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CULTIVATING MISSIONAL COMMITMENT: SHARING RECIPROCAL  
HOSPITALITY WITH THE MONROVIA YOUTH ALLIANCE

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BY

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## ABSTRACT

### **Cultivating Missional Commitment: Sharing Reciprocal Hospitality with the Monrovia Youth Alliance**

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Mountainside Communion—A Church of the Nazarene (hereafter, Mountainside), was founded in 2005. As a new church, Mountainside has enjoyed the freedom to risk, experiment, and even fail at missional ventures. One of the most significant missional initiatives was a four-month commitment to share reciprocal hospitality with an at-risk youth organization called the Monrovia Youth Alliance (hereafter, MYA). Mountainside now needs to build on this initiative, moving from missional experimentation to missional commitment.

This paper has three parts. Part One provides description of the spiritual discernment process Mountainside completed which led to recognizing an adaptive challenge of cultivating missional commitment. The section goes on to examine a series of obstacles in addressing this challenge, namely, Ideal Type Romanticism, how a consumer culture affects Mountainside's practice of ministry and mission, and how elements of discontinuous change make it difficult to lay roots in local neighborhoods.

Part Two is an exploration of pertinent theological themes for cultivating missional commitment. Working with Galatians 5 along with Charles Taylor's concept of "social imaginary," the first chapter in Part Two provides theological and philosophical frameworks for thinking about congregational change.<sup>1</sup> The next chapter then describes Mountainside's current social imaginary, suggesting both boundaries and possibilities in expanding it towards missional commitment. Concepts focused on in this chapter are functional rationality, Eucharistic theology, and Mountainside's core values of "community" and "hospitality."

Part Three presents an adaptive approach to moving towards missional commitment with MYA. It introduces four relational events to be participated in by members of Mountainside and MYA which are designed to test how a church might shift the "relational descriptions" of the participants, thus expanding its "social imaginary," thus moving it towards deeper missional commitment. The section closes by presenting the research of the project as well as providing analysis and evaluation.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

Words: 299

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

To Ari

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## INTRODUCTION

This project is an exploration in congregational change. More specifically, it is a chapter in one congregation's journey into committed missional life. Utilizing socio-cultural frameworks, this project begins by exploring and analyzing the current praxis of Mountainside Communion—A Church of the Nazarene (hereafter, Mountainside).<sup>1</sup> This part is followed by two chapters of theological and philosophical reflection that aid in shaping the work of the project. This work is to test the thesis that moving Mountainside from missional experimentation to missional commitment requires participation in relational engagements of shared hospitality with other groups in the neighborhood. The final section of the project contains description, reflection, and analysis of the ministry project as well as a concluding section on ways this project helped to change the missional praxis of Mountainside.

Mountainside first gathered on January 30, 2005 in Monrovia, California. The initial meeting took place in a home and consisted of fourteen people, all having some degree of relational history with one another and living in Monrovia or a neighboring city. The group had come together around the missional vision of being a local church in the city of Monrovia and committed to working together at discerning vision; practicing hospitality; and being faithful with time, gifts, and financial support. Mountainside had no idea as to what was in store for it over the next few years.

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<sup>1</sup> More will be said about the concept of praxis in Chapter 5, but praxis can be understood as “the constant rhythm that includes study and reflection (including working with theology and other theoretical material) in continual interaction with engagement and action.” Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2011), 41.

Mountainside's first year was spent in two different locations working diligently at cultivating worship life, discerning vision, experimenting with practices of hospitality, and striving to live faithfully as God's people in Monrovia. This work included befriending women and children from a local residential shelter, welcoming a local business owner into fellowship, heavy involvement of students and staff from a local Christian university, and the decision to shape weekly worship around the celebration of the Eucharist. Also during this initial year, Mountainside's first mission team was established around a Christian response to the genocide in Darfur. A goal of raising awareness in Monrovia as well as ten thousand dollars to build a well in Darfur was set. Both goals were met through a variety of strategies including concerts in local coffee shops, organizing a booth at the local street fair, partnering with local businesses, and contributing 10 percent of all tithes and offerings towards the effort. This was a vibrant year of missional experimentation.

The second two years were initiated with another change in meeting location. Due to numerical growth, primarily among young adults and children, Mountainside moved into the Monrovia Community Center. Highlights from 2006 and 2007 included Easter baptisms, picnics in a local park, weddings, ongoing small group gatherings, and continued neighborhood engagement experiments. Also during these years the church began to be affected by the transitory nature of Western culture with people deciding to leave the church for a variety of reasons. Some moved for work, others returned home after finishing school, and some decided to move on to different churches. All of these moves brought feelings of loss, pain, and confusion to what had been a very lively and

energetic group. In walking through this challenging time, Mountainside got the sense that it was becoming a real church.

The fourth and fifth years of existence were initiated by yet another change in location. In response to increased rent at the Monrovia Community Center, the church began to worship in the basement of the local United Methodist Church on Sunday afternoons. During these years Mountainside continued in ongoing worship life, had its first three retreats, entered into a spiritual discernment process, and went through a rigorous consensus process in deciding to officially affiliate with the Church of the Nazarene.<sup>2</sup> These were the most challenging years of Mountainside's existence thus far, and they were characterized by focused prayer, hard work, vehement disagreement, conflict resolution, and difficult decisions.

Mountainside has now entered into its sixth year of existence and enthusiastically anticipates God's future. The last few years of hard work and challenging decisions have helped it better understand who it is. It has become increasingly clear that Mountainside's first few years of worship life could be characterized as a period of missional experimentation. Being a church plant almost necessitates this kind of culture. Nevertheless, after five years of experimenting, God has been moving Mountainside from a culture of missional experimentation to one of missional commitment.

Describing a church as missional has become commonplace for many churches and denominations in North America. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a full and robust definition of the term, it is important to at least describe briefly what is

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<sup>2</sup> This spiritual discernment process will be described in more detail in Chapter 1.

meant here when using the word “missional.” Al Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk give a helpful description when they write that mission is

not a program or project some people in the church do from time to time (as in “mission trip,” “mission budget,” and so on); the church’s very nature is to be God’s missionary people. We use the word *missional* to mark off this big difference. Mission is not about a project or a budget, or a one-off event somewhere; it’s not even about sending missionaries. A missional church is a community of God’s people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very nature, God’s missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all of creation in Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

As this description so aptly explains, ongoing missional life is about more than activities, projects, and experiments. Missional life is about God working on the imagination and culture of a church so as to move it towards the self-understanding that it is a participant in what God is bringing about in its local community and in the world. A missional church is a people with an ongoing presence in a local community whose very life points towards God’s future in that place. Thus this kind of life entails more than temporary and short-term activities or experiments. This kind of life requires a redemptive commitment and relationship to a local community and what God is up to there. It is this kind of redemptive commitment that this project attempts to cultivate.

Cultivating an environment where this type of cultural shift can happen is no easy task. As a church plant made up of people with no experience in church planting, the people of Mountainside recognize that there is a lot that we do not

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<sup>3</sup> Al Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), xv. John Yoder also gets at this when he writes, “Because the risen Messiah is at once head of the church and *kyrios* of the *kosmos*, sovereign of the universe, what is given to the church through him is in substance no different from what is offered to the world. The believing community is the new world on the way.” John H. Yoder, *For the Nations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 50.

know about cultivating this kind of cultural shift among a church body. While we have addressed a number of challenges over the last few years, this will be a challenge unlike any that we have faced thus far. It is what can be described as an adaptive challenge.<sup>4</sup>

Adaptive challenges are more easily understood when juxtaposed with more common technical challenges. Technical challenges require the application of “current know-how.” They are challenges that an organization or church body already has the capacities to address and are generally addressed by leaders in authority. These are the types of challenges that we have largely faced and addressed thus far. On the contrary, adaptive challenges are those that require “new learning” not only by people in authority, but also by the very people facing the challenge.<sup>5</sup> This project is a description of Mountainside’s attempt at gaining the new learning, understanding, and capacities needed in order to address the adaptive challenge of moving from a culture of missional experimentation to one of committed and sustainable missional life.

The work of Roxburgh and Romanuk is an important resource in thinking about missional change and innovation within a congregation. In their book, *The Missional Leader*, they describe “The Missional Change Model” (hereafter, the MCM) as a tool for congregations to use when trying to diffuse missional

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 13-20.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

innovation that brings about change in the culture of a congregation.<sup>6</sup> This is the framework for change utilized by Mountainside in this project.

The MCM is based on a few critical factors. The first factor is that when a leader and congregation try to implement change, rarely does this happen in a linear fashion or a straight line. Much like sailing a boat in the ocean, a congregation must gain the skills and capacities to read the winds and currents navigating from one point to another on its way to a destination. The second factor is unlike sailing in that the target or goal is not always where the church may think it is. The shape and actions of missional life are difficult to predict at the beginning of this type of process. The third factor is that the leader and the congregation are going to make a lot of mistakes along the way. These mistakes generally have to do with ingrained habits of believing they can control the outcomes of processes like this. The final factor is that not only is the target or goal rarely where we think it is, it also keeps moving. Since local neighborhoods and congregations are never static, missional change and innovation are moving targets.<sup>7</sup>

The MCM is made up of five stages; but since change does not happen in a linear fashion, congregations move back and forth between stages as the process unfolds. The first stage is Raising Awareness.<sup>8</sup> Put simply, this is about beginning where people are at in this moment. It is about creating an

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<sup>6</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*, 79-108.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 84-90.

environment where people can articulate some of their feelings about faith and life. The second stage is Gaining Understanding.<sup>9</sup> This is about using conversations and dialogue to help congregants integrate what they think and understand about missional life with what they are feeling. Within emerging missional congregations, these two stages are happening all of the time.

The third stage in the MCM is Evaluation.<sup>10</sup> This is about applying awareness and understanding. During this stage a congregation evaluates some of the forms of life in the church and neighborhoods in light of the awareness and understanding that it has gained. While this stage can be uncomfortable, it is here when a church discerns small creative experiments that might be helpful in moving the church into missional life.

The fourth stage is Experimentation.<sup>11</sup> During this stage a congregation begins to implement small changes that focus on addressing adaptive challenges based on the work it has done in the first three stages. It is in this stage that churches test new actions and practices based on what they think will move them toward missional life. This is an action stage; but, actions based on the hard work of raising awareness, gaining understanding, and evaluating what they have learned.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*, 91-95.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-102.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

The final stage of the MCM is Commitment.<sup>13</sup> Once the congregation has gained confidence and momentum through the experiments, the culture of the church begins to change. This is when a missional culture begins to be embedded within the congregation and becomes more than the idea of one person. This process takes time. It takes flexibility and patience as people move back and forth from one stage to another. Nevertheless, as the process continues to move forward, committed missional life begins to take shape.<sup>14</sup>

Over the last three years, I have been leading Mountainside through the MCM. The focus of this project is on the transition from the Experimentation stage to the Commitment stage. This project will test the thesis that moving Mountainside from missional experimentation to missional commitment will require participation in relational engagements of shared hospitality with other groups in the neighborhood. The paper is broken down into three parts.

Part One provides context for the project. It begins in Chapter 1 with description of both the spiritual discernment process Mountainside has been in as well as its recognition of the adaptive challenge it faces in cultivating missional commitment. In Chapter 2 a series of obstacles to missional commitment confronting Mountainside are examined. These obstacles include Ideal Type Romanticism,<sup>15</sup> how a consumer culture affects a church's identity in relationship to ministry and mission, as well as how

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<sup>13</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*, 102-103.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24-31. See also Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 108-110.

elements of discontinuous change<sup>16</sup> make it difficult for a congregation to become rooted in its local neighborhood.

Part Two is an exploration of pertinent theological and philosophical concepts for cultivating missional commitment in a church. Chapter 3 describes the identity and agency of a church, congregational life in the Spirit, and Charles Taylor's concept of "social imaginary" in presenting a theological and philosophical framework for cultivating missional commitment.<sup>17</sup> Chapter 4 begins by describing both debilitating and generative aspects of the social imaginary of Mountainside and concludes by drawing suggestions for the cultivation of missional commitment from a lecture given by Warren Brown on long-term L'Arche assistants as exemplars of transformation.<sup>18</sup> These suggestions are used in the development of the ministry strategy in the final section.

Part Three presents an adaptive approach to moving towards missional commitment with MYA. A more detailed description will be given later, but briefly, MYA is an at-risk youth organization connected with both the Ministerial Association and the YMCA in Monrovia. This project develops and implements four gatherings of shared hospitality, to be participated in by Mountainside and MYA, as new practice in the social imaginary of Mountainside. These gatherings are designed to test how the relational descriptions of the participants might change, thus expanding the social

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<sup>16</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 87-110. See also Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> L'Arche was founded by Jean Vanier and Fr. Thomas Philippe in the early 1960s and now has homes established in more than thirty countries worldwide. L'Arche communities are groups of people who live together in a home-like setting, focusing on the care and support of people with developmental disabilities. See <http://www.larchewavecrest.org/contactus.html>.

imaginary of Mountainside, thus moving Mountainside towards deeper missional commitment. The paper will close with evaluation of the process and description of how this project helped to change the missional praxis of Mountainside.

PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### LISTENING, DISCERNMENT, AND EXPERIMENTATION

In the summer of 2007 Mountainside entered into a process of spiritual discernment under girded by the MCM.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 1 a description of the process will be given followed by description of the discerned adaptive challenges facing Mountainside. This is followed by description of the relationship between Mountainside and MYA and how that came to be an experiment in addressing those challenges. The chapter will close by describing the past year of missional experimentation and the discovery of a new adaptive challenge of moving from missional experimentation to missional commitment.

#### **Raising Awareness**

This stage is about beginning where people are. It is about raising awareness in the congregation of the feelings and thoughts they have about church life.<sup>2</sup> The MCM accomplishes this by inviting the congregation to take a survey based on aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> This process was developed by Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk of the Missional Leadership Institute. For an updated version of this process as well as other surveys and resources, see The Missional Network at [www.roxburghmissionalnet.com](http://www.roxburghmissionalnet.com).

<sup>2</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*, 84.

missional life and then sharing the results. During the raising awareness stage a few important decisions were made that had varied affects on the process.

I began the implementation of the MCM with a conscious decision to use the words “spiritual discernment process” when describing and referring to it. I chose this description because I wanted to emphasize that we were entering a process of discerning what God was doing among us. I thought that emphasizing the theological convictions undergirding the process as well as the corporate discernment aspect of it would help people understand the nature of the process, thus raising their enthusiasm for participating. I was especially concerned about the use of a survey in this process. I knew that a few members of the church had participated in church surveys before wherein the results of the survey became the data that leaders used to make overarching decisions for the congregation. I wanted them to understand that in this process the survey ends up functioning as a conversation starter and that the narratives of those conversations become what generates future action rather than the survey results. The conscious decision to use language of spiritual discernment helped people understand the difference.

The second decision that I made in implementing this process was to select a Guide Team. This was a group of people representing diverse groups in the church that would take ownership of the process and carry out much of what needed to be done in implementing it throughout the church. By empowering others in the church to help lead the process I was hoping to diffuse leadership and enthusiasm throughout the congregation. Early on in the process the Guide Team functioned well. We met consistently and they began to understand the process. We presented the process to the

leadership of the church and each member of the guide team helped describe the process and how it would unfold throughout the months ahead. We gained a strong consensus for moving forward and even heard comments like, “I hope that this kind of listening becomes a way of life for us as a church.” The diffusion we had hoped for was happening.<sup>3</sup>

This enthusiasm moved into the congregation as a whole as we explained the process to the church and distributed the surveys. The Guide Team was pleasantly surprised by the participation. Fifty-eight people took the survey, which was around 80 percent of the worship attendance at the time. While some maintained a reserved posture towards the survey, the amount of participation infused energy throughout the church. After taking the surveys and receiving the results Mountainside moved into the next stage of the MCM.

### **Gaining Understanding**

The Gaining Understanding stage of the MCM is about creating conversations that help a congregation integrate what they are feeling with what they think about missional life.<sup>4</sup> The MCM does this by organizing a Feedback Session on the survey results as well as by organizing Listening Groups. The Feedback Session is when the congregation receives the results of the survey and begins to learn how to interpret them. The Listening Groups consist of people of the congregation engaged in dialogue and

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<sup>3</sup> Once the process was organized and started, the Guide Team met a challenge in that two of its members ceased to be involved. One person ended up moving out of state and another person, who happened to be the designated leader of the group, ceased to participate. In his absence I stepped in to lead. While this was not an insurmountable obstacle, it did present challenges in maintaining the original diffusion and momentum within the congregation.

<sup>4</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *Missional Leader*, 93.

conversation around the survey results. Both are chances to continue to raise awareness of what is going on in the church as well as help people gain a deeper understanding of what God might be doing among them.

The raising awareness stage of the process was exciting work for the leadership of Mountainside. The Guide Team began by training eighteen facilitators that were to co-facilitate nine different groups.<sup>5</sup> Getting this many people involved in the process with official roles for involvement had great affects in keeping the momentum of the process going. The training focused on a posture of listening as the primary role of the facilitators and while more could have been done to encourage them in the responsibility of prompting, the training was sufficient for the facilitation of the groups.

After the training, the Feedback Session on the survey results took place.<sup>6</sup> The Guide Team made a few important decisions in organizing this. First of all, the decision was made to hold it during an extended worship time on a Sunday morning at a different location than usual. The change in location helped to emphasize the fact that what was happening that day was different from the church's usual worship. A beneficial result of doing this during the regular worship time is that it got the vast majority of the congregation involved in the conversation right from the beginning. If the Feedback Session had been done at a different time, there would not have been as much participation. It was also a good way to show everyone that spiritual discernment is about what God is doing among a church and is not something that is separate from the

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<sup>5</sup> The facilitator training happened on August 24, 2007. See Appendix A for an abbreviated timeline of Mountainside's missional journey.

<sup>6</sup> The Feedback Session was held on August 26, 2007.

church's worship of God. The church was able to understand that while this worship gathering was different from normal, it was still a part of worshipping God.

Another helpful decision made by the Guide Team was to have Mark Lau Branson lead the Feedback Session. Branson has extensive experience in working with churches and did a great job explaining the process as a whole as well as some of its underlying convictions. People were well engaged in their time with him and were working hard to understand all of the information he was sharing. As positive as the Feedback Session was and as clearly as Branson explained things, there was too much information shared in too short of a time for people to grasp. While the point of the process is to prompt conversation and dialogue throughout the life of the church, some people ended up feeling overwhelmed with the amount of information that they had received and were tempted to disengage.

The final step in Gaining Understanding was to organize the Listening Groups. During the time of implementing the Listening Groups, there were a number of other things going on in the church and to try and implement these groups alongside those other ministries was an overwhelming thought for the leadership of the church. Therefore, the first decision the Guide Team made was to host the Listening Groups once a month during the regular worship time. Each worship gathering began with *Lectio Divina* and then entered into the Listening Process around tables. Worship then ended by celebrating the Eucharist.<sup>7</sup>

By holding the Listening Groups during worship, once again the majority of the congregation was able to be involved in the Listening Process. There was input from a

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<sup>7</sup> More will be said about the significance of the Eucharist in Chapter 4.

number of people, including some visitors, from whom the church would never have received input had this process taken place at another time. This further infused conversation around the spiritual discernment process into Mountainside. This decision also helped people understand that there is a place for discerning God's direction and vision for a church community during worship and not only among a few people at some other point in time. Due to the decision to hold these groups during worship, Mountainside came to a better understanding of the role that worship plays in discerning what God is doing in a church.

There were also some drawbacks with this decision. The first is that very few of the groups had consistency of participation. This lack of consistency made it challenging to make connections between conversations. Another drawback is that people were less committed to the groups than the Guide Team had hoped. By having the groups during worship, people were tempted to view them in the "consumeristic" way that worship can be viewed at times.<sup>8</sup> The final drawback is that by having them during worship, people were forced to participate that may not have wanted to. This ended up diminishing some of the hope that people had for the process and also caused some stall in the overall energy of the groups.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> More will be said about the effects of consumerism on missional commitment in Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> Having completed the process, I would not organize the Listening Groups in this way again. Rather, I would wait for a season in our church that is less busy and also would hold the groups outside of the normal worship time. In doing the groups this way, we could update everyone on the process, but would not force people into participation who did not want to participate. While it would have lowered the overall participation, I think it would have been helpful in maintaining and even increasing momentum.

### **Evaluation: Discerning Adaptive Challenges**

The third stage of the MCM is about applying awareness and understanding. For this stage the leadership of Mountainside gathered for a weekend retreat to evaluate some of its forms of life in light of the awareness and understanding gained through the listening groups. The group spent two days discerning adaptive challenges facing the church and began thinking about experiments to initiate as a way of addressing those challenges.

Going into the retreat there was a lot of speculation as to how it would go. Some people were hoping for concrete and practical moves forward while others were leery of getting too concrete just yet. I was excited for the challenge of bringing everyone together. Once the retreat was finished and two adaptive challenges had been discerned, there was great excitement and energy for everyone involved. Having been through a long and grueling survey and listening process, the work and results of the retreat brought encouragement and hope at just the right time.

