an organizational structure that takes them a step closer to the soul they see in the church in Acts, and away from a heartless institution that feels political and power-hungry. They are starving for the will of God and to experience His Kingdom in our midst.

### **The Need for a New Ecclesiology**

John Drane, in *The McDonaldization of the Church*, presents a post-radical, postmodern view of modernity in Christianity. Drane, who claims to be an optimist about the church, uses the McDonaldization<sup>3</sup> analysis: “To give some focus to these questions,

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<sup>2</sup> 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), 20.

<sup>3</sup> *McDonaldization* has become a new idiom for those who are critical of the consequence of globalism and modernity. For example in *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Benjamin R. Barber points out that, “McDonald’s serves over 20 million customers around the world every day; drawing more customers daily than there are people in Greece, Ireland, and Switzerland together. General Motors . . . employs more people internationally than live in a number of the world’s smaller nations. . . . Dominos Pizza earned enough revenues [2.4 billion dollars in 1991] to fund the collective expenditures of Senegal, Uganda, Bolivia, and Iceland. Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 23-24.

I want to use a model of social analysis popularized by sociologist George Ritzer, and summarized most comprehensively in his book *The McDonaldization of Society*.<sup>4</sup>

Today, there is a new generation of Christians who seem to react strongly to this McDonalization of Christianity. I was interviewed in a podcast by a group of believers called “Relational Tithe”<sup>5</sup> (they might be called former evangelicals) on the meta church as an ever-changing, decentralized organization. They consider themselves to be a part of a movement they call *postcongregational* (which means they are no longer advocates of the physical church). This movement, which turns churches into online communities, is strong in the San Francisco Bay area and in France. While they may be viewed as reformers of the Christian Church, I find their idealism quite honest and educational. The interviewer (Craig Burnett) has moved to Paris, and I believe his faith to be authentic and his ideas insightful. Relational Tithe’s slogan is “From philanthropy to friendship, connecting the rich and poor in sharing, discussing, and meeting needs through a global resource of sharing.” For those of us within the organized church, it is of the utmost importance that we listen to the followers of Christ who are “turned off” to the institutional church and to at least wrestle with the issues that they are bringing up.

Drane points out the fears of Christian modernity and rational, tight, bureaucratic systems. “They are mechanical, and therefore dehumanizing. Indeed, in the 1996 revised edition of his book, Ritzer supplemented his original analysis with a new chapter insisting

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<sup>4</sup> John Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity, and the Future of the Church* (London, UK: Dartman, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2000), 28.

<sup>5</sup> Relational Tithe, Darin Peterson and Craig Burnett, co-founders, <http://www.relationaltithe.com> (accessed January 28, 2009).

that the Nazi Holocaust—arguably the most dehumanizing of all events of recent history—could best be understood as a manifestation of McDonaldization.”<sup>6</sup>

People for whom I have great compassion believe that the Pacific Northwest is one of the last hopes against modernity, and even here it is a losing battle. I know many today in the Pacific Northwest who have grown up in Christian homes but have rejected organized religion because of its McDonaldization. As long as I am alive, I will try to reach them with what I believe to be the redemptive qualities of a truly organic, relational church.

I took notes on a conversation between a couple of land-use attorneys about our church and other Christians in the area. They were of Jewish heritage but considered themselves atheists. One woman said, “I can’t even watch the programs on global warming anymore. These big churches are destroying our planet.” I know this family because her husband was our attorney for a short time and their home is bigger than our first sanctuary. She continued,

I hate these Christians. They are more dangerous to society than the Nazis. Everything is black and white for them. There is no individuality. They create clones—they are like the body snatchers. Their building chairman reminds me of some kind of Pat Robertson. Do you know he tried to shake my hand? I won’t even get in the same room with them. They think with their charm and utopian ideals they can steal this country. They don’t know we have moles in their church telling us everything they are doing. All I had to do was read one email from this senior pastor—he actually responded to my complaint personally, and offered to come by and have coffee with me and listen to me. This guy, I knew he was hopeless. I tell you, I won’t get in the same room with him. It is only yelling and screaming at large meetings that they understand. You can’t have a dialogue with these people. If you put him in a room with anyone, they have trouble. This land all around us needs to be agricultural, and that doesn’t mean farms—it means

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<sup>6</sup> John Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church*, 29.

empty fields. I'm sorry, but these Christians just drive me a little nuts. They're just anti-community. Do you know they actually hired my husband? He knew he had to dismiss them immediately or not come home. They're jerks—just like the Lake Washington Soccer Association.<sup>7</sup>

This conversation inspired me to look again at the organization of the church and ask the question, “How can we best reach this culture in which Washington Cathedral was planted?” We make every effort to communicate to the community that Washington Cathedral desires their input. Monthly community meetings have been held at the church to listen to critics regarding traffic jams, continuing development, and even the concept of Christianity in a pluralistic society. As the senior pastor, I go door-to-door every Christmas and Easter and talk to the neighbors about their objections or answer their questions about Washington Cathedral. Each congregational pastor is asked to create organizational charts, which encourages input from the congregation rather than elitism.

### **The Term *Meta* within its Semantic Pool in New Testament**

*Meta*<sup>8</sup> is a prefix used in Koine Greek for such important words such as *metanoia* or *repentance*, but it is also used as a preposition (often adverbially) properly denoting accompaniment, amid or occupying an independent position. The Washington Cathedral constitution, bylaws, and operating manual define *meta* as “together, different, relational, servant-focused, repentant-minded, organic-organized, and definitely innovating outside

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<sup>7</sup> Notes taken at the Hollywood Hills Tully's in Woodinville, WA in 2007.

<sup>8</sup> J. Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (electronic ed.) (G3326) (Ontario, Canada: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996), s.v. “*meta*.”

the box.”<sup>9</sup> The word *meta* dates back to its use by Homer. In A. T. Murray’s translation of *The Odyssey* 10, section 320, an argument is taking place between Circe and Odysseus. He is drunk and she says, “Be gone now to the sty and lie with (*meta*) the rest of thy comrades.”<sup>10</sup> She had turned his comrades into swine, and, if he slept with them instead of with her, he would be a man among (*meta*) pigs. This idea of *different but among* is essential to the concept of Washington Cathedral, which represents many journeys of faith coming together into a community for an honest, lifelong conversation. We are together, but not conforming. Our differences are not something to run from, but to embrace, bringing honor to our relationship with Jesus Christ.

The New Testament uses *meta* 469 times as a preposition.<sup>11</sup> It occurs much more than *sun* which would be the other choice for the preposition meaning the same.<sup>12</sup> The basic meaning, when used with a dative noun, is *in the midst of but not the same*. In Mark 1:13, Jesus was *meta* the wild beasts when he was experiencing his temptation. He was with them—he suffered under the sun and wind and felt hunger and thirst as they did in the wilderness—but they were not the same. Most often *meta* (in the dative) expresses a form of personal relationship. This includes *going or coming with* and *remaining with*

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<sup>9</sup> Washington Cathedral Constitution, Bylaws, and Operating Manual by McGee, Skinner and White, the staff and Board of Directors, 2008, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, vol. 1 of the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 369.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Aland, *et al.*, *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament*, 27<sup>th</sup> ed. with McReynolds English International (Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> George V. Wigram, *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), s.v. “*meta*” and “*sun*.” Geoffrey W. Bromiley with Gerhard Friedrich Kittel, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 795-797.

someone. In Matthew 20:20, they came with (*meta*) their sons to him. In Acts 1:26 he (Matthias) was numbered among (*meta*) the Apostles. For example in Luke 7:36, Jesus had dinner with (*meta*) the Pharisees. Therefore, when diverse people have dinner with or among others with whom they do not have much in common (except Jesus Christ) they are living out Luke 7:36. One of the manifestations of this meaning of *meta* at Washington Cathedral is a full, family-style meal that is prepared and served to the community at all twelve worship services, fifty-two weeks a year. Those who cannot afford to pay eat for free, and those who have been blessed put extra money in the basket. For many children with single mothers, it may be their only time to sit down to a meal with male role models. For senior adults, who may have no family or grandchildren, it is their time to eat with children. Recently, Rev. David Gerzsenye (a Vietnam War veteran) said he had overseen two thousand meals the previous week, and all of it was done with volunteers. He is present for almost every meal, loving people and teasing and joking with them. Many times, there are more at the meal than at the service, homeless people join us, and even people who have quit the church come as well.

*Meta* is also used as a marker for a point in time<sup>13</sup> and is very close to the Latin for *post*. *Meta* is, for Washington Cathedral, the way we feel when we leave worship. It is as if we, who are so different from each other and who each have our own authentic journey of faith, have experienced a marker-in-time and are following (post) a visit with the Kingdom of God which has changed us forever. Second John 3 uses *meta* as a marker

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<sup>13</sup> J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the second edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996, c1989), s.v. *meta*.

for an experience of an event. Every gathering at Washington Cathedral is an event of the Kingdom of God.

Finally, the classic use of *meta* in Luke 24:5 clearly points to what a church should *not* be: “Why do you look for the living among (*meta*) the dead?” Therefore, why would you look for the church in an organization, or a building, or an institution?

### **The Changes in Church Organization Because of Pentecost**

Prior to Pentecost, the examples of leadership in the Scriptures often show God working through an individual leader. Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, and Samson all worked from a dictatorial pattern of leadership. God dictated to them, and then they dictated to the people. At Pentecost, it is seen that not only were diverse people able to communicate with one another, but later it is written that they would be judged by how they loved one another. The communities of believers were given spiritual gifts which spread among the common people as they did the works of Jesus. The meta church must hold to this same standard—listening to those who are gifted by the Holy Spirit and involving them in the leadership of the family of God.

In a study that was done of our church, only 79 percent of those surveyed believed that Washington Cathedral was doing a good job of helping people to discover and use their spiritual gifts. The leadership team learned that we have a need for increased change in this area of “the eight important variables.” We learned these eight variables from a Doctor of Ministry class taught by Dr. Bob Logan: first, empowering leadership; second, loving relationships; third, passionate spirituality; fourth, holistic small groups; fifth,

inspiring worship; sixth, need-oriented evangelism; seventh, gift-oriented ministry; and eighth, functional structures.<sup>14</sup> We also learned an analogy which represents the fact that growth will reach limits—it is as if you are filling a bucket with water, and you cannot keep the water above the lowest hole in the bucket. Therefore, the church cannot grow beyond its weakest key area.<sup>15</sup> Washington Cathedral was surveyed by Natural Church development and given results in each of these key areas.<sup>16</sup>

### **Misdirected Understanding of the Kingdom, Acts 1:6**

So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight (Acts 1:6-9).

In this section, one gets a picture of the misunderstandings the disciples had of the Kingdom of God. They had spent three years under the teaching of Jesus and experienced his crucifixion and resurrection, but they still did not understand the good news of the

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<sup>14</sup> Christian A. Schwarz and Christoph Schalk, *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development* (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 1998), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Christian A. Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church: How Natural Church Development Can Transform Theological Thinking* (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 1999), 221.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix F for Natural Church Development analysis of Washington Cathedral.

Kingdom of God that Jesus had preached right before their eyes. *A Translator's*

*Handbook on Acts* points out,

The English expression “give the Kingdom back” is quite impossible in most languages. In fact, in most languages one cannot “give a rule” to anyone. This is essentially a causative in most instances and must usually be translated as “cause the Israel people to rule again.” Some have interpreted this merely as “to be self-governing” or “to be free,” but what is asked about is not independence from Rome but a dominant role in governing. If a goal for “to rule” is required, then one may use some such expression as “to cause the Israel people to rule other nations again.” In other words, the restoration of the period of David and Solomon.<sup>17</sup>

Their question reveals their motives and is a good example of where the human heart finds itself in modern churches today. People want power and control and they expect Jesus to give that to them.

Psychologist Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was deeply influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer. Adler proposed that we can never understand human behavior until we understand the basic need that we all have for power, or as he described it, “the ego’s need for assertiveness and completeness.”<sup>18</sup> All parents can see this need in their children, and every pastor or leader can see it in every human organization. The disciples wanted to dominate the world. They did not understand the new Israel or the “Comforter” that Jesus talked about. They wanted details and bottom-line production. It was not until Pentecost that they got a good glimpse of the “already not yet” Kingdom of God, or God’s new model of leadership, or an understanding of how

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<sup>17</sup> Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *Translator's Handbook on The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 12 (London, UK: United Bible Societies, 1972), 17.

<sup>18</sup> James P. Chaplin and T. S. Krawiec, *Systems and Theories of Psychology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc.), 1974.

the church's organizational structure would be so fast-changing and dynamic—it would become a living organism that was nothing like their worldly models.

### **Pentecost Unites Diversity, Acts 2:1-13**

Prior to Pentecost, the leadership of the church was made up of twelve Jewish men with only faint memories of Jesus' crossing cultural lines to minister to Samaritans, Roman centurions, prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners. During the life of Jesus, he seems to be the only one holding the group together, with a lot of opposition by the disciples. They ask to be first and he tells them, "The last will be first, and the first will be last."

At Pentecost, there are Jews from around much of the world and they do not even speak the same language.

"Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean" (Acts 2:8-12)?

In the increasingly fragmented world that we live in, people are again searching to see those with real differences love one another as if Jesus is in their presence. The fragmentation trickles down to today's family where, in one home, everyone watches a different channel on TV and has a different choice in music and philosophy. In the world, this fragmentation of cultures goes to an insane extreme when nations break into civil war and old empires crumble into racial genocide.

For the meta church, Pentecost represents the goal of bringing different kinds of people together to follow Jesus and show the world what Jesus can do when a group of people who truly have no other gods before them let power struggles be under His control rather than battle as if we live in a corporate world—a world which seems to come right out of Nietzsche’s essay on *The Will to Power*.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Use of the Plural Pronoun at Pentecost, Acts 2:1-47**

Acts 2 describes the incredible founding of the church through the experience of Pentecost. Viewing this chapter in the context of our highly individualized society, it is amazing to see the use of the plural pronoun to describe something that is larger than just conforming to the will of one person. In *The Today’s New International Version* of the Bible, plural pronouns are used at least thirty-seven times.

In Acts 2, Peter preached to the people, and they were amazed as he described an experience that would last for generations: “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). These were one person’s seemingly prophetic ideas, as they stood against all ideas in opposition. In this sermon, Peter described something that they were all experiencing and drew conclusions that impacted everyone. I believe that this was the beginning of the *collaborative method* in the church. A people who were looking, not for their own will, but for a greater will than one group against another. They were searching for the One

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<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 2006)

before whom they should have no other gods—and for the very will of God to be imposed on everyone.

### **Entropy as a Spiritual Issue in Acts**

Pentecost has always been viewed as a highpoint in renewal of the church. In fact, for many theologians, it is viewed as the beginning of the church. It was a tremendous point of change. Throughout the century, when churches have prayed for renewal and change, they have looked to elements of Pentecost to be that God-like force for change. Today, every church leader struggles with the need to change the church that he or she is called to lead. In an article in *The Global Dictionary of Theology*, Martin Shaw says, “While global revivals cover the theological spectrum, most are characterized by a creative use of several elements of early Christianity, typically from the book of Acts.”<sup>20</sup>

There are many forces that work against change. Institutional entropy is the term that we at Washington Cathedral use to summarize the idea that change is not a choice but a necessity. Institutional entropy is something that is in the mind of every leader of every institution in our culture. Whether they have another name for it or not, they know that every organization must change—become better or die. In the challenging times of the book of Acts, when persecution was so real and the challenge of the Great Commission to make disciples of every ethnic group was so daunting, the church was committed to grow and change to meet these challenges. However, it was not change just for *adaptation to culture*, or *response to challenge*; it was change in order to *find the will*

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Shaw, *Global Dictionary of Theology*, eds. William A. Dryness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 770.

*of God*. Therefore, the council at Jerusalem or the debates over strategy (such as Paul going to Jerusalem) are issues that were handled with prayerful, thoughtful, and assertive communication with hearts that were ready to yield to God's will.

At Washington Cathedral, we are constantly training for and improving on these types of conflicts and creative communication, but there is still a need for much improvement in this area. At Washington Cathedral, trained Christian psychologists teach a class on listening as part of our discipleship training, and this class is periodically offered to the general church and community. Conflict resolution and communication skills are taught in pre-marital counseling, parenting seminars, staff workshops, and our all-church leadership summit. However, even those of us who teach these courses freely admit that we (personally) have a lot growing to do in this area.

#### The Severity of Stagnation, Acts 5:1-11

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a dramatic telling of the devastating consequences of inauthentic faith. If institutional entropy is resistance to the concept of continual authentic change, then Ananias and Sapphira are great examples of the danger of inauthentic faith. They were faking change (the giving that was required by their hearts) and they are shocking examples of resisting the Spirit of God's leading to sacrificial change. They held back part of the money that they had pledged, which I am sure was a conservative move done for reasons that they had rationalized and justified.

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a

thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.” When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened (Acts 5:3-5).

If refusal to change and grow means death in the universe, according to the second law of thermodynamics, then this story is a dramatic representation of “spiritual entropy.”

Microsoft, at one time, had billions of dollars in cash. The person who used to be in charge of investing for Microsoft is a continued supporter of the Charity Alliance Organization, and I had lunch with him in his office one day (which was next to Bill Gates’ office). This very intelligent man asked me for prayer because the pressure of investing Microsoft’s money was huge, and he could not just rest upon the *status quo*. More than one vice-president has repeated the words, “We are only as good as last year’s plan. If we don’t reengineer our company regularly, then we will no longer exist.” This is true of businesses such as Boeing, Microsoft, Starbucks, and the Church.

In the story of Ananias, the second law of thermodynamics had an immediate impact and everyone was shocked and amazed. We would like to think that we could have enough put away, or that insurance will cover everything, or that our real-estate investments are strong enough. That is not the way the universe works, and God makes a point of it here in Acts. It is either all-out-obedience or stagnation and death.

#### Kingdom Refreshment, Opposition, and Reorganization, Acts 5:12-6:7

Acts 5:12-6:17, shows the Spirit of God working in the midst of the church. They are doing the work of Jesus. People are being healed, evil in individual personalities is challenged, and people are changed, but life is not easy. There is persecution and

opposition. The disciples are thrown in jail, and then they escape and go out and start doing their work again. Organizational problems occur with taking care of widows and serving meals. Jewish apostles appoint Hellenistic young men to the position of caretakers of the Greek widows who were being denied help, but Stephen follows the lead of the Spirit and does the work of the apostles. There is no record of his ever doing the job description that was given “the Seven.” In Paul Walaskay’s commentary:

“Stephen, a Hellenistic Jewish Christian and one of the Seven, is presented as a true hero in the history of the early church. Luke piles up superlatives in describing him: full of grace and power, a worker of great wonders and signs, possessing wisdom and the Spirit. Finally, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, has a ‘face...like the face of an angel.’”<sup>21</sup>

James Montgomery Boice makes a significant point in his commentary on this section.