The retreat started with a time of defining the terms of adaptive and technical challenges and preliminary work with the reports that came out of the Listening Groups. The next session began with a time of Dwelling in the Word using a story from Luke 10.<sup>10</sup> Mountainside had been dwelling in Luke 10 throughout the Listening Groups and while people had engaged early on, some of the enthusiasm and curiosity had dwindled near the end. This particular morning though, the conversation was again vibrant and rich. The participants discovered and discussed themes of receiving hospitality from people of peace, the concrete and local nature of the gospel, cultural analysis that led to

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<sup>10</sup> Dwelling in the Word is a form of Bible Study that is similar to *Lectio Divina*.

conversation about the culture that Mountainside is a part of, as well as issues of boundary crossing. This has proven to be an especially generative time of Dwelling in the Word for the church.<sup>11</sup> The rest of the day was spent working with the Listening Group reports and discerning and embracing three adaptive challenges.<sup>12</sup>

This project focuses on two of the three adaptive challenges discerned during the retreat. The first challenge was articulated as, “How do we cross boundaries in our community?” The second adaptive challenge was articulated as, “How do we cross boundaries in our community as one body?” After articulating these challenges, the group took a break and then began working on an experiment to address them.

### Crossing Boundaries in the Community

After finishing the listening groups and heading into the retreat there were many people who had begun to recognize a need for Mountainside to begin engaging its community in a more intentional way. First of all, the data from the survey revealed that the church thought much lower of itself in terms of neighborhood engagement than it did in all other areas of church life. It was obvious from its low scores that Mountainside’s perception was that it should be doing more within its communities and neighborhoods.

Not only were the scores low in the survey results, but this concern also came out in the Listening Group reports. These conversations went deeper than survey results and brought Mountainside to a place of asking questions about the ethnic and cultural makeup

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<sup>11</sup> This will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup> Another adaptive challenge articulated this weekend was, “How do we share Memories and Hope?” This question stemmed from conversation about the identity and agency of a church. This concept will be further explored in Chapter 3. Examples of memories and hopes within our congregation that have proved to be helpful in cultivating missional commitment will be addressed in Chapter 4.

of the church compared to the neighborhood in which it felt called, the availability of people to participate in community engagement activities in light of busy schedules, as well as questions about whether Mountainside should be focused on the neighborhood it worshipped in or if it should be supporting individual members in mission in their neighborhoods and work places. These discussions also got people thinking more about what it might mean for more people to begin moving into the local neighborhood of the church.

A final influence in discerning this adaptive challenge was the session the leadership group spent dwelling in Luke 10. As mentioned above, the conversation around Luke 10 proved to be a generative one. The group spent time discussing the reciprocal nature of ministry and the spiritual practice of receiving hospitality as opposed to always being the ones to offer it. It also began imagining what it might mean for Mountainside to cross boundaries in a receptive spirit looking for what Luke 10 seems to describe as “people of peace.” Finally, this exercise with Luke 10 prompted the group to discuss the concrete and local nature of the gospel and doing cultural analysis of both the world of Luke 10 as well as the local culture that Mountainside is a part of. In discussing the reports of the Listening Groups in light of the time spent in Luke 10, the leadership ended up naming its first adaptive challenge. The challenge was posed as the question “How do we cross boundaries in our community?”

### Crossing Boundaries as One Body

The second adaptive challenge discerned on this retreat was how to engage in missional life, specifically crossing boundaries, in a corporate way. Mountainside has

had an interest in pursuing *koinonia* and corporate mission from its very beginning. This pursuit is revealed in a number of ways throughout its life together. Mountainside's name alone speaks to both a commitment to geography and corporate life. Its vision statement is to be "A community of followers of Christ, desiring to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God." One of its core values is "Community" and it focuses on pursuing community by engaging in mission.<sup>13</sup> Finally, Mountainside's primary practice as a church is celebrating the Eucharist each week as a culmination of its worship of God. Each week the church journeys forward to the table of the Lord gathering together as the body of Christ. From the time of Mountainside's founding, its instincts have been to confront the individualism of Western culture and practice faith in a corporate way.<sup>14</sup>

On the retreat the leadership of Mountainside was reminded of this commitment once again. While dwelling in Luke 10, they spent a great deal of time discussing the fact that Jesus sent the disciples out two by two. The group talked about the safety, comfort, encouragement, wisdom, creativity, and support that come from pursuing God's mission with one another. In reading over the Listening Group reports in light of this discussion they were able to see just how individualistic Mountainside's vision of mission had been. In the Listening Groups there was a good deal of discussion about supporting one another in individual missional ventures, but there was much less about corporate initiatives. As the group reflected on this in light of the Luke 10 conversation,

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix B for description of Mountainside's founding vision and values. This particular core value will be discussed further in Chapter 4 as a generative aspect to Mountainside's social imaginary.

<sup>14</sup> This will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

it began to wonder what it might look like for Mountainside to try and cross boundaries in the community as a united local expression of the Body of Christ.

### **Mountainside Communion and the Monrovia Youth Alliance**

As mentioned above, Mountainside came into the Spiritual Discernment Retreat unsure of what might come of it. There were a number of people who had grown tired of the Listening Groups and were ready for concrete and practical application. Other participants were not as sure about jumping into something without processing a bit more. After spending Friday night and Saturday morning working in Luke 10 and naming adaptive challenges, the group was ready to begin deciding on a concrete experiment that it could implement as a way of addressing the named challenges. The group spent the rest of the retreat working on this. As these discussions took place, current events in the city and relationships Mountainside had formed with other residents began to help shape the ministry experiment.

### **Race-based Gang Violence in Monrovia, California**

From November 2007 until February 2008, there were nine shootings in the city of Monrovia. The perpetrators of the shootings were members of rival gangs from Monrovia and the neighboring city Duarte. As the shootings continued to happen, it became clear that these were race-based gang activity. Three of the shootings resulted in the deaths of a 63-year-old African-American man, a 16-year-old Latina girl, and a 19-year-old African-American man. One of the murders occurred just a few blocks from my home. While Monrovia had experienced gang activity and even violence in the past, the

amount of activity as well as the overtly raced-based nature of the shootings was unlike anything Monrovia had gone through previously.<sup>15</sup>

During the days between and following the shootings, residents of Monrovia were afraid. Streets and sidewalks that usually bustled with activity were empty. During this time I had a conversation with a bi-racial couple from our church. The wife is Caucasian and the husband is Filipino, and they had made the conscious decision to stay indoors in the evening because they felt that he could easily be mistaken as being Latino. During this horribly violent and scary time, neighbors retreated into their homes and there was a general depression that overtook the city.<sup>16</sup>

City officials, clergy, school administrators, and other city leaders responded by calling meetings in attempts to calm everyone down. Early on city officials had downplayed the race-based nature of the violence in attempts to relieve the fear people were feeling. In meeting after meeting they declared the incidents to be simply gang activity. But as the shootings continued, there was no denying their race-based nature. The scheduled meetings functioned well in bringing people together and lowering fear, but they did not address the ongoing problems that cultivated this type of behavior among

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<sup>15</sup> For more on these shootings see <http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/monroviashootings>.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Carl Salzman, *Understanding Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theory* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2001), 16. This interview can be described as what Salzman calls “participant observation.” Much of the research done in this project can be understood this way. Salzman describes participant observation as including “such activities as attending rituals and ceremonies, going to the fields and pastures and fishing areas to watch and even help with production activities, sitting in on court cases, following political deliberations, engaging in play and sports activities, and listening and even entering into discussions, debates, and arguments, as well as having informal conversations with local people, holding formal interviews, doing surveys, and collecting oral knowledge and written documents.” 16. Harry Wolcott also describes this concept well. See Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 88-93.

the youth. As soon as the fear had subsided, most city officials and community leaders went back to the normal activities of life.

One of the meetings held during this time was a citywide prayer gathering that I led with another pastor in town.<sup>17</sup> He is an African-American man and his congregants, primarily African-American as well, had been especially affected by the shootings when a cousin of one of their members had been murdered. The prayer meeting was held at the local YMCA and was a wonderful ecumenical service with people and clergy from different backgrounds and faiths participating. A troubling aspect of the evening, though, was that only a couple of people from our church attended. This was a poignant example of the adaptive challenge discerned in the Spiritual Discernment Process.

For the next three months during worship, Mountainside focused in on the violence of the town. I showed maps of our city with mention of where the shootings happened and their proximity to the homes of people in our church. It started to hit home. I had us recite Jeremiah 29:4-7 which states,

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.<sup>18</sup>

I also began telling stories about people who had been affected by the violence. These were people I knew from walking the neighborhoods, playing basketball in the park, sipping coffee in local coffee shops, or with whom I had mutual friends. I was trying to

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<sup>17</sup> This took place on January 31, 2008 at the Santa Anita YMCA.

<sup>18</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

expand the perspectives of the congregation beyond themselves and their everyday lives. I was pretty frustrated with people's indifference at first in light of our vision of "doing justice," but I was grateful to God for the response of people once I started leading so intentionally.

#### How Mountainside Can Share Reciprocal Hospitality with the Monrovia Youth Alliance

When I began pastoring in Monrovia in 2005, one of the first things I did was join the local Ministerial Association. An especially impressive ministry initiative that developed out of the association is MYA, an at-risk youth organization. MYA was initially developed as a multi-church youth group focused especially on at-risk youth in Monrovia. Over the course of a couple of years a variety of circumstances allowed for MYA to become a sponsored program of the local YMCA. One of the first people I met when joining the Ministerial Association was Ulises Gutierrez, who is the founding director of MYA and the youth pastor of a local Pentecostal church. Gutierrez is a gifted, brave, and charismatic leader who is also a former member of one of the local gangs involved in the shootings. Over the last five years he has become a good friend and one of God's graces for me and for Mountainside.

A few months after meeting Gutierrez and hearing about his ministry, I invited him to come and speak at Mountainside about some of the things that MYA had going on and about ways the church might be able to support them.<sup>19</sup> Gutierrez came, bringing about ten students from MYA, and cast a vision for the youth of Monrovia, inviting Mountainside to help out financially as well through volunteer opportunities. After

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<sup>19</sup> Chapter 4 will discuss functional rationality as a boundary to missional commitment within the social imaginary of Mountainside. Mountainside's initial posture with MYA is a good example of this.

hearing Gutierrez speak, a couple of people from our church participated in volunteer opportunities that Ulises had suggested. The church was also able to help financially support an upcoming event they had planned.

Mountainside's Spiritual Discernment Retreat was scheduled for the last weekend of February, which was four weeks after the final shooting had occurred, three weeks after our prayer gathering, and on the heels of our intentional focus on the violence in our city. As we spent the first part of the weekend discerning our adaptive challenge, the current situation in the community as well as the church's relationship with MYA was at the front of everyone's mind. It did not take long for the group to decide that whatever our experiment might be, it needed to include work with MYA. Leaning heavily on the Luke 10 conversation, the current events in town, as well as our articulated adaptive challenges, the group decided on an initial experiment of "How do we share reciprocal hospitality with the Monrovia Youth Alliance as One Body?" The primary hopes behind this named challenge were the receiving of hospitality from these teenagers and staff as people of peace, the crossing of boundaries by working with and befriending the people of MYA, and the challenge of making this a corporate venture and not just the work of a few volunteers. While boundary crossing was the heart of this challenge, it was concrete enough for those growing tired of the listening process. We had the "win" that we needed.

### **Four Months of Missional Experimentation**

As the retreat came to a close, the church selected a Missional Action Team that would organize and initiate a four-month experiment in sharing hospitality with MYA as

one body.<sup>20</sup> The group met briefly to jot down ideas that had been mentioned during the retreat, and committed to include more people from the congregation in the process. This team was given the responsibility of taking the vision discerned at the retreat and putting together a plan of action that would address our adaptive challenge.<sup>21</sup> There was a great deal of excitement and energy around this experiment as members left the retreat.

Over the next few weeks the plan of action was organized and the group initiated a four-month experiment in sharing hospitality with MYA as one body. The first aspect of the experiment was to have Gutierrez come and share about volunteer opportunities available with MYA over the next four months.<sup>22</sup> There was a great response and twelve people ended up committing to volunteering for four months, participating in a variety of ways including mentoring, tutoring, program setup, music, and teaching.

The second part of the plan was having those volunteering with MYA share during worship about their experiences as the worship service moved into prayer. This kept the issues of the city and MYA at the forefront of people's consciousness as the church came before God. It also was a way for the twelve volunteers to get support from

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<sup>20</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Action Teams: A Workbook for Participants* (unpublished manuscript, 2008), 4. Roxburgh describes a Missional Action Team as "a group comprised of church leaders who meet regularly to 'problem-solve' a primary church challenge for which there is no readily identifiable solution. [It] works through a carefully designed Challenge-Resolution Process comprised of a series of steps that will lead to the identification and development of an 'Action Plan' for initiating 'Missional' change with respect to the challenge. . . . [The] team utilizes a 'Team-Based' process to develop the 'Action Plan.'"

<sup>21</sup> Patrick R. Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006), 115. Keifert writes, "A vision without a plan of action is but a dream. A plan of action without a vision gets you nowhere but with a longer list of things to do. A vision with a plan of action, however, can change the world."

<sup>22</sup> This took place on March 9, 2008.

the rest of the congregation in this missional venture. By giving regular updates, the initiative more and more became something that the church was doing as one body.

The final two pieces of the plan were attempts at creating environments for reciprocal hospitality between the groups. The first event was a one-time meal with MYA at the YMCA so that people from Mountainside could spend time with the staff and teenagers asking them about life in Monrovia from their perspective. There was a great response with around twenty-five people participating from Mountainside.<sup>23</sup> The final piece of the plan was initiated by MYA. They suggested that the church and MYA gather for worship together on a Sunday at Mountainside's normal time and location, but that they lead the evening. We enthusiastically accepted their offer and a month or so later they came and led us in worship through music, dance, preaching, and prayer. This evening was one of the highlights of the year.<sup>24</sup>

### Outcomes Worth Celebrating

After four months of missional experimenting with MYA there were a number of outcomes worth celebrating. The first was that throughout the four months, relationships were formed that would not have been possible if the congregation had not experimented with crossing boundaries within the community. There were now a few church members who had cultivated friendships with people connected with MYA due to this missional experiment. Along with these friendships, one Mountainside member ended up serving

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<sup>23</sup> This took place on April 11, 2008. While the event was fun and helped with MYA's program, it did not achieve the hoped outcome of sharing hospitality. We had lessons to learn.

<sup>24</sup> This took place on July 13, 2008. This gathering and two more that happened in 2008 became the initial engagement/action that led to the re-imagined worship gatherings that are the new practice developed and implemented in this project.

on staff with MYA for a year, providing music, transportation, and supervision for the program. While most of the twelve people who committed to volunteer for four months decided to stop either during the experiment or right when it was finished, there were three or four people who continued to volunteer into the following year.

A second outcome worth celebrating is that some friendships that developed between church members and people of MYA had grown beyond MYA or Mountainside activities. These friendships developed by friendly interactions around town in restaurants, parks, the street fair, and a basketball tournament that both groups participated in. While there were only a few church members who developed relationships to the point of recognizing one another in the community, it is still something worth celebrating.<sup>25</sup>

Another exciting development that came out of the experiment was a commitment from both Mountainside and MYA to have a quarterly worship gathering together. Building off of the energy and excitement of the first worship gathering, both groups decided that this was something that should continue into the future. The times of worship and fellowship were too important to stop. These gatherings, initiated by MYA, ended up being the primary context for the work of this project.

Finally, this experiment was successful in getting the church to think about missional life as one body. The plan that the team developed and implemented, coupled with the church's corporate discernment process, created a *koinonia* that had not been

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<sup>25</sup> An interesting observation with this is that each of the people that have developed deeper friendships with people involved with MYA is a local resident of Monrovia. No one at Mountainside living outside of Monrovia has been able to develop quite the same relationship with people of MYA. This will be reflected upon further in Chapter 2.

anticipated.<sup>26</sup> This process not only helped in cultivating redemptive relationships with new friends from MYA, but it also deepened Mountainside's understanding of what it means to be "a community of followers of Christ desiring to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God."

#### A New Challenge Discovered: Moving from Experiments to Commitment

A final outcome of the initial experiment was that it raised the congregation's awareness of a new adaptive challenge for the church. It was as if the winds of missional life had shifted the church like a boat at sea, from the stage of experimenting back to the raising awareness stage all over again. In the months following the four-month experiment, there was a decrease in involvement in the church's relationship with MYA. Despite a few encouraging outcomes from the experiment, the relationship was losing momentum. People still spoke as if they wanted to maintain the relationship that had started, but the shape of Mountainside's life as a church was falling back into our pre-experiment mode as it pertained to MYA. The challenge now faced by Mountainside was moving beyond missional experimentation to missional commitment. This is a challenge not only for Mountainside's relationship with MYA, but also in terms of how Mountainside relates to other groups of people within its context.

The decrease in enthusiasm and involvement surrounding the church's relationship with MYA was evidenced in a couple of different ways. First of all, as MYA and Mountainside worship gatherings continued, I began to notice a decrease in attendance from people of Mountainside. While only one person had said that he was not

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<sup>26</sup> Mountainside's core value of "community" will be explored further in Chapter 4 as a generative aspect to Mountainside's social imaginary.

attending because of the nature of the gathering, the decrease in attendance was something that could not be ignored. A second way that the church's waning enthusiasm was evidenced was in the number of people who ceased to volunteer. Of the twelve people who began the experiment in an official volunteer role, only three maintained any kind of official connection beyond the experiment.

There were a few primary reasons that people gave for being unable to continue to work with MYA. First of all, two of the church's most devoted volunteers moved out of the area. One of these people was the leader of the Missional Action Team. A second reason given was that people were growing uncomfortable with the theology of MYA and how that was embodied in some of their activities. A third reason was that people were unable to make the commute any longer from their place of residence outside of Monrovia to the activities of MYA. A fourth reason was that people were too busy to maintain another weekly commitment on top of everything else they had going on. Finally, though this was not articulated by anyone specifically, I sensed that some of the enthusiasm had drained because unrealistic expectations had been built up through the spiritual discernment process for what this ministry might look and feel like, and those expectations were not being met in the actual experience of volunteering.

In reflecting on the church's decrease in involvement, the reasons given for the decrease, as well as the new adaptive challenge facing the church, I began to get some clues as to what some of the obstacles to missional commitment might be. I realized that most of these reasons were not simply a particular individual's struggle, but were the fruit of deep cultural forces. These deep cultural forces not only affected Mountainside's commitment to MYA, but also its commitment to missional life in general.

I also began getting clues as I reflected on those people that did maintain a connection with MYA. Each person who maintained a relationship with MYA lives in Monrovia. Not one person residing outside of Monrovia has been able to sustain any kind of commitment beyond the initial experiment. Also, most of the people who have maintained a friendship with people of MYA were able to live out the reciprocal nature of hospitality that the church was striving for.

A final clue came as I reflected on the dinner gathering we had with MYA as well as on the relationships that MYA has with other organizations in town. Due to the makeup of MYA and its need for financial resources, the group has relationships with a variety of organizations in our town that are based primarily on financial contribution. Wealthy people and organizations in town donate money to MYA on a regular basis. It works well in that MYA gets the money they need to keep programs moving forward, and the wealthy individuals and organizations feel good about themselves and the generous contributions that they make. In reflecting on these relationships, I began to realize that here too were cultural clues in addressing the adaptive challenge of missional commitment that Mountainside is faced with. It is to these obstacles to missional life that this paper now turns.

## CHAPTER 2

### OBSTACLES TO MISSIONAL COMMITMENT

As noted in Chapter 1, when Mountainside's experiment with MYA came to a close, I quickly noticed a decrease in enthusiasm and participation when it came to addressing the adaptive challenge of sharing reciprocal hospitality with MYA as one body. I watched our attendance shrink at MYA and Mountainside worship gatherings and witnessed people finish their four-month commitment and decide to no longer participate in MYA activities. In reflecting on the reasons people were giving, there were clues revealed for understanding not only why commitment with MYA was challenging, but also why commitment to missional life in general is challenging for churches. This chapter will explore some of the challenges Mountainside faces, pointing out cultural forces that lead to these obstacles to missional commitment.

#### **Ideal Type Romanticism**

As Mountainside's experiment with MYA came to a close, a variety of reasons were given as to why people would no longer be volunteering with MYA in specific and committed ways. Some of the enthusiasm had drained because of unmet expectations. Reasons that people gave were both real and legitimate, but it became clear that unmet

expectations were a primary reason for the lack of sustained commitment. In reflecting on this as well as the church's spiritual discernment process as a whole, it became clear that during the process, unrealistic expectations had been built up as to what this experiment might look and feel like. In the end, these inflated expectations were not being met in the actual experience of volunteering. This led to frustration, disappointment, boredom, and therefore a lack of commitment. Lurking behind these over-inflated expectations is Ideal Type Romanticism.