Not only was there to be a division of responsibility, but there was also to be a plurality of leadership even in a specifically designated area. I have in my office a sign somebody gave me some years ago that says, “God so loved the world that he didn’t send a committee.” I can understand what it means. Committees are inefficient, indecisive, and slow. We think how much better it would be just to do away with them and get the job done quickly. Well, sometimes that may be necessary. But the problem is that the directions taken are often wrong or unbalanced, and this is what a plurality of leadership corrects. The gifts of Christ to the entire body are needed to correct such imbalances. It is significant that in the New Testament the Holy Spirit never seemed to have led anyone to appoint merely one elder or one bishop in a place. It is always elders (plural) or bishops (plural).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Paul W. Walaskay, *Acts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 70-71.

<sup>22</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *An Expository Commentary on Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 115-116.

**Second- and First-Generation Conflict and Cooperation in Leadership,  
Acts 7:1-8:40**

One of the valuable aspects of the Acts narrative is that it describes the conflict and change involved in multiple generations of faith. Some examples of such conflict are: conflict over how the enemy (now new convert) Saul would be treated, conflict over what would be required of gentiles, and there was even conflict between two life-long friends Paul and Barnabus over the inclusion of John Mark. This kind of generational conflict is a great example for the church of the twenty-first century. It leads us to ask the question, How can this conflict be resolved in a God-directed, creative fashion that makes the church stronger?

“His name was Stephen. Without Stephen there might not have been an Apostle Paul, a break with Judaism, or world-wide Christianity. Stephen is the personification of the transition Luke wants us to feel.”<sup>23</sup> The story of Stephen creates a typology that is very important to the meta church. Stephen had been appointed as one of the seven to take care of the widows so that the apostles could spend more time in prayer and the word, but, like many young people, he did not quite fit into the organizational pattern the way that those who lead the institution would like. Instead, he did the work of an apostle and did it mightily. This seemingly spontaneous act of courage and tragedy becomes the major breakthrough for the church in Acts.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Mastering the New Testament: Acts* (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1983), 132.

<sup>24</sup> “This profile is surprising given Stephen’s recent selection to assume the administrative duties of the Twelve.” Rob Wall, *Acts*, vol. 10 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 121.

The demand for authentic faith rather than institutional control is repeated in the important story of Simon who wanted to buy control of the Holy Spirit.

Simon... followed Phillip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. The Samaritan Simon of Acts is a compelling figure. Later theologians who wrongly identify him as the prototype of every Christian heretic rightly recognize that at the root of Simon's spiritual failure is a temptation that every new believer must resist. From his conversion, he is attracted to the spectacular. He covets the religious authority that would allow him to broker the power of the Spirit. He knows from personal experience that the one who holds on the reins of a spectacular can control the entire community.<sup>25</sup>

The insistence of the Acts narrative explains why God must stay in charge of the church, allowing the church to have great humility and authentic flexibility. We see the church spontaneously follow the leadership of the Spirit in the brief life of a young man named Stephen when he yielded to leadership from his former enemy Paul, and yet it showed resistance to bids for control from an inauthentic Simon.

### **The Meta Church as a Horizontal and Missional Organism, Acts 13:1-4**

F. F. Bruce, in his classic work on *The Book of Acts*, makes it quite clear how different the early church in the first part of Acts was from many modern concepts of organizations:

The community was organized along the lines of the voluntary type of association called a *haburah*, a central feature of which was the communal meal. The communal meal could not conveniently be eaten in the temple precincts, so they ate "by households" as we translate the Greek phrase (AV "from house to house" gives the sense fairly well). Within the community there was a spirit of rejoicing and generosity; outside, they enjoyed great popular good-will. They ascribed all glory to God, and their numbers were constantly increased as more and more believers in Jesus were added by Him to the faithful remnant. It is the Lord whose

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<sup>25</sup> Wall, *Acts*, 140.

prerogative it is to add new members to His own community; it is the joyful duty of the community to welcome to their ranks those whom Christ has accepted.<sup>26</sup>

This early organization of the church might be called horizontal and missional. By *horizontal*, I am referring to a term often used in high-tech culture for organizations which are moving away from hierarchicalism. This does not mean that no hierarchy exists, but the very best and brightest minds want to work in organizations where their innovative abilities are empowered. Eddie Gibbs calls this “the flattening of organizational structures.” Just as people are refusing to work for tyrannical, hierarchical structures, the same is true in churches that are constructed with purely hierarchy and power in mind. Gibbs says,

[Flattening of organizational structures] represent[s] a postmodern, decentralized, relational paradigm. The effective networker is constantly asking two questions, “Who knows?” and, “Who needs to know?” The network-based movement should not be regarded as a place where everyone is free to do his or her own thing. This would simply result in a network becoming a tangle and ripping itself apart. Rather it represents a significant change in the decision-making process. Whereas in the hierarchical pyramid, decision-makers are removed from the scene of action and delegate their decisions to the people responsible for their implementation, in the network, decision-makers are available when needed to ratify a decision. At the same time, they resist the temptation for decisions to float to the top of an organization, emphasizing that each key decision must be taken and acted upon at the appropriate level. Most decisions are *operational* rather than *policy-based* and therefore must be made as close to the operation in progress as possible by those individuals most directly involved. On the other hand, decisions are often not made in isolation but are communicated to the network for input by anyone who can make a worthwhile contribution. The cyberspace revolution that got under way in the decade of the 1990s has changed for all time how information is disseminated.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 81.

<sup>27</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 83.

The missional nature of the church comes with a struggle. Amidst persecution and martyrdom, its mission becomes focused through unlikely leaders such as Stephen and Paul. Ray Anderson describes this missional nature of the church so well when he says,

The mission of the church overrides its boundaries, spilling out into the world in fulfillment of the apostolic commission to “go into the world.” The church’s mission is not to build up an empire or kingdom but to disperse the mission of God through the lives of its members as well as various groups and organizations that they form. The church finds its being in its mission, under the guidance and power of the Spirit. Its intention and direction is oriented to the world that God loves and to which it is sent.

By the ministry of the church, I mean its life, activities and programs by which it carries out its mission. Jesus had both a mission to fulfill as the apostle who was faithful to his calling (Hebrews 3:1-3) and a ministry by which he carried out this mission. The church carries out ministries and so participates in God’s mission. The ministry of the church should always be understood as grounded in the mission of God in Christ to reconcile the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). When mission leads, ministry follows. In this way the ministries and programs of the church are empowered by the presence of the Spirit in the life of members of the community.<sup>28</sup>

### **Meta Church as a Collaborative Method, Acts 20:13-37**

If ever we see the collaborative method working at its best, it is in the history of the church as described in the book of Acts. Divergent ideas being led by the Spirit for Kingdom-enhancing conclusions is an amazing phenomenon to be studied. “That is, the synergism affected by the dominant theological commitments of Acts suggests that the diverse theologies ingredient in the biblical canon compose a dynamic, self-correcting system, preventing theological distortion.”<sup>29</sup> Darrell L. Bock makes an insightful analysis

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<sup>28</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 185.

<sup>29</sup> Wall, *Acts*, 32.

of Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders at Miletus.<sup>30</sup> However, Bock's personal summary is most insightful.

The speech can also be viewed from another angle. It is not related primarily to Paul but to God's plan for the church and its sense of community. Gaventa (2004) has shown how the speech turns the church's focus toward God. Christians are to rely on God for their future wellbeing. The nature of God's plan, the provision of the Spirit, and the presence of Jesus all lead the church in this direction. No matter how difficult things get, they can rely on God. In a sense, Paul edifies the church when he points them in this direction.<sup>31</sup>

This view of the church (being only *a part* of the Kingdom of God and only authentic when it submits to the leadership of Christ) is a hard goal to put before the church in any period of history.

“We have established that the particular mission community is the central focus of God's mission, as it carries out its witness in a specific cultural setting. It is not biblical, however, for particular communities of the visible, organized church to exist in isolation from one another. Particularity is not exclusivity.”<sup>32</sup> As a second-generation, independent, evangelical church, this not existing in isolation is a particular challenge. In fact, most of the mega churches in the Pacific Northwest refer to themselves as independent evangelical. This is the point where Scripture must challenge and bring change to those who find themselves in isolation and yet read about a church, which was

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<sup>30</sup> Bock summarizes the points of view of Witherinton (1998) who sees this as a speech steeped in Pauline style; Marshal (1980) who sees this speech as essentially authentic; Weiser (1985) who sees it as a Lukan creation; Roloff (1988) who sees Luke's hand but says the essential elements are historically accurate; Trebilco (2004) who sees it as neither Lukan nor Pauline but as dependent upon Ephesian tradition. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 623-624.

<sup>31</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 624.

<sup>32</sup> Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel of Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 248.

always in a dynamic, collaborative relationship with others who were pursuing the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the collaborative method in Acts speaks not only to individualism (which is a struggle for any community), but it is a challenge to individualistic communities such as independent evangelical churches as well.

## CHAPTER 5

### THEOLOGICAL ISSUES BEHIND CHURCH LEADERSHIP IN ACTS

When we finally make a commitment to a belief system about leadership in the present church, we have set our feet upon ground that is defined by our theological understanding. George Eldon Ladd taught that “the *ekklesia* is not to be viewed simply as a human fellowship, bound together by a common religious belief and experience. It is this, but it is more than this: it is the creation of God through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> The following Bible study establishes the ideals that Washington Cathedral sees grounded in the book of Acts. It is not a statement that we have arrived at the final, perfect conclusion, but it is a strong, to-the-death commitment that this is the journey we are determined to make.

#### **Kingdom of God Consciousness as the Collaborative Method, Acts 4:23 and 32**

Ladd summarized the attitude of the church in Acts with words that capture the vision of Washington Cathedral: “The Beginning of the church: Pentecost. Jesus looked upon his disciples as the nucleus of Israel who accepted his proclamation of the Kingdom of God and who, therefore, formed the true people of *ekklesia* who would recognize his messiahship and be the people of the Kingdom and, at the same time, the instrument of

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<sup>1</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 347.

the Kingdom in the world.”<sup>2</sup> What pastor has not dreamed of all believers being of one heart and mind? This oneness existed in a moment that is described in Acts 4. (I am convinced that we have one chance at this kind of teamwork or collaborative methodology, and that chance comes only if we, as community of faith, are gripped by the pervasive presence of the already-not-yet Kingdom of God with all of its power and glory.) In this moment there was sharing of their possessions; in fact, they shared everything they had. They must have had a sense that everything was given to them by God in the first place, and, therefore, teamwork was the God-honoring response. This resulted in great power to testify and God’s grace powerfully working in them all.

#### **The Active Holy Spirit in Acts and the Meta Organization, Acts 6:1-7**

In Acts 6, one sees some dramatic events, which helped define the direction of the meta church. As the church grew, it crossed cultural lines and strived to be incarnational within each group. The church moved from its primary group being Hebrew to include the Hellenistic Jews. There were issues of discrimination, so the apostles intentionally appointed seven Hellenistic leaders. The appointing of these leaders was an attempt to be not only multicultural, but to be one church, and it gave the apostles the freedom to devote more time to prayer and ministry of the word.

There is no record of whether this administrative strategy worked because the story that takes over is that of Stephen doing the work of the apostles—proclaiming the good news and witnessing before the community. The frenetic nature of the story of

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<sup>2</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 342.

Stephen, with all of its spontaneity, makes one wonder if there is such a place for this kind of enthusiasm in the tightly-held, bureaucratic institution of the church today.

Stephen's work is obviously directed by the Holy Spirit and not by the apostles. This is the way each of the twelve cultural congregations began at Washington Cathedral.

A good case example is the New Life Recovery twelve-step congregation. One Sunday, a man named Larry King came to church. I met him before the service and asked how he had come to Washington Cathedral. He said that his wife had told him that she would divorce him if he did not come. I said, "Well, you are going to be a tough audience—since you are forced to be here. Try and relax, it might not be as painful as you thought." Larry came back, and before long he had made a commitment to become a Christ-follower, but he wrestled with more than one addiction. I visited him in the hospital one time, and he shared that he believed his addictions were going to kill him. (That same week I had three other people tell me the same thing). I asked him to help start a Tiny Little Church for people struggling with addictions. About a year later, I attended Larry's one-year-sobriety party. I hardly knew anyone at the party and found out that Larry had become a Tiny Little Church apprentice pastor. He had worked with the pastoral staff and disciplined Christian leaders, who helped organize the congregation. A couple of years later, his Tiny Little Church (that specialized in his addiction) had grown to include seventy-five weekly attendees, and was a part of a larger twelve-step ministry that reached out to hundreds of people in the community with practically every kind of addiction. They were all supervised by psychiatrist Dr. Ray Vath, and the Health

Resource Center, to make sure that they stayed authentically Christian and psychologically wholesome.

When Larry died, I was asked by the *Seattle Times* and the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* as to the number of people who attended his funeral. I told them there were so many that not everyone could fit in the sanctuary. As I presided over his funeral, I looked out over the crowd and realized that I did not know most of the people. They were all people he had reached through this ministry. I asked everyone to stand who was part of a group he had started, and close to one hundred people stood. All of them were people who were finding their sobriety through this cultural congregation. This beginning of the twelve-step ministry was entirely a work of the Holy Spirit; we just followed His leading. It is not hard to see when God is leading; we just need to be ready to march when we get the orders.

Ladd points out how the church in Acts represented differing cultural groups within groups. He summarizes their coming together to be one church, “The early Christians were conscious of being bound together because they were together bound to Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Without this active work of the Holy Spirit, the incredible challenges of human beings working together collaboratively seems to be a daunting impossibility. However, when God comes upon us with forgiveness, grace, and hope, the world is surprised at the fulfillment of the age-old dream of a diverse people working together in unity. In fact, those who observe this will be tempted to give the glory to Jesus for this amazing accomplishment.

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<sup>3</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 350.

### **Discipleship as a Coaching Model to Empower Deacons and Elders, Acts 9:17-31**

Acts 9 tells a prototypical story of how salvation works (at least in the experience of Washington Cathedral). Salvation comes when a person meets Jesus personally. It is not an act of manipulation on the evangelist's part. One sees several key ingredients: first, (9:7) courageous testimony (Stephen willing to die to share the good news); second, (9:4-12) an authentic response to the reality of Jesus Christ (Saul is blinded by the sight of Jesus and is willing to be healed by a Christian); third, (9:17-19) courageous friendship (Ananias is willing to go and heal Saul, the enemy of the church); fourth, (9:26-28) courageous acceptance (Barnabas is willing to befriend this scary person as an advocate); fifth, (9:30-31) courageous community (the church protects Saul from the Hellenistic Jews who try and kill him); sixth, courageous launching (the church launches Saul/Paul into ministry). Throughout this process, there must have been a great environment for discipleship because later we see that Paul knows how to pray and practice solitude, and that he knows what his spiritual gift is and how to use it, how to study and understand the Scriptures, and how to relate to the body of Christ.

Ladd points out his observation of the early church when he says, "The churches at large were bound together by no ties of organization or appointed officials, but stood under the spiritual authority of the apostles."<sup>4</sup> This seems like a winning formula for discipleship, spiritual formation, and leadership development. Ladd describes an early church that is built more on relationship than organizational structure. Relationships like

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<sup>4</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 352.

this describe an institution that makes intuitive sense to humans who are in desperate need of a practical plan to help the church become all that it was intended to be.

### **Signs, Gifts, and Fruit as Guidelines throughout the Meta Church, Acts 10:44-48**

Much has been written about the signs and wonders and their role in the Book of Acts. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* says, “The phrase signs and wonders appears some sixteen times in the NT. As with the OT, the continuing emphasis is on the redemptive activity of God. The focus switches from the exodus to the system of events surrounding the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>5</sup> As mentioned before, miraculous signs have been a part of the church since the beginning. We have found that signs and wonders do not establish people in their faith. In fact, people who have experienced amazing miracles in their life do not necessarily become consistent followers of Jesus Christ. It has been our experience at Washington Cathedral that those who are touched by the miracle of a love that could only be from God are often the ones most profoundly impacted to follow Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, miracles were a very important part of leading the church in Acts.

“The appearance of something like tongues of fire dividing and resting on each one (2:3) suggests unity and diversity.”<sup>6</sup> At Pentecost, the miracle of tongues of fire suggests diversity. In Acts 10:44-48, the Holy Spirit coming upon gentiles and giving

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<sup>5</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1101.

<sup>6</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 348.

them the gift of speaking in tongues became an informative argument as to the church's relationship with gentiles.

At Washington Cathedral, we have been convinced by the fruitfulness of women in ministry that women should be allowed leadership of the body. In Acts 2:17-19, the Bible says, "In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy'" (Acts 2:17-18). Walter Linfield comments on this passage in the book *Women in Ministry*, "Given the importance of this event for the church in the present age, it is surprising that the significance of the quotation is so easily lost."<sup>7</sup> If the book of Acts is going to be a revolutionary document concerning the meta church, then the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of women becomes very significant. As the husband of a very dynamic wife, whose ministry far exceeds my own, this is a very important point to me. Also, as a father of two remarkable daughters in ministry, whose impact for Christ will far exceed anything I have ever dreamed, the narrative of Acts is essential. Reimer, a Latin American liberation theologian, chose Acts because of the importance of women in the story. In her book *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*, she cites three important reasons that all relate to the meta church design: first, the stories of women are important to Latin American liberation theology; second, there has been no thoroughgoing analysis of the "women" passages in Acts; and, third, women,

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<sup>7</sup> Robert D. Culver, *et al.*, *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 135.

then as now, have a central position in house churches or base communities and therefore are strongly represented, at least at the local level.<sup>8</sup> Again, in the meta church at Washington Cathedral, the role of women in ministry and leadership of the body of Christ is impossible to argue against because it is clear that the Holy Spirit is working through their ministry.

There are many important examples of the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit being an important guideline for the narrative of the church in Acts. One example is the role of Lydia in the church at Philippi. Reimer writes about this when she says, “The story of Lydia can and does give us strength, for it, too, tells us of a woman whose power came to expression in her relationship to God and to other women and men. This applies to construction of conditions that, within the house church also, are founded not on hierarchical relationships, but on the leadership of equals.”<sup>9</sup>

The fruitfulness of women and gentiles in ministry provides just a few examples pointing to an important directive for ministry in the book of Acts. This normative standard also becomes a guideline for every ministry. Are nonchurched people being converted and disciplined to maturity? Are prayers being answered, people being healed emotionally, spiritually, and physically? Just as in the early church in Acts, the work of the miraculous is a strong directive. The fruitfulness of each ministry becomes a guideline that helps ministry to avoid running into a financial deficit; even more importantly, it helps ministries from running at a spiritual deficit. Therefore signs, gifts,

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<sup>8</sup> Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist Liberation Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), xix.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

and fruitfulness are important guidelines for the meta church to prosper under the reign of God.