Ideal Type Romanticism is a functional rationality stemming from a Cartesian understanding of the world.<sup>1</sup> Rene Descartes is credited as the founder of Rationalist thinking and his famous saying, "I think therefore I am," is understood to be the foundational premise of this school of thought. Surrounded by the complete theological and political chaos of the 30 Years War, Descartes ventures into a Quest for Certainty, which is not dependent upon the fractured world that he finds himself living in.<sup>2</sup>

The result of this quest is Descartes' declaration that one can know with certainty that he or she indeed exists because he or she indeed thinks; hence his statement: "I think therefore I am." In a world ravaged by war, uncertainty, and vehement theological disagreement, the idea that one can find truth and certainty through functional and rational thinking, apart from one's context, was received and widely embraced.

Descartes' thinking prompted "a shift within philosophy away from practical issues to an exclusive concern with the theoretical—by which local, particular, timely,

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 5 will further discuss the evidence of functional rationality revealed in the social imaginary of Mountainside.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 69-80. Toulmin describes this quest for certainty as "The Politics of Certainty."

and oral issues surrendered their centrality to issues that were ubiquitous, universal, timeless, and written.”<sup>3</sup> This shift created a perceived divide between the physical, embodied, material world and the mental, cognitive, intellectual and spiritual aspects of the same world.<sup>4</sup> This shift brought a renewed emphasis on a hierarchical dualistic understanding of reality, including a shift in people’s understanding of human nature.

Generally, a Cartesian understanding of the world is labeled as Modernist or Rationalist and Ideal Type Romanticism is understood as a reaction to the Rationalism of Modernity and its tactics of management, predictability, and control. In his book, *To Change the World*, James Hunter defines Ideal Type Romanticism as

a principle and tradition in metaphysics that maintains that something “ideal” or nonphysical is the primary reality. It isn’t as though nature or the material world doesn’t exist or isn’t important, but what has greater ontological significance and is certainly prior to nature and the physical, are ideas- in short, the “mind.” . . . In the basic (and, if you will, Platonic) formulation, physical objects are just pale imitations of the ideas and ideals that represent them.<sup>5</sup>

Roxburgh describes the ways Ideal Type Romanticism plays out as “a commitment to the moment, a trust in the connection and truth found in one’s inner experience, a conviction that outside of ourselves existed another world, an ideal world we could grasp intuitively, which would be a clearer guide to the nature of life on this planet.”<sup>6</sup>

This may sound like a logical reaction to a hyper form of Rationalism, but upon reflection, a striking irony is revealed. Ideal Type Romanticism entails a functional

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<sup>3</sup> Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, 70.

<sup>4</sup> Warren Brown, "Numinous or Carnal Persons: The Practical Costs of Inner Souls and Selves" (lecture given at the Integration of Faith and Psychology Lectures, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 24-25.

<sup>6</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 108-109.

rationality very similar to Modern Rational thinking. Like Modern Rational thinking, Ideal Type Romanticism is about experiencing a predetermined future. As both Hunter and Roxburgh point out, Ideal Type Romanticism focuses on ideal types, experiences, and indicators for a predetermined ideal future. It too has a tendency to focus away from practical issues to an exclusive concern with the theoretical—by which local, particular, and timely issues are sidelined for issues that are ubiquitous, universal, and timeless.<sup>7</sup>

In Mountainside's spiritual discernment process and in the experiences of people who were volunteering, an ideal had been established as to what reciprocal hospitality with MYA might look and feel like. It was an ideal based in a preferred future that stemmed from dualistic theology. It was not dualistic in the sense of human nature, but dualistic in the sense that an ideal had somehow been perceived as to what the Kingdom of God or Christian community ought to look like in Mountainside's relationship with the people of MYA. These were ideas based not in the particular, local, or concrete realities of life, but based on ideal, universal, and ubiquitous ideas of what these theological convictions are about. Many people of Mountainside had expectations of relating with the people of MYA ideally rather than in the flesh and blood relationships of reality. It was no wonder that expectations were not being met. They were expectations that were not based in reality.

Ideal Type Romanticism does not come upon a group of people by accident. There are clues in the makeup of Mountainside as to why Ideal Type Romanticism might be an obstacle to missional commitment. Some of those clues have to do with high education level, the age and stage of life of many of the people volunteering, as well as

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<sup>7</sup> Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, 69-80.

the privileged suburban upbringing that many people of Mountainside grew up in. But no matter where Ideal Type Romanticism comes from, it has proven to be an obstacle to missional commitment.<sup>8</sup>

### **Consumerism**

One of the primary reasons people gave for an inability to continue volunteering with MYA is busyness. Descriptions of this busyness varied from “I just don’t have time” to “I have *so* much going on” to “I really want to do that but I just can’t fit it in my schedule right now.” Mountainside is primarily made up of young professionals, young families, as well as some college-aged adults. With the church being located in the busy Los Angeles area, there is no question that life can get fast and busy, causing volunteering—especially with a group that involves crossing major generational, cultural, and socio-economic boundaries—to seem a bit daunting.

Another reason given for decreased involvement with MYA was that ‘it became too hard.’ People using this reasoning would cite cultural, theological, and generational differences that caused this difficulty. In many cases, I could understand why people were unable to continue volunteering, whether for reasons due to busyness or the difficulty of boundary crossing. But once again there seemed to be some deeper cultural issues going on that made life seem busier or this work harder than it really was.

It is no secret to anyone that one of the major cultural realities of the West is consumerism. It is impossible to avoid the effects of a growing consumer culture where

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<sup>8</sup> Another aspect to this obstacle is what Dr. Warren Brown, founding member of Mountainside and faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary, described to me as “Sentimentalism.” Sentimentalism is about regulating and orienting one’s religious life by emotions. It entails evaluating and practicing one’s faith—what one does and what one will not do—based solely on emotion. Brown feels that there are strong links between Sentimentalism and the entertainment culture of the West.

much of life is spent listening to ads, watching commercials, viewing billboards, reading junk mail, hearing ourselves referred to as “consumers” by news media, and spending money on things that we perceive will make life better or at least easier to handle. In their book, *StormFront*, James V. Brownson, Inagrace Dietterich, Barry Harvey, and James West, describe the situation this way: “The water we swim in as North Americans, the environment that permeates every aspect of our daily lives, is a culture that has made ‘meeting needs’ (some quite real, others fabricated) into what has literally become an ‘all-consuming’ way of life.”<sup>9</sup> In describing the depth of the issue they go on to write:

The principal problem is not the number of billboards, magazine advertisements, and television commercials we see every day, though they do constitute a symptom of our malaise. Nor is it just the sheer amount our society consumes, although this is indeed a problem. The ecological harm done by our society’s habits of consumption, their damaging consequences to our health, our families, and our country, is also not our chief concern in this book, though those consequences are considerable. The real difficulty is that, as more than one pundit has noted, most of us no longer consume to live; *we live to consume*.<sup>10</sup>

There are many effects of living in a consumer culture, some of which were mentioned in the preceding paragraph. For the purposes of this project, Benjamin Barber, in his book, *Consumed*, points out an interesting aspect to global consumer capitalism as well as a primary repercussion of it.<sup>11</sup> Barber writes about an infantilist ethos that permeates a consumer culture and that leads to a lack of civic responsibility and citizenship among adults. These observations are worth paying attention to in trying to

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<sup>9</sup> James V. Brownson, Inagrace Dietterich, Barry Harvey, and James West, *StormFront: The Good News of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 (italics mine).

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

discern some of the cultural forces that have become obstacles to missional commitment for Mountainside.

### The Infantilist Ethos

Barber defines the infantilist ethos of a consumer culture as an induced and enduring childishness that is closely tied to the demands of consumer capitalism in a global market economy.<sup>12</sup> In describing this cultural ethos he uses three archetypical dualisms to get at some of the values this ethos holds: “EASY over HARD,” “SIMPLE over COMPLEX,” and “FAST over SLOW.”<sup>13</sup> Barber claims that “infantilization aims at inducing puerility in adults and preserving what is childish in children trying to grow up, even as children are ‘empowered’ to consume.”<sup>14</sup>

Throughout his book Barber goes to great lengths in describing how important this infantilist ethos is to consumerism and how consumerism works to sustain the infantilization. He writes,

The infantilist ethos generates a set of habits, preferences, and attitudes that encourage and legitimate childishness. As with Protestant asceticism in its time, infantilism reflects broad attitudes and general behavior that mirror the age, beyond specific concerns of capitalism. But it also serves capitalist consumerism directly by nurturing a culture of impetuous consumption necessary to selling puerile goods in a developed world that has few genuine needs.<sup>15</sup>

In reference to consumerism’s role in sustaining infantilization, Barber points out,

Marketers and merchandisers are self-consciously chasing a youthful commercial constituency sufficiently padded in its pocketbook to be a very attractive market,

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<sup>12</sup> Barber, *Consumed*, 3, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

yet sufficiently unformed in its tastes as to be vulnerable to conscious corporate manipulation via advertising, marketing, and branding. At the same time, these avatars of consumer capitalism are seeking to encourage adult regression, hoping to rekindle in grown-ups the tastes and habits of children so that they can sell globally the relatively useless cornucopia of games, gadgets, and myriad consumer goods for which there is no discernible “need market” other than the one created by capitalism’s own frantic imperative to sell.<sup>16</sup>

This cultural reality is not news to many people of Mountainside. The realities and effects of consumerism are highlighted from the pulpit, discussed in small groups, and referenced in casual conversations. Members of Mountainside do a comparatively good job at encouraging a more simple and humane life than consumerism tends to produce. But the reality is that many have come of age (no pun intended) during the height of this growing consumer culture, and though they have a great start in trying to combat its effects through a growing awareness, we are people who have been shaped deeply by this infantilist ethos.

### The Swallowing of Citizens

Another aspect of consumerism that Barber highlights is how the mixture of an infantilist ethos and a growing consumer culture has a tendency to “swallow citizens whole.” It is this repercussion of consumerism that is especially helpful in discerning obstacles to missional life. Barber writes, “Affiliated with an ideology of privatization, the marketing of brands, and a homogenization of taste, this ethos of infantilization has worked to sustain consumer capitalism, but at the expense of both civility and civilization and at a growing risk to capitalism itself.”<sup>17</sup> Later he writes, “Once upon a time,

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<sup>16</sup> Barber, *Consumed*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

capitalism was allied with virtues that also contributed at least marginally to democracy, responsibility, and citizenship. Today it is allied with vices which- although they serve consumerism- undermine democracy, responsibility, and citizenship.”<sup>18</sup>

In this section Barber begins to mix privatization into the cultural pot that he is stirring. He goes on to point out quite convincingly that our culture’s mixture of consumerism, infantilization, as well as privatization lead to a lack of citizenship and participation in public life. He describes privatization as

a fresh and vigorous expression of traditional laissez-faire philosophy that favors free markets over government regulation and associates liberty with personal choice of the kind possessed by consumers. In its latest guise, privatization ideology takes aim squarely at the public and those democratic philosophies that created the last century’s prudent balancing of capitalism and popular sovereignty, with fateful consequences for citizens.<sup>19</sup>

But as Barber points out very well, privatization is more than just an economic ideology:

It acts in league with the ethos of infantilization to embrace and reinforce narcissism, personal preference, and puerility. It misconstrues liberty and thereby distorts how we understand civic freedom and citizenship, often ignoring and sometimes undermining the very meaning of public goods and the public weal. To the degree Hannah Arendt is right in arguing that political freedom is defined by participation in government rather than freedom from its reach, privatization has not only diminished our capacity to shape our common lives and determine the character of civilization in which we want to live; it has made us less free.<sup>20</sup>

A final quote from Barber gets to the point in his argument that is most germane for the purposes of discerning obstacles to missional life. When speaking of freedom in terms of privatization he writes,

It foments a kind of civic schizophrenia that divides the choosing self into opposing fragments and ultimately denies legitimacy to the fragment we

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<sup>18</sup> Barber, *Consumed*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-128.

understand to be “civic” or “public”—the self associated with our capacity to exercise public freedom. Privatization ideology treats choice as fundamentally private, a matter not of determining some deliberative “we should” (a kind of “general will” produced by citizens interacting democratically) but only of enumerating and aggregating all the “I want’s” we hold as private consumers and creatures of personal desire. Yet private choices do inevitably have social consequences and public outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

Barber goes on to write,

Privatization turns the private, impulsive me lurking inside myself into an inadvertent enemy of the public, deliberative we that also is part of who I am. The private me screams “I want!” The privatization perspective legitimizes this scream, allowing it to trump the quiet “we need” that is the voice of the public me in which I participate and which is also an aspect of my interests as a human being. All the choices we make one by one thereby come to determine the social outcomes we must suffer together, but which we never directly choose in common.<sup>22</sup>

The relevancy of this cultural force and its effects on Mountainside are fairly clear. The dualisms that Barber uses to describe the infantilist ethos are closely linked with obstacles to missional commitment. Again, volunteering that crosses cultural, theological, and generational boundaries is indeed hard and complex. It is especially hard when linked with romantic and idealistic expectations. It seems that Mountainside approached this missional venture wanting idealistic expectations to be met in a simple, easy, and fast manner. But nothing worthwhile is achieved or accomplished in this way.

There are also close connections between Barber’s cultural descriptions and the perceived busyness used as a reason for not volunteering with MYA. On the one hand, people may just be too busy. They may be busy working and working in order to make the money needed to survive in this consumer culture, no matter how one might

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<sup>21</sup> Barber, *Consumed*, 128.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-129.

understand survival.<sup>23</sup> But on the other hand, busyness may be perceived and sensed by the part of oneself that screams, “I want” rather than the part that quietly whispers, “We need.”<sup>24</sup>

### **The Challenge of Becoming Rooted in a Neighborhood**

Transitioning from missional experiments to missional commitment requires a rootedness in the local neighborhoods of churches and their members. This aspect to missional life has proven to be challenging for Mountainside and its relationship with MYA. This final section on obstacles to missional life has to do with two of the most committed volunteers with MYA ceasing their participation because they moved out of the area. One moved to Northern California to take a new job and the other returned to his home state of Georgia after completing graduate work in California. While both of these reasons are completely understandable, the reality of these volunteers moving within such a short period of time reveal cultural forces that make it challenging for Mountainside to become rooted in its local neighborhood. The final section of this chapter will describe the reality of discontinuous change in the world and how the forces behind this change affect Mountainside’s ability to become rooted in the neighborhoods that its members live and worship in.

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<sup>23</sup> The next section will further discuss the busyness created in trying to survive in a globally competitive market.

<sup>24</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 8. Addressing some of the issues raised in this section, Bauman writes, “We tend to be proud of what we perhaps should be ashamed of, of living in the ‘post-ideological’ or ‘post-utopian’ age, of not concerning ourselves with any coherent vision of the good society and of having traded off the worry about the public good for the freedom to pursue private satisfaction. And yet if we pause to think why that pursuit of happiness fails more often than not to bring about the results we hoped for, and why the bitter taste of insecurity makes the bliss less sweet than we had been told it would be—we won’t get far without bringing back from exile ideas such as the public good, the good society, equity, justice, and so on—such ideas that make no sense unless cared for and cultivated in company with others.”

Change is a normal part of life. From the time we are born until we breathe our last breath, human beings experience changes that are common to the human experience. But it is hardly debatable that the world is currently experiencing changes that are unprecedented in their nature and scope to any other time in history. They are far beyond the common elements of change that is a normal part of human existence. In his book *Runaway World*, Anthony Giddens writes, “There are good objective reasons to believe that we are living through a major period of historical transition. Moreover, the changes affecting us aren’t confined to any one area of the globe, but stretch almost everywhere.”<sup>25</sup> He goes on to write, “We live in a world of transformations, affecting almost every aspect of what we do. For better or worse, we are being propelled into a global order that no one fully understands, but which is making its effects felt upon all of us.”<sup>26</sup>

There is little need to convince anyone that the primary characteristic of our time is that of unprecedented change. The more challenging task is gaining a better understanding of the forces that are driving this change and the resulting effects that these forces have on the shape of life. In his book, *Missional Map-Making*, Roxburgh spends considerable time getting at what some of these forces are. He suggests that the primary forces of discontinuous change are globalization, pluralism, rapid technological change, postmodernism, staggering global need, a loss of confidence in primary social structures, the democratization of knowledge, and a return to romanticism.<sup>27</sup> A few of these cultural

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<sup>25</sup> Giddens, *Runaway World*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>27</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 87-110.

forces of change have proven to be obstacles for Mountainside becoming rooted in its local neighborhood and participating in committed missional life.

### Globalization, Mobility, and Delocalization

The first current of change affecting Mountainside's ability to become rooted in its local neighborhood and its relationship with MYA is globalization. Giddens describes the force of globalization as a "package of changes" that has effects all around the world. These global changes include scientific and technological advancement, political and cultural shifts, as well as massive restructuring in economic and social structures.<sup>28</sup> He goes on to write, "Globalization has something to do with the thesis that we now all live in one world."<sup>29</sup> The effects of globalization are, obviously, global.

Giddens is also quick to point out that globalization influences everyday local life at least as much as it does those things happening around the globe. He writes, "Such aspects of globalization are at least as important as those happening in the global marketplace. They contribute to the stresses and strains affecting traditional ways of life and cultures in most regions of the world."<sup>30</sup> He goes on to write, "Globalization isn't only about what is 'out there,' remote and far away from the individual. It is an 'in here' phenomenon too, influencing intimate and personal aspects of our lives."<sup>31</sup>

Roxburgh focuses on the social and economic implications of globalization,

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<sup>28</sup> Giddens, *Runaway World*, 3-4, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

describing it as an “alternative vision of social and economic life.”<sup>32</sup> He writes that globalization

has become the single most powerful narrative reshaping the economies of the world, national identities, and social relationships between peoples. Around the world, practically no one is immune from the effects of globalization. . . . New technologies spawned in the latter half of the twentieth century now connect the economic life of the world in a global economy so vast that few can grasp it.

Although globalization seems very new, it represents a resurgence of eighteenth-century laissez-faire free-market capitalism, with its concept of the invisible hand and notion of a natural law inherent in economics that, freed from government control, would result in economic blessing for all. The invisible hand requires that global markets and local economies be free of government regulation. This is a secular theology with its own vision of salvation and eschaton, where an unfettered market creates a new utopia that renews the whole world.<sup>33</sup>

He goes on to write,

Churches and their leaders are largely silent in the face of the fact that in this massive globalization of economics, work, and production, the definition of what it means to be human is being transformed into *Homo Economicus*. . . . One result is that more and more people feel more and more insecure; they find themselves working longer hours as if they are strapped to a massive rocket of economic inevitability that is beyond their control.<sup>34</sup>

He continues,

There are huge costs to the current practice of economic globalization. People are being overwhelmed by the reality that the downsizing, offshoring, and clawing back of work security affect some of the most basic relationships that make us human. People no longer have time for life. The new economic realities of globalization require families to spend almost no time together. Parents work longer and longer hours, with children in expensive day care (if they can afford it). When the weekend comes, family time is consumed by all the practical elements of family life that couldn't be done in the week (cleaning, shopping, and so on), and Sunday becomes practically the only day when people can find a small moment to relax and do as they please. With the zeal of a religious vision,

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<sup>32</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 90.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

globalization promises to remake the world through a universal free market. In this evangelistic movement, *the local and the particular are encumbrances*.<sup>35</sup>

Another driving force behind this cultural transition is rapid technological change, including forms of instantaneous electronic communication that is changing the way people interact and connect with one another. This technology is not just a way to share news and information, but is altering the texture and shape of our lives. Giddens comments on this: “When the image of Nelson Mandela may be more familiar to us than the face of our next-door neighbor, something has changed in the nature of our everyday experience.”<sup>36</sup>

This unprecedented change in technology is one of the primary vehicles for the expansion of globalization.<sup>37</sup> Commenting on this rapid change and its effects on local communities, Roxburgh writes,

The world is linked through an information highway that has become more and more ubiquitous. People meet on Facebook and share their inspirations on YouTube all the while Twittering to an assortment of friends. Groups of people at opposite ends of a continent or around the globe don’t need to leave their own contexts in order to meet in real time and in video on Skype or some Webinar format. Telephones are no longer connected by wires in the ground but satellites in the sky that make them usable at all times, everywhere. E-mail means instant communication. The notion of “local” seems to be transformed into “anywhere at any time.” What does it mean for the formation of local churches and communities when people come to believe that “local” can mean anywhere?

The technological revolution is both a wonderful gift and a radical uprooting of people at the same time. We are still not able to adequately assess what is happening in education, business, politics, or social life as a result of the technological revolution. . . . Technology makes communication across the street

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<sup>35</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 91-92 (italics mine).

<sup>36</sup> Giddens, *Runaway World*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 97.

and around the world instantaneous, blurring the difference between the local and global. Social life is increasingly *delocalized*.<sup>38</sup>

Addressing some of the ways that globalization is played out, such as disembodied concepts like “networks” and “third spaces,” and the challenges for Christian life that they pose, Roxburgh writes,

People now embrace such notions as expressions of the new, technologically shaped world with little sense of how this approach to living radically undermines Christian life. This belief in a world where place is unimportant and people are increasingly physically disconnected flies in the face of the Incarnation because this most fundamental of Christian convictions confesses that place and people are inseparable and utterly central to human life. The interconnections and bonds that form a local culture (a neighborhood, for example) are being strained. The local is becoming more opaque and the global more pervasive and demanding on our lives.<sup>39</sup>

The effects of globalization on Mountainside and its capacity to live out committed missional life run deep. The experiences of the two volunteers mentioned above embody both the economic and transitory effects that living in a globalized world can have on a local church and its ministry. Even more significant though are the aforementioned effects of globalization on the people of Mountainside that remain in the area. Despite living in the local neighborhood of many of the families of MYA, new technology and a globalized economy make it increasingly difficult for people to engage

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<sup>38</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 97-98.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 98. See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 14. Addressing these realities Bauman writes, “The disintegration of the social network, the falling apart of effective agencies of collective action is often noted with a good deal of anxiety and bewailed as the unanticipated ‘side effect’ of the new lightness and fluidity of the increasingly mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power. But social disintegration is as much a condition as it is the outcome of the new technique of power, using disengagement and the art of escape as its major tools. For power to be free to flow, the world must be free of fences, barriers, fortified borders and checkpoints. Any dense and tight network of social bonds, and particularly a territorially rooted tight network, is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way. Global powers are bent on dismantling such networks for the sake of their continuous and growing fluidity, that principal source of their strength and the warrant of their invincibility. And it is the falling apart, the friability, the brittleness, the transience, the until-further-noticeness of human bonds and networks which allow these powers to do their job in the first place.”

in geographically rooted ministry. Long work hours, the delocalizing of one's social life through new technology, as well as the encumbrance that things local and particular can feel like, make it increasingly difficult for Mountainside, or any other local church, to engage its local neighbors in committed missional life.<sup>40</sup>

### Gazing beyond the Local: Awareness of Need "Over There"

Another challenge for Mountainside in regards to locally rooted missional life is the ongoing temptation to gaze beyond local opportunities for ministry and mission to the seemingly more dire needs in other parts of the world.<sup>41</sup> It must be stated that there are certainly noble aspects to a local church doing overseas mission or relief help. Any local church striving to be the body of Christ for the sake of the world has an obligation to respond in some way to the atrocities of violence and poverty that people are facing around the world. But this desire to do mission and ministry in other parts of the world can be an obstacle for the locally rooted missional life of a church. It is much easier for a church to participate in a missional experiment in another part of the world knowing that after doing their work, participants are able to return to the comforts of their own home

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<sup>40</sup> Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, 29. Speaking to some of the cultural powers behind the current reality of long work hours, Bauman writes, "In the Darwinian world of universal struggle it is in that overwhelming feeling of paralyzing uncertainty, in the fear, stress and anxiety born of uncertainty, that obedient service to the tasks set by companies is to be rooted. And, as the ultimate weapon, there is the permanent threat, at all levels of hierarchy, of dismissal- and of the loss of livelihood, social entitlements, place in society and human dignity that goes with it: 'The ultimate foundation of all economic regimes placed under the sign of liberty is therefore *the structural violence* of unemployment, of precariousness of jobs and of the threat of dismissal which they imply.'" This type of uncertainty causes many at Mountainside to work long hours and therefore have less time for committed missional presence in the local neighborhood.

<sup>41</sup> Early on in the life of Mountainside there was an effort to engage in issues of social justice, and rather than deciding on a local initiative to participate in, Mountainside decided to raise money to build a water-well in Darfur, Africa. Included in this initiative was a desire to raise awareness in our local community about some of the atrocities taking place in Darfur, but the decision to make this our first social-justice initiative raised some questions that reveal hidden obstacles to committed missional life.

and community. Participating in mission in other countries allows the participants to feel the warm feelings that come from helping others while not having to face the ongoing oppressive realities upon returning home. While much good can be done with well-thought-out overseas initiatives, these kinds of trips can also be a major obstacle to ongoing missional commitment in a church's local context.<sup>42</sup>

Looking closer at this impulse to ministry abroad, some of the cultural forces of change that Roxburgh mentions are exposed as well as some of the obstacles to mission mentioned earlier in this chapter. Closely connected to the technological advancement of our time is a growing awareness of the staggering need all around the globe. For generations people were not aware of what was happening in remote places of other countries, but with the advancement of technology, churches are now abreast of events going on almost anywhere in the world. Roxburgh writes that a “complex world of need has emerged in which it is not easy to identify causes or to shape responses.”<sup>43</sup>

Another current of change revealed in short-term overseas mission initiatives is what Roxburgh calls postmodernism. Roxburgh describes postmodernism as “a form of shorthand for the fact that we don't know where we are and we are having difficulty getting our bearings. It is a comment on the fact that few of us believe any longer that we in the West are the most ‘progressive’ and ‘developed’ people in history and that we have

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<sup>42</sup> In Chapter 4, evidence of functional rationality within the social imaginary of Mountainside and its effects on how Mountainside relates to people of its context will be explored, as well as Rene Girard's concept of “askesis for the sake of desire.” My observation is that these cultural realities, embodied in global short-term missions, has shaped the missional imagination of churches so deeply that they have a difficult time imagining what local missional life might even look like.

<sup>43</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 105.

a privileged method that gives us access to truth unlike any others.”<sup>44</sup>

Connected with this realization are feelings of guilt for the superior living conditions that people from the West perceive themselves to have.<sup>45</sup> When this cultural reality is combined with an awareness of need around the world, as well as with Barber’s infantilist dualisms of EASY over HARD, SIMPLE over COMPLEX, and FAST over SLOW, and finally with a return to romantic idealism, it is not hard to understand why short-term overseas mission initiatives are chosen as responses to the need that churches are now aware of. The challenge with these ventures is that they expose cultural powers as well as obstacles to rooted local missional life more than they provide a sufficient aspect of the missional life that believers are trying to embody by participating in them.<sup>46</sup>

Part One of this paper has described the ministry context of the project. Chapter 1 provided frameworks and narrative description of Mountainside’s missional process. Chapter 2 explored obstacles to missional commitment with MYA specifically and Mountainside’s local community more generally. Part Two will now turn to theological and philosophical explorations that are relevant to moving Mountainside beyond these obstacles and towards missional commitment.

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<sup>44</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 102.

<sup>45</sup> William Easterly, *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006). Easterly explores the results of well-intended relief efforts of the West, likely stemming from the guilt mentioned here, that prove to be more harmful than helpful.

<sup>46</sup> This material also connects with the work of Rene Girard and what he terms “askesis for the sake of desire.” This concept will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

## CHAPTER 3

### LIFE IN THE SPIRIT AND CONGREGATIONAL CHANGE

This chapter is about germane theological and philosophical concepts in leading Mountainside from missional experimentation to missional commitment. The chapter begins by suggesting a way of thinking about what is usually described as the identity of a church, by using the concepts of memories, hope, and practices. Next is a section on congregational change based in an exploration of Galatians 5 and what it is for a church to live by the Spirit. This chapter closes with description of the concept of social imaginary, using it in connection with the rest of the chapter in suggesting a framework for understanding how Mountainside might move from missional experimentation to missional commitment.

#### **Memories, Hopes, and Practice: The Identity and Agency of a Church**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, this is a time of massive transition and uncertainty.<sup>1</sup> When leading a church in this type of environment, it seems a wise venture to try and identify the church so as to better be able to predict, control, and protect what becomes of it. In an age such as this, the temptation is great to try and declare a church's identity as a

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<sup>1</sup> Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, 24-31. Bauman writes, "The two things we tend to be certain of nowadays more than anything else is that there is little hope that the pains of our present uncertainties will be assuaged; and yet more uncertainty looms ahead."

way of solidifying and establishing it. But while establishing a church's identity might be considered a noble and honorable exercise, it is in actuality an attempt based more in fear and a desire for control than in flesh and blood life. It can also be counterproductive to the work of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word "identity" as "the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness."<sup>3</sup> The word implies the existence of a pure and unchanging essence or form behind everything that we see and experience as a body.<sup>4</sup> In a world of massive transition, it is tempting to welcome and pursue anything considered to be pure and unchanging. Craig Keen describes our current angst and our desire to grasp hold of identity well:

Unable to sleep we wake long before dawn each morning to find that an invisible hand has wiped even more stars from our sky. We tremble before the prospect of a literally disastrous future, one with no star to steer by. "Since Copernicus [human beings have] been rolling from the center toward X," Nietzsche wrote. Maybe so, but we have realized it only of late; too late, we fear. The anxiety exuding from the pores of the leaders of established institutions is thick and acrid. A new ecclesiastical task force seems to be formed daily to stem the tide of this recklessness. We no longer even know who we are, we say. And so, we huddle together, haul in bus-loads of experts, look each other suspiciously in the eye, do market research, and ache to recover our identity. We want what way down deep *is* still the same and will *remain* the same consistently across time. We know that there must be some essence, some manageable ground upon which we can stand firm. How else could we face the future?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The work of the Spirit in congregations will be explored further in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "identity," <http://www.oed.com.naomi.fuller.edu:2048/view/Entry/91004?redirectedFrom=identity#eid> (accessed May 1, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> The Cartesian influence can be noted here.

<sup>5</sup> Craig Keen, *After Crucifixion: The Promise of Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, Forthcoming), 5. Keen is a leader and member of Mountainside, and his work has been influential in the theological frameworks presented in this chapter.

But the church is not an unmoved mover. The church is not distinguished by an unchangeable essence, composition, nature, or identity. The church is constantly being changed, formed, and created anew by the Spirit of God—that Holy Wind that blows wherever she pleases. What distinguishes, forms, and gives shape to the church are the memories, hopes, and practices used by God in ongoing new creation.<sup>6</sup>

Memories are lived histories. The primary memories of the church are the histories found in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the gospel accounts of Jesus. They are memories of the exodus rehearsed in the practice of the Passover and memories of Jesus' passion rehearsed in the celebration of the Eucharist. The church's formational histories are stories of saints and martyrs throughout generations as well as histories of the way God is working today. So memories are not nostalgia or what might be described as fond, but they are formative histories of a people. They are lived and concrete realities, often embodied through particular practices and liturgy, that together shape and form the church.<sup>7</sup>

The hopes of the church are held within and birthed from these memories. They are contextualized in God's promises to God's people throughout the generations. These are promises that often get fulfilled in strange, incomplete, or even excessive ways. They

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<sup>6</sup> The concepts of memories, hopes, and practices have been brought together based upon several works, including: Craig Keen, *After Crucifixion*, 16; Mark Lau Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 95; and Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004). Keen writes, "A theology in Christ is done in the open space where memory and hope converge. It is a life's work, living from the coming of a gift that never becomes anyone's private property, the coming of a gift that never ceases to be a gift. Theology thus works to put aside the inertia that resists the new. It works not to be conformed to the present evil age, but transformed by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:1-2)."

<sup>7</sup> Keen, *After Crucifixion*, Chapter 1.

are promises that many times end up spilling over into new ones. For example, promises of land, national security, and prosperity become a promise for a Messiah; the promise of Messiah becomes an apocalyptic promise of the judgment and redemption of the world; this becomes the promise that comes to pass with the history of Jesus and the announcement of the coming New Jerusalem. These hopes, much like a church's memories, are embodied in practices and liturgy such as Eucharist, prayer, serving the poor, and offering hospitality to the stranger. God uses these overflowing hopes and the memories that they stem from to call the church out into the future that is both already and not yet.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, the church's memories are embodied in practices that birth its hopes. These hopes are also embodied in some of the same practices and as they are strangely and excessively fulfilled, they become the church's memories. It is the movement from memory to hope and hope to memory, embodied in the church's practices or liturgy that shape the church toward God's new creation. The church does not have an unchangeable essence, as attractive and reassuring as that may sound, but rather it is constantly being changed, formed, and reformed by the Holy Spirit as it lives its life out into God's future.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Craig Keen, *After Crucifixion*, 13-14.

<sup>9</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 110. Anderson gets at this nuance of understanding when he writes, "The church is constantly being re-created through the mission of the Spirit. At the same time it has historical and ecclesial continuity and universality through its participation in the person and mission of Christ Jesus through the Spirit."

## **Congregational Life in the Spirit**

This section is about congregational life in the Spirit. Reflecting on Paul's use of horticultural metaphors, the first part of this section explores a theological framework for understanding the work of this project as means of grace. The second part of this section will look at some of Paul's instructions to the church in Galatia, highlighting his call for a posture of radical openness to what the Spirit is doing among them. Reminding the church of some of its memories, hopes, and practice, Paul calls for an openness that is to be embodied in the Galatians' posture towards God and the other.

### Horticultural Metaphors and Means of Grace

The Spirit of God is the lifeblood of the church. She is the vivifying force that makes the existence of life and church possible. Philip Kenneson writes, "Without the Spirit the church is either a lifeless shell or a horrific monstrosity that is animated by some spirit other than the Spirit of the risen Jesus."<sup>10</sup> Just as the pedigree of a plant is recognized or discerned by the fruit that it bears the church also is recognized by the fruit that it bears. If the Spirit of God is animating the church, the church will bear the fruit of the Spirit. Likewise, if the church is animated by another spirit, it will bear the fruit of that spirit instead.

Along with the familiarity that Paul's readers would have with horticulture, there are a few other likely reasons that Paul chooses to use a horticultural metaphor in describing the work of the Spirit of God. One of those reasons is that this metaphor is

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Kenneson, *Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Christian Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 15.

helpful in conveying the importance in Christian life of both work and grace.<sup>11</sup> A farmer knows that regardless of how hard he or she works, no amount of labor can cause the seed to sprout, the sun to shine, or the rain to fall. While a seed does better when the ground and environment are prepared, the farmer understands that the growth of that seed is a gift. By using this metaphor, Paul is conveying that the same holds true for life in the Spirit. There is always work to be done, but growth in the Spirit, as well as the cultivation of the fruit of the Spirit, is a gift that comes only from God.

John Wesley gets at this holy paradox in his sermon entitled, “The Means of Grace.”<sup>12</sup> He writes,

Before you use any means, let it be deeply impressed on your soul; -- there is no power in this. It is, in itself, a poor, dead, empty thing: Separate from God, it is a dry leaf, a shadow. Neither is there any merit in my using this; nothing intrinsically pleasing to God; nothing whereby I deserve any favour at his hands, no, not a drop of water to cool my tongue. But, because God bids, therefore I do; because he directs me to wait in this way, therefore here I wait for his free mercy, whereof cometh my salvation.

Gleaning from this sermon as well as other works by Wesley, Keen suggests that Wesley’s understanding of a means of grace might be described as “an action ordained by God by which we wait for God.”<sup>13</sup> The practices of the church, which embody its memories and hopes, can be understood in this way. These practices, understood as means of grace, are offered to God in full recognition that any result or movement of the

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneson, *Life on the Vine*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace/> (accessed October 1, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> This idea has been gleaned from many personal conversations with Keen on the subject. Keen, *After Crucifixion*, 31. Working with Wesley’s sermon Keen also writes, “The logic of the crucifixion/resurrection, the logic of the eucharist, is the logic of active waiting. It is the logic that works the fields, plants and waters, while looking for the harvest to be given from a mystery beyond our control (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). It is a logic that lets go of cause and effect.”

Spirit that stems from them is a gift from God. In this way, the practices of the church—as well as the work of the farmer—can be considered a prayer.

Another reason Paul may have used this image is that horticulture illuminates the complex interplay of factors required when bringing to harvest any fruit or vegetation.<sup>14</sup> Elements such as the composition of the soil, the surrounding plants, temperature, and water all have influence when working to harvest food. This is similar to the cultural realities at play when a church strives to harvest the fruit of the Spirit. There are complex factors, out of the church's control, that both encourage and obstruct the work of the Spirit. Paul was acutely aware of this and chose his metaphors accordingly.

The theology gleaned from Paul's use of this metaphor has important implications for how to best understand the work of this project. First of all, any movement or transformation from missional experimentation to missional commitment will be due to the work of God among Mountainside and is to be understood as the fruit of the Spirit. Secondly, leadership in the church, and for this project specifically, is to be understood as a means of grace. It is work that is ordained by God by which we wait for God. With a similar understanding Roxburgh defines church leadership as “cultivating an environment wherein the Spirit of God might call forth the missional imagination of the people of God.”<sup>15</sup> This paper provides description of frameworks and strategies used in cultivating such an environment. This cultivation involves the implementation of new practice as

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<sup>14</sup> Kenneson, *Life on the Vine*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Roxburgh, “Missional Leadership” (class lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February 2006). Roxburgh also writes, “The leader's primary calling is to cultivate a people and nourish the conviction that God's future is among them.” Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 145-146.

well as deepening Mountainside's understanding of its memories and hopes. Again, much like the work of the farmer, this work is prayer.

Another important implication in understanding the work of this project is that there are complex factors at play when moving from missional experimentation to missional commitment. Chapter 2 suggested three primary obstacles that are a part of the equation and Chapter 4 will suggest both debilitating and generative aspects.<sup>16</sup> Cultivating an environment where God might move a church to missional commitment is no easy task. Further exploration of congregational life in the Spirit is needed.

#### The Fruit of the Spirit and a Posture of Openness

In Galatians 5 Paul is instructing the church of Galatia in regards to life animated by the Spirit of God as opposed to life driven by the “desires of the flesh.” In Galatians 5:16, Paul describes virtues that stem from these juxtapositions respectively, as the “fruit of the Spirit” and the “works of the flesh.” His instructions are in response to debates and conflict within the church of Galatia in regards to the practice of circumcision. It appears from Paul's writing that leaders of the church are instructing members to be circumcised despite Paul's teaching to the contrary. It seems that the practice of circumcision, signifying a covenant that God had made with God's people, had become a way for the people of God to maintain a closed position to those who were outside the covenant community. What was initially a practice of openness to God had become a means of being closed off to others. In response to this, Paul proclaims the memory of Christ's passion, the hope of God's future in Christ, and the practice of “faith working through

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<sup>16</sup> These aspects will be described in Chapter 4 in terms of Charles Taylor's concept of social imaginary. The general concept of social imaginary will be discussed later in this chapter.

love” (Galatians 5:4-6). Each of these reminders from Paul calls for an openness to the other that is to be characteristic of the church if the fruit of the Spirit are to be cultivated in its common life.

For Paul, Christ’s work on the cross was the ultimate embodiment of opening to the other. God’s sending of Jesus, in the Spirit, to the world, that all things might be gathered and reconciled to God, shows God’s radical openness to all of creation. In the life story of Jesus, it is precisely his openness to the other—the widow, the tax collector, the Pharisee, the woman caught in adultery, the sick, the demon-possessed, the poor—and their response to him, that gets him crucified (Ephesians 5:1-2). With Jesus’ arms wide open he offers up his final cry from the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” In his life and his death Jesus reveals an openness to God and God’s will that is almost unbearable. To this life of openness and faithfulness, God says a resounding “YES!” in raising Jesus from the dead.<sup>17</sup> The resurrection of Christ is God’s affirmation of Jesus’ radically open life.

It is this memory of Jesus’ life story and God’s raising him from the dead that ushers in the hope of God’s future. This hope is an overflowing promise that is fulfilled in strange and excessive ways. Like the memory that ushers it in, God’s future is also characterized by a radical openness to the other. In combating the exclusive posture that the church of Galatia is taking in regards to the meaning and practice of circumcision, Paul reminds the church of Galatia that through the Spirit and by faith, they are waiting for the hope of God’s future (Galatians 5:5). He encourages them to wait for this future by working out their faith in the same open love demonstrated by Jesus.

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<sup>17</sup> Keen, *After Crucifixion*.

When considering the shape of God's future, it is helpful to look at the vision described at the end of the book of Revelation, which also attests to the radical openness of God's future. This vision begins with description of a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem "coming down out of heaven from God" (Revelation 21:1-2; 10). Much like the fruit of the Spirit, God's future is received as a gift from God. While God's people are to work out their faith in love while waiting for God's future, ultimately the *eschaton* can only be received as gift. Also evident in this vision is that God's future is to be inherited by "those who conquer." This description refers to the martyrs or those who have opened their lives to God's future in such a wide and radical way that they have walked the same road of martyrdom as their Savior. Perhaps the openness of God's future is best described in Revelation 21:22-27:

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day- and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.<sup>18</sup>

Lastly, Paul responds to the church of Galatia's closed posture towards the other by reminding them of their practices, beginning with "faith working through love." This practice, as well as the other fruit of the Spirit, are "virtues or dispositions to act in certain ways rather than others that are rooted deeply in the dynamics of any community;

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<sup>18</sup> The "unclean" referred to here are those who participate in the sins of the empire and not those considered unclean by the law. This can be understood as an example of God's promises being strangely and excessively fulfilled.

they both reflect and sustain that common life.”<sup>19</sup> The fruit of the Spirit are not character traits, personality traits, or individual possessions to be shared with other people. The fruit of the Spirit are virtues or ways of life, lived out through practice, among the people of a particular church, which help to sustain that church’s missional life.