### **The Council of Jerusalem as a Model for Reengineering, Acts 15:1-33**

The first great council of the church was the council of Jerusalem, but it was not the last. Throughout church history, most major decisions of the church have been determined at church councils with collaborative communication. This is the fashion in which the books of the Bible were determined or the ideas of the Trinity were organized. Therefore, the methodology established in the first council of the church is of the utmost importance. New Testament scholars Wall and Robinson point out the precedent in communication styles used in the council of Jerusalem:

But before we turn to Acts 15, we offer several observations about conflict in contemporary congregations. On one hand, there is a good deal of conflict in the church, in both denominations and in local congregations. Too many congregations are like dysfunctional families, stuck in conflicts that are never resolved and that continue to debilitate the mission and life of those congregations, inflicting fresh wounds on anyone who gets too close. Partly in response to the negative witness of just such conflicted congregations, we sometimes come to the misleading conclusion that the healthy congregation does not experience conflict, or that a good congregation is one where all are constantly in harmony and agreement. But that picture too often turns out to be yet another kind of dysfunctional family, the one where differences are swept under the rug and people merely pretend that there are no disagreements or arguments, issues or conflicts. That is neither healthy nor faithful. By way of an alternative, one recalls the line of the great Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray: “A good argument is a great achievement.” Because we so seldom see “good arguments,” conflicts that are engaged thoughtfully and respectfully, and where there is resolution for the good of the church, many congregations and pastors become conflict avoiders. Acts suggests another way. Conflict can be productive, a sign of life rather than death. While it is seldom easy, successfully dealing with change and the conflict change often brings may strengthen a congregation and make possible new chapters of life and ministry.

Acts 15 gives us a crucial illustration of the church dealing with change and conflict. We can be grateful that our scriptural narrative does not pretend that the early church experienced uninterrupted harmony and agreement. Rather, the church had to deal with change, and it had to deal with conflict; and the conflict had to be resolved. Clergy and other congregational leaders can turn to Acts 15 for guidance in teaching and preaching before conflict comes, and in so doing they may provide the church with resources for dealing with change and conflict.<sup>10</sup>

The conflict of Jerusalem is not merely an exercise in conflict. It is wonderful that this kind of theological conflict has been preserved for us. It was deep—not merely the conversion of gentiles, but the relationship of new believers to the Old Testament law. It was not just democracy as we often understand it. It was an exercise in seeking the will of God. The argument went to executive session, and the leadership looked for a resolution—not one that would please the majority, but please God.

### **Group Conflict as a Creative Process in the Church of Acts, 18:24-28**

Again one sees the book of Acts revealing conflict in the early church.

Repeatedly, the author shows us the attitude of the church where focusing on a broader Kingdom of God at work is powerfully innovative. There appears on the scene a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. First of all, there is multiplication of ministry, which takes place outside the mere power of the Apostle Paul. Paul impacted Priscilla and Aquilla (18:18), and now, while Paul is working elsewhere, Priscilla and Aquilla discover that God has been working in the life of Apollos, a Jewish Egyptian and a Hellenistic believer. Second, there is sanctity in the way Priscilla and Aquilla treat the legitimate Body of Christ, even though they are different. Apollos has been instructed in

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<sup>10</sup> Robinson and Wall, *Called to Be Church*, 179-180.

the Lord, he has great knowledge of Scripture, and he has taught Jesus accurately, but he knows nothing about baptism except for that of John. He speaks boldly, and Priscilla and Aquila take him home to disciple him; even though they disagree with Apollos, they spend time pouring their lives into him.

Where would we be today if we did not have this amazing fabric of the body of Christ that goes beyond the *institutional church*. It includes groups such as The Salvation Army, which focuses on ministering to the poor; evangelicals with great fervor for evangelism; liberal churches which speak prophetically on social justice issues; fundamentalists who often invest heavily in battling for the rights of Judeo-Christian ethics; Friends churches that focus on simplicity; emerging churches that bring vast creativity to reaching those who are culturally alienated by the modern church; Catholic churches with their committed clergy and ability to think in world-wide, long-term perspectives; Coptic churches with a great relationship with Muslim groups, even though they are persecuted by them; and Seventh Day Adventists, who bring a much needed focus to physical health.

Ladd points out the diversity and unity in the early church of Acts: “And although it is clear that the church had a central meeting place (12:12), it is difficult to imagine a place large enough to contain the entire body of believers.”<sup>11</sup> These churches cannot *all* be right on every issue, because they are diametrically opposed to one another, but they all bring something to the table that helps the overall cause of Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of The New Testament*, 349.

Twenty-four years ago, no one knew of Tim White or Washington Cathedral, and we had no guaranteed financial backing. Over the years, though, I have experienced support and encouragement from many in the area. An Episcopalian media tycoon backed me by putting me on the longest-running church television broadcast in history, called *Eucharist*. A reformed Jewish rabbi's wife took me under her wing and encouraged my dreams. Dr. Bruce Larson and Dr. Fulton Buntain took the time to mentor me. Earl Palmer and Robert Schuller came to preach at our church. The Archbishop of the Catholic Church had his assistant help us when we tried to buy property. The LDS bishop's wife joined our choir and asked Jesus Christ to become her Lord. The Unity church gave us a pulpit and asked for members of our Health Resource Center to speak at their church. The Episcopalian bishop allowed me to serve the Holy Eucharist to him. Pastors from our area have gone through our Divorce Recovery Program, sent work parties to volunteer on our building programs, and cooperated in local missions to the poor. The entire congregation of Northwest Community Church came to our Sunday worship service and gave their entire weekend offering to our building fund (about \$26,000). I had never even met the pastor before. The elders of their church had been in prayer and felt urged by God to make this sacrificial gift to us, even though they did not have a building. Watching the tears and hugs between the two congregations, which have very little in common except Jesus Christ, was one of the most moving moments of my life.

Every one of these experiences is a reminder that the phenomenon of Acts 18 is still working today in the larger body of Christ that goes beyond the local institution. This

somehow seems strange and maybe unusual in the most unchurched area in the United States, but there is amazing cooperation between faith groups in such an area.

## CHAPTER 6

### EIGHT MEASURABLE VARIABLES OF A HEALTHY CHURCH ORGANISM IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Being efficient is not the same as being effective. Peter Drucker says, “Efficiency is doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right things.” Many churches are efficient in that they are well organized and maintain a full slate of programs. But while they generate a lot of activity, there is little productivity. Energy is wasted on trivial issues. It’s like rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic; everything may look nice and organized but it doesn’t matter because the ship is still sinking! It is not enough for a church to be well organized; it must be well organized to do the right things. God wants churches to be effective. Those few churches that are really effective concentrate on their purpose. By continually reviewing your purpose, you can keep your priorities straight and your church focused.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter sets out the plan, based on the book of Acts, as to what we will value and analyze yearly in each aspect of ministry. This will help us reengineer our ministries regularly and grow to be more and more the ministry that God wants us to be.

#### **Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches**

Establishing measurable guidelines for healthy ministry is essential if a church wants to evaluate and improve. The leadership of Washington Cathedral wanted to have principles that would work in analyzing not only the whole church, but individual congregations, Tiny Little Churches (home churches), and other ministries that would grow out of the church. This was a major decision for the leadership of Washington

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 90.

Cathedral to agree upon how they were going to measure and analyze the success or failure of the church as it continued to grow and change.

The first class that I took in the Doctor of Ministry program was a class by Robert Logan on Natural Church Development. It was a life-changing, church-changing class. *The Study of Natural Church Development* was presented, and the books of Christian Schwarz were discussed. While the heart and gifts of Dr. Logan provided all the blessing that each of the students experienced, the material of Christian Schwarz (while found to be intriguing and somewhat biblically intuitive) did not seem completely scientific in its study of church growth. Nevertheless, the concept of churches and organizations being *organic* was a very important balance. The spiritual, living aspect of the body of Christ cannot be neglected, but the realities of meeting the challenges of a human organization are also challenges that need to be faced. In the class, eight variables were presented as a way of analyzing the health and vitality of the church. While these variables are obviously not the final word from Scripture or church history on the health of a church, they can be helpful. Washington Cathedral became part of the *Study of Natural Church Development*, and this language became a very good working tool for analysis.<sup>2</sup> This analysis works not only to appraise the ministries of Washington Cathedral but to help leadership look at specific aspects of the ministry. “The church as an organization can be ‘manufactured’ by humans; the church as an organism cannot. We can have control over the organization, but never over the organism.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix F for results of Natural Church Development Survey.

<sup>3</sup> Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church*, 21.

At Washington Cathedral, we strive to respect and keep alive the organic aspect of church, as well as efficiently care for the eight aspects of organization, which we have learned from the book of Acts. Through our study of this book, we have learned to empower leadership, foster loving relationships, cultivate passionate spirituality, develop holistic small groups, offer inspiring worship, generate need-oriented evangelism, support gift-oriented ministry, and develop functional structures.<sup>4</sup>

### **Empowering Leadership, Acts 1:8 and 14:23**

“Is the ministry of the leaders focusing on equipping other Christians to serve” (Ephesians 4:12)?<sup>5</sup> The first measurable variable of a healthy church organism and one of the yearly evaluations that we make in every ministry is in the area of empowering leaders. In Acts 1:8, the believers are told to wait together for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. They are asked not to misunderstand the Kingdom of God and get fixed on times and dates, but remember that they will receive power. This is referred to in the plural and so we expect every ministry to be a launching ministry and not just a show for a few.

Paul and Barnabas followed this same pattern in Acts 14:23 when they appointed elders. They were proactive in asking for leaders to commit, and then they responded to the volunteers by training and empowering them as leaders. It is such a very spiritual

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<sup>4</sup> Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Schwarz, *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development*, 47.

process that, rather than just filling out an organizational checklist, they spent time in prayer and fasting prior to appointing these leaders.

### **Loving Relationships, Acts 2:41-42**

“Are the relationships of the members of the church characterized by a high degree of love and affection” (John 13:34-35)?<sup>6</sup> The second measurable variable is that of creating and maintaining loving relationships in the group. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42).

To the meta church at Washington Cathedral, this means that they were not building their own little kingdom, and trying to separate the disciples given them from the rest of the body; in fact, they were being connectional and keeping them in contact with the rest of the body. When someone has a problem with part of the church, such as parking, another cultural group, another church member, staff leadership, etc., their long-term relationship with the church family is at risk. This becomes a risk for everyone in the family and everyone in the Tiny Little Church, so the leadership must be proactive about creating and building an environment where loving relationships can exist. So they regularly break bread together. This way they maintain the loving relationships of a healthy family.

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<sup>6</sup> Schwarz, *Implementation Guide*, 116.

### **Passionate Spirituality Acts 2:43-45**

“Is the spiritual life of the members characterized by prayer, enthusiasm and boldness” (Romans 12:11-12)?<sup>7</sup> The third area of yearly evaluation, developing improved strategy for every ministry, is passionate spirituality. If a family loses their passion for living, they pray, strategize, and then develop a plan to activate their passion for living. I have noticed that good parents do this for their children who have lost their spiritual passion. Do they need to go on a retreat, pursue new Christian friends, read and discuss a new book? The same issue is equally important for every aspect of the ministry.

In Acts, people were all filled with awe at the signs and wonders. We try to carefully keep track of the answered prayers and miracles that are taking place in our church. Although our tradition is to handle these matters privately, we never call attention to the leader who prayed for the miracle nor to the one who received the miracle, as if they were somehow unusual. We have found that publicizing these things often leads to a fall. However, regularly meeting together, worshiping together, breaking bread in homes, having glad and sincere hearts—these are not to be taken for granted. Learning truly to praise God and enjoying the favor of the people has a profound impact on spiritual passion. It also has an impact on adding to their numbers daily. This is especially true in an age in which word-of-mouth is becoming much more important than any other form of advertising.

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<sup>7</sup> Schwarz, *Implementation Guide*, 63.

### **Holistic Small Groups, Acts 2:46**

“Are the small groups dedicated to answering the true questions and meeting the real needs of their members in a holistic way” (Acts 2:46-47)?<sup>8</sup> The fourth area of evaluation is holistic small groups, or as Washington Cathedral calls them, Tiny Little Churches. Is a shepherd (pastor) watching out for people to make sure that they do not drop out of the Tiny Little Church or public congregational worship? Are they taking part in Good Samaritan projects and keeping a good attitude towards the rest of the church? Do they need discipleship? How is their physical and emotional health? Perhaps they need to go to a Health Resource Center seminar or a parenting or marriage seminar through Build the Family? How is their marriage doing? Can they manage their finances and career in God’s way? Each of these areas impacts the souls of the Tiny Little Church or the cultural congregation. So we evaluate and reengineer in this area yearly. *Natural Church Development* contends that,

Our research in growing and declining churches all over the world has shown that continuous multiplication of small groups is a universal church growth principle. Furthermore, it has also disclosed what life in these small groups should be like if they are to have a positive effect on both quality and numerical growth within a church. They must be holistic groups which go beyond just discussing Bible passages to applying its message to daily life. In these groups, members are able to bring up those issues and questions that are immediate personal concerns.<sup>9</sup>

Every ministry that has been successful at Washington Cathedral is made up of multiple Tiny Little Churches. When the leadership of a Tiny Little Church allows it to become unhealthy, the ministry falls apart with tremendous casualties for the church and

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<sup>8</sup> Schwarz, *Implementation Guide*, 96.

<sup>9</sup> Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 32.

the cause of Christ. When the leadership cultivates the group (which is very hard work), they become fruitful and they launch many more ministries in the church and around the community. The more Tiny Little Churches within a ministry, the stronger the ministry becomes and the better it can weather the storms.

### **Inspiring Worship, Acts 2:46-47**

“Is visiting the worship service an inspiring experience for church members” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19)?<sup>10</sup> In Acts, believers are worshipping at the temple daily. At Washington Cathedral, someone who is just going through a divorce or working towards the first thirty days of being clean and sober can worship every day of the week. Times like this have been formative in our church when, for example, people literally join a prayer meeting that meets all night long because they are getting ready to make a major decision, or they are putting down roots that they will need for the rest of their life.

Keeping worship fresh and alive does not just happen. It is something that the whole body needs to work at and reevaluate yearly. If worship is not inspiring, in every part of Washington Cathedral, then we have a lot of work to do because, if people cannot sense the presence of God, nothing else will work.

### **Need-Oriented Evangelism, Acts 3:1-11**

A sentence well known in politics is: “All politics are local politics.” Similarly in evangelism, all evangelism is local church growth. If evangelism does not end with a new believer being incorporated into a healthy church for spiritual formation, then it is less

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<sup>10</sup> Schwarz, *Implementation Guide*, 86.

than effective. For the church to be healthy, it must be fruitful—leading people to a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

I believe the most important priority of the local church is to continue Christ's mission to make disciples. There are other things a church can and should be doing. But nothing is on a par with this singular mission of the church. Call it evangelism, church growth, outreach, disciple making. It doesn't matter. The bottom line is that people outside the Christian community need to be the central focus for which the church exists. Just as Christ came to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10), the church is equally responsible to seek and to save those who are lost.<sup>11</sup>

“Are the forms and contents of the evangelistic activities related to the needs of those you are trying to win” (1 Corinthians 9:20-22)?<sup>12</sup> In chapter 3, Peter is asked by a beggar for money and instead he heals him. Does our evangelism scratch people where they itch? Are we saving marriages, rescuing parent/child relationships, showing how the gospel applies to a person's physical health, or how God's truth responds to the atheistic theories of Richard Dawkins?

Every year we need to evaluate how our evangelism is doing. We have noticed that God's work can change, and the things that we are investing the most money and effort in are no longer working. We need to pay attention to how God is working now in the area of evangelism to our culture and community.

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Arn, *How to Start a New Service: Your Church Can Reach New People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 22.

<sup>12</sup> Schwarz, *Implementation Guide*, 105.

### Gift-Oriented Ministry, Acts 6:3-4

“Are the tasks in the church distributed according to the criterion of the spiritual gifts of individual Christians” (1 Peter 4:10)?<sup>13</sup> In this section of Acts, an attempt is made for the Apostles to focus on their gifts, which include prayer and ministry of the word, and to launch others to use their gifts. It has been the experience of the leaders of *Natural Church Development* that, “When Christians serve in their area of giftedness, they generally function less in their own strength and more in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> This is not an easy task for church leadership or organization. A high degree of friendship and trust must be created to allow for people to discover and use their spiritual gifts in a way that helps the body of Christ and honors his Kingdom. In a relationship-based organization, developing trust is essential. If people are not allowed to use their spiritual gifts, they feel abandoned and deprived by the church. In his book, *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen Covey said this,

There is one thing that is common to every individual, relationship, team, family, organization, nation, economy, and civilization throughout the world—one thing which, if removed, will destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, the most thriving economy, the most influential leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love.

On the other hand, if developed and leveraged, that one thing has the potential to create unparalleled success and prosperity in every dimension of life. Yet, it is the least understood, most neglected, and most underestimated possibility of our time.

That one thing is trust.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Schwarz, *Implementation Guide*, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen M. R. Covey with Rebecca R. Merrill, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 1.

Stephen is one of the seven deacons who are discovering their gifts, and his discovery and empowerment is a tremendous strategic breakthrough for the church in Acts. Therefore, we lead each ministry to evaluate itself in this area and ask how they can do a better job of getting people in touch with their gift and using it within the body.

### **Functional Structures, Acts 6:5-6**

“Are the forms, regulations, and institutions of the church designed according to the criterion of what is demonstrably the most useful for the development of the church here and now” (Mark 2:27)?<sup>16</sup> According to Acts 6, this new discovery of gifts requires a new functional structure. Every time we help people discover and use their gifts, we need to tweak the structure to allow for regular use of their gifts within the body in a teamwork fashion.

Lyle Schaller points out the importance of continuing to develop new models for each ministry. In his model, discovering the bad news and coming to grips with it is essential to the evaluation and development of a new strategy. Schaller says,

A new model has emerged that moves the congregation and its ministries away from the controlling center and toward the collaborating perimeter. The model is less protectionist and more dangerous, as control slips further and further away from the traditions that are associated with the church’s name.<sup>17</sup>

Henri Nouwen speaks prophetically about the difficulty of daring to ask questions and to be in this continual process of rediscovering oneself and the plan that God has prepared. He says,

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<sup>16</sup> Schwarz, *Implementation Guide*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 29.

Living the questions runs counter to the mainstream of Christian ministry and wants to impart knowledge to understand, skills to control, and power to conquer. In spiritual listening, we encounter a God who cannot be fully understood, we discover realities that cannot be controlled, and we realize that our hope is hidden not in the possession of power but in the confession of weakness.

The main questions for spiritual direction—Who am I? Where have I come from? And where am I going? . . . are not questions with simple answers but questions that lead us deeper into the unspeakable mystery of existence. . . . The quest for meaning can be extremely frustrating and at times even excruciating, precisely because it does not lead to ready answers but to new questions. When we realize that the pain of the human search is a necessary growing pain, we can accept as good the forces of human spiritual development and be grateful for the journey on the long walk of faith.<sup>18</sup>

Washington Cathedral's study of Acts has truly been a journey as we have sought to empower leadership, foster loving relationships, cultivate passionate spirituality, develop holistic small groups, offer inspiring worship, generate need-oriented evangelism, support gift-oriented ministry, and develop functional structures. These biblical principles were imperative for the Christians of Acts to develop as they engineered an organization for the church during its organic development.

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<sup>18</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 8-9.

## PART THREE:

### EVALUATION, REENGINEERING, AND LEADERSHIP FORMATION

Specific details of Washington Cathedral's plan for evaluation, constant reengineering of ministries, and development of leaders is developed from the book of Acts. The incarnational ministry plan is communicated through the five nonprofit foundations serving the community. Evaluation for change is explained from the model of the book of Acts with the hope that this model can become a core proficiency of the Washington Cathedral meta church. Practical aspects of decentralized empowerment are discussed in terms of close lifelong relationships that run deeper than the ecclesiological organization. A focus of the church on the Kingdom of God beyond the local church is developed.

## CHAPTER 7

### DEFINING THE INCARNATION OF THE GOSPEL AT WASHINGTON CATHEDRAL

Though the meta church is diverse, the diversity promotes overall health in the church. Intercultural dialogue helps Christians see how culture has shaped their thinking and their interpretations of Scripture. Also, the collaborative method helps diverse cultures to work together. There is a great advantage in having a culturally diverse meta church. We have so much to learn from each other. Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou point this out when they say,

Christians must recognize that they read and interpret Scripture in the categories and logics of their own cultures, but this does not mean that their theologies are totally culturally shaped. The more they read and carefully study Scripture, the more its categories and logic shape their thinking. They must also test for their own cultural biases by studying Scripture with Christians from other communities and cultures, because others often see cultural biases more clearly than individuals do themselves. Such intercultural dialogues help Christians see how their culture has shaped their thinking and their interpretations of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

But there are also tremendous challenges in helping diverse groups who see the world differently to actually work together. Will Mancini describes this challenge when he points out, “The question we then need to ask is how to move from stage zero: confusion to stage three: collaboration. Collaboration is the point where individual

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<sup>1</sup> Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 24.

ministries and leaders have checked their ego at the door and are actively trying to serve the mission by serving one another.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Washington Cathedral’s Specific Plan to Better Incarnate the Gospel**

The plan of Washington Cathedral to incarnate the gospel is simple. When we lead people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we disciple them as they launch Tiny Little Churches within their culture. These Tiny Little Churches are the cells, which form into cultural congregations (which worship together) or one of five nonprofit foundations which minister to the community in the church, outside the church, and in other churches.

#### Empowering Individuals to Share the Gospel within Their Cultural Context, Acts 16:16-34

Washington Cathedral has learned from the story of the jailer in Acts 16 that, when culture encounters the gospel, hearts are changed. When one person of a representative culture is impacted by the gospel, other members of their culture are in turn affected. From one person meeting Jesus, entire households may be saved. John Pohill describes such a drama in this exciting story in Acts:

The miracle of the earthquake and the prisoners who wouldn’t flee arrested his (the jailer’s) attention and prepared his heart to receive Paul’s message. His question is a classic expression that has lived through the centuries and must be asked by everyone who comes to faith. Paul’s answer is equally as classic. It cannot be put any simpler, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your whole household” (cf. 16:31). At some point the jailer’s household entered the scene. Luke did not specify when. Perhaps the mention of

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<sup>2</sup> Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2008), 199.

the household triggered the jailer's awareness that Paul and Silas were about to share something his whole family should hear. . . . Then the jailer treated Paul and Silas in a most unusual fashion for prisoners. He took them into his house and fed them at his own table. They were no longer prisoners in his eyes; they were brothers in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

These representatives of cultures who meet with Jesus not only return to impact their culture, but also find a new unity, equality, and collaboration with other believers of different cultures. When a person makes a commitment to become a believer or one might say a Christ follower, the meta church plan is to create an environment in which the Spirit of God can allow this person to grow. When these new believers experience growth, they begin to impact their immediate world by becoming physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually healthy. This kind of health is great soil for growing a leader, and since we believe in the power of community, if we combine three leaders together, then they can build a successful Tiny Little Church in the midst of their culture. This is exactly what took place when Paul and Silas took their jailor and began the church in their home.

#### Developing Ministries and Contextualizing in a Different Culture

There are many potential ministries ready to develop, and we will do everything we can to help bring them to life and nurture them to health within the context of a Tiny Little Church. The story told in Acts is a great example of the methodology of birthing ministries at Washington Cathedral. We serve people because we honor Jesus in this work. People all around us begin to tell us their stories: how they have questions about

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<sup>3</sup> John B. Polhill, *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Acts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 355-356.

God, what he has been doing in their lives, and the obstacles that prevent them from becoming active followers of Jesus.

Developing ministries and allowing those ministries to come to life is a lot like being surrounded by pregnant women, in that potential ministries are waiting to be born. We do everything we can to help them come to life and thrive once they are born. We see different ministries as if we are obstetricians, and we find ourselves surrounded by pregnant women, many of whom (often more than we can handle) are in labor pain. We deliver those we can, and then we do the work of nurturing them. In so doing, if we can put them in the right environment, we have a greater chance of their healthy growth into world changers. We make sure that every person has a pastor, a counselor, a mentor, a health-care practitioner, and a personal health trainer. Most importantly, though, we want them to have a Tiny Little Church group with a spiritually healthy pastor because nurturing ministries into health and life is important.

### **The Five Nonprofit Organizations and Their Mission to Serve with No Expectation of Return**

One of the challenges of living in the most unchurched area in the United States is the fact that most companies are not allowed to give to a local church, but they are allowed to give to a nonprofit foundation that is recognized by the state and the IRS. A company cannot have as one of its goals the conversion of people to a religious belief; it must be independent and community-minded.

One of the goals of Washington Cathedral is to care for the holistic needs of health and well-being in our community with no expectation of return. The identity of

Christians as the priesthood of all believers calls us to be people of healing. A healthy church requires a collective mindset. We are more than a group of isolated individuals because each person is influenced by other individuals, just as they are influencing other individuals. If the meta church is able to engage in holistic ministry, it must view itself as a community, not simply as individuals.

Theoretically, ministries which focus on health come out of seeing the church as reflecting lifetime relationships between individuals and families that work towards holistic health.

One of the keys to functioning in a healthy manner as a church is for the leaders to look at the church as a system rather than as a collection of isolated people. Every church is more than a collection of individual members. People in the church, as in any group, are intricately interconnected. They exist in a system that is much bigger and more powerful than the individual members. Each person both influences and is influenced by everyone else.<sup>4</sup>

If we look at the church only from the modernistic mega church perspective, we miss so much of what the Kingdom of God may be doing because we are only seeing one small piece and missing all other dimensions of the work of the prevailing Kingdom of God. Such a popular perspective tends to measure the church by measuring the building, the number of people that attend, and the amount of its finances.

Surface evaluations of churches have many examples. In our community there is one church that has become very famous, and, if you ask any of the pastors in our community, that pastor will have an insightful understanding of what is taking place there. This rapidly growing church, like many in our nation, has grown mainly with

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 26.

young people that have become dissatisfied with their fundamentalist roots. In fact, one pastor of a large mega church told me that all of his young people started going to that church at once. Since the emphasis of this church is often very negative, the people who go to that church (to find others with whom they can socially identify) often carry the “bad-boy” image. They hear how bad they are from the pulpit and they live it. When half the people walking in are smoking and have tattoos, one might conclude that this is really counter-cultural, but in talking to them, one really finds a rebellious fundamentalist who still wants to hear popular fundamentalist morals, delivered with a few swearwords thrown in. I am not putting down this church because I believe that it is a legitimate church, people need to find a church community regardless of their background, and their faith needs to become vital. I pray for them just as I pray for any other church in our area. However, the point is, “Do we measure a church by the *visible* or by the *unseen* systems that are going on in the community?” Maybe only God can measure a church.

#### Five Holistic Ministries in Acts, Acts 5:12-16

“As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by” (Acts 5:15). It has always been the mission of followers of the Great Physician to be concerned with the physical and emotional health of other human beings. This might mean the laying on of hands, or eating the right foods, but nevertheless this is part of the mission of those who care. If we want to follow Jesus Christ then we must be interested in the issues that people face, involving primary family relationships, their economic well being, the

leadership potential that God has placed in their lives, their relationship with the great injustices in this world, and their physical health. Each of these issues has a relationship that is intertwined with all the others. For example, if a person is born-again, goes to seminary to become a leader, succeeds in his or her business life, and enjoys great physical health, all of this will be negatively impacted if that person is in an abusive relationship with his or her spouse. As parents, if our children are medically uninsured, we still have a responsibility to care about their health. That is why we believe that the church should be on the front lines of healthcare.

### **Physical and Emotional Health (Health Resource Center)**

Since we are ministering to the people of our church for the rest of our lives, we have long-term interests in their health and well-being that can be viewed as holistic. Dr. Bruce Larson was a real visionary when it came to seeing the work of the church as holistic, and it was he who introduced me to the world-famous oncologist Glen Warner, from Swedish Hospital. Warner is the one who merged Northwest Oncology with Washington Cathedral's Health Resource Center (a nonprofit organization) and moved his office onto the church campus. Out of this organization, the church crossed lines towards health that need to be crossed. Warner and I were both inspired by the holistic vision of Bruce Larson, who said in his book *There's a Lot More to Health Than Not Being Sick*,

I hope this book will encourage those dedicated healers who are attempting to practice whole person medicine. But, even more, I hope it will help each of us to be more aware of our own powers to help ourselves and to help one another discover health, wholeness, and the life God intended. The Bible reminds us that

Christians are a fellowship of priests, each with the power to be a channel of healing for others. And while the church has largely neglected this important ministry, modern medicine is reminding us that it has never been more urgently needed. We are entering an extraordinary new age in medicine. Doctors standing at the threshold of this new age are beckoning us into their research laboratories to show us overwhelming proof of the connection between illness and such things as loneliness, hopelessness, fear, resentment, stress, and lack of purpose. In other words, doctors are discovering or rediscovering that people are essentially spiritual. Our feelings about ourselves and others and the quality of our relationships may have more to do with how often we get sick and how soon we get well than our genes, chemistry, diet and environment.<sup>5</sup>

It was not long before Stanford Medical School neurologist Dr. Jeff Dunn became a Christian and started the *MS Hub*, which grew out of the Health Resource Center. His mission was to find the cause and cure of Muscular Dystrophy, which is more prevalent in our area than anywhere else in the world. The medical director of Swedish Cardiology, Dr. Paul Huang, joined Washington Cathedral and is now planning a program to establish preventative cardiac care through the Health Resource Center. These are three, just to name a few, of the programs that began in the holistic environment of the meta church, and there are many more to come.

### **Preparing People for Leadership (Washington Seminary)**

“Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn responsibility over to them” (Acts 6:3). In this passage, one sees the church begin (almost immediately) the work of producing future leaders and world changers. Of course, this has always been the heritage of the Jewish Synagogue, but it is also near to the heart of God.

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Larson, *There's a Lot More to Health Than Not Being Sick* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1981), 10-11.

Therefore, Washington Cathedral has launched a seminary to develop not only the emerging leaders in our congregations for ministry within our church, but for ministry in other churches; and to reach out to the community and be a part of the broad-based intellectual conversation. Washington Seminary, one of our 501(c)(3) organizations, is under the leadership of Chancellor Marty Folsom PhD and offers four state-approved Master's degrees.

### **Positive Family Advocacy (Build the Family Center)**

The book of Acts follows in the tradition of the rest of the Scriptures in telling us the story of a family. “To this he replied: ‘Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran’” (Acts 7:2). The family is the most basic cell of the living organism of the church and it is impossible to think of long-term spiritual, physical, cognitive, and emotional health without considering the family.

Therefore, one of our 501(c)(3) organizations is Build the Family Center. They provide marriage counseling, mentoring, retreats, seminars, workshops, parenting classes, divorce recovery (which has had over two thousand people go through the program), divorce recovery for children, turning-point investments (for families that are financially struggling and need a no-interest loan to get going again), tutoring for students, and an after-school program. We are also starting a pacesetting preschool next fall. The center also features the Academy of Joy enrichment programs for children, which include all

kinds of activities for children and their parents. The Build the Family Center is led by President Ed S. Childs.

### **Community Organizations for Ethical Success in the Marketplace (Excel Business Ministries)**

“He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child” (Acts 7:5). Excel Business Ministry is focused on helping individuals find ethical success in their career lives. The ministry provides seminars, small groups, traveling opportunities, and mentoring. Excel specializes in the counseling, support, and retraining that is needed when people go through transitional times in their career. This 501(c)(3) organization is led by President, Richard Skinner.

In a time where people are forced to make several career changes in one lifetime, there is a tremendous need for ministry in this area of ethical success. Many times, individuals in the community have come to meet with a pastor and tell us that they were fired and are so devastated that they have not been able to tell their family. They are frozen in fear. For most individuals, the thought of developing a new resume or learning a new career requires a lot of prayer and support.

One young CEO, who came to Christ at Washington Cathedral, decided that his prominent shoe company was unethical in terms of the Scriptures. Therefore, after talking to a pastor, he flew back to New York and proposed (to a very intimidating board of directors) that they release all celebrity contracts because it unfairly added to the price of the shoes. Then he proposed moving the manufacturing plant from China to Yugoslavia,

where they could pay a fair wage. He believed that they could build a better product and that they would be blessed by doing the right thing rather than profiting from sweat shops. Brooks Shoes was transformed into developing a high-end market, which has been successful because of Jesus Christ getting into the business life of one young man.

### **Project Transformation Worldwide (Charity Alliance Organization)**

“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt’” (Acts 7:33-34). In keeping with the rest of the Scripture, the book of Acts teaches that God sees injustice and wants to do something about it.

This is what the Charity Alliance Organization, one of our 501(c)(3) organizations is about. It features a broad range of ministries from Project Transformation in Honduras to No Hungry Child in Egypt to the Santa Claus Conspiracy in Seattle. The standard for Charity Alliance is that every cent given goes directly to the project, and the church covers all the administrative costs of running the programs. It is because of the amazing effectiveness of this ministry that many corporations and individuals outside of the church are excited to get involved (and it is growing exponentially).

### **Five Prophetic Voices in a Healthy Meta Church**

The five nonprofit organizations equal five prophetic voices in a healthy meta church. In a chapter entitled “Overcoming the Pagan Influence,” Clark Pinnock said, “Every theology interacts with its environment. It seeks to conceptualize and it creates a

kind of synthesis. We have a responsibility to pay attention to the insights of the surrounding culture so that we can communicate the gospel more effectively.”<sup>6</sup>

At Washington Cathedral we have five prophetic voices to keep us balanced in our culture. Through these organizations, people can reach out to others with no expectation of return; and doing the work of Jesus often allows them to see behind the barriers they once had between themselves and Jesus and his followers. The community is blessed by such an approach, but it is vital to the church as well. Therefore, we do not create these organizations to leave our church family, but they are interwoven in our mission to build a great caring network. Together we call these prophetic voices The Round Table of a Great Caring Network.<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes, they work collaboratively on a similar project. For example, Excel is helping Charity Alliance by creating a website for Project Transformation and marketing products in the US that are made by microenterprises in Honduras; The Health Resource Center is a resource for medical help in Honduras; Build the Family is very interested in family projects such as the Christmas party in the dump. These kinds of collaborative efforts cut costs and allow each organization to accomplish so much more than they could on their own. In a visit to Washington Cathedral, representatives of the Murdock Foundation commented that they had never seen anything like it before (as far as enlisting volunteer support and stretching a budget).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 65.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix G for a diagram of the Round Table.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix H for lay ministry commitments and requirements.

### **Dozens of Culturally Diverse Worshiping Congregations in a Symbiotic Relationship as One Church with One Dream**

The many congregations of Washington Cathedral form a diverse community. In this we reflect the relationship nature of the trinity, and we find unity through a common vision. There are three basic elements to the meta church at Washington Cathedral: Tiny Little Churches, which make up everything that we do; five nonprofit foundations ministering to the community with no expectation of return except to bring honor to Jesus' name; and diverse cultural congregations that share one Lord and one dream—to build the greatest caring network that the world has ever seen.

When asked how big the congregations of a meta church can be, we say that, at Washington Cathedral, they may begin as small as forty worshipping adults (which can be very effective) and grow no bigger than eleven hundred (not counting Sunday school).

Kevin Ford describes the church that applies this meta church approach:

Community is God's essence. He not only created community, but he Himself also experiences it as part of His very nature. To say that God exists in community means that He is not isolated but is in reciprocal relationship. He knows others and is known. He gives and receives. For humans, being part of a community means that we are bound together in love and that we are aware of others' needs and put them ahead of our own (Phil. 2;3-4). Not only do we develop meaningful relationships, but also we are united by a common mission. This is a great mystery. But it is not mysterious at all to say that if we exist in God's image, and if God exists in community, then we are created for community as well.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> David C. Cook, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 66.

### Christ over Culture, Acts 10:34-36 and 10:44-48

At Washington Cathedral one sees culture, not truth, as relative. We also know that God is greater than our culture. The last paragraph of H. Richard Niebuhr's important work entitled *Christ and Culture* says,

To make our decisions in faith is to make them in view of the fact that no single man or group or historical time is the church; but that there is a church of faith in which we do our partial relative work and on which we count. It is to make them in view of the fact that Christ is risen from the dead, and is not only the head of the church but the redeemer of the world. It is to make them in view of the fact that the world of culture—man's achievement—exists within the world of grace—God's Kingdom."<sup>10</sup>

We find it very liberating for a church constantly to be reminded that the cultural forms of music, arts, language, etc., are all under God. For Washington Cathedral, this is not a philosophy that everything is relative and there is no truth. We just know that our culture is relative and is under God. In a pluralistic society, this is an incredible evangelistic advantage. It helps people remember that they do not have to be conservative Caucasian Republicans to be Christians. They may be, but, when they relate to others from a variety of cultural backgrounds, it helps their faith stay focused on Jesus Christ and not on the humans (who would like to be his exclusive representatives).

### The Advantage of Cultural, Heterogeneous Believers in One Body

Even families have different cultures within them. For the church to do its work and reach out to people who are inherently diverse, it too must reflect that diversity.

Brian McLaren said,

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<sup>10</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1951), 256.

The new church can be of any age, any denomination . . . . But the new church does not try to draft a new blueprint. Instead, it comes up with a new philosophy of ministry that prepares it to meet whatever unforeseen changes are to come. To use contemporary jargon, it discovers “new paradigms.” In biblical terms, it seeks not only new wineskins (renewal), but new wine—which includes a new attitude toward wineskins in general. The church decides that it loves new wine so much, it will never again be so attached to wineskins of any sort. Then, when the wineskins need to be discarded, they can be with a minimum of anguish. When an old church thus reinvents itself, it is born again as a new church, like a caterpillar entering its cocoon and emerging as a butterfly. In so doing, the church has maximized discontinuity.<sup>11</sup>

When a group of congregations are all working at letting God do his work in their culture, then it becomes contagious. But it is even better when different worship services reach different family members, demonstrating the fact that even families today are multicultural. In my family, when we celebrate Thanksgiving, we have Native Americans, Danes, Irish, Scots, African Americans, Hispanics, Japanese Americans, and Vietnamese (more diversity on the way as some of my children are still dating). Why would I want my home church to be any different than my family?