As mentioned above, Paul juxtaposes the fruit of the Spirit with the works of the flesh. He writes: “Live by the Spirit I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh.” Paul then goes on to list both the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:19-26:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

A close look at both of these lists reveals a striking difference. The works of the flesh are generally manifest when people remain focused in on themselves and closed off to the other. Relational challenges such as enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, and envy are manifest when one or more people in relationship refuse to open themselves up to another person. On the contrary, the embodiment of the fruit of the Spirit among a community is only possible if people maintain an open posture to the other. The evidence of the fruit of the Spirit necessitates a posture of openness or

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneson, *Life on the Vine*, 34.

else these virtues cannot be present. Virtues such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and gentleness, by definition, require an open posture to the other in order to be embodied.<sup>20</sup>

A final observation is critical for the purposes of this project. Paul is suggesting that the church of Galatia's hope for God's future, stemming from their memory of Jesus, is fulfilled among them as they practice the fruit of the Spirit. These virtues are signs of God's mission of a reconciled future for the world. As the Spirit gifts the church with the fruit of the Spirit, the church becomes a sign and foretaste of, as well as a witness to, the coming age of God that has been made known in Jesus Christ. It might be said that as the Spirit gifts the church with this fruit, it becomes missional. Kenneson writes,

Nurturing individual fruit in individual lives is not our ultimate goal. Instead, the church is called to embody before the world in all its relationships the kind of reconciled and transformed life that God desires for all of creation. This is a lofty goal and one we would be foolish to think that we could achieve apart from God's powerful working in our lives. But it is precisely this high calling to which we have been called.<sup>21</sup>

The question must then be asked, "To whom is this openness directed?" It is clear by now that the embodiment of the fruit of the Spirit among a church is only possible if a church opens itself up to the great Other, the Trinity. Once again, the fruit of the Spirit are gifts from God and can only be received with an open hand. These gifts are bestowed upon the church as it practices means of grace as understood by Wesley.

Paul has also made it clear that a church must be willing to open up to one another and to the outsider if the fruit of the Spirit is to be manifest among them. There is much

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<sup>20</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The One, The Three, and The Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). See Gunton for more on openness to the other and a Trinitarian conception of relationality.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneson, *Life on the Vine*, 34.

more at stake in the controversy over circumcision than merely sustaining a religious ritual. There are enormous cultural issues at play that are raising questions about the current memories and practice of the church. There also seem to be new hopes growing out of the church's memories that are beginning to shape new practices. This small Jewish sect, made up of people following the risen Jesus, has now opened up its life to the point that Gentiles are being converted to the faith. The Spirit is moving among them in such a way as to break down cultural barriers that these people had once held firm. In this letter, Paul is calling both Jew and Gentile to an openness to one another that is unfamiliar and uncomfortable for them all. It is a call to openness to both the other within the Christian fellowship as well as to the other who is neighbor.

A final point must be made in regards to openness to the other. The welcome being suggested by Paul and the vision received by John is an actual welcome of the one who is other and remains other. This pertains to both God and neighbor. The temptation in showing openness to the other is to do so as long as the other becomes like me.<sup>22</sup> Maintaining a posture of openness to the other is much easier if the expectation or hope is that the other will change into an image of oneself. This is precisely the kind of posture that is behind requiring the Gentiles to be circumcised in order to become a part of the people of God. It is this posture that Paul is vehemently confronting in the book of Galatians.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, Paul is suggesting a hospitable openness to the other that

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<sup>22</sup> This passive aggressive type of welcome, of both God and neighbor, is evident in much of the language in Evangelical churches, including the Church of the Nazarene with which Mountainside is affiliated.

<sup>23</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 19-20. Writing in response to what he describes as "the politics of equal opportunity," Volf suggests a "politics of difference." He writes, "The politics of

allows for distance to be acknowledged and even remain. Perhaps Paul understands that it is in the distance between those that are other, where God abides.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

The first section of this chapter suggested understanding the church in terms of its memories, hopes, and practice. Gleaning from Paul's use of horticultural metaphors, the second section suggested that a church's practices, including leadership, are to be understood as a means of grace and that leadership is largely about implementing practices and deepening the understanding of a church's memories and hopes. This section closed by exploring Paul's description of congregational life in the Spirit, where he calls the church—utilizing a specific memory, hope, and practice—to a radical posture of openness to both God and other. The final section of this chapter will explore Charles Taylor's concept of social imaginary in connection with the rest of this chapter, as a helpful framework in understanding congregational change.

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difference rests on two basic assumptions. First, the identity of a person is inescapably marked by the particularities of the social setting in which he or she is born and develops. In identifying with parental figures, peer groups, teachers, religious authorities, and community leaders, one does not identify with them simply as human beings, but also with their investment in a particular language, religiousness, customs, their construction of gender and racial difference, etc. Second, since the identity is partly shaped by recognition we receive from the social setting in which we live, non recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in false, distorted, and reduced mode of being." Volf goes on to write, "It may not be too much to claim that the future of our world will depend on how we deal with identity and difference."

<sup>24</sup> Alan Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership" (class lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February, 2007). This idea was gleaned from this lecture. Though I have not thought deeply or researched this idea thoroughly, there seems to be a connection between this thought and the theological conviction that the Father sends the Son, in the Spirit, to the world, so that the world might be gathered through the Son, in the Spirit, to the Father. Thus the Son, God incarnate, occupies the space between God and God's creation.

## The Concept of Social Imaginary

As has been stated, this project is about moving Mountainside from missional experimentation to missional commitment. A helpful framework for thinking about this in light of the philosophical and theological reflections explored above is given by Mark Lau Branson and Charles Taylor in their concepts of language house and social imaginary. For the purposes of this project I will glean from both of these concepts, but will primarily use the language of social imaginary for the sake of clarity. Simply put, the social imaginary of a particular community consists of the language and practices that shape its common life. Influenced by the previous sections, the remainder of this chapter will fill in this definition by describing the concept generally and then describing aspects of the concept that are important for the purposes of this project.<sup>25</sup>

One aspect to the social imaginary of a community is its language. Church communities, like all other communities, dwell inside of language. Just as people dwell and live inside a physical structure called a house, communities similarly dwell inside a house of language. A physical house provides people with a setting and resources for life while at the same time providing boundaries and restrictions. Much like a house, language provides communities with resources and meanings for interpreting life while at the same time placing boundaries and restrictions on a community that can stifle its generative potential. A church's language is the means by which it thinks and it is the means by which the people of the church interact with and understand the world.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*.

<sup>26</sup> Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," 95-96.

Branson describes the development of a community's language as hermeneutics and defines this as "the continual process of making the meanings in which we live."

Branson goes on to state,

All of our churches—all human communities—are shaped and sustained by Hermeneutics. That is, the cohesion that makes possible human community, the energized glue that forms and deploys a people, is the generative cohesion of meanings. We are formed, personally and corporately, as those around us (concurrently and historically) give us access to the world; everything from the stars and clouds, to persons and places, to days and years, are given meaning, made real in particular ways, by the interpretive community. A community's imagination, its stories and practices, its history and expectations, are created and carried by words that interpret everything. We are constructed by and live our lives in and through language – not language as we have come to understand it as a tool, as positivism or as propaganda – but more like a "house of language." Communities are formed and sustained, or not, by their hermeneutics.<sup>27</sup>

The social imaginary of a community is also made up of the community's practices. The social imaginary, writes Taylor, is "not a set of ideas; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society."<sup>28</sup> Taylor continues by stating that a social imaginary is "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."<sup>29</sup> Social imaginaries are not simply a set of ideas or words,

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<sup>27</sup> Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," 95. Branson credits his use of the metaphor "house of language" or "language house" to the work of Heidegger, Nietzsche, and later linguistic theory. When Branson mentions the temptation to use language as a tool, he is exemplifying how a functional rationality affects even our understanding of language. The effects of functional rationality on the language house of Mountainside will be explored further in Chapter 4.

<sup>28</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2. When using the concept of social imaginary Taylor is largely referring to entire societies. For the purposes of this paper I will be describing and utilizing the concept of social imaginary in regards to a much smaller group than Taylor does, namely a church. I am using the concept of social imaginary as well as Branson's concept of language house because of their usefulness in understanding how groups of people might change.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

but they entail the common language and practices that make up the life of a particular community or society.<sup>30</sup>

For the purposes of this project there are a few aspects of the concept of social imaginary that are especially important to highlight even if they might seem redundant. First of all, a social imaginary is a shared social enterprise. Learning the language and practices of a social imaginary trains a person (most often a child) into a communal mode of living.<sup>31</sup> Quoting Benjamin Whorf, Brad Kallenberg writes in his book, *Live to Tell*, about the role of language in this social reality:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, not alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group . . . we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretations.<sup>32</sup>

A second important aspect to the concept of social imaginary has to do with the way people are invited in. The primary way that this happens is by means of a community’s interpretive stories. Just as maps help us navigate our physical terrain, stories provide us with clues and role models for helping us comprehend and achieve our proper ends.<sup>33</sup> Taylor writes that he adopts the term imaginary because “my focus is on the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, and this is often not

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<sup>30</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2. See also Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 24. In a similar description to that of social imaginary, Kallenberg describes a community’s “form of life” as “that weave of activity, relationships, and speech that gives the community its unique personality.”

<sup>31</sup> Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends.”<sup>34</sup> The kind of meanings gleaned from these images, stories, and legends is what enables a community to carry out the collective practices that make up its social life.

A third aspect of the concept of social imaginary that is helpful for the purposes of this paper pertains to the lived practices of a particular community of people. Not only are social imaginaries a shared social enterprise, they are also “performative.”<sup>35</sup> The common understanding shared in a community’s social imaginary through language is what enables a community to make sense of and carry out the collective practices that make up its social life.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, fluency is gained and meanings are made not only by hearing stories of the community but even more so by participation in the community’s practices that are connected to its stories.<sup>37</sup> This relationship between the practices and the background understanding behind them is not one-sided. Taylor writes, “If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice that largely carries the understanding.”<sup>38</sup>

A fourth aspect to the concept of social imaginary is that it can function as an imaginative boundary for the group. A social imaginary, writes Taylor, “constitutes a

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<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 24. Kallenberg borrows this term from John L. Austin. Kallenberg goes on to write that language is “a form of action that gets work done.”

<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. Taylor also suggests that not only does the common understanding within a social imaginary make possible common practices, but it also provides a widely shared sense of legitimacy within the community. Pressing forward into the missional conversation can leave churches and their leaders feeling a “lack of legitimacy” due to the conversation still being largely outside the social imaginary of most denominations. This “lack of legitimacy” can also be detected in leaders of churches not involved in the missional conversation when they are with a group of leaders who are. Welcoming one another into the conversation through the sharing of stories might be the most helpful way forward.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

horizon we are virtually incapable of thinking beyond.”<sup>39</sup> Once again the image of a house is helpful. While a house provides a setting and resources for life, it also provides restrictions and limits. A household is only able to plant and harvest a garden if there is physical space, imagination, and shared practices in the household available. If there is not sufficient space, a lack of imagination on the part of people, or no sense of shared practice, the household will be restricted from planting and harvesting a garden. The same can be said about the social imaginary of a group. While a social imaginary provides a setting and resources for understanding and making sense of the world, it also restricts what a community can imagine itself being and doing.

The final aspect worth highlighting is that a social imaginary can prove to be false or myopic. Taylor explains, “What we imagine can be something new, constructive, opening new possibilities, or it can be purely fictitious, perhaps dangerously false.”<sup>40</sup>

Taylor goes on to write,

In fact, my use of the term is meant to combine both these facets. Can an imaginary be false, meaning that it distorts or covers over certain crucial realities? Clearly, the answer to this is yes, in the light of some of the examples above. Take our sense of ourselves as equal citizens in a democratic state; to the extent that we not only understand this as a legitimating principle but actually imagine it as integrally realized, we will be engaging in a cover-up, averting our gaze from various excluded and disempowered groups or imagining that their exclusion is their own doing. We regularly come across ways in which the modern social imaginaries, no longer defined as ideal types but as actually lived by this or that population, are full of ideological and false consciousness.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 185.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. This description of the social imaginary of American culture applies to some of the families that are a part of MYA. This description also fits the social imaginary of Mountainside. This will be further discussed in the next chapter.

In a similar critique of the social imaginaries of faith communities, Branson writes, “Faith communities are often myopic, and their inadequate vision concerning what is real will leave them malformed. Faith communities that are unable to see and interpret themselves, their context, their traditional texts, and the presence and movement of the Holy Breath, assume shapes and practices that too often run counter to God’s grace.”<sup>42</sup>

The question left to answer is how to go about changing or expanding the social imaginary of a particular community. Once again Taylor’s work is helpful. He writes,

What exactly is involved when a theory penetrates and transforms the social imaginary? For the most part, people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices. These are made sense of by the new outlook, the one first articulated theory; this outlook is the context that gives sense to the practices. Hence the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn’t before. It begins to define the contours of their world and can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention.

But this process isn’t just one-sided, a theory making over a social imaginary. In coming to make sense of the action the theory is glossed, as it were, given a particular shape as the context of these practices. Rather like Kant’s notion of an abstract category becoming “schematized” when it is applied to reality in space and time, the theory is schematized in the dense sphere of common practice.

Nor need the process end here. The new practice, with the implicit understanding it generates, can be the basis for modifications of theory, which in turn can inflect practice, and so on.<sup>43</sup>

### A Way to Think About Congregational Change

Summarizing what has been covered thus far will be helpful in moving forward.

The agency of the church consists of its memories and hopes lived out in its practices.

These memories open up and become its hopes, over time these strangely and excessively

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<sup>42</sup> Branson, “Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church,” 96. In this chapter Branson uses the concept of language house or hermeneutics where I have used the concept of social imaginary.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 29-30.

fulfilled hopes becomes its memories, and they are both lived out and embodied in the church's practices. Stemming from Paul's use of horticultural metaphors in describing the work of the Spirit, the next section described these meaningful practices as means of God's grace for the church, by which it waits for God. Therefore, as a church moves from memory to hope and hope to memory, through its practices, it is continually being changed, formed, and reformed by the Holy Spirit as it lives its life out into God's future.<sup>44</sup> It was also suggested that leadership in the church, also understood as a means of grace, is largely about implementing these practices and deepening a congregation's understanding of its generative memories and hopes.

The next section of the chapter, also working with Galatians 5, proposed that congregational life in the Spirit requires a posture of openness to both God and other. It was suggested that in order for a church to live according to the Spirit, it must remain open to the surprising work of God as well as to the other, acknowledging the distance between and allowing it to remain. This chapter also exemplified—through Paul's use of memory, hope, and practice—the type of leadership suggested in the previous section.

The final section of this chapter considered the concept of social imaginary as a helpful framework for thinking about congregational change. It was suggested that the social imaginary—made up of a community's language and practices—is both generative for the community in helping it understand the world and also provides boundaries which the community is challenged to live beyond. A church uses its language and practice to describe, shape, and proclaim its memories and hopes. In order for a community to live

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<sup>44</sup> Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," 117. Addressing this type of fluid formation of churches, Branson writes, "This is ecclesiology: a house of meanings and a bundle of practices that are given by God and that shape us on God's behalf for the sake of the world."

beyond its existing social imaginary, new practices need to be introduced that carry new meaning and language for understanding the world. As these new practices are introduced and their meaning is grasped, a church's social imaginary will expand.

Summarizing for the purpose of this project, moving Mountainside from missional experimentation to missional commitment will require an expanded social imaginary. An expanded social imaginary will require new or deeper understanding in regards to the memories and hopes of Mountainside. This new understanding will come by introducing new practices into the life of the church that embody and appropriately modify this understanding. These practices are to be understood as "means of grace" and will need to embody a posture of openness, while allowing distance to remain, with both God and the families of MYA. This work is a prayer that God might move Mountainside towards missional commitment as a fruit of God's Spirit.

## CHAPTER 4

### MOUNTAINSIDE COMMUNION: A SOCIAL IMAGINARY

This chapter will explore the social imaginary of Mountainside, highlighting both generative and debilitating aspects of it. In the first section, functional rationality will be discussed as the primary boundary within the social imaginary of Mountainside. This functional rationality is revealed in the memories and practices of Mountainside as it relates to groups and people of its shared context that are not a part of the church. The chapter will close with a section on some of the generative aspects of Mountainside's social imaginary as they pertain to missional commitment. Specifically, this section will explore the practice of Eucharist as well as Mountainside's praxis of both community and hospitality.

#### **Social Imaginary as Boundary: Functional Rationality**

Many people of Mountainside have memories and language formed from involvement in evangelical churches within the United States—the primary tradition being the Church of the Nazarene. While the initial energy behind the start of Mountainside stemmed primarily from a clear vision of being a local church in the city of Monrovia, there was also energy that stemmed from the people's reaction to previous

church contexts. From the beginning Mountainside was clear on what it wanted to be about, but it was also clear on what it did not want to be about.

The memories, language, and, practices that most people brought with them to Mountainside were from the context of what Craig Van Gelder describes as a corporate church.<sup>1</sup> According to Van Gelder, the formation of the corporate church within the United States began during the formation of the American colonies and has developed since. While the development of the corporate church has been dynamic over time, its primary identity came into existence around an organizational self-understanding in relation to a purposive intent. Van Gelder writes, “This understanding leads us to think about the church primarily, though not exclusively, in functional terms where the church is responsible to do something.”<sup>2</sup>

This functional identity of purposive intent becomes cemented over the years in the formation of denominations. Van Gelder continues, “The inherent logic of a denomination is that it is organized to do something, normally with a focus on doing something on behalf of God in the world.”<sup>3</sup> During the years 1870-1920 most denominations begin to develop more elaborate infrastructures and take on a more programmatic approach to their ministries. The Church of the Nazarene was founded in 1906 and therefore has been heavily influenced by this cultural reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church, A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 74-84.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 74. In this description Van Gelder notes the coalescence of two movements, free-church ecclesiology and voluntary association.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 77.

The challenge with an identity of purposive intent and being organized on the basis of doing or achieving something is that it stems from functional rationality. Functional rationality was recognized in Chapter 2 as leading to Ideal Type Romanticism, which is an obstacle to committed missional life. As mentioned in Chapter 2, functional rationality is about predicting, managing, and controlling certain outcomes. The outcomes are those deemed worthy by the people striving to achieve them. Within corporate churches and the programs that they desire to be successful, often the goals and outcomes are achieved, but with little thought for the people involved in the achievement of those goals. This can lead to an objectification of people and creation that is not faithful to the gospel.

Early documents in the life of Mountainside reveal a desire to move away from the programmatic influence of the corporate churches that most Mountainside members came from. Rather than offering programs, the hope of Mountainside has been to be a church that embodies relational descriptions and practices like community, hospitality, friendship, and authenticity.<sup>4</sup> This language has now made its way from the founding documents into the conversation and descriptions that people use to describe Mountainside.<sup>5</sup> It is language that has become a part of Mountainside's social imaginary, especially in regards to how people of Mountainside relate with one another.

The purposes of this project, though, pertain to how Mountainside relates to its local context, specifically the people of MYA. While the social imaginary of Mountainside contains language that moves it away from functional rationality in regards

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B for a description of core values and an initial mission statement.

<sup>5</sup> Salzman, *Understanding Culture*, 1, 16. This has been observed through what Salzman describes as participant observation. Participant observation will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

to how people of the church relate to one another, it also contains language and practice that reveals the remnants of functional rationality in regards to how Mountainside relates with people from its local context. Looking at some of the founding documents of Mountainside is helpful. One of the church's hopes, stated as a founding core value, is diversity. The description reads,

Diversity: We want to be a safe and accepting place for people, whatever their background. We believe that without a conscious pursuit of diversity we will tend to fall back into our “looks like me” comfort zone. We reach out to a wide variety of people and encourage them to explore their questions and progress in their spiritual journey at their own pace. We welcome them with their unique blends of experiences, gifts, challenges, and insights, believing that we will be enriched as a community by the contributions of each individual.<sup>6</sup>

A glossary look at this value and its description might not reveal evidence of functional rationality. But looking more closely reveals a purposive intent to do things in a way that predicts a preferred outcome, namely in the quality of diversity. After an initial sentence describing this preferred future, the second sentence uses language of “pursuit” in terms of achieving it. The goal of this “pursuit” is stated in terms of Mountainside achieving its preferred outcome. The “pursuit” being suggested has purposive intent for the sake of Mountainside reaching its goal of diversity. The third sentence then uses language of “reach out” and this time the language refers to people who have been enfolded into Mountainside, assumedly via Mountainside's “pursuit.” This leads to a final sentence—referring to those now enfolded—about welcoming a

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B. This core value has been updated and now reads, “Diversity: We will try to reach out to a wide variety of people. We will allow those who worship with us to progress in their spiritual journey at their own pace, exploring their questions in an open atmosphere. It is our goal to learn to welcome all sorts of people with their unique blends of experiences, gifts, challenges, and insights, believing that we will be enriched as a community by the contributions of each individual. We believe that without a conscious pursuit of diversity we will tend to fall back into our ‘looks like me’ comfort zone.” While this is worded differently and in a less objectifying way, the language mentioned in the previous version still remains.

diversity of people and assuming that they will enrich the community by their contributions.