### **Every Home Church (Tiny Little Church) with Its Own Good Samaritan Project**

Tiny Little Churches take on projects, not as committees to raise money, but as real Christians on the frontlines of real ministry. Every one of our Tiny Little Churches has a hands-on Good Samaritan project that reaches into the community. The Tiny Little Churches are on the frontlines of ministry and are blessed by remembering that the Kingdom of God is bigger than one local church. Some examples of Good Samaritan projects are: watching after homeless teenagers and trying to get them off the streets;

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<sup>11</sup> Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 24.

adopting widows who live on the Yakima Indian Reservation; adopting a convalescent home and visiting the people weekly; taking care of the yard for an AIDS house; delivering food and serving meals weekly at the Union Gospel Mission; providing host homes for homeless people; building a school in Latin America; sending Christmas packages to soldiers on tour; fixing cars for single moms; and adopting an adult home for people with disabilities. The list continues, and the church is blessed more than anyone else, except the Tiny Little Churches, which quietly and consistently do these acts of charity to honor Jesus Christ. As Ronald Richardson points out, “This church will have a strong ‘other’ focus.”<sup>12</sup>

#### Tiny Little Churches as a Model for Spiritual Formation, Acts 16:29-34

New Christians need Tiny Little Churches to help them remain Christians and to help them to grow spiritually. Tiny Little Churches were inspired by my friend Dale Galloway and New Hope Community Church twenty-four years ago. Dale Galloway said the following about Spiritual growth in groups:

At New Hope Community Church for the past three years we’ve been growing at a rate of more than 500 new members a year. More than 80% of these new members are unchurched. . . . There is no way that we can disciple all these new converts without the Tender Loving Care groups. We know that once we have new converts established in a Tender Loving Care group, they are going to be nurtured in their Christian walk and led into becoming steadfast followers of Jesus. The very best plan in this whole world for discipling is Tender Loving Care groups.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Galloway, *20/20 Vision*, 144.

At Washington Cathedral we have a seminary which discipled people, but we also have a seven-year program to take unbelievers and help them to become world changers. Nevertheless a lot of discipleship and spiritual formation takes place in the Tiny Little Church. Our pastoral staff has estimated that a person grows ten times as fast in the Christian walk when that person is an active member of a Tiny Little Church.

Every Tiny Little Church as Incarnational and Synergistic within a Worshiping Network

Every Tiny Little Church is led by someone who is anchored in Washington Cathedral by attending weekly worship. This allows the members of the Tiny Little Church to be reconnected to the church, even if they are on the fringes of coming to or leaving the church. One of the principles we have found is that every group must have a leader who is worshipping weekly. This is a part of the covenant of a lay pastor. However, the group itself *catches* people who have never been to church before and *catches* them even after they have quit. It operates as a safety net around the church, and it only works if the majority of people worship regularly with a larger congregation, which allows them to feel a part of the church. It is one of God's ways to remind us that we are not alone.

The five nonprofit organizations of the Round Table of the Great Caring Network have created a great opportunity to address areas of deep need in the community and our church family. These organizations have been active for over twelve years, and their 503(c)(3) status has allowed them to receive a large amount of funding from outside the church. More importantly, they have given honor to Jesus Christ for their collective efforts of caring for people with no expectation of return. At Washington Cathedral we

could no more think of living without one of these organizations than a Baptist church could imagine building a building without a baptismal. These organizations have also been a great way to invite people, from any background, to join in just helping people.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE QUEST TO REENGINEER THE META CHURCH

The nineteenth-century theologian William Newton Clarke said, “Faith is daring the soul to go farther than it can see.”<sup>1</sup> At Washington Cathedral, the responsibility of the senior pastor is to listen—to listen to God, to listen to people, and to listen to the culture in which we live. Sometimes God says something like this: “Will you tell the people of Washington Cathedral to take emotional and physical health more seriously. I want to see a revival this year in every family and in every single part of their lives. And by the way, it needs to start with you.” When the pastor listens to the culture, though, the culture usually says something like this: “We can’t understand what you Christians are saying. We don’t think you know who we are and what it is like to have a gay child or to hate the politics of conservative Christians or to have serious intellectual questions about creationism.” This role of the meta church as led by a servant pastor is asked for by God in Ezekiel 22:30. “I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one” (Ezek. 22:30). Reengineering the church is simply being an obedient person who stands in the gap.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 11.

### **The Reengineering Process Present in the Book of Acts, Acts 11:1-9**

In the book of Acts, the Bible details for us how difficult it was for the early church to change its paradigm. Peter is struggling with the role of his Jewish heritage and the imperative of the church to reach out to Gentiles. He goes through a time of incredible dissonance and has a nightmare about being told by God to eat food that he had previously thought to be inedible. John Polhill summarizes the issue when he says,

It is interesting that the circumcision group raised a question about Peter's table fellowship with the Gentiles rather than about their being baptized. As has already been shown in the discussion of 10:8-16, the issues of table fellowship and acceptance of the Gentiles were closely related. Peter's eating with the Gentiles showed his acceptance of them as fellow Christians, and they were still uncircumcised (v. 3). In any event, Peter's response quickly led them to the real issue—God's acceptance of the Gentiles.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the book of Acts, we see this continuing struggle as the church experiences the Holy Spirit's leading the leaders to reengineer the church. At Washington Cathedral, which is located in one of the world's great high-tech corridors, people understand the concept of reengineering although they may never have heard of justification or propitiation (*reengineer* in our culture would be as readily understood as the term *harvesting a crop* in a farming culture).

#### Implementation of Change and Its Follow-up

As Washington Cathedral is faced with the need to change and grow, the great question that the leadership must ask is not only how do we change, but in what direction do we change. The eight characteristics of a healthy church give us an analysis and an

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<sup>2</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 266.

ability to focus on the reason for change, but it is up to each leadership task force to determine who best to address the problems that may be holding the ministry back.

While on staff at Washington Cathedral, Colonel Erskine Austin instituted a process of evaluation for ministries. Each leader would turn in an evaluation of his or her ministry event, which would be put in a file. At a later date, a leadership team would meet for a group-evaluation of the ministry, which would again become part of the file. These ministry files became valuable tools in providing a history and the information necessary to begin the process of formulating needed change in a ministry.

For a writer, nothing is so exciting and at the same time so terrifying as a clean sheet of paper or a blank computer screen. For a reengineering team, it's the first redesign session. . . . Redesign is the most nakedly creative part of the entire reengineering process. More than any other, it demands imagination, inductive thinking, and a touch of craziness. . . . The good news about redesign is that while it may require creativity, it's not necessary to start with an entirely blank slate. Techniques that have proved effective for some companies will work for others—or at least pieces of them will. So while no hard and fast rules yet exist for process redesign, we do know the principles on which redesign depends, and we now have some precedents.<sup>3</sup>

For each cultural congregation, the change that takes place may be approached very differently. The postmoderns tend to change rapidly, and the moderns tend to be painfully slow. The Hispanic congregation allows for amazing flexibility with change, and the Coptic congregation's changes in worship styles have taken centuries. The important element in all these different approaches to change is a commitment to the fact that God is working and that we are as thoughtful and prayerful about the process as possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 266, 134-135.

### Incarnating the Gospel in Fast-Changing Cultures

We live in an age where change has become the only certainty. Before the advent of the Internet, the amount of information in our world was doubling every two hundred years. Today, the amount of information doubles every eighteen months. While providing more choices, information overload also creates a cynical society . . . . The rapidly changing landscape has accelerated the breaking up of the modern era; so quickly, in fact, we haven't yet been able to name what will replace it. For the time being, "postmodern" is the best we can do. Boundaries are rapidly disappearing.<sup>4</sup>

For many years, during the Easter season we would have about six thousand people attend our Easter services. Forty to sixty new people who attended during holidays would eventually go through a well-defined process and become first-time Christians. We would pay exorbitant amounts for Easter advertising and know that this investment would pay for itself. For some reason, the gospel just seemed to be in the air at Easter. Then suddenly our numbers dropped. Almost accidentally, we discovered that Christmas had replaced Easter as the prime time for first-time converts, so we redirected our focus to Christmas. A major shift took place, and a new and different season became our prime evangelistic time. Maybe it was because our Singles ministry was strong, and floods of people without families needed to experience some moments of faith at Christmas. However, over a period of about five years, we began to notice that special events were slowly dropping on the list of evangelism opportunities. The crowds were there but the converts were dwindling. A whole new time of reassessment of church strategy had to take place. This is an example of how events in society can dramatically change the harvest.

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<sup>4</sup> Ford and Cook, *Transforming Church*, 25.

When the war in Iraq began, our Sunday service was shown on *Good Morning America*. Some children of soldiers went to the front of the service and placed flags on the altar so we could pray for their parents. During the next six months, our attendance nearly doubled, then dropped down below the attendance we had prior to the war. However, listening to society is not enough in the process of reengineering. There is a need for church leaders who can contextualize the gospel in our society. We need leaders who listen to the still small voice of God and respond to the specific challenges the society erects as a barrier between themselves and God.

#### **Stage One: Broad-Based Feedback and Evaluation, Acts 11:10-14**

Acts 11:10-14 shows God intervening in the plan of the church. Peter had a vision, which had a tremendous impact on the short-term strategy of the church in Acts. The process of change begins with the leadership team of any ministry realizing that the ministry is not working at the optimum level that God would want. This discovery often takes place after a day of prayer or fasting, or as the result of a retreat or a conversation after a vacation.

The leadership team may have been heard by God in prayer, but the realization often comes out of a Bible study or from continuing patterns of mistakes that just do not make sense in light of the Kingdom of God. The leadership team then brings the idea to reengineer the ministry to their leaders and asks for input on the process that is going to take place.

**Stage Two: Reverse-Engineering and Recalling Why  
and How It Was Created in the First Place, Acts 11:15-18**

As Peter preached and explained his actions in verse 16 he said,

Then I remembered what the Lord had said: “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way? When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:16-18).

Peter asked the listeners to figure out how they would navigate the waters of relating to gentiles in the future and remember how the design worked in the first place. This is essentially how reverse-engineering works. When Microsoft developed its windows software, Steve Jobs allowed the engineers to look at the Apple operating software. They simply reverse-engineered it and, as they would say, improved upon it to develop the original windows program.

Each year we ask every ministry to go through a process of evaluation, prayer, and communication, and then determine what needs to be reengineered. When the go-ahead has been given to reengineer discipleship, or Charity Alliance, or the youth ministry, we ask that the leader of the ministry spend some time asking the question, “How was the ministry designed to work in the first place?” Then we ask that they find another model that may seem to work better and reverse-engineer it before reengineering the old ministry or model or program.

Another very important aspect of this process is that the goals of yearly reengineering are limited to something that is attainable, to prevent a breakdown of a working system. This does not eliminate risk. The new program might fail, but this

limitation prevents failure of the entire ministry. Goals like this can only take place in a highly collaborative environment where the friendship is so honest that nothing is off-limits for discussion.

#### Taskforce for Reengineering Every Five Years

Once a specific program of a ministry is working, we try to stick with the basic plan for five years. We can tinker with the program and share it with other ministries within the meta organization, but the five year rule is a guideline when launching a successful ministry. However, if the situation demands it, there may be occasions when complete reengineering is necessary before the five-year marker.

For example, when the rent on our North Campus was doubled, we were faced with a need for fast change. It called for quick teamwork decisions and a new design. For several years, our Chief Operating Officer was retired Marine Colonel Erskine Austin. He had experienced two tours in Vietnam and helped plan the invasion of Iraq. He taught us that a high degree of innovation and collaborative leadership is necessary and good, but, in a battle, at some point everyone has to be willing to “salute the flag and take the hill.”

#### Continual Evaluation and Innovation

Anyone who longs for a reformation of the church today—and any fundamental change of church structures or theology is, after all, a form of reformation—has every reason to be humble and learn from their “fathers in the faith.” What we need today—and what I understand by natural church development—is nothing less than the application of the principles of the Reformation to the present situation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift*, 11-12.

In the first years of Washington Cathedral, one of our leaders was a new convert whose job was Executive Vice President of Boeing Computer, Marv Stone. Marv was the chief operating officer of a large power company and helped mentor the church leadership team. He suggested that every year the church work at becoming better. He asked that we create a business plan, which required a yearly evaluation and reengineering of the church. This yearly evaluation and brainstorming, which would be filtered by a metaprogramming team, to create an implementation plan has been working and improving over the past twenty-four years at Washington Cathedral. After further refining of this process through the doctor of ministry program, we at Washington Cathedral propose the yearly evaluation process will like this (table 1).

Table 1. Yearly evaluation process

Month	Activity
January	Survey from Natural Church Development and/or other current surveys
February	The School of the Prophets begins a program to disciple those interested in leadership and launching new ministries (Yearly discipleship is Cathedral-wide)
March	All-church <i>Vision Quest</i> retreat and teaching on two-way prayer and listening to God
April	All-church Day of Prayer
May	Leadership teams gather in discipleship to brainstorm areas of reengineering
June	<i>Weekend at Galilee</i> discipleship retreat with foot washing, fireside discussions and dialogue about the process of reengineering. Innovation teams begin their work
July	Leadership teams submit innovation plans
August	Leadership prayer retreat and agreement on yearly goals
September	Development of plan, calendar and budget

### **Stage Three: Developing Collaborative Recommendations, Acts 11:19-23**

After the death of Stephen, the believers scattered, and Barnabus, a meta programmer (overseer), was sent in to encourage them. God's hand was already on the leadership of the church in Antioch, but Barnabus brought a powerful recommendation for innovation. Then Saul, the former enemy of the church, got involved in leadership. This story demonstrates the interdependence of the early church—something that is desperately needed in our age today.

People want to be empowered, but it is difficult for them to stay connected and under leadership. This tension is overcome by continual contact. Therefore, an innovation team at Washington Cathedral is given guidelines and the freedom to innovate. Then they bring their innovations back, and we (the leadership team) analyze how practical the innovation seems and how much it will cost in terms of resistance to change: how many families we will lose, how much money must be diverted. Together, difficult decisions are made.

Another aspect of the innovation strategy is for the church as a whole to analyze where God is leading us this year. All of the leaders analyze their ministry and bring their conclusions to an all-staff retreat, and a prayerful dialogue continues. Then there is a week-long process in which the entire plan for the next year is formulated using the collaborative method. Within two weeks the budget is developed and the calendar is planned. All of this begins with analysis, focus groups, and prayer retreats to ask the question: What is God telling the body about where we need to improve and grow? A

general diagram of the reengineering process at Washington is proposed and diagramed in figure 1.

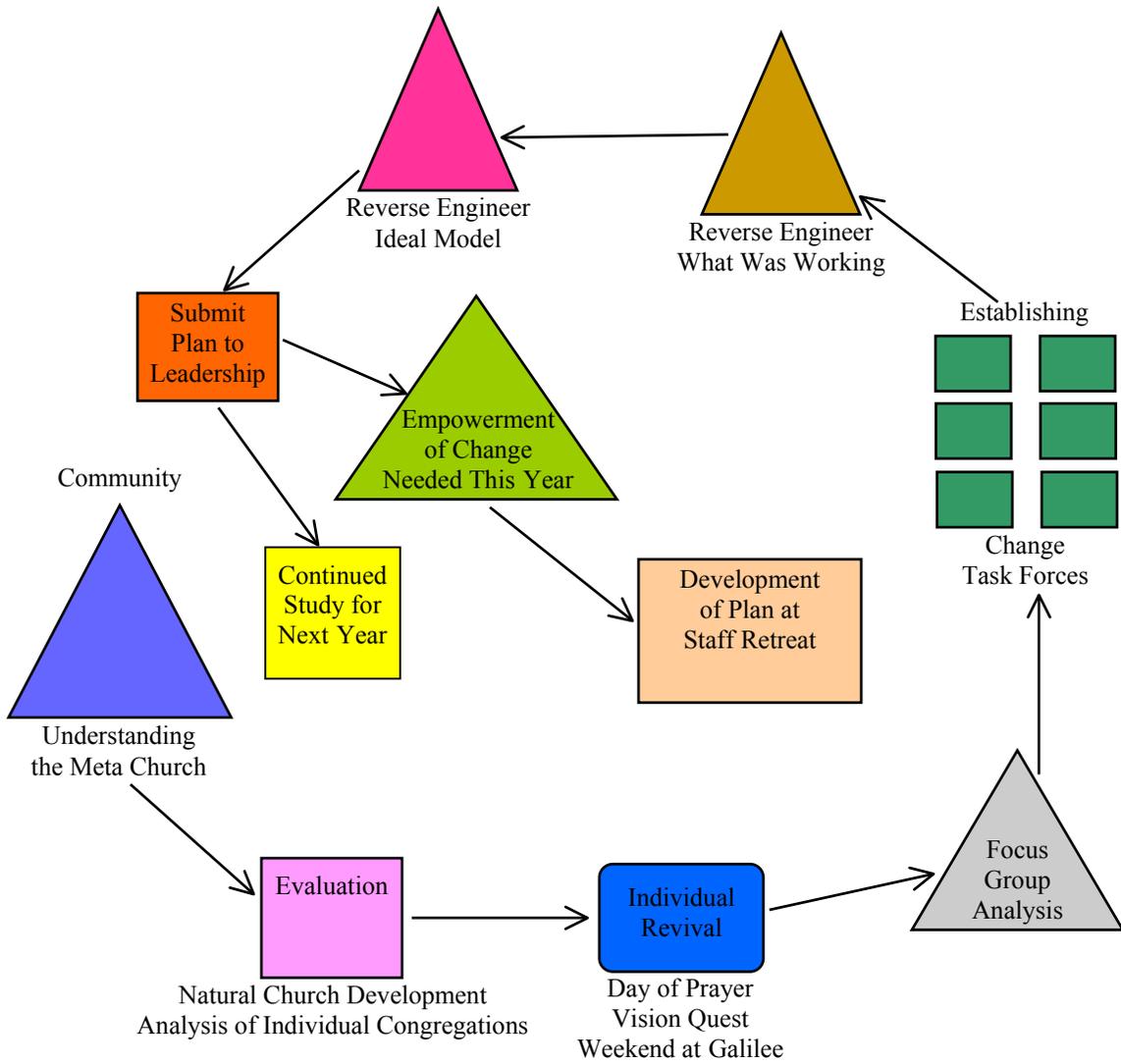


Figure 1. The new Washington Cathedral reengineering plan.

### The Continuing Inclusive Conversation of Change

Bringing about change in any organization is hard work. This becomes even more difficult when the collaborative method is used. Often a lot of bad ideas surface and wrong motives or agendas rise up. Our present Chief Operations Officer, Pastor Linda Skinner, has a law which we call *Pastor Linda's Law*—when you ask for volunteers, ninety-nine-point-nine percent of the time, the worst possible volunteer in the room will dominate the process. What this means to us at Washington Cathedral, is that the leadership has a strong role to play in creating an environment for inclusive conversation which allows everyone's voice to be heard and uses the opportunity to deal with wrong motives when they surface in the conversation.

People who have been through difficult, painful and not very successful change efforts often end up drawing both pessimistic and angry conclusions. They become suspicious of the motives of those pushing for transformation; they worry that major change is not possible without carnage; they fear that the boss is a monster or that much of the management is incompetent. After watching dozens of efforts to enhance organizational performance via restructuring, reengineering, quality programs, mergers and acquisitions, cultural renewal, downsizing, and strategic redirection, I draw a different conclusion. Available evidence shows that the most public and private organization can be significantly improved, at an acceptable cost, but that we often make terrible mistakes when we try because history has simply not prepared us for transformational challenges.<sup>6</sup>

History has not prepared us for transformational challenges but when you stick with it the painful process helps train the entire group. The key is sticking with it and growing through the painful process. After this study of the meta church at Washington Cathedral, the following specific plan for reverse engineering is proposed to be implemented as a standard process for each task force (table 2).