It must be noted that pursuing diversity, reaching out to people who are different, and welcoming others into the fellowship and work of a church are wonderful and important initiatives. This description is not meant to minimize the significance of those activities. Rather, this description is trying to make clear the evidence of functional rationality in the social imaginary of Mountainside, and it seeks to add caution regarding the objectification of people that can happen when this obstacle to missional life is present.

A second example that is helpful in understanding this aspect of Mountainside's social imaginary is evidenced in the connection between the language of Mountainside's core value of Compassionate Action and the practice of saving and spending its Compassionate Action Fund (hereafter, C.A. Fund). Mountainside's C.A. Fund was established in the first year of the church and is made up of 10 percent of monies contributed to Mountainside through the giving of tithes and offerings. This fund is overseen by a team of people who are responsible for ensuring that the money is spent according to the established bylaws of the fund. The bylaws were intentionally established with the idea of encouraging members of Mountainside to practice love of neighbor in an embodied way.<sup>7</sup> The hope—again stated as a core value—connected to this practice reads as follows:

Compassionate Action: We strive to enter creatively and compassionately into the pain and injustice of a suffering world.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix C for a list of the bylaws.

We believe that issues of justice are close to the heart of God and therefore they are close to our hearts as well. We as a community are committed to practicing justice and compassion in our speech, actions, planning, and spending.<sup>8</sup>

Functional rationality is not overtly evident when reading the description of this core value. But as this value is practiced in the spending of the C.A. Fund and described in testimonies about the practice, there is evidence of functional rationality that can objectify rather than welcome the other. These aspects were especially evident in testimonies given during a particular worship service that was focused entirely on the use of Mountainside's C.A. Fund. The intent of the evening was to celebrate the work of God through the fund and how people of Mountainside had been able to participate in that. But as the testimonies were shared, the sense of the worship became less about the work of God and more about what Mountainside had accomplished through the saving and giving of this fund. The worship became somewhat self-congratulatory. The language connected with the practice that evening was much different from the language in the description of the core value. It was language of purposive intent. In his book, *Dependent Rational Animals*, Alasdair Macintyre describes the type of objectification that can happen when practices such as this are linked with language of purposive intent:

The limitations and blindness of merely self-interested desire have been catalogued often enough. Those of a blandly generalized benevolence have received too little attention. What such benevolence presents us with is a generalized Other—one whose only relationship to us is to provide an occasion for the exercise of *our* benevolence, so that we can reassure ourselves about our own good will—in place of those particular others with whom we must learn to share common goods, and participate in ongoing relationships.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>9</sup> Alasdair Macintyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Humans Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1999), 119. Offering a similar thought or sentiment William Gass writes, "[The moralist] is a man in love, not with particular men or women, not with things, but with principles, ideas,

While some of the formal language found in these documents has become a part of the common vernacular of Mountainside, and therefore the social imaginary, this night revealed that the language in the description of compassionate action had not made its way into Mountainside's social imaginary. Because this had not happened, the language of purposive intent that is a part of Mountainside's memories shaped the practice in a way that was potentially objectifying of the other. Functional rationality is revealed in these memories, hopes, and practices as the primary boundary within the social imaginary of Mountainside that will need to be expanded if the culture is to move from one of missional experimentation to one of missional commitment.<sup>10</sup>

### **Generative Aspects of the Social Imaginary of Mountainside**

As was mentioned previously in this chapter, there are many aspects to the social imaginary of Mountainside that are generative for missional commitment. For the purposes of this paper and the work done with MYA, there are three particular aspects to Mountainside's current social imaginary that will be highlighted in this chapter. These aspects were also used in the formation and implementation of the ministry strategy described in the next two chapters. These aspects are the celebration of Eucharist, the praxis of community, and the praxis of hospitality.<sup>11</sup>

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webs of reasoning; and if he rushes to the aid of his neighbor, it is not because he loves his neighbor, but because he loves God's law about it."

<sup>10</sup> There are obviously strong connections between this boundary revealed in Mountainside's social imaginary and the obstacles to Missional Commitment presented in Chapter 2, particularly in regards to Ideal Type Romanticism and Consumerism.

<sup>11</sup> Once again, a more robust description of the concept of praxis will be given in Chapter 5.

## The Celebration of the Eucharist

Mountainside began to shape its weekly worship around the celebration of Eucharist during the first year of its existence. As the practice has continued, Mountainside's understanding of the memories and hopes embodied in this practice have deepened and expanded.<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of this paper, a brief explanation of Mountainside's understanding and practice of Eucharist will provide one of the more generative aspects of Mountainside's social imaginary in terms of moving from missional experimentation to missional commitment.<sup>13</sup>

### **Jesus as Sacrament, Church as Sacramental**

The practice of Eucharist begins with the understanding that Jesus is the one sacrament of the church. This is to say that in Christ, both human life and God's life are thrown together. The gospel accounts as well as the writings of the later New Testament describe Jesus in such a way as to reveal both what God looks like as well as what it looks like to be truly human. Thus, the story of Jesus of Nazareth—his life, death, and resurrection—is the story of life (John 10:10). As Alexander Schmemmann writes, "In Christ, life—life in all its totality—was returned to [humanity], given again as sacrament and communion, made Eucharist."<sup>14</sup> The church is invited into this sacramental life. By

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<sup>12</sup> Over the years there have been numerous members of Mountainside who have moved out of the area after finishing school. It is common for these former members to cite the celebration of the Eucharist as the aspect of Mountainside that they miss the most and found most meaningful in their time with the church.

<sup>13</sup> Much of this section will be drawn from a sermon given at Mountainside on Spiritual Formation and Eucharist. The language and practice drawn from this sermon is now used in worship preparation as well as when the Eucharistic elements are received.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 20.

the power of the Spirit, in the Eucharist the church participates in the memory and hope of Jesus and is shaped by this story in such a way that the church's life becomes sacramental. Its life points towards the one sacrament of the church, which is Christ.

This sacramental or Eucharistic understanding of the church and its connection to missional commitment has been deepening among Mountainside as it has celebrated the Eucharist over the years. There is a shift happening within Mountainside's corporate understanding of Eucharist and mission that Schmemmann describes well when he writes,

The Western Christian is used to thinking of sacrament as opposed to Word, and he [or she] links the mission with the Word and not the sacrament. [The Western Christian] is, moreover, accustomed to consider the sacrament as perhaps an essential and clearly defined part or institution or act *of* the church and *within* the Church, but not of the Church as being itself the sacrament of Christ's presence and action. And finally [the Western Christian] is primarily interested in certain very "formal" questions concerning the sacraments: their number, their "validity," their institution, etc. Our purpose is to show that there exists and always existed a different perspective, a different approach to sacrament, and that this approach may be of crucial importance precisely for the whole burning issue of mission, of our witness to Christ in the world. For the basic question is: *of what are we witnesses?* What have we seen and touched with our hands? Of what have we partaken and been made communicants? Where do we call [humanity]? What can we offer them?<sup>15</sup>

For Mountainside, the celebration of Eucharist and the Eucharistic life has become the answer to these questions. The Eucharist has taken on a significance in the life of Mountainside to the point that spiritual formation is now understood as an ever-increasing participation in Eucharistic life. As Schmemmann alludes to above, the celebration of the Eucharist is no longer understood as a specific "act of the church and within the Church" but as the primary memory, hope, and practice that constitutes the church. It has become something Mountainside dwells in, "the way one might dwell in a

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<sup>15</sup> Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 21.

cosmos,” and is the primary story through which people are invited into the social imaginary of Mountainside.<sup>16</sup> While a robust description of Eucharistic theology is beyond the scope of this paper, the remainder of this section will briefly describe the elements of Mountainside’s understanding of Eucharistic life.

## **Liturgy**

The first aspect of Eucharistic life is a broadened understanding of Eucharist as liturgy. Liturgy signifies “the work of the people.”<sup>17</sup> It can be described as a means of God’s grace. Sadly, liturgy is often understood solely in cultic terms as a sacred act of worship set apart from other non-sacred acts. When understood in this way, it is separated from the ordinary activities of life and even from other activities of the church.<sup>18</sup> For Mountainside, liturgy has taken on a much broader and deeper meaning.

Keen describes Eucharistic liturgy in this way:

It is a big word that reaches into every day of every week. Congregational kneeling and singing are liturgical, but so also is getting out of bed a couple of hours earlier or harvesting an acre of wheat on a Friday or giving birth to a baby girl on a Wednesday. More specifically, the word for the particular liturgy of those people who are in Christ is “Eucharist.” “Eucharist” is to be understood as the grateful pattern of life that is nourished by the work of Christ. Week after

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<sup>16</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), 206, as quoted by Keen, *After Crucifixion*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> John H. Yoder, *Body Politics* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 14. Yoder writes, “In the New Testament passages to which we have been given the technical label, ‘words of institution,’ Jesus said, ‘Whenever you do this, do it in my memory.’ What that originally meant may not be as simple as we assume because we have covered it over with centuries of ceremonies and arguments about what the ceremonies mean. . . . Those debates were focused on late-medieval philosophical questions, with which Jesus and his apostles were not concerned. Theologians were concerned in the sixteenth century for a detailed theoretical definition of the meaning of certain special actions and things, called ‘sacraements,’ within the special set-apart world of the ‘religious.’ The underlying notion—namely the idea that there is a special realm of ‘religious’ reality—that when you speak special prescribed words, peculiar events happen, was not a biblical idea.”

week one moves from and to the social moment in which the women and men of a church of friends take in the broken body and shed blood of Christ and by the Spirit throw themselves with him on the mercy of the Father. It is this event that gives to the lives of these people the shape of the cross. It is this event that makes the postures and sounds of Sunday morning and of every day and every time a kind of earthy spiritual worship.<sup>19</sup>

As stated above, the liturgy of the church, which embodies its memories and hopes, is what constitutes the church and is a rhythm that entails all of life. It is a rhythm where throughout their week, the people of Mountainside are moving towards or from the Eucharist table.

### **Thanksgiving and Joy**

A second aspect of Eucharistic life is entering into joy and thanksgiving. The word Eucharist means “thanksgiving” and also has roots of the words “joy” (*chara*) and “grace” (*charis*).<sup>20</sup> The Eucharistic liturgy of the church is celebrated within a context of joy. Joy is a gift of the Spirit that is only possible when a posture of openness is evidenced within a community. Specifically, this is a joy and thanksgiving for what God has done in Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup> As Schmemmann states, “Joy, however, is not something one can define or analyze. One enters into joy. ‘Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord’ (Mt. 25:21). And we have no other means of entering into that joy, no way of understanding

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<sup>19</sup> Keen, *After Crucifixion*, 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “Eucharist,” <http://www.oed.com/naomi.fuller.edu:2048/view/Entry/64906?redirectedFrom=eucharist#eid> (accessed October 1, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> The book of Luke begins (2:10) and ends (24:52) with this proclamation of great joy.

it, except through the one action which from the beginning has been for the Church both the source and the fulfillment of joy, the very sacrament of joy, the Eucharist.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Breath**

This leads into a third aspect of Eucharistic life, which is the acknowledged presence of the Holy Spirit. As mentioned in Chapter 3, entering into the joy and thanksgiving of the Lord is only possible as the Spirit gifts the church with the fruit of the Spirit. Each Sunday morning the celebrant stands before the people of Mountainside and leads a prayer where he or she thanks the Spirit for gathering the church for the worship of God in Christ. The celebrant is giving thanks to God for leading the congregation from the Eucharist table last week and towards it in this moment, thus acknowledging the Eucharistic life and movement. This prayer also acknowledges that the Holy Breath is the vivifying force of the church that alone can transform all of life into that which is holy. It is a time for the people of Mountainside to open themselves up to the great Other who has gathered them, and to the others in their midst.

### **Gather**

A fourth aspect of Eucharistic life for Mountainside is gathering. As was mentioned above, the church is constituted when it is gathered by the Spirit. This gathering happens each week during worship as the people of Mountainside come forward to the table. This gathering also happens when the Spirit brings the people together in homes and workplaces or in the public spaces of the neighborhood as they

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<sup>22</sup> Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 25.

continue to dwell in the liturgy of the Eucharist. Often times it is in these gatherings where God uses Mountainside as a witness to God's future.

## **Food**

A fifth aspect to the Eucharistic life is food. As Schmemmann points out, banquet imagery is the central image of life in the Bible and the world is described as one all-encompassing banquet table for humanity. In the Genesis accounts humanity is described as a hungry being and the earth is described as food. The second command that God gives to humanity is to eat the earth, to take the world into our bodies and transform it into ourselves.<sup>23</sup> This banquet imagery is used again at the fulfillment of life when Jesus says, "That you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (Luke 22:30). Food is at the center of Eucharistic life.

This food is to be eaten both for the joy that comes with a shared meal as well as for sustenance, so that being fed, the church might become empty again in service of the Lord. Within the Eucharistic liturgy, the bread and the wine become the sacramental food that invites the church into the body of Christ. Each week, when the people of Mountainside come forward to receive the elements of the Eucharist, they are taken up into Christ's body, made a member of God's future reign, and sent back to the world as witness to this new reality in Christ. Citing Cavanaugh, Keen writes,

One of the peculiarities of the eucharistic feast is that we become the body of Christ by consuming it. Unlike ordinary food, the body does not become assimilated into our bodies, but vice versa. . . . The fact that the church is literally changed into Christ is not a cause for triumphalism, however, precisely because

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<sup>23</sup> Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 25, 11.

our assimilation to the body of Christ means that we then become food for the world, to be broken, given away, and consumed.<sup>24</sup>

## **Work**

The final aspect to Eucharistic life leads back to liturgy or work. Ephesians 2:4-10 states,

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

This passage reminds the church that God's pleasure, love, and kindness does not depend upon the work that it does. God's love and kindness, like all of life, are given as gift from God in Christ. But this passage also reminds the church that it has been created in Christ Jesus for good work that God has prepared as a way of life. It is a reminder that in the Eucharistic life, the ordinary work that the church does throughout the week is gathered as liturgy and an offering of praise to God. While participating in the liturgy, the church is taken up into the body of Christ and sent out to do the good work that God has prepared ahead of time as witness to God's coming future. Mindful of both Jesus as sacrament and a broad understanding of liturgy, the church is invited into the joy of the Lord in the rhythm of breath, gathering, food, and work. This rhythm is participated in as sacramental liturgy, as Eucharistic and missional life. As Schmemmann writes, "Everything is free, nothing is due and yet all is given. And, therefore, the greatest

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<sup>24</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, as quoted in Keen, *After Crucifixion*, 12.

humility and obedience is to *accept* the gift, to say yes—in joy and gratitude. There is nothing we can *do*, yet we become all that God wanted us to be from eternity, when we are *eucharistic*.<sup>25</sup>

### **Eighth Day**

A final element of the Eucharistic life is the theological concept of the eighth day. Again, a robust description of this theme is beyond the scope of this paper, but the primary idea is that as the eighth day, Christian worship is connected with both the fallen world that God has redeemed as well as with the coming reign of God manifest in the memory and hope of Jesus. On the one hand, Sunday is to be understood as an ordinary day belonging fully to this world. On the other hand, through the Eucharistic liturgy, Sunday reveals and manifests God’s coming future “in all of its glory and transforming power as the *end* of this world, as the *beginning* of the world to come.”<sup>26</sup> The Eucharistic life therefore entails a transformed understanding of time. Schmemmann is again helpful when he writes,

Sunday therefore was not a “sacred” day to be “observed” apart from all other days and opposed to them. It did not interrupt time with a “timeless” mystical ecstasy. It was not a “break” in an otherwise meaningless sequence of days, and yet by revealing itself through the Eucharist as the eighth and first day, it gave all days their true meaning. It made the time of this world a time of the *end*, and it made it also the time of the *beginning*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Schmemmann, *For the Sake of the World*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

The Eucharistic life acknowledges the reality of the present and yet lives openly and expectantly toward God's future.<sup>28</sup> As the church is shaped by the memory and hope embodied in the liturgy of the Eucharist, it becomes a witness to God's coming future that has been made known in Christ Jesus.

### The Praxis of Community

Another generative aspect to the social imaginary of Mountainside as it pertains to a movement towards missional commitment is the praxis of community. This section will describe some of the frameworks undergirding Mountainside's core value of community by utilizing the work of founding member Warren Brown. The section will close by suggesting that this particular core value is especially generative for the work of this paper when understood in connection with Mountainside's core value of hospitality.

Community is a frequently used word in churches, but one that too often carries very little meaning. When writing the description for this core value, Mountainside was very careful to provide meaning for what can be a rather ambiguous word. Mountainside describes community in this way:

Community: We strive for "mission through community," believing that mission is essential to community, and community to our mission. For us, church is not just a disconnected crowd of people who attend public programs together. Balancing community and mission takes time, effort, and vulnerability. It takes people being willing to serve and be served, challenge and be challenged, forgive and be forgiven, teach and be taught, give and receive, encourage and be encouraged. It takes people laughing, crying, working,

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<sup>28</sup> Keen, *After Crucifixion*, 13. Keen writes, "For a theology in Christ Easter is the first day, the day the world starts over again. But it is also the eighth day, the day that consummates the old order. This hope of a new life includes what was." This understanding helps to counter the missional obstacle of Ideal Type Romanticism while remaining open in hope.

communicating, resting, and serving together, in relationship with God and one another in a dynamic community of faith.<sup>29</sup>

In a paper entitled, “Attachment, Spiritual Formation, and Wesleyan Communities,” Warren Brown and his colleague, Sara D. Marion, give a helpful survey of what is behind this core value for Mountainside.<sup>30</sup> In their paper, Marion and Brown argue that “spiritual formation occurs primarily through interpersonal interaction occurring in small, more interdependent groups” and not individually or in large groups.<sup>31</sup>

Marion and Brown begin by grounding their ideas about spiritual formation in natural human development.<sup>32</sup> They conclude this section by summarizing: “Thus far we have noted: 1) the power of imitation of other persons in cognitive and social development; 2) the self-organizing nature of the brain in development and throughout life; and 3) the formative power of interhuman attachment both in and out of a traditional therapeutic context.”<sup>33</sup> Marion and Brown conclude this section by posing “that ongoing transformative experiences leading to spiritual maturity function in the same

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<sup>29</sup> Branson has also been helpful in understanding the praxis of community. Particularly helpful is his section on “A Worshipping, Learning Community” in “Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church,” 102-108.

<sup>30</sup> Warren Brown and Sara D. Marion, *Attachment, Spiritual Formation, and Wesleyan Communities*, presented at the Society for the Study of Psychology and Wesleyan Theology in 2008. While this paper was written following the writing of Mountainside’s core value, as a founding member of Mountainside, Brown’s thinking was and continues to be an important resource for the social imagination of Mountainside. The ideas organized in this paper are in the background of Mountainside’s description of this core value.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. Marion and Brown are responding to the popular idea in many Evangelical churches that spiritual formation and transformation comes primarily by spending time alone with God.

<sup>32</sup> This paper will rely on the results of their research; the reader is invited to explore the details of their arguments elsewhere.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

way that our earliest development occurs.”<sup>34</sup> They lead into their next section by suggesting that human flourishing, spiritual formation, and change are based upon the formative power of attachment relationships.

Marion and Brown’s second section looks at the way interdependent and interpersonal interaction enhances human development and flourishing within larger social contexts. They begin this section by exploring the work of MacIntyre in *Dependent Rational Animals*.

This title, *Dependent Rational Animals*, is quite explicit regarding MacIntyre’s views. “Animals” refers to MacIntyre’s physicalist view of humankind as continuous with the animal world, as well as his view of the embodiment of our essential humanness. “Rational” expresses MacIntyre’s understanding of the critical role of practical reasoning in fostering human flourishing. This form of rationality is not limited to the conscious, problem-solving rationality of classical philosophy. Rather, the rationality referred to here is more like common everyday wisdom. In the end, the goal of human development for MacIntyre is to become rational in the sense of being an “independent practical reasoner.” We read MacIntyre as pointing to something here that is not unlike the sort of spiritual maturity and wisdom that the church seeks to promote. . . . However, the critical step in becoming an independent practical reasoner is, for MacIntyre, development of the virtue of “acknowledged dependence” (thus, the designation of humans as “*dependent* rational animals”).<sup>35</sup>

By virtue of their connection between MacIntyre’s ideas of becoming an “independent practical reasoner” and spiritual formation, Marion and Brown suggest that it is only those persons who are able to acknowledge and function within their dependence on others that are able to grow and mature in Christian formation. At this suggestion they quote MacIntyre, “The acquisition of the necessary virtues, skills, and self-knowledge is something that we in key part owe to those particular others on whom

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<sup>34</sup> Brown and Marion, *Attachments*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. The authors are discussing MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

we have had to depend.”<sup>36</sup> Marion and Brown claim that they “take from MacIntyre the idea that formation in the virtues of life generally, and Christian life specifically, is dependent on relationships with other persons—be that a family when we are young children, a wider range of adult mentors during adolescence, or a network of Christian colleagues within the church throughout adult years.”<sup>37</sup>

Moving from this section, Marion and Brown then begin to explore some of the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher in regards to the development of virtues and Christian practice in the context of groups such as the church. They write,

Schleiermacher deals with the issue of how we might learn to be a person whose life includes compassion, particularly habits of benevolence on behalf of the poor. The problem is that neither contemplation of one’s own privileged status nor reflection on one’s moral obligations elicit sentiments in any of us sufficient to give rise to meaningful benevolent actions. Schleiermacher felt that the binding power of pure obligation is insufficient. However, the solution for Schleiermacher was through the combination of “sociable connections” and small-group action. Compared to individual action, the small-group mode not only has the benefit of being more effective, but simultaneously “strengthens the intensity of the sentiments of those performing the benevolent actions.” Within groups of persons engaging in such action, there is reciprocal strengthening of benevolent and compassionate affections and sentiments.