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<sup>6</sup> John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 17-18.

Table 2. Plan for reverse engineering

CONTEXTUALIZE WITHIN CULTURE	
<b>THE REVERSE ENGINEERING TEMPLATE</b>	
1. Study Present Ministry Asking	a. How did this come to be?
	b. What part is working?
	c. What aspect is not working?
2. Find Model to Reverse Engineer	a. How did this come to be?
	b. What part is working?
	c. What aspect is not working?
	d. What is unique about the model's culture which might cause this ministry to fail?
	e. What can we borrow from this model?
3. Establish Goals for Redesign of Ministry	a. Survey People.
	b. Focus Groups.
	c. Prayerful Discussions.
4. Establish Design for New Ministry	a. What resources will be needed for new design?
	b. Whose collaboration is needed?
	c. Acquire permission for design implementation.
5. Allow Leadership to Amend Design to Fit	a. Is it the right time?
	b. Does it benefit the whole?
	c. Do seasoned veterans think this will work?
6. Launch New Design	a. Explain to key personnel why change was needed.
	b. Cast vision of why this will work.
	c. Hold reserves in preparation to rescue the plan if it gets in trouble.
7. Evaluate and Amend Design	a. Constant feedback.
	b. Constant communication.

PRACTICALITY

INNOVATION

COMMIT TO BE BIBLICALLY AUTHENTIC

### Utilizing Scripture to Evaluate and Refine Each Recommendation

*Lectio divina* has become very popular around Washington Cathedral and around the world, but behind this disciplined approach to Scripture, is the emphasis on listening to God in Scripture rather than Bible study—just for the gaining of knowledge.

To take the scriptures and read them contemplatively is called *lectio divina*, or spiritual reading. The term *lectio divina* comes from the Benedictine tradition and refers primarily to the divine or sacred reading of the Bible. *Lectio divina* is the ancient monastic practice of reading scripture meditatively—not to master the word, not to criticize the word, but to be mastered by and challenged by the word. It means to read the Bible “on your knees,” that is, reverently, attentively, and with deep conviction that God has a unique word for you in your own situation. In short, spiritual reading is a reading in which we allow the word to read and interpret us. Spiritual reading is the discipline of meditation on the word of God.<sup>7</sup>

An overall humility in listening to God is an essential foundation for the listening skills that are required in the collaborative method—which often comes out of somewhat conflictive discussion and brainstorming. Something that we at Washington Cathedral find helpful to say (when in conflictive discussion) is, “I don’t want to be right and it is not important whether you are right or not; our first priority is that God is right at the end of this discussion.”

### **Stage Four: Empowering the Implementation Task Force, Acts 11:24-30**

In Acts 11:24-30, one sees the year-long emergence of the apostle Paul through the friendship of Barnabas. At first people were afraid of him, but their trusting relationship empowers one of the greatest innovators in the history of Christianity. This trusting relationship is essential to empower a team to innovate. At Washington

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<sup>7</sup> Nouwen with Christensen and Laird, *Spiritual Direction*, 91.

Cathedral, we say that life-long friendship is the glue that holds our organization together.

An example of the empowerment of an innovation team occurred during the completion of the new twenty-million-dollar ReCreation Center. As the senior pastor, I appointed an interior design task force and gave that task force the authority (even over the building committee) to make the choices of texture, color, and style of this new building. The task force was intentionally made up of a three-person core team. All three were experienced in commercial interior design. One was postmodern in taste and radically opposed to anything modern, both in aesthetic sense and philosophical position. A second was an experienced painter and finish carpenter, who as a baby boomer loved the modern and had a distaste for the new postmodern approach. The third person on the core team had the deciding vote. This person was an interior designer for commercial properties and had worked with clients from both philosophical patterns. We needed a place that would do more than simply avoid the landmines of creating a structure that would be uncomfortable for one group or another. They, in fact, had to create a structure that both groups would love. Guests from the congregation, the building committee, and the staff would be a part of the process, but decisions were made by the interior design taskforce.

Miraculously, after a long, painful process, they accomplished the goal—something that could not have been accomplished without the dialectic of opposing forces learning to love one another and communicate while searching for the will of God.

Today, people from all varieties of large commercial buildings are coming to look at the innovative result of this process.

Without empowering people, we miss out on their important contribution.

Sometimes we can immediately see that the results are positive, but other times it is going to take a lot of faith. Bruce Blake was the chairman of our recent building project to build a ReCreation Center for the community. Prior this project, he traveled the world to see some of the great cathedrals and engineering wonders of the world. At the end of the process, the twenty-million-dollar building has his ideals written all over it. As I walk through the building, I have commented publicly that, if it were up to me, we would never have such a world-class building, but Bruce had envisioned a building that would last three hundred years. Through all the conflict involved in the collaborative process of building this center, it is obvious that the end result is something that God worked out through different personalities. Those involved went through the painful process of searching for the will of God, which was beyond themselves, and the empowerment of individuals in this process created something that is greater than what any individual could have accomplished alone.

#### Allowing Some Parts of the Organization to Do It Wrong

Many times the creative process allows people to make mistakes. The very thing that they are doing will seem completely wrong to the leadership, and sometimes it will turn out to be a mistake. Creativity must embrace an atmosphere where mistakes are going to be made. In such moments, we need to learn from our mistakes, and this can be

an amazing growth moment. However, many times, the leadership has thought something was a mistake and it turned out to be a genius breakthrough of creativity. So, what initially seemed wrong was right and could only be discovered by “allowing them to do it wrong.”

If you have grown up with and known only one style and structure of worship, there is a good chance you will initially be uncomfortable participating in whatever new style of service is defined. Whether the new service is for a different generation, a different culture, or a different spiritual pilgrim than your present service is designed for, it will be a style with which you are probably unfamiliar. Your greatest discomfort will likely be with the music. But the issues and themes of the service, the dress, the day of the week, or the location will also likely be new and make you uncomfortable.<sup>8</sup>

Since Washington Cathedral has been a meta church for twenty-four years, people are somewhat more understanding of this kind of decentralized empowerment. For example, when we started a Hispanic congregation it began as bilingual. But the greatest edge of growth was for a purely Spanish-speaking ministry. Some of the more conservative members of our congregation were opposed to the concept of a nation in which not all people speak English, but they were willing to stretch on this point. This is a great example of allowing a group to do something that the leadership felt was wrong. The leadership team was wise enough to know that the Hispanic leaders might know something about their culture that was unknown to the rest. It could have turned out to be a mistake but instead it turned out to be a breakthrough.

Our postmodern congregation talks a lot about global warming, but there are those who do not believe in global warming, and, again, since they had been educated

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Arn, *How to Start a New Service: Your Church Can Reach New People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 58.

about the meta church, they were willing to stretch on this point. Our Eastern worship with exercise as part of the service (in the Christian form of Tai Chi) is again something with which many would disagree, but they cannot argue with the results and the hearts of those who lead it.

We are currently in the process of forming a permanent alliance with a Coptic congregation. They are very effective at reaching Muslims, and their services are in Arabic. They burn incense, and women are not allowed to take communion with men. The Pope has given the Coptic church permission to move ahead in exploring this alliance. Many of our church members are hesitant but have been prepared by many years of conversations and teaching on the meta church.

### **Decentralizing Empowerment for Diverse Innovation**

Leadership is not defined by the exercise of power, but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those who are led. The most essential work of the leader is to create more leaders. . . . A large organization is a collection of local communities. Individual and institutional growth are maximized when these communities are self-governing to the maximum degree possible.<sup>9</sup>

This approach sounds exciting, but the only thing that makes it work is developing a high level of trust between leaders through deep friendships. In discipleship training, we teach and explain that sometimes we spend a couple of years managing an area of ministry more closely just because this area is so essential to the life of the church. Conversely, other areas are given more freedom to innovate. When a leader is

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<sup>9</sup> Gary Hamel, *The Future of Management* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2007), 186.

allowed to make mistakes and receives correction well, great trust is developed. This approach allows for many areas to proceed with a lot of room to innovate.

To glimpse the future of management, you must search for “positive deviants,” organizations and social systems that defy the norms of conventional practice. In management as in science, it’s the anomalies that point us toward new truths. Yet it’s often difficult to see the anomalies for what they are, since by definition they don’t fit into our preexisting mental categories.<sup>10</sup>

Innovation and decentralization of power do not come because of a superior organizational idea but because of greater trust, which allows for greater honesty with open conflict while looking for the greater will of God. It is a painful, worthwhile process that makes a church more like a family than an organization. When people stay for a long time, they develop a depth of friendship that reminds people of the book of Acts. This kind of friendship, which is greater than organizational structure, was taught to me by Bruce Larson. He said,

We can lie by our silence. A false impression is conveyed, simply because we didn’t say anything. Our silence could simply be a way of avoiding involvement. Interestingly enough, in Jewish law, the person who kept silent and withheld the truth was as guilty as a liar. If you can speak up to protect a reputation or change the course of events or exonerate someone else, do so. Otherwise, your very silence is a form of lying.<sup>11</sup>

I believe innovation and decentralization of power is determined more by the quality of honest friendships than by organizational structure. The only way people can understand this is if the time is taken through discipleship to explain it to them again and

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<sup>10</sup> Hamel, *The Future of Management*, 187.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Larson, *The Presence: The God Who Delivers and Guides* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 137.

again. Then, even that is not enough. We have to experience the faithfulness of God in honest relationships over and over again before we begin to raise our level of trust.

## CHAPTER 9

### A COACHING VISION FOR TEAMWORK LEADERS IN A META CHURCH

In John Calvin’s commentary on the book of Acts one sees the same world-shaking ideas that were presented in the previous eight chapters of this paper. In the introduction, Calvin says, “And now Luke sums up the purpose of the gospel teaching: it is that God may reign in us. Rebirth marks the beginning of the kingdom, and the end is the blessing of immortality. In the middle we are growing in spiritual life.”<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, we have looked at a model of the church inspired by the book of Acts, a model we are calling a meta church. It is a church that has diversity in its Tiny Little Churches, which form into a variety of separate cultural congregations all combined together as one church with one dream—“To build the greatest caring network that the world has ever seen.” This is the dream of a servant church. For each person, it is the desire to do the work of Jesus Christ. With such a high goal, there is always room for improvement; therefore, constant reengineering needs to take place yearly. At the heart of this living organism (the meta church) are lifelong friendships. An authentic, personal relationship with Jesus Christ brings about lifelong friendships with those called to be in the church. Calvin says, “Luke tells us again that the apostles had been very well taught, by their only Master, before they taught others. Therefore, whatever they said about the

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 13.

kingdom of God, either through their written or spoken words, is what Christ himself had said.”<sup>2</sup> This very old commentary by John Calvin points out an idea that runs against the highly organizational standards of twenty-first-century institutionalism. It is not so much a formula for a perfect organizational model as it is the discipleship of relationships that are strong enough and flexible enough to work despite the opposition.

The reengineering history of Washington Cathedral demonstrates the truth that Calvin is trying to relate. The church began with year-long discipleship groups in which we focused on holistic growth for each future leader. As the leaders grew and began to lead ministries, the need for discipleship became greater than what we could produce. So we took the discipleship programs of large mega churches and reengineered them. We have a flowchart from evangelism to Christian maturity and leadership. The year-long discipleship, with planned retreats and revival, turned into four-hour classes called 101, 201, 301, 401, and 501. It soon became apparent that the free-spirit entrepreneurial types we had founded our church upon really resented this conveyor-belt approach, and that the type of people who could be warehoused into leadership were not always the best leaders for a meta church—they were, in fact, better suited for a mega church mold. This type of person was threatened by someone who did not hold exactly the same beliefs, and therefore struggled to communicate with the unchurched culture as if talking to someone from another planet. The church that had begun as relational and incarnational was now tipping towards becoming industrial, attractional, and authoritarian. We first noticed this

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Acts*, 13.

during our annual reengineering process, and so a task force was set up to reengineer the church and regain our lifelong relational approach.

### **The Use of Passive Verbs to Describe Miracles in the Process of Growing Leaders**

In this process, our taskforce determined that people who were *far from God* resented evangelism that focused on the techniques and skills used to convert them. They wanted to meet God and not be manipulated by American evangelicals. After a careful study of the process of salvation and the new birth experience of the leadership, we found that none of us had become Christians because of the proficiency of the evangelist or of the church.

There are many examples in the book of Acts with the use of the passive verbs to reflect cooperation with the leadership of God. A good example is in Acts 13:4: “The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.” Therefore, we became determined to use passive verbs to describe the stages of growth and to allow a lifetime (if necessary) for people to work through these miracles. Only God can call someone into leadership or launch a Tiny Little Church, and only God can spiritually lead someone to the point of mentoring others in leadership.

First, Christ had chosen them. Here Luke is not setting God’s election up against man’s merits but is simply affirming that the apostles did not presume to appoint themselves. What was Luke’s point here? Simply to impress upon us the fact that the apostles were called so that we may learn not to defer to men but to the Son of God who calls men. This must always be a rule in the church, so that no one may grab praise for himself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Acts*, 12.

### **Five Concentric Discipleship Circles of a Meta Church, Acts 23:1-9 and 18-22**

In Acts 23:1, Paul shows his passive role in the miracle of human change. “Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, ‘My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.’” In other words, from here on out, it is going to have to be up to God. I can only play my part. At Washington Cathedral, we pray for five miracles of growth to take place in people, and, when these miracles happen, then we can develop great trust in the meta church (which allows for a lot of freedom to innovate).<sup>4</sup>

The process of the five miracles of growth begins with learning to treat everyone as a neighbor. This was the teaching of Jesus Christ, and it is something that we cannot fake but must pray for personally all the time. Therefore, the first miracle occurs when a *neighbor* becomes a *friend*. Now we know the neighbor, who associates with our church as a friend, and the relationship begins. The second miracle occurs when a *friend* become a *believer* (this could take twenty-five years if that is God’s timetable). People meet Jesus Christ, and He becomes the Lord of their life. They are baptized and we make sure they understand the basics of what it means to become a Christian. The third miracle occurs when a *believer* becomes an *achiever*. This happens when believers actually begin to understand the holistic reign of the Kingdom of God that applies to family relationships, work ethics, health, etc. We have a highly relational discipleship (as shown in the diamond principle)<sup>5</sup> that helps these areas become a focus of discussion, and an openness

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<sup>4</sup> These miracles are pictured as concentric circles. See Appendix I for a diagram.

<sup>5</sup> The Diamond Principle is a format for discipleship that has been used at Washington Cathedral from the beginning. It is included in each disciple’s journal, and it is discussed during the year long discipleship relationship. A copy can be found in Appendix J.

to where God may be leading these achievers. The fourth miracle occurs when an *achiever* becomes a *leader*. Again, this is only something that the Holy Spirit can accomplish by gifting people and calling them into a ministry with other believers. In this way, a person actually receives the blessings of pursuing God’s plan. This step also builds a highly relational mentorship, which includes fun, play, correction, heartbreak, testing, and a lot of growth. The fifth miracle occurs when a *leader* becomes a “*catholic*” *world changer*. By *catholic* we do not necessarily mean Roman Catholic, but rather the universal church. The person moves beyond being parochial and becomes a blessing to the whole cause of Christ, other churches, parachurch organizations, non-Christian service groups—anything that honors Jesus through love and sacrifice. Becoming a catholic world changer does not necessarily mean entering full-time ministry, but rather beginning to move towards ordained ministry. In our constitution and bylaws, we ordain lay pastors, an office which represents a highly trusted relationship with someone who becomes the backbone of the body of Christ.

“Conduct myself toward God: The verb *politeuomai* has the sense of “living as a citizen,” and therefore of “conducting one’s life” . . . also Paul’s instruction in Philippians 1:27, “conduct yourselves (*polieusthe*) worthy of the goodness of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> This fifth miracle is the high calling of building ministries that are not ends unto themselves but that find a way to lead and make blessings flow to the poorest of the poor. The only reason is that this is what Jesus would do if he were in charge of the church.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 396.

Concentric Circle One – When Neighbors Become Friends, Acts 23:1-9 and 18-22

At Washington Cathedral, we work very hard at teaching and modeling a Christ-like lifestyle in which we treat everyone as our neighbor (Matt. 12:31). We consider it an incredible miracle when a person identifies with Washington Cathedral as friend. The person may be a Jewish rabbi, a Catholic priest, or a Marxist professor, but we consider it a miracle when he or she begins to regularly worship in a congregation or associate with a Tiny Little Church. We view this as a lifetime friendship where we begin to dialogue about the other's life and faith. As the senior pastor of Washington Cathedral, I sign all my correspondence, "Your friend for the rest of my life," and I mean it.

Richard C. Halvorson said, "At Pentecost...by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, those 120 individual disciples were galvanized into one, inseparable, indivisible, indestructible living organism—the body of which Christ is the head. They literally became members of one another, needing one another, responsible to one another as the members of a physical body are responsible and necessary to each other. . . . What the first century world saw was a phenomenon of people of all walks of life loving one another, praying for one another. Slaves and free men were in that community. Rich and poor were in that fellowship. Roman citizens and non Roman citizens were in that community. Members of the establishment and those violently opposed to the establishment were part of that community. The intelligentsia and the illiterate were members of that community. To the utter amazement of the world outside, they were bound together in an unexplainable love and unity."<sup>7</sup>

One advantage of developing a relationship with these friends is that they attend the church, bring friends to the church, and they often financially support the church. The most important advantage, though, is the lifelong friendship.

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<sup>7</sup> Robert C. Girard and Larry Richards, eds., *The Book of Acts*, The Smart Guide to the Bible Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), 337.

Concentric Circle Two – When Friends Become Believers,  
Acts 24:22-27; 26:28, and 28:20-24

King Agrippa sums up the opinion of many people who are very far from God.

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’” (Acts 26:28). Perhaps the reason that so much church growth is merely transfer growth from other churches is that real evangelism is much more relational and long-term than what our current “nonmeta” paradigms would think. The analogy of raising children is a perfect example of how important relationships are in this endeavor. It is impossible to raise a child into a mature adult by merely downloading information, and it is impossible to help baby Christians become mature by downloading information or even dazzling them with music or entertainment. The Soviet State tried to raise children by warehousing them at special training centers, and it did not work. People need personal relationships, and that is especially true in helping friends become believers in Christ.

Paul’s mission to the nations challenges Roman (or secular) notions of identity as well, but for very different reasons. If the universalism of Paul’s mission subverts the particularity of a Jewish identity, whose religious beliefs and practices stress Israel’s special relationship with the one and only Creator God, then his messiahship subverts also the relativism of Rome’s ethos, which tolerates the diverse and multiple identities of its different subjects. Not only does Jesus’ resurrection fulfill Israel’s hope according to its Scriptures, but his present and future significance is cosmic in scope.<sup>8</sup>

The struggle of King Agrippa can also be seen in the struggle of Festus. The gospel, as it should be, is challenging to many. The meta church of Washington Cathedral has come to believe that (for us), we cannot *convert* anyone. People only become

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<sup>8</sup> Wall, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10, 340.

followers of Christ when we build lifelong friendships with them and at some point along the way, they become Christians. This truly is a miracle.