According to Schleiermacher, an important new dimension comes into play in group activity. Theologian Michael Welker describes this process: “Complex and strengthening sentiments arise in me when my action is embedded in an interconnection with the action of other human beings, strengthening this interconnection and being strengthened by it.” It is likely that reciprocal imitation is one key factor—we learn by observing and imitating one another. Schleiermacher helps us to understand the role and power of smaller groups, with their more intense “sociable connections” (or attachments) and the opportunity afforded to grow by imitation of one another. Further, we begin to see how understanding these influences can contribute to the church’s attempt to enhance the spiritual formation of people.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 96, as quoted in Brown and Marion, *Attachments*, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Marion and Brown, *Attachments*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 96, as quoted in Brown and Marion, *Attachments*, 11.

According to Marion and Brown, what can be concluded from the views of MacIntyre and Schleiermacher is that human maturation and spiritual formation occur from “top-down influences from groups to persons.”<sup>39</sup> They go on to say that these ideas connect directly with their research mentioned in the first section. They conclude by noting,

The social environment has a life-long impact on the brain and its behavioral products. Attachment theory focuses us on the formative power of close, dyadic interpersonal relationships. In this light, we suggest that networks of dyadic attachment form the bonds (the “sociable connections”) that allow small-group networks to form, and to exert a formative influence on individuals within groups toward becoming independent practical reasoners, and within the church, becoming spiritually mature persons.<sup>40</sup>

At risk of oversimplifying their argument, Marion and Brown suggest that human beings need “inter-dependent sociable connections” based in secure relationships of virtuous imitation in order to mature, be formed spiritually, and change. It can also be concluded that commitment to the virtues, such as the fruit of the Spirit, is more possible when practiced within a small group of Christians rather than alone.

These ideas undergird Mountainside’s founding value and robust description of “community” and provide important resources for the work of this paper. This description and the undergirding concepts have made their way into the social imaginary of Mountainside both in language as well as shared practice and have become ways that Mountainside lives out Eucharistic life, makes a conscious effort to remain open to the other as described in the theology of the Holy Spirit, and confronts missional obstacles such as idealism, consumerism, and becoming rooted in one’s neighborhood. The living

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<sup>39</sup> Marion and Brown, *Attachments*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

out of “mission through community” and the formation, change, and commitment that this can foster will be vital to Mountainside moving beyond missional experiments to missional commitment.

But while praxis of community will be important in moving towards missional commitment, it alone will not be enough. In fact, if Mountainside’s only goal was to practice “mission through community” as described in this core value, missional experimentation would be adequate to achieving it. Missional commitment would not be required. A careful look at Mountainside’s description of community and the frameworks that undergird it reveals the same functional rationality of purposive intent when it comes to relating with people not a part of the church as described earlier in this chapter. Moving from missional experimentation to missional commitment will require the praxis of hospitality.

### The Praxis of Hospitality

The overall work of the project is to test the thesis that moving Mountainside from missional experimentation to missional commitment will require participation in relational engagements of shared hospitality with other groups in the neighborhood. This participation will serve as the practice needed in order to expand the social imaginary of Mountainside beyond its current boundary of functional rationality. This section will look at generative memories and hopes of hospitality present within the social imaginary of Mountainside. More specifically, it will explore the concept of hospitality revealed in Luke 10 and in long-term caregivers within L’Arche Communities. These explorations

will provide the framework for the practice of the project that will be described in the next two chapters.

### **Hospitality as Core Value: Evidence of a Boundary**

In exploring the concept of hospitality within the social imaginary of Mountainside it will again be helpful to briefly consider how it is described within Mountainside's core values. Mountainside describes hospitality in this way:

Hospitality: We seek to be known by our welcoming and gracious spirit and our friendly and generous deeds. In a world that is becoming more and more impersonal, we strive to be a community that is personal. We follow the example of the Good Samaritan—we are a place for the traveler, the outsider, those that are different, and those that need a place of safety.<sup>41</sup>

Having recognized evidence of functional rationality in previous core values, it is not difficult to recognize aspects of this boundary to missional commitment in this description as well. The description begins by stating Mountainside's desire to "be known" by activities that it performs, potentially suggesting that Mountainside would like to act on behalf of God by exhibiting a "welcoming and gracious spirit" and "friendly and generous deeds." This again carries hints of the "purposive intent" that Van Gelder described. The statement goes on to say that Mountainside is committed to following the example of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10 in being "a place for the traveler, the outsider, those that are different, and those that need a place of safety." This once again places Mountainside in the place of privilege and power and can potentially lead to the objectification of others as a way of achieving a preferred outcome. While responding to the love of God with generosity, friendship, and grace is certainly something to celebrate

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix B.

and pursue, approaching relationships with other groups in the neighborhood with these types of activities alone will not cultivate the missional commitment that God is calling forth among Mountainside.

### **Hospitality as Core Value: Expanding the Boundaries**

Expanding the boundaries of this understanding is critical for the purposes of this project. Fortunately there are generative aspects in the Scriptures as well as in the description above that have aided in expanding the current boundaries to Mountainside's social imaginary. This expansion began during the Spiritual Discernment Process described in Chapter 1 as the church spent time dwelling in Luke 10:1-12. As mentioned in Chapter 1, rich themes like recognizing people of peace, receiving hospitality from others, the concrete and local nature of the gospel, as well as issues of boundary crossing were being noticed within the text. This led to creative and inspiring dialogue about what ministry and mission in our local context might look like in light of who God had created Mountainside to be up until this point and what this passage was suggesting.

Especially impressionable upon the social imaginary of Mountainside during this time were the instructions Jesus gives to his disciples on receiving hospitality from people of peace as they were crossing boundaries. The idea of crossing boundaries and receiving hospitality as a practice of mission was completely foreign to most people, if not everyone, in the room. One could almost feel the social imaginary of Mountainside being expanded as the wondering, dialogue, and imagining of what this might look like in the church's own context took place.

Looking back at the description of Mountainside's core value of hospitality in light of the time dwelling in Luke 10 gives evidence to generative language within the description for the purposes of this paper. The second sentence of the statement, when understood in the terms suggested here, cautions against the challenges of functional rationality when it describes the world as becoming "more and more impersonal" and Mountainside's desire "to be a community that is personal." To be personal in interaction with the other suggests reciprocity in relationship that acknowledges dependence on one another and moves beyond functional rationality. This is language that connects with the suggested practice of this project and which, upon deeper understanding, can lead to further expansion of Mountainside's social imaginary.

A second aspect to Mountainside's description of hospitality that is germane to this project is the reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan also found in Luke 10. In reading the description, it is evident that Mountainside understands itself in the position of the Samaritan, as the one offering care and aide to the injured traveler. But this understanding misses the point of the parable entirely. Reading this story in light of the observations gleaned from our study of Luke 10:1-12 opens up this well known parable in wonderful ways.

In the story, a lawyer who is well versed in the Torah, presumably a Jew—and therefore culturally divided from Samaritans—asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds by asking the man, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" The man answers by stating, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." After Jesus acknowledges the appropriateness of his answer,

the man pushes further, presumably trying to trick Jesus, and asks, “And who is my neighbor?” The man was likely trying to bait Jesus into revealing his offensively open grace that would deem him a heretic. To this question Jesus tells the well known parable.

When read in both the context of the time as well as the literary context of Luke 10, this story turns the man’s world upside down. When asking Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” he is asking, “Whom shall I love as myself in order that I get the preferred future that I want, namely, eternal life?” This is evidence of the functional rationality highlighted throughout this paper. To this question, Jesus begins the story by stating, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers.” At this point, the man would likely position himself in the story as the one traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, as this would have been a journey he had taken numerous times. The surprising attack of the robbers would certainly have caught this man’s attention. Perhaps he repositioned himself in the story at this point, assuming he might be the next character mentioned who would likely come and save the injured man. The plot thickens though as the next two characters, who are religious leaders, pass by the man, failing to offer the love of neighbor which Jesus is describing through the story.

This twist in the story would certainly have left the lawyer puzzled and therefore expectant for the conclusion of the story. Jesus’ next words are, “But a Samaritan while traveling came near to him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.” By telling this story, Jesus has forced the man into one of two positions, both of which he would be very uncomfortable with. On the one hand, the man can claim the place in the story of the traveler, who was likely Jewish, but who was in need and therefore powerless and dependent. On the other hand, the man could claim the place in the story of the

Samaritan, the one showing love of neighbor, but who was a part of a people group that this man and his culture were hostile towards.

The word “parable” means “to throw to the side.”<sup>42</sup> When hearing a good parable, the listeners’ attention—currently on some type of status quo or assumed path forward—is thrown to the side and a new perspective or understanding is revealed. Jesus uses parables as a way of catching his listeners’ attention and inviting them off of their current path and onto the path of the reign of God. This story has done just that to the lawyer’s understanding of his position in society and what God is doing in the world. Similar to the work of the Spirit in Galatians 5, this parable opens the lawyer up and expands his imagination of what it means to be a neighbor in light of the reconciling work of God in Christ. The call to love of neighbor is about a radical welcoming of the other combined with the willingness and courage to acknowledge our dependence upon them. Much like God is calling this lawyer to a position of acknowledged dependence upon the other who is Samaritan, God is calling Mountainside to a position of acknowledged dependence upon the other who is groups of people outside of our fellowship yet within our local neighborhoods. As Mountainside continues to move towards missional commitment, revisiting this parable as an important memory and hope within our social imaginary will be vital.

#### Long-Term L’Arche Assistants and Missional Commitment

A final aspect to the social imaginary of Mountainside that has been helpful in supporting a move towards acknowledged dependence upon the other as vital for

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<sup>42</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “parable, <http://www.oed.com/naomi.fuller.edu:2048/view/Entry/137268?rskey=zi3sPl&result=1#eid> (accessed October 1, 2011).

missional commitment is found in the writing of Rene Girard in connection with the work of Jean Vanier. A few years ago, a group of leaders within the church spent time reading Vanier's book, *Community and Growth*, as well as researching and visiting a L'Arche community in Orange, California.<sup>43</sup> The life of this community has been a living parable within the social imaginary of Mountainside. What has proved especially helpful for a few of the church's leaders is applying Girard's mimetic theory to L'Arche communities as a way of understanding exemplars of committed compassionate ministry.<sup>44</sup>

Girard's theory rests on the observation of ubiquitous and constant interpersonal imitation that is evident in human beings from birth. Girard's idea is that not only do human beings imitate one another's behavior, but also one another's desires. Mimetic theory suggests that often one desires an object not because of the value of the object, but because he or she is imitating the desire of others who possess it. This imitation of desire leads to competition and rivalry, which often leads to either social or physical violence.<sup>45</sup>

Key to mimetic theory is the observation that, as people grow older, they begin to desire the power and social status of other people. Girard describes this as metaphysical

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<sup>43</sup> For more on this L'Arche Community see <http://www.larchewavecrest.org/index.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Rene Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978) and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Warren Brown, "Exemplary Virtue: Imitation and Formation" (lecture given at the "Just Peacemaking and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Discipleship Conference" on October, 5, 2010, held at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA). See also Warren Brown, S. Garrels, and K. Reimer, "Mimesis and Compassion in Care for the Disabled," *Journal of Religion, Disability, and Health* 15, no. 1 (October 2011): 2. Brown gleans much of his lecture from this article. Brown's lecture and article cited here express some of the language and hopes in the social imaginary of Mountainside while the work of this project was being developed. Girard's theory easily connects at this point with the closed off posture that is evident in the "desires of the flesh" as described by Paul in Galatians 5.

desire.<sup>46</sup> While metaphysical desire is less overt than the desire of a physical object, it too leads to rivalry and competition, though they may take more covert forms. Once again, this covert rivalry and competition can lead to covert forms of social violence such as argument, verbal abuse, gossip, and the like.<sup>47</sup> Brown writes, “According to Girard, our mimetic capacities involve us in competitive behavior, leading to intense and unique forms of human relational conflict and violence.”<sup>48</sup>

Girard believes that the outcome of mimetic rivalry and violence is that the expressions of violence are then imitated and become the focus of social contagion. The only way for this contagion to be resolved is by focusing the violence onto an individual or group that serves as a scapegoat for the violence that has emerged. Focusing the violence on the scapegoat solves the rivalry and discord of the community and brings a temporary sense of harmony. While the selection of a scapegoat is somewhat arbitrary, it typically is an outsider of the community or someone who is observably different. The outcome of this process in primitive times was often the killing of the scapegoat. Tragically this violence can also be seen in modern times such as in the treatment of the disabled, immigrants, and the poor.<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, Girard suggests that religion emerges in the institutionalization of the scapegoat mechanism.<sup>50</sup> The ritual killing of a scapegoat—whether human, animal,

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<sup>46</sup> Girard, *Things Hidden*, 296-297.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, “Exemplary Virtue.”

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Girard, *Things Hidden*, 3-47.

or symbolic sacrifice—is re-enacted in order to re-instate harmony and maintain order. But, Girard emphasizes, this harmony is always dependent upon the presence of a victim. Interestingly, as a Christian, “Girard believes that the uniqueness of the Bible and of Christian faith is the progressive revelation of the problem of scapegoat victimization and the clear portrayal of the innocence of the victims, as well as the sinfulness represented in the need to continue sacrificing innocent victims (either within or outside religious institutions) to maintain order and harmony.”<sup>51</sup> This is most evident in the memory of Jesus’ death on the cross.<sup>52</sup>

Brown and his colleagues suggest that L’Arche communities are a counterpoint to mimetic rivalry and victimization. As such, he also proposes that the work of these communities can serve as an example of how individuals might escape mimetic desire and rivalry and become exemplars of the virtue of compassion. Brown does this by focusing on long-term L’Arche assistants and the narratives that they share when describing their experience in L’Arche over the years.<sup>53</sup>

L’Arche was founded by Jean Vanier and Father Thomas Philippe in the early 1960s, and now has homes established in more than thirty countries worldwide. L’Arche communities are groups of people who live together in a home-like setting, focusing on the care and support of people with developmental disabilities. In these unique communities, members with more visible disabilities—known as *core members*—

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<sup>51</sup> Brown, “Exemplary Virtue.”

<sup>52</sup> For a non-substitutionary theology of atonement utilizing the work of Girard, see T. Scott Daniels, “Passing the Peace: Worship that Shapes Nonsubstitutionary Convictions,” in *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 125-159.

<sup>53</sup> Brown, Garrels, and Reimer, *Mimesis and Compassion*.

live in community with caregivers who are known as “assistants.” According to Brown, a primary theme of L’Arche caregivers is that of downward mobility. Within these communities, desire and rivalry are acknowledged and disparaged. Caregivers seek to live for downward mobility that Brown describes as “an interpersonal posture without desire, competition, or exclusion.”<sup>54</sup> These themes are reinforced and encouraged through community narrative and ritual.<sup>55</sup>

The problem from the perspective of Girard is that desire and rivalry are universal. Much of Girard’s theory is based in literary analysis where he finds that even within protagonists of famous novels, mimetic desire is evident in what he calls “askesis for the sake of desire.”<sup>56</sup> Brown describes *askesis* as the practice of self-denial in order to obtain spiritual and religious goals. He goes on to point out that “askesis for the sake of desire” occurs when persons use *askesis* to hide their own mimetic desire and to stir metaphysical desire in others toward themselves.<sup>57</sup> Brown, Garrels, and Reimer explain,

The goal of *askesis* is to gain social favor and/or to possess desired objects, such as a lover, by turning oneself into a model for the metaphysical desire of others. While appearing virtuous to others, the novelistic hero’s *askesis* is more accurately a form of hypocrisy, a cover for the attainment of desires albeit in a more covert fashion. The character perceives that if they can disguise their own needs well enough, especially in a way that displays indifference to such needs, they can then be seen as possessing enormous ‘strength of soul.’ This illusory

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<sup>54</sup> Brown, “Exemplary Virtue.”

<sup>55</sup> This has obvious connection to Taylor’s concept of social imaginary and how people are initiated into one primarily through narrative and story.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, Garrels, and Reimer, *Mimesis and Compassion*, 5-6.

<sup>57</sup> Brown points out that this leads to forms of self-deception and to more intense and covert forms of rivalry.

image is used to draw admiration toward oneself and ultimately to proclaim oneself as more autonomous and therefore superior to others.<sup>58</sup>

From this point, Brown suggests that Girard develops his perspective on transformation.<sup>59</sup> By again looking at the protagonists of famous novels, Girard suggests that one is only able to escape his or her desire and rivalry, masked by *askesis*, when he or she is forced to face his or her own vulnerability and brokenness, as well as the consequences of his or her mimetic desire, and give up the illusion of autonomy and the desire for social status. MacIntyre's idea of "acknowledged dependence" connects at this point.

This understanding of transformation proves helpful in recognizing committed compassion in long-term L'Arche assistants. Within L'Arche, Brown distinguishes between novice and long-term assistants. Novice assistants are those who have served in a L'Arche community for one year or less. More than half of these assistants will quit within the first year of starting. Based in extensive analysis of self-identity interviews, Brown suggests that *askesis* for the sake of desire "is a real possibility for novice assistants who are trying to adjust, coming to terms with their own brokenness."<sup>60</sup> The research reveals that novice assistants are outwardly compassionate, yet mostly self-

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<sup>58</sup> Brown, Garrels, and Reimer, *Mimesis and Compassion*, 5. They go on to write, "Ironically, desire according to *askesis* not only sets the hero apart, but it does so in a way that creates an inordinate distance between himself and others – a divide that cannot be crossed without leading to disillusionment. The ultimate goal of acquiring genuine relationships with others can never be fulfilled since it will mean revealing one's fundamental illusion of autonomy. The closer others are drawn to the novelistic hero based on his or her admirable 'strength of soul', the more the hero has to push them away in order maintain this ascetic illusion."

<sup>59</sup> Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structures* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965). Brown cites this book.

<sup>60</sup> Brown, "Exemplary Virtue."

focused in how they describe the work they are doing in L'Arche.<sup>61</sup> One might say that they show functional rationality in their relationship to core members of L'Arche.

The more important question for Brown and for the purposes of this project is whether the descriptions of long-term assistants provide any evidence of change and transformation towards committed compassion. The research reveals that those who persevere “go through a period of discernment which weighs personal insight together with their experiences serving in L'Arche.”<sup>62</sup> Brown's research reveals that as assistants interact with core members (those with more obvious disabilities), they are able to confront and acknowledge their own vulnerability and disability, resulting in what he calls “a developmental transition.”<sup>63</sup> Brown goes on to speculate that the “processes detected by Girard in the transformation of the heroes in the great novels must happen over time in experienced L'Arche assistants for them to be able to care for the cognitively disabled over the long-term, while undergoing the consequent downward social mobility.”<sup>64</sup> Brown suggests that the L'Arche experience “breaks down askesis and shapes [the long-term assistant's] self-understanding around the semantics of caring, justice and bravery.”<sup>65</sup> This is cultivated by hospitable and reciprocal interactions with the core members, causing assistants to confront their own vulnerability and acknowledge

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<sup>61</sup> Brown, “Exemplary Virtue.” This same description could be used to describe the worship service mentioned earlier in this chapter that, when connected with Mountainside's core value of “compassionate action,” revealed the presence of “functional rationality.”

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

their own dependency in deep and profound ways. Brown concludes his analysis by stating, “Genuine compassion emerges in relationships between those who might be able to hide their brokenness through feigned *askesis* (assistants) and those who cannot (core members). Thus, core members (the disabled) are the prophets and teachers that engender transformation in assistants toward genuine virtue.”<sup>66</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, this serves as an incredible example of how the practice of reciprocal hospitality might lead to committed missional life. The assistants who stay long-term in L’Arche communities are those who undergo transformation. This transformation happens as they practice a radical welcome of the other that moves beyond generalized benevolence to an acknowledged dependence upon the other. It is this type of transformation that is necessary if Mountainside is to move from missional experimentation to missional commitment.