Concentric Circle Three – When Believers Become Achievers, Acts 28:30

“Though he had no freedom to move, he was still able to act as a Christian missionary, since people could come to see him; Paul could well write about the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the Word of God is not fettered.”<sup>9</sup> Paul was blessed to be in a position where his whole life came together to effectively *live under the reign of the Kingdom of God*. Even when he was in prison, he pointed out that God was working from a higher authority than his Roman captors.

When we disciple people, we help them to have a holistic view of their lives and to know that God cares about their physical needs, financial issues, emotional growth, etc. We do this not just to display that followers of Jesus Christ do not have problems, but that even when we have those problems the high ethical choices we make can honor a reality that goes beyond what is merely visible and temporal. People in the emerging world are suspicious of Christians who only want to save their souls and could care less that they suffer from malnutrition or have parasites, or that their children are being forced into a gang. And the same thing is true in the United States. If we only care about people so that they will make our church larger by tithing, filling seats, or telling a story about how Christian magical thinking took away their problems forever, then our churches will

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<sup>9</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 425.

look more like corporations with products to market than invincible networks of relationships which are impossible to destroy.

Concentric Circle Four – When Achievers Become Leaders, Acts 28:26-27

The step of ministry training is critical to the expansion of the movement. At this point most organizations and local churches reach their peak. If they do not train believers other than the pastor to evangelize and build disciples, their expansion stops. Their maximum potential is reached without a continuing growth and a broadening impact. True multiplication occurs only when disciples are trained in evangelism and disciple building. No matter how dynamic the pastor, no matter how financially stable and well organized the church, expansion will not continue if people are not trained to minister.<sup>10</sup>

Washington Seminary is committed to a mentorship model of education, which looks more like something from the East than the concepts of leadership training in the West. All of the leaders in our church are first given other potential leaders to mentor. We treat them as family. We vacation together, we celebrate holidays together, and we do their pastoral care and refuse to “job it out” to the pastoral-care department. We try to keep the friendship even when they drop out of leadership. Most of our executive pastors are people who at one time dropped out of the church, and we waited for them with open arms until miraculously God brought them back. The fact of the matter is that leadership in the body of Christ is hard, and we do not believe it is caught in a series of lectures but that it is caught when we share our lives with those who would join us.

Presently, Washington Seminary provides four state-approved master’s degree programs: Master of Ministry, Master of Theological Arts, Master of Christian

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<sup>10</sup> Carl Wilson, *With Christ in the School of Disciple Building: A Study of Christ’s Method of Building Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 101.

Counseling and Master of Christian Entrepreneurship. The goal of Washington Seminary is to have full accreditation for these Master's Degrees within the next five years as well expanding the programming and what it offers. Professors from local Christian schools, graduate schools, and volunteer professors from the church all help the seminary to keep its tuition costs at half those of the nearest competitor. For the church, this kind of mentoring relationship, helping people develop their gifts and leadership skills, is a very meaningful endeavor.

Concentric Circle Five – When Leaders Become “Catholic” Christ followers, Acts 28:28

“The community life depicted in the early part of Acts fulfills the Old Testament hopes set forth in Luke 1-2 of an Israel free of oppressors, joyfully worshipping God without fear, serving him in holiness and righteousness, with poverty and hunger banished by the caring rich.”<sup>11</sup> This fifth miracle is something that is very hard for people to understand. This is especially true in an independent, interdenominational church. However, growing up in an independent, interdenominational church has given me a deep appreciation of the fact that no Christian is truly independent. In fact, whether we realize it or not we are all interdependent.

As a church, we have made a commitment to allow pastors of churches without a church building to use our church sanctuary for their family members' weddings for free. Another commitment we have made is to offer our ReCreation Center with an indoor pool, theatre, gymnasium, library, commercial kitchen, and café to another local church

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<sup>11</sup> David Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 531.

once a month on a Friday night. If a parachurch organization tells us that the largest donation they have ever received has come from a member of our church, then we believe that person is accomplishing the fifth miracle. Like most miracles, this accomplishment is a result of much prayer and constant conversation and dialog over many years. Ken Hemphill eloquently points out the nonradical difference of this approach when he says,

Today, the church is frequently compared to a business. Increasingly business concepts and models are being applied to church growth methodology. Dr. William Crabb objects to such thinking when it comes to the bottom-line issue of purpose for existence. “The business,” he notes, “exists to produce a product. Without a product that produces a profit, a business would not survive. In the local church, the product—or more precisely, the aim—is to promote and facilitate growth of people toward Christlikeness.” Thus, people are not resources to perform functions, but people for whom Christ died, given in stewardship to be grown into His image. Healthy churches place a high priority on promoting the growth of people toward Christlikeness, which is the fundamental issue of the discipling ministry of the church.<sup>12</sup>

### **Review of this Coaching Model and its Accomplishment by Outside Consultants**

The evaluation of this improved coaching model for the meta church at Washington Cathedral must continue. This paper has failed if its reengineering plan is thought of as an unchanging perfect plan that never needs to be improved on. It would be counterproductive to ask the meta church at Washington Cathedral to continually change by bringing new and more leaders into the process and then, at the same time, follow a plan which itself was designed never to change.

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<sup>12</sup> Ken Hemphill, *The Antioch Effect: 8 Characteristics of Highly Effective Churches* (Nashville TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 181, quoted in William Crabb and Jeff Jernigan, *The Church in Ruins* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1991), 148.

Brian S. Rosner summarizes Acts by saying, “The spread of the gospel message, the word of God, is a major theme and the main storyline of Acts. Luke prepares his readers for this theme in the prologue of Acts and by stressing the broad scope of Jesus’ ministry in Luke’s Gospel. The theme is confirmed throughout with summaries which underscore how impressive and far-reaching is the expansion, for which God is given the credit. Acts does not, however, depict triumphalistic growth since progress is consistently attended by opposition. The open-ended ending of Acts indicates that the progress of the word is ongoing.”<sup>13</sup>

Because this reengineering process continues as long as the church wrestles with institutional entropy, regular evaluation will also need to be a part of this process. The ideals put forth in this paper will provide a template not only for leaders and future leaders of Washington Cathedral but for outside consultants as well to help measure and counsel in this continual process of change. The reason for bringing a consultant at least once every five years is to help prevent institutional entropy, which can so easily take over a church. Erwin McManus speaks to this issue when he says,

Our inability to distinguish between the water in the bucket and the rapids is perhaps one reason we are often so inept at impacting the culture we seek to engage. Whenever the church assumes the role of an institution committed to protecting its constituency from the emerging culture, we reduce our impact to a drop in the bucket. It is tragic enough when the church relinquishes its place at the dangerous edge of the rapids for the safety of the bucket. It is even more perplexing when the structures of the church actually become the buckets justifying isolation from the river.<sup>14</sup>

This continuing evaluation is an effort to communicate to a church that change must continue to stay at the forefront of its future. This is not change for change’s sake, but the continued openness to the will of God as expressed through open, honest,

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<sup>13</sup> I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 215.

<sup>14</sup> Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Church in the Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2003), 237.

conflictive communication, as well as prayer and Bible study. A commitment to yearly reengineering should help the entire church understand that they can hold true to foundational concepts and yet experience the fresh work of the Kingdom of God as long as everyone is willing to humbly listen and collaborate. This coaching model is an exciting prospect. Every coach is excited about the infinite possibilities in students (if they really want to learn) and this is the prayer for Washington Cathedral.

## CONCLUSION

The dream of building a meta church began for me when I was seventeen years old and I met Jesus Christ on top of a mountain. It was a transforming point of personal faith. It was in 1973, and it immediately put me in fellowship with the “Jesus People” movement. In its day, this movement was thought of as highly revolutionary in the way it thought about following Jesus Christ and innovation and decentralization of giftedness. In the Jesus People movement, people’s attitudes towards the organized church were beginning to change. For me, in those early days, it was all about Jesus. When my wife Jackie and I talked and dreamed about starting and building a church, it was never about empire or ambition, it was just about following Jesus Christ. There were many moments in our church when the criticism was the most intense or the pressures were ready to break us, during which we retreated to this simplistic view of what we were doing at Washington Cathedral. It has always just been about following Jesus Christ.

That is why the church is “deconstructible,” but the kingdom of God, if there is such a thing, is not. The church is a provisional construction, and whatever is constructed is deconstructible, while the kingdom of God is that in virtue of which the church is deconstructible. So, if we ask, ‘What would Jesus deconstruct?’ the answer is first and foremost the church! For the idea behind the church is to give way to the kingdom, to proclaim and enact and finally disappear into the kingdom that Jesus called for, all the while resisting the temptation of confusing itself with the kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 35.

While we have attempted to rethink the church in view of our culture and the book of Acts, I want to make it clear how much I love the local church. I have given my life to serving it, as did my father and grandfather. The church is the place where people find Jesus Christ as Lord. In fact, I believe that all evangelism is local church growth. The church is where new believers are baptized and grow up into their faith. The church is where marriages take place in front of a congregation of people who are also committing their lives to make sure that these marriages succeed. The church is where children are dedicated to the Lord and parents recognize that their children are on loan to them, that life is short and that they commit to serve God in raising their children, and the whole congregation makes a commitment to protect that child by being extra aunts and uncles, grandpas and grandmas, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders and babysitters, as the child grows up to pursue God's best for his or her life. The church is where people who are broken by divorce, business failure, or moral collapse come to find grace, and to find people who will believe in them and to find a solid place to start over again. The church is where young people dream the dreams that they will follow the rest of their lives and find a community to believe in those dreams and support them. The church is where a widow who has lost her husband of fifty-five years comes to find what else God has in store for her life. The church is the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the family of God, and I believe the greatest hope for the world.

Because we started the church from nothing and we have not been a part of a denominational system, we have always believed that in the *broad-horizon view of God* much more experimentation was required of us (surrounding the structure of the church)

than of people who did not have the freedom to follow their ideals. So when we read the book of Acts, it was as if our names were written all over it. And we would ask ourselves and other leaders, “What if we tried it the way we see God working in the book of Acts? If we fail, then some of our brothers and sisters in Christ serving in other churches can learn from our mistakes.”

I imagine every founding pastor feels this way, but we never started out to build an institution; we just wanted to follow Jesus Christ. When a movement starts to get organized, there are some strange things that take place. Millions of dollars of Key Man Insurance is purchased, and the senior pastor has to sign a promise that he or she will not run rapids in life rafts, scuba dive, skydive, or even climb mountains. Lawsuits begin to take place between the people to whom you are ministering and the institution that you are building. Christian friends do not want to meet together to pray as much as they want to lobby you for power. The dynamic of living in the book of Acts becomes more and more difficult as the church turns into an institution.

When a pastor has given his or her life to starting a church, the last thing that person wants to see is another cold institution with the life slowly being strangled from it as change becomes much more risky and faith becomes much more religious. So a *bona fide* Jesus freak and his family do strange things, such as spend time with homeless people (who just want a warm place to stay) or get to know the names of children living in the city dump of an emerging nation and pray through a broken heart for them every single day. Since I have been changed by this whole experience of having a meta church born right in my home, I suffer the consequences of having children who have believed

my sermons. My daughter moves out on the streets of Seattle in the winter just to see what it is like to be with other young homeless people, and my other daughter, her husband, and my only grandson move to the city dump to live with people there. After my daughter and grandson are robbed by a man with a machete and my son-in-law is shot at, praying without ceasing becomes easy for an aging member of the Jesus-people movement. In fact, when I pray on my knees for the church to which I have given my life, I pray that it will not become so political, so personality-focused, so competitive, so success-driven that it loses Jesus.

The majority of pastors instinctively battle institutional entropy in their church. One might call it spiritual warfare, or just complacency and resistance to change. Changing just to try to stay relevant to a culture brings no promise of success. This kind of change may in fact bring spiritual disaster, not only to the church but to the families which make up the church family. A fresh study of Acts creates a tremendous opportunity to battle institutional entropy and yet to search for the will of God in bringing about change.

When I was discussing my project with Acts scholar Dr. Robert Wall, I asked him what he would do if he were in my shoes attempting to reengineer the church annually to fight the stagnation that so easily sets into churches today. With a smile he said, “Preach Acts.” I said, “I have. I just completed a six-month series on Acts.” He said, “Keep preaching it.” I smiled and said, “Surely you’re kidding.” He explained, “Preach it to yourself—it is one of those books you are going to have to come back to again and again.” Then he encouraged me to write a commentary on Acts since I like to study it so

much.<sup>2</sup> He went on to explain that his belief as a biblical theologian is that nothing helps a church to stay healthy and continue to grow like correctly dividing the word of God.

This ministry focus paper helps clarify for Washington Cathedral the path of the meta church design that we have been following for twenty-four years. Any number of leaders in the church could have written it and done a better job than I have. Nevertheless, the time I have invested in it helps us all to better communicate to the community, and to new leaders and members, the path along which God has led us in trying to build a great caring network. Because the meta church design is so different from the mega church design (See Appendix B), the importance of communicating this is a project on which we will need to work for the foreseeable future. The impact of this paper in clarifying these issues cannot be overestimated. If conflict with local governing bodies can be reduced, as well as bringing in new leaders to resolve these issues, it will save immeasurable resources. It has been our experience that, when someone comes to the leadership team, one long year of dialogue about these concepts is a very quick turnaround for an individual to “get it” when it comes to the meta church.

The plan of yearly assessment through *Natural Church Development and Reveal*, is a helpful part of our corporate life. The focus groups, the planned discipleship, and retreats all lead up to the yearly reengineering process of the ministry at Washington Cathedral. Most helpful is the commitment of the leadership of Washington Cathedral to bring in a consultant once every five years to help in this process.

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<sup>2</sup> Conversation with Dr. Robert Wall at Seattle Pacific University, 2008.

For every ministry to be involved in reengineering, some aspect of its life requires values that are shared by the entire community. A well-defined process can help lead the deep, heartfelt expression of lay leaders to have their voices heard in the mix of defining their ministry for the coming years. One of the greatest benefits is people buying in to the meta church and its goal of building a great caring network. This brings a broad-based willingness for lay people to dive into church projects with both finances and large amounts of volunteer time.

Working on the incarnational mission of Washington Cathedral needs to be a part of every discussion—from the board of directors, to the discipleship of leaders. The tension between *attractional* ministries and *incarnational* ministries can only be overcome by teaching theory and the practical plans of hands-on Good Samaritan projects and by building Tiny Little churches around new emerging leaders.

The intentional diversity of the meta church is a big factor in staying incarnational. This diversity is revealed in homeless people coming by weekly to take a shower; in single moms who bring their families to meals at the church because they cannot afford food or they want their children to eat a meal with a big extended family; or in conversations at the ReCreation Center between Communist-anarchists and Republicans, which help to breathe a breath of fresh air into a church which can so quickly forget about an incarnational mission. When people sit down to dinner with their church families or when an individual going through a divorce begins to tear-up when talking about Christmas, it is much easier to sense Jesus at the table than it is when living in a church that becomes more and more fortified.

Eleven times throughout the book of Acts one sees the phrase “in the name of Jesus.” First, we see it in Acts 2:38 as Peter sums up his message at Pentecost. The structure of the church is forever changed by this outpouring of the Holy Spirit on young and old, Hellenist and Hebrew, male and female. “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call’” (Acts 2:38-39). To the early church, the importance of this simple phrase becomes even more apparent in its next appearance when Peter is asked for money by a beggar: “Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk’” (Acts 3:6).

When the church did not have any money, property, or people, all we had was the name of Jesus. This is the thing that a large institutional church forgets and that a Tiny Little Church might remember. The same manner is used to describe a miracle before the Sanhedrin: “Then know this you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed” (Acts 4:10). Therefore, when we have to raise millions of dollars, or I ask the church to experience a renewal in every family’s health, or claim a revival in reaching Muslims for Jesus Christ—we do these things not as a meta church, but simply in the name of Jesus.

This paper has been written to assist Washington Cathedral to overcome institutional entropy by presenting a plan for systematic change to the meta church’s

incarnational organizations through a methodical, cathedral-wide process learned from the collaborative method displayed in the book of Acts. All of this is done in the name of Jesus so that this church can keep on being a continual renewal of Christ-followers rather than an institution which becomes so organized that, somewhere along the way, the Jesus People movement gets lost.

## APPENDIX A

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PURE CELL AND META MODELS

	<b>META MODEL</b>	<b>PURE CELL MODEL</b>
<b>TYPES OF SMALL GROUPS</b>	Any type of group acceptable	The cell group is similar in purpose, vision, and format
<b>SMALL GROUPS/ CHURCH PROGRAM</b>	No conflict between the small groups and church programs  Small groups are seen as another program	Cell groups are key programs of the church  Other programs generally resisted in order to prioritize the cell ministry
<b>HEAD PASTOR</b>	Could possible delegate this ministry to an associate pastor	Must be at the very center of the cell ministry
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL</b>	Very loose and flexible with some light control	Strongly organized, directed to ensure quality control
<b>EVANGELISM</b>	Strong nurture focus in small groups with some evangelism  Multiplication a desired option for the small group	Strong evangelism focus with nurture as well  Multiplication strongly encouraged and promoted
<b>LEADERSHIP</b>	Some kind of ongoing training, although flexible and loosely organized  Leaders on pastoral team oversee specific ministries	Closely monitored, required ongoing training  Leaders on pastoral team oversee small groups in some manner
<b>STUDY MATERIAL</b>	Leaders free to choose	Material chosen for leaders and normally based on head pastor's message

APPENDIX B - REVEAL SURVEY RESULTS

## Washington Cathedral's Importance vs. Satisfaction for Small Groups

BENEFITS OF SMALL GROUPS PROGRAM	Importance Rating*	Satisfaction Rating*	Satisfaction "Gap" (satisfaction minus importance)
Has a leader that has knowledge on how to run a small group	84%	79%	-5%
Provides a safe place to process the issues I am facing in my life	80%	84%	4%
Provides a place where I can develop genuine friendships	79%	85%	6%
Is open to new members	78%	90%	12%
Makes the church seem smaller and more personal	76%	93%	17%
Holds me accountable to lead a Christian life	72%	72%	0%
Provides an in-depth study of the Bible	70%	79% ↑	9%
Provides easily accessible, good materials	63%	75%	12%
Offers a variety of times, locations and types to accommodate most people	61%	76%	15%
Creates an opportunity to find a spiritual mentor	54%	63% ↑	9%

\*Top Two Boxes out of Six Options

## Washington Cathedral's Importance vs. Satisfaction for Serving

BENEFITS OF SERVING EXPERIENCES THROUGH YOUR CHURCH	Importance Rating*	Satisfaction Rating*	Satisfaction "Gap" (satisfaction minus importance)
Gives me an opportunity to serve in an area I am passionate about	65%	62%	-3%
Allows me to use and develop my spiritual gifts	63%	62%	-1%
Allows me to directly help those in need	57%	61%	4%
Allows me to contribute to the overall vision and mission of our church	54%	68%	14%
Provides community and connection for me	54%	69%	15%
Allows me to select a serving time from a wide range of options	50%	59%	9%
Provides a wide range of serving experiences	47%	72%	25%
Provides an opportunity for me to be spiritually challenged (e.g. love the unlovable)	45%	68%	23%
Provides easy access and clear instructions for the serving experience (e.g. it's obvious what I need to do)	43% ↓	58%	15%
Allows me to serve with my family, share the experience	40%	60%	20%

\*Top Two Boxes out of Six Options

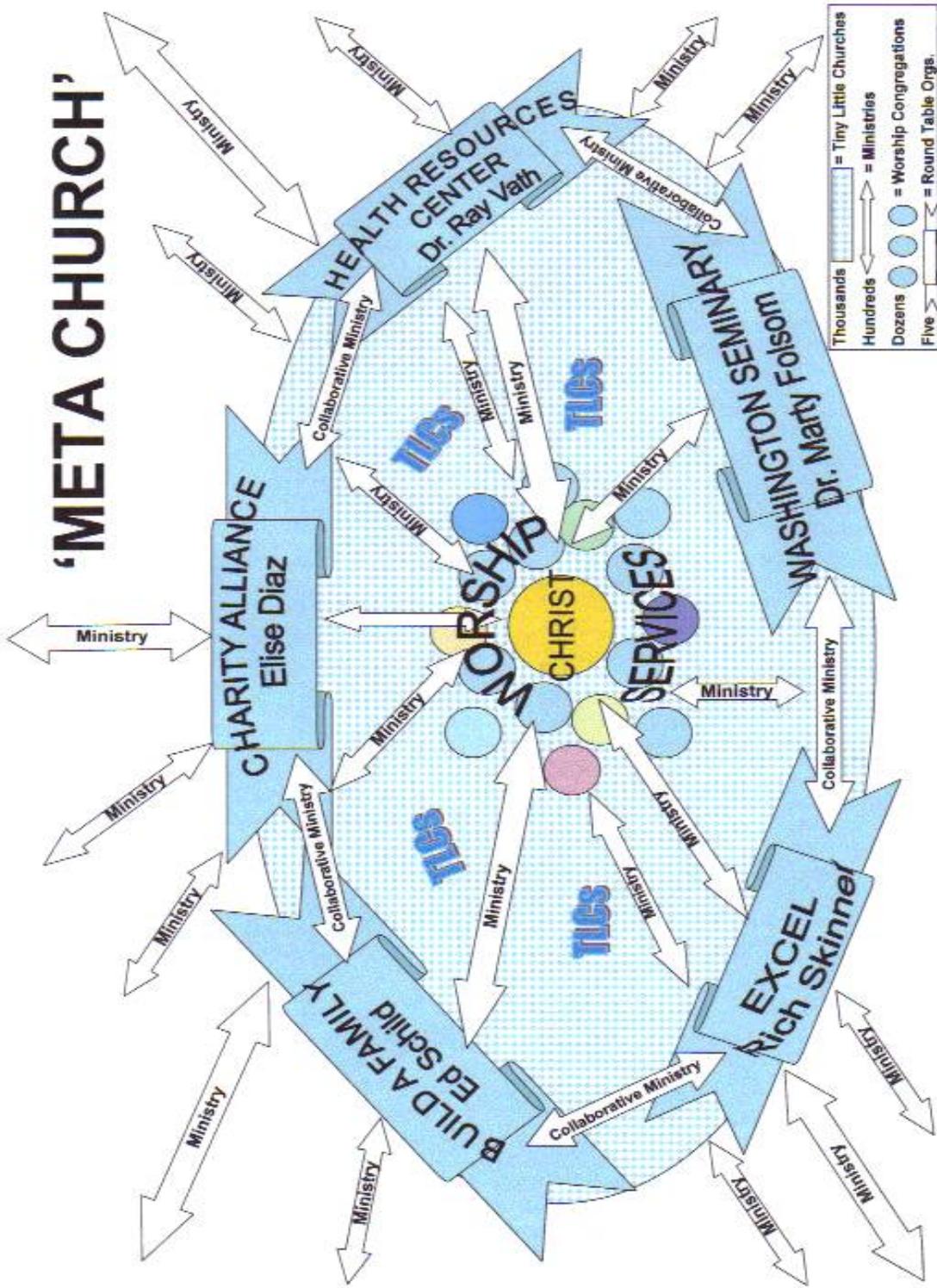
## APPENDIX C

### WASHINGTON CATHEDRAL'S CHURCH GROWTH STATISTICS

Year	Worship Attendance	Education	Number of Congregant Families	Number of Tiny Little Churches	Annual Giving	Number of Worshipping Congregations	
1984	47	14	21	5	44357	1	
1985	148	39	46	12	85212	1	
1986	142	31	200	17	121819	2	started North Campus
1987	302	71	247	32	250069	2	kicked out of high school meeting space
1988	492	87	301	39	267920	3	bought property
1989	604	142	521	48	308606	3	closed North Campus
1990	625	195	1175	51	348701	3	
1991	617	282	1007	51	506139	3	
1992	601	273	989	52	501230	2	
1993	634	264	1203	54	702534	2	church split
1994	824	294	1423	78	758209	2	
1995	984	305	1498	93	901122	2	moved into the building
1996	1012	298	1554	210	932581	2	
1997	1160	345	1621	209	1062787	5	
1998	1262	332	1801	203	955206	4	
1999	1279	302	2454	201	1121339	4	
2000	1288	321	3022	204	1531808	5	Inspiration TV
2001	1446	389	3702	190	1571839	6	started North Campus
2002	1312	362	3027	187	1690979	7	
2003	1326	354	2987	174	1361547	8	closed Inspiration TV
2004	1235	367	3001	162	1709034	9	church split
2005	1246	584	3329	156	3075861	10	started building project
2006	1341	621	3403	142	3449218	11	
2007	1408	423	3448	148	3803896	12	closed North Campus

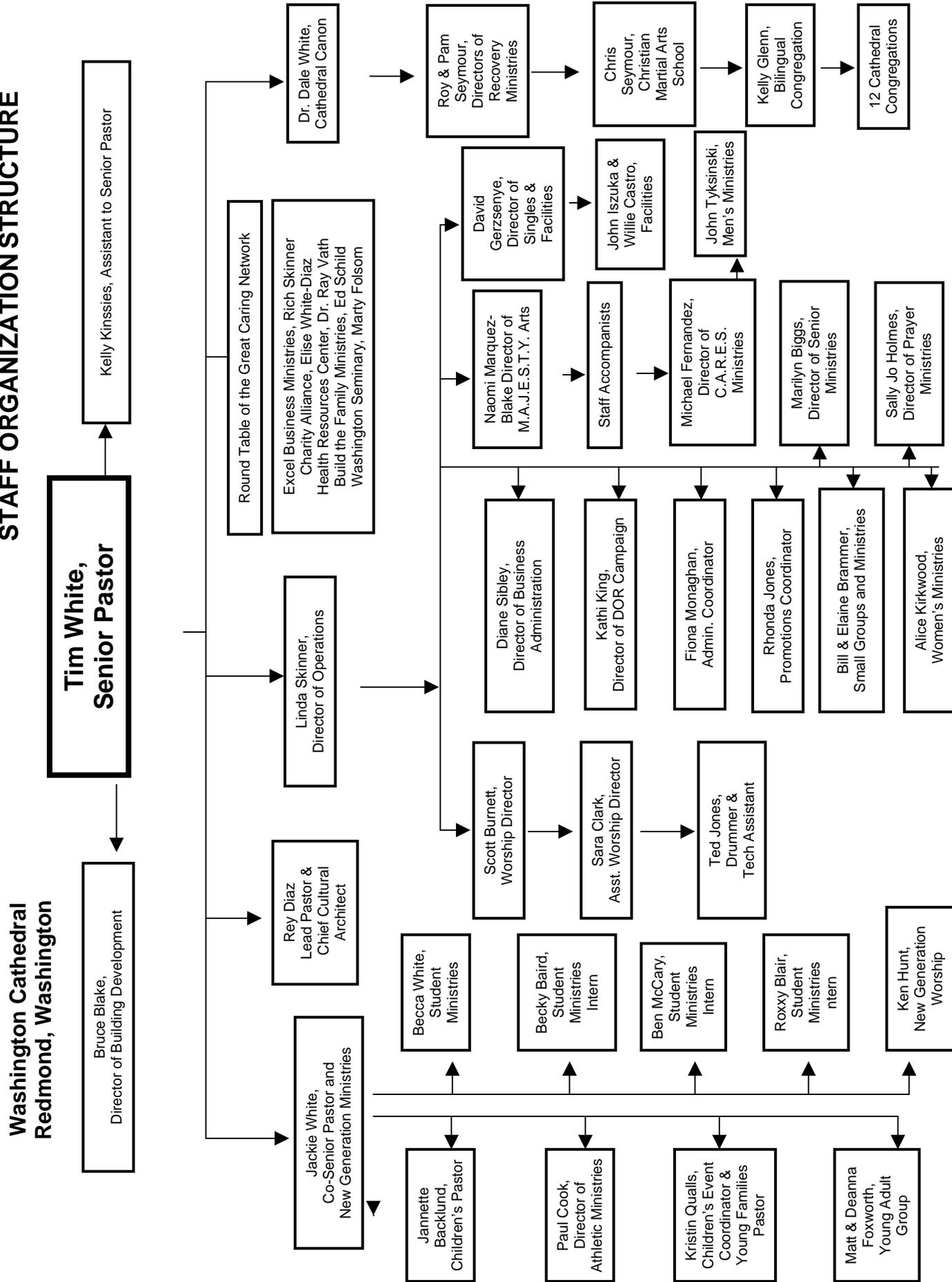
APPENDIX D

MODEL OF WASHINGTON CATHEDRAL



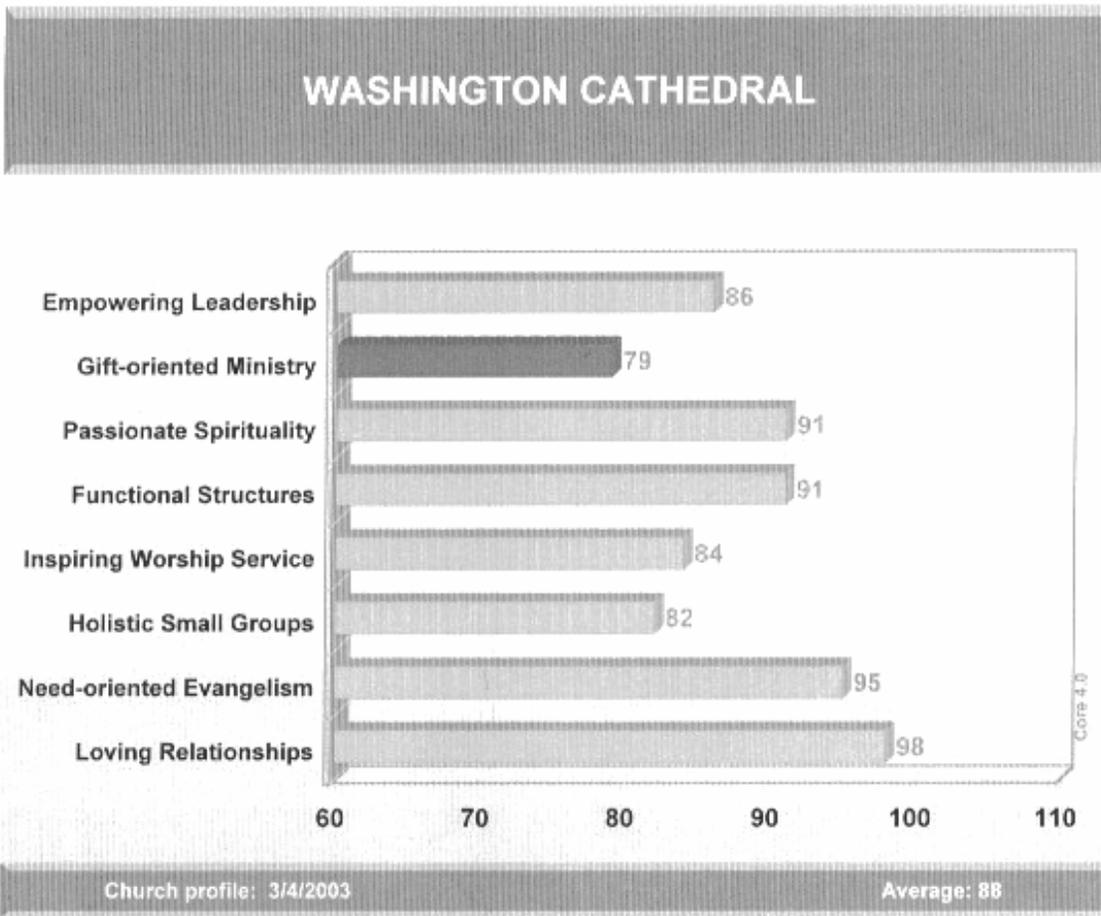
# APPENDIX E - ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

## STAFF ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE



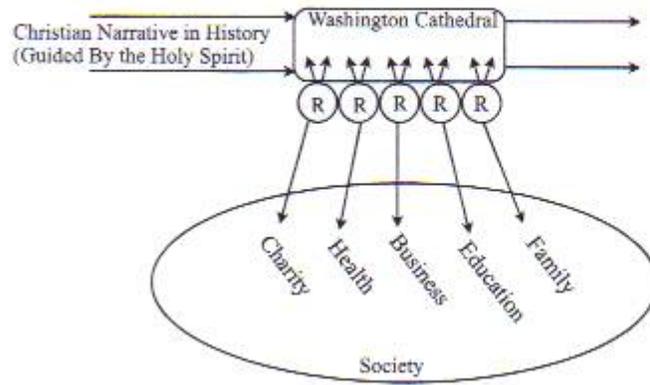
APPENDIX F

NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT RESULTS FROM A STUDY OF WASHINGTON CATHEDRAL IN 2003



APPENDIX G

DIAGRAM OF ROUND TABLES OF THE GREAT CARING NETWORK



**Rough Explanation:**  
Round Table Ministries Partner to minister to society and the church by extending service the the community, as well as drawing the community into the Christian Narrative.

APPENDIX H

LAY MINISTRY COMMITMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS

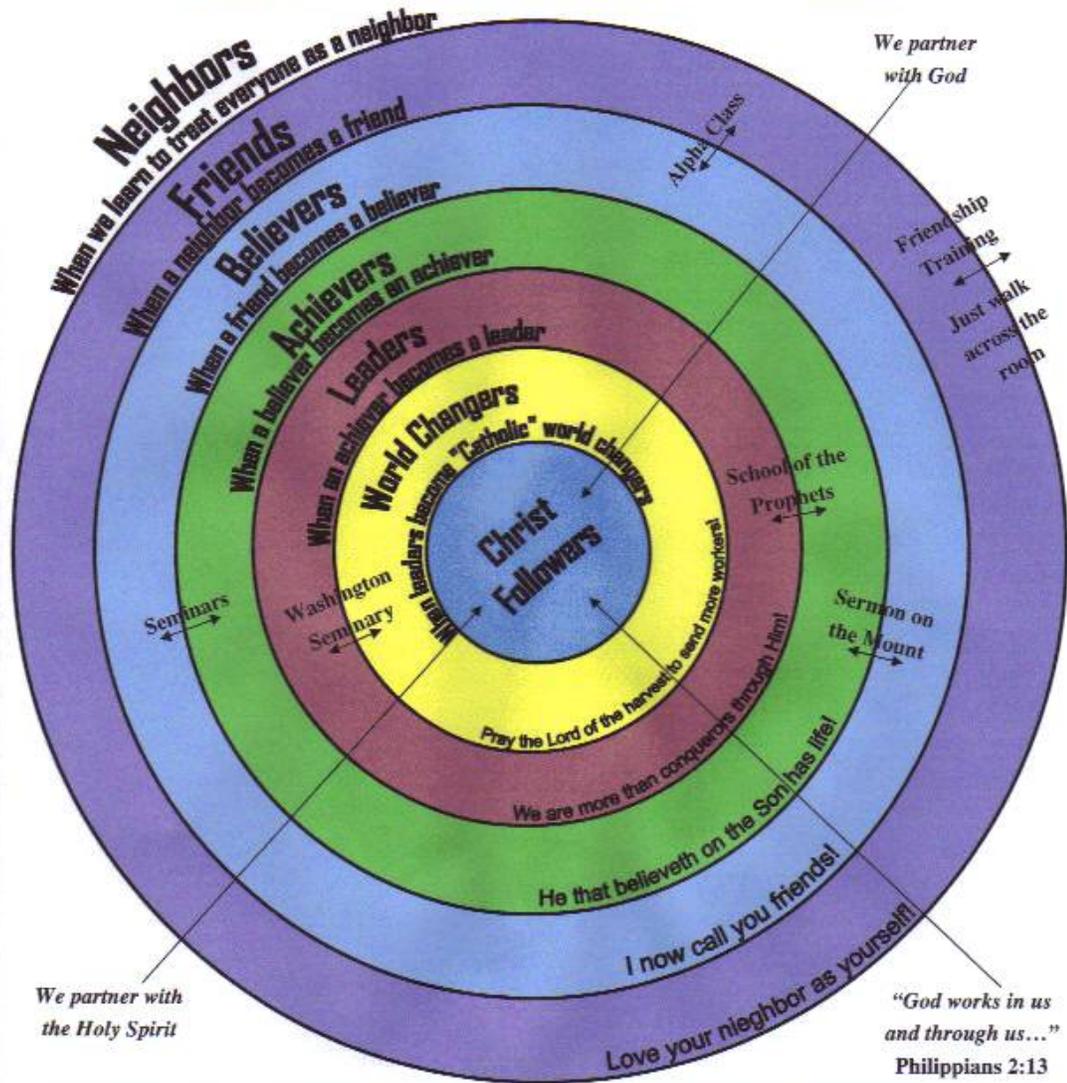
<p><b>Commitments for Lay Ministers</b></p>	
<p><u>Faith:</u> Lay ministers are expected to confess these basic statements of faith.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confess Jesus as Lord and Savior</li> </ul>
<p><u>Growth:</u> Lay ministers are expected to commit to personal spiritual growth and discipline.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular worship</li> <li>• Devotional reading of and adherence to scripture</li> <li>• Financial responsibility</li> <li>• Continual yielding to the Holy Spirit</li> <li>• Daily devotion</li> </ul>
<p><u>Faithfulness:</u> Lay ministers are expected to fulfill these requirements as a sign of commitment to Washington Cathedral.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become an official member of Washington Cathedral</li> <li>• Regular church attendance</li> <li>• Loyalty (as defined in Discipline for Effective Ministry) to church leadership, Vision, Mission, Core Values, and Statement of Faith</li> </ul>
<p><u>Accountability:</u> Lay ministers are accountable to Senior, Regional, and Small Groups Pastors. They can be held accountable for any of the following. Discipline may range depending on the severity of the offense.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any kind of immorality</li> <li>• Disloyalty or strife that causes harm to church</li> <li>• Teaching false doctrine</li> <li>• Breach of faithfulness commitment</li> <li>• Not participating in semi-annual Leadership Summits and training</li> </ul>

APPENDIX I

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES

Washington Cathedral Discipleship Plan

We partner with God to disciple people from Neighbor to Christ-follower



Five miracles we pray for

Neighbors to become Friends, Friends to become, Believers, Believers to become Achievers, Achievers to become Leaders and Leaders to become World Changers!

APPENDIX J  
DIAMOND PRINCIPLE

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and required to view this picture.

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