Brown concludes his lecture by offering suggestions on how the conclusions of this research can be utilized, beyond L’Arche, by other faith communities in forming people into individuals capable of committed virtues of caring, compassion, and justice. He suggests the following language and practice:

- Close integration with, and inclusion of, persons who are disadvantaged, distressed, or disabled.
- Imitation and social contagion of a life of compassion and interdependence.
- Narratives that focus on the fact that all are disabled, distressed, or disadvantaged at various times and in various ways.
- Rituals and practices that make manifest vulnerability and interdependence.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Brown, “Exemplary Virtue.”

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

The next chapter will develop the ministry strategy of this project, utilizing Brown's suggestions as well as other theological concepts highlighted throughout the previous chapters, as the basic framework.

PART THREE

MINISTRY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER 5

### RELATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS OF SHARED HOSPITALITY

As stated in Chapter 3, leadership in a church is about “cultivating an environment wherein the Spirit of God might call forth the missional imagination of the people of God.”<sup>1</sup> The work of cultivating this type of environment is a means of grace. For the purposes of this project, this work involved prayerfully implementing new practice in hopes of deepening the understanding of Mountainside’s memories and hope, trusting that God might use this work to expand the social imaginary of Mountainside, thus moving the church towards missional commitment.

Based in the theology and frameworks presented in the previous two chapters, this project has tested the thesis that moving Mountainside from missional experimentation to missional commitment will require participation in relational engagements of shared hospitality with other groups in the neighborhood. More specifically, the practice implemented in this project has been Mountainside’s participation in relational engagements of shared hospitality with MYA. This chapter will describe the

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<sup>1</sup> Roxburgh, “Missional Leadership” (class lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February 2006).

development and implementation of this practice and the following chapter will provide observations and analysis of the implementation.

### **A Praxis Approach to Congregational Change**

The implementation of new practice with the hope of congregational change and transformation cannot be done in a vacuum. This work must be done while being mindful of the actual life of the congregation and God's ongoing work among them. Churches, being rooted in their local context, are called to engage that context in sacramental ways. Branson helps describe this movement when he writes,

We live our lives in a world of neighbors and jobs and schools and civic life. This is the context—the environment of a congregation. We engage that context—we work and watch and listen and converse and befriend. We also do research, seek justice, evangelize, create coalitions, and serve. Then when we gather as congregations (everyone together or in smaller groups) we reflect with each other—we speak and listen and analyze and study and pray. We also worship and meditate and discern and imagine. This prepares us for more faithfully reengaging our context.<sup>2</sup>

The work being described here is praxis.<sup>3</sup> Praxis is a rhythm or movement of the congregation between action and reflection. Branson again is helpful when he writes,

In study/reflection we are changed as the Holy Spirit leads the community, shaping our meanings and practices as we deal with the texts and each other. During engagement/action we are transformed as we participate in the Holy Spirit's generative work among neighbors in the world. Then we are different as we come back to study/reflection. Thus we hear each other differently, we are

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Lau Branson, "Praxis and Social Structures," Fuller Theological Seminary student website, <http://moodle.fuller.edu/mod/resource/view.php?id=294> (accessed February 2007). Branson also covers this material in "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," 112-117 and *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership*, 59-77.

<sup>3</sup> Branson writes regarding "praxis": "This term, rooted in Aristotle's concept of the interaction of theory and practice in the realm of ethics and politics, is often confused with practice. Critical theory has challenged the positivist sequence of theory-to-practice, a fragmented framework that posits pure theory leading to instrumentalist application." Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," 115.

engaged by texts differently, and we continue to be transformed. Praxis is this whole, this mutually transforming and changing set of practices and meanings.<sup>4</sup>

In considering the history of the relationship of Mountainside and MYA one can easily see this praxis lived out. Within this relationship there is ongoing movement from engagement/action to study/reflection on the part of both Mountainside and MYA. As noted in the history given in Chapter 1, this engagement/action began with my relationship with Gutierrez and continued as Gutierrez came and shared with Mountainside about MYA on a few occasions. The Spiritual Discernment Process, also described in Chapter 1, was a time of study/reflection on the life of Mountainside as a whole, and eventually led to significant study/reflection on Mountainside's relationship with MYA. The four-month experiment that the two groups embarked on was a movement from study/reflection to engagement/action and brings us to the work of this project. Both Mountainside and MYA must keep this history in mind as both groups consider implementing new practices in hopes of continued transformation.

Before moving to description of the development and implementation of the new practices, it also must be noted that praxis is what makes conversion of churches possible. Branson proposes that in the movement between engagement/action and study/reflection churches, and the people that make them up, "are converted into Christlikeness."<sup>5</sup> He suggests that a church's conversion is about moving from irresponsible to responsible practices. Branson writes, "The New Testament texts—Epistles and Gospels—show how the praxis rhythm of disciples and churches was expected to deepen the maturity, the

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<sup>4</sup> Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," 116-117. The connections with this description and what I have been describing as social imaginary are obvious.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

transformation, of these new God-breathed social entities and their individual participants.”<sup>6</sup> The hope of this project is that as more responsible practices are developed and implemented, God will use them in Mountainside’s ongoing transformation.

### Study/Reflection

After the four-month experiment with MYA had come to an end, leaders of both Mountainside and MYA decided to continue with some of the activities. Though tutoring did not happen during the summer, there were still chances to be involved by volunteering on Friday nights or participating in three worship gatherings that were held during this time. But it was during this season that two of the primary leaders of the group moved away and the relationship began to lose much of its momentum. When the fall came around again, there were only a few people who continued to help with tutoring, there were only two people helping on Friday nights (one was a volunteer and one was now a paid staff member of MYA), and attendance at the combined worship gatherings had diminished for both groups. For the reasons presented in Chapter 2 as obstacles to missional life, the people of Mountainside and MYA began to show less enthusiasm and commitment to the work they had been doing together.

As momentum began to wane, the team of leaders guiding the experiment came together in order to reflect on what was going on as well as to imagine what the next move of engagement/action might be. During these three meetings the group celebrated the completion of the experiment and some of the good work that had been done between

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<sup>6</sup> Branson, “Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church,” 117.

the two groups, but the team also was able to acknowledge the loss of energy and excitement surrounding the experiment and verbalize some of the reasons that contributed to this decrease in momentum. The team began to wonder what a sustainable relationship with MYA might look like in light of the challenges.

The combination of these meetings, conversations that stemmed from them, as well as dialogue with Gutierrez helped clarify some of the challenges for maintaining commitment from both groups. Aware of the massive cultural, generational, socio-economic, and theological differences present in the relationship, it seemed to the group and to Gutierrez that the primary challenge was being more intentional to the idea of sharing reciprocal hospitality. This time of study/reflection revealed that even though the initial hope was that the two groups might share reciprocal hospitality, getting in a setting that made this possible had proven to be extremely difficult. While attempts at meeting more apparent needs like financial and educational support had happened, the team recognized that most of the activities implemented in the four-month experiment did not lead to reciprocal hospitality or acknowledged dependence on one another. The team concluded that if the relationship was to be sustained on any kind of level, Mountainside and MYA needed to work harder at creating spaces where reciprocal hospitality was shared.

These observations and analyses revealed the boundary to Mountainside's social imaginary discussed in Chapter 4. Though the church's initial time of dwelling in Luke 10 had led to language of hospitality and reciprocity, the practices implemented did not adequately embody the language being used. Functional rationality had continued to be a

boundary to Mountainside's social imaginary.<sup>7</sup> Using different language but coming to the same conclusion, the group decided that new practices and a renewed commitment to the language of "reciprocal hospitality" would be essential if a commitment to this relationship from both groups was going to be established.

The context within the experiment that had best cultivated an environment of reciprocal hospitality was the times of common worship. While the other activities were certainly positive and helpful, the reciprocal hospitality and acknowledged dependence needed in order to sustain missional life was lacking in them. During its times of study/reflection, the guide team, and Gutierrez especially, discerned that the two groups needed to start with the common worship gatherings in moving forward. This study/reflection on engagement/action that had already been done led to a reimagining of the worship gatherings and the elements they would need to entail. While Mountainside members were still encouraged to mentor and tutor at MYA, it was hoped that these gatherings would become the focus in moving forward.

#### Engagement/Action: Re-Imagined Worship Gatherings as Means of Grace

As stated before, the work of this project was to implement new practices of reciprocal hospitality into the relationship of Mountainside and MYA, thus expanding Mountainside's social imaginary beyond the boundary of functional rationality and *askesis* for the sake of desire, so that God might call forth missional commitment among

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<sup>7</sup> I would also posit that if a study was done on the social imaginary of MYA, functional rationality might also be evident as a boundary to missional commitment for them. As noted in Chapter 1, most, if not all, of the relationships that MYA has with other groups in the city are financial in nature. The primary reciprocity that I can observe is the good feelings that these groups have when they offer money to help. If money dries up or volunteering ceases, the commitment from MYA also ceases. Functional rationality is an obstacle to missional commitment in general.

us. These re-imagined worship gatherings, offered as a means of grace, were this new practice. The gatherings were re-imagined with a renewed focus given to the praxis of community, hospitality, and Eucharistic liturgy. Using the categories of Eucharistic liturgy and the frameworks suggested by Brown in Chapter 4, the remainder of this chapter will give general description to this new practice and how study/reflection moved into engagement/action. Observation and analysis of the gatherings will be given in Chapter 6.

Each of the four worship gatherings was intentionally organized as Eucharistic liturgy and contained the elements of Breath, Gathering, Food, and Work. Broadly, these elements were implemented as movements throughout the liturgy. Though the ways in which these elements were implemented varied from one gathering to the next, there was intention on my part to make sure that each of the elements was included in one way or another during each time of worship.

Also included in each time of worship were elements of reciprocal hospitality that can be understood well utilizing Brown's suggestions described in Chapter 4.<sup>8</sup> The goal of the leaders was that this type of reciprocal hospitality, gleaned from both Luke 10 as well as some of Brown's work, be embodied throughout Mountainside's liturgies. As a

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<sup>8</sup> These suggestions were offered in Chapter 4 in the section entitled "Long-term L'Arche Assistants and Missional Commitment." While these liturgies were planned and implemented prior to these suggestions being stated so clearly in the lecture cited, Brown's suggestions provide clear description of what had become Mountainside's growing understanding of hospitality. As a founding member of Mountainside, Brown has been infusing this understanding of hospitality into the social imaginary of Mountainside from the very beginning. Brown has done extensive research and writing on ways that churches might embrace those with more observable disability in receptive, creative, and compassionate ways. This writing stems, in large part, from his wife Janet's disability due to a spinal cord injury suffered in a car accident.

reminder, the suggestions given by Brown in terms of churches shaping people capable of committed virtues of caring, compassion, and justice were:

- Close integration with, and inclusion of, persons who are disadvantaged, distressed, or disabled.<sup>9</sup>
- Imitation and social contagion of a life of compassion and interdependence.
- Narratives that focus on the fact that all are disabled, distressed, or disadvantaged at various times and in various ways.
- Rituals and practices that make manifest vulnerability and interdependence.<sup>10</sup>

What follows is a general description of the worship gatherings and how elements of Eucharistic life as well as Brown's suggestions for forming virtues were used in organizing the liturgies.

### **Breath**

Each of the joint times of worship began with invocation. The importance of this aspect of our worship was that it theologically framed the strange gathering that the groups were participating in. During this moment the celebrant (sometimes me and other times Gutierrez), while acknowledging the odd work that God was doing and the feelings of unfamiliarity that came with it, would welcome the people into the joy of the Lord. At this point the celebrant would acknowledge that it was the Holy Breath who had gathered us, who was the vivifying force of the work we were doing, and who was among us those nights. Framing the gatherings in this way was an attempt to move our attention off of

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<sup>9</sup> For the work of this project, I added the description "observably different" to this first suggestion. As Brown convincingly describes, long-term L'Arche caregivers are those that realize their own "disadvantage, distress, and disability" through their relationships with the core members. While this is a hoped for result of Mountainside's work with MYA, I expanded this particular suggestion fearing that by leaving it "as is" might invite a functional rational approach to the work done here.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, "Exemplary Virtue."

ourselves and to open us up to the Other who had gathered us and the other in our midst. It was a prayer that God might take this gathering of people and the work we were doing and make us a sacramental witness to the work of God in Christ in our neighborhoods.

Throughout the remainder of our gatherings there were other prayers that would again remind us of God's presence. These included written prayers for relevant issues in our local neighborhoods like our schools and immigration reform, guided spontaneous prayer that was followed by the entire group praying the Lord's Prayer, as well as prayers of thanksgiving offered prior to receiving the Eucharist or having dinner. The variety and timing of the prayers provided an intentional focus on the presence of God among us as we moved through the Eucharistic liturgy together.

### **Gathering**

After the invocation, the liturgy then moved into elements of worship that can be described as gathering. These were activities done by the group that further opened us up to one another and to God and would lead us towards the hosting of God's Word and receiving the Eucharist. The leaders planning the liturgies expected that these gatherings would have an odd, strange, and even awkward feel. Though there were certainly relationships that had been cultivated during the four-month experiment and friendships were being established, bringing together for worship two larger groups of people who generally come from very different social locations was unlike any experience that any of us were used to. In terms of Brown's suggestions, our coming together was an attempt at including and being in close integration with people who are disadvantaged or distressed. More specifically, it was an attempt at being in relationship with those that are

observably different and other. Our hunch was that disadvantage and distress as well as difference and otherness would be apparent in all of us at a variety of levels. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6, but this hunch proved to be correct.

Each of the four times of worship contained different gathering elements. Some of these elements were Passing of the Peace, break dancing and drama performances by MYA students, music leaders of both groups playing instruments together and leading the entire group in singing, the sharing of testimonies of God's goodness, celebrating the baptisms of members of MYA, as well as fun activities that invited people to move about the room and mingle with other people in the group. Each liturgy contained elements that we hoped would further encourage the opening of ourselves to the other.

Once again noting Brown's suggestions, the leaders also hoped that these gathering activities might provide an initial attempt at imitation and social contagion of a life of compassion and interdependence, thus embodying the praxis of community with people from the neighborhood. While the depths of this suggestion from Brown are far beyond what can happen in four times of worship, we thought that steps could be taken towards this. Activities such as music, testimony to God's goodness, group activities, and passing of the peace all have the potential to embody the type of compassion and interdependence that we hoped would be imitated by the group as a whole.

## **Food**

As mentioned in Chapter 4, banquet imagery is one of the central images of life in the Bible. Food is given to us by God as a way of entering into the joy of the Lord as well as means for being filled up that we might go out and get hungry again in service of

the Lord. With this Scriptural emphasis in mind, each of the four worship gatherings included food as a central focus. This element was embodied in the most basic and fundamental way by sharing a meal together at the end of our gatherings. On two occasions this was a potluck that everyone participated in and on the other two occasions Mountainside and MYA provided the meal respectively. The hope was that these times of giving and receiving, eating and serving, and preparing and cleaning, would provide opportunities for reciprocal hospitality among us.

Beyond sharing meals together, this element of worship was also embodied in some of our worship practices. At some point during all four gatherings we were fed together by the preaching of the scriptures. While the preaching moment of the liturgy served primarily to lead us into the Eucharist, it was important that these gatherings include preaching. Mountainside, being a part of the Church of the Nazarene, and MYA, with its roots in charismatic Pentecostal churches, both share the transformational preaching of God's Word as a part of their respective traditions. The preaching moment in each of these liturgies was to provide opportunity for us to acknowledge our dependence on God as well intentionally open ourselves to the work of God through the preaching of God's Word. Again noting Brown's suggestions, this was also a way that narratives focusing on the fact that all are disabled, distressed, or disadvantaged at various times and in various ways could be highlighted. Advantageously, these could be highlighted in a context of the presence, grace and love of God.

A final way that this element was included in our worship gatherings was with the celebration of the Eucharist. During three of the four gatherings, our liturgy ended with all of us coming forward to the table of the Lord. The hope of implementing this element

was that as we gathered together at the table and served one another the bread and wine, we would sense ourselves being gathered up into the Body of Christ, thus uniting us in committed, interdependent, and sacramental ways. Once again this aspect to the liturgy has obvious connection to Brown's suggestions. Brown's suggestion to initiate rituals and practices that make manifest vulnerability and interdependence is lived out in the celebration of this important practice within the social imaginary of Mountainside. For in the celebration of the Eucharist, the vulnerability of Jesus is remembered as well as the interdependence that we have with one another as those made to be children of God through the work of our vulnerable Savior.

## **Work**

The final element of the Eucharistic life implemented into the liturgies was work. As noted in Chapter 4, this work is not to be understood in terms of employment, but as common labor offered as a means of grace. When understood in these terms, much of what we are about in the preparation and implementation of this practice, as well as future rhythms of praxis, is to be considered work. As was described in Chapter 4, when people work together, offering their work to God and waiting for God to act in, through, or despite it, the praxis of community takes shape.

For the purposes of these worship gatherings there was a variety of ways that shared work between people of Mountainside and MYA would be done. We recognized that simply by gathering together and participating in some of the activities described above (music, dancing, prayer, cooking), there would be work that would need to take place in order for the worship to happen. Beyond that, there would be essential work like

opening doors for people, setting tables, organizing chairs, cleaning dishes, and preparing food that must not be overlooked when thinking about doing work. More specifically and intentionally though, the work of children, namely play, was weaved into the liturgical flow.

As was mentioned prior, there is generational difference when it comes to MYA and Mountainside. This difference is primarily evident in the amount of adolescent teenagers that are a part of MYA and the complete lack of teenagers among Mountainside. But while this striking difference is apparent, both groups have a number of pre-school and elementary age children in their fellowships. In light of the youthfulness of the gatherings as well as the importance of getting people to work/play together, the group designing these gatherings thought that playing games would be an important element in our worship. This element of the liturgy proved to be vital in cultivating an environment of reciprocal hospitality. This paper will now turn to Chapter 6 and observations and analysis of the implementation of these re-imagined gatherings.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Over a ten-month period, Mountainside and MYA came together four times to worship and share reciprocal hospitality. This work tested the thesis that moving Mountainside from missional experimentation to missional commitment would require participation in relational engagements of shared hospitality with other groups in the neighborhood. Undergirding this thesis was the hypothesis that as this new practice was implemented into the social imaginary of Mountainside, the language of Mountainside might change, either in relational descriptions as pertained to the people of MYA or revealing a deepened understanding of Mountainside's praxis of community and hospitality. Any change would be considered evidence of expansion in Mountainside's social imaginary and therefore a move towards missional commitment.

#### **Qualitative Research Methods: Participant Observation and Appreciative Inquiry**

The research done in this project was qualitative research (as opposed to the more traditional quantitative research). Qualitative research rests on the interpretation of data,

collected in a variety of different ways.<sup>1</sup> The primary means of collecting data for this project was through participant observation and appreciative inquiry (hereafter, AI). This chapter will describe and evaluate the data collected from each of the worship gatherings, analyzing whether there is evidence of expansion in Mountainside's social imaginary.

### Participant Observation: Getting on the Balcony

The meaning of participant observation, like any well-named term, can be gleaned largely from its title. First of all, this form of qualitative research is about participating with the people and groups that one is researching. Unlike demographic studies or other types of research where the researcher maintains a more distant posture, participant observation is about engaging and learning with and from a particular group of people. It is critical that subjects of the study be treated as human beings and not simply as objects being studied. In his *Introduction to Qualitative Research*, Uwe Flick writes, "In participating, the researcher methodologically authenticates his theoretical premise and furthermore he makes the research subject, the other, not an object but a dialogical partner."<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, it is about observation. While a researcher is participating with a particular group, he or she is also observing, paying close attention to the language, relationships, and practices of the group. While doing this observation, it is critical that the observer be aware of the ways his or her participation affects the data that is

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<sup>1</sup> Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 295.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

collected.<sup>3</sup> Salzman describes participant observation as “living for a good period among the people; observing their economic, political, and ritual activities; and speaking with them to learn their perspectives, attitudes, and values.”<sup>4</sup> Describing participant observation further, he writes,

Participant observation includes such activities as attending rituals and ceremonies, going to the fields and pastures and fishing areas to watch and even help with production activities, sitting in on court cases, following political deliberations, engaging in play and debates, and arguments, as well as having informal conversations with local people, holding formal interviews, doing surveys, and collecting oral knowledge and written documents.<sup>5</sup>

This form of research was practiced by the group of leaders that developed and guided all of the activities in which Mountainside has participated with MYA. (I served as leader of this group). After each gathering I would record my observations from the evening and would also contact a focus group of Mountainside members—including the people of this group—asking for observations and stories stemming from the previous time of worship. This was done via telephone calls, face-to-face conversations, as well as through a questionnaire sent via email.<sup>6</sup> The goal in this research was to analyze both the language and practices of people of Mountainside and MYA, evaluating it in terms of the goals of the project.

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<sup>3</sup> Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 220.

<sup>4</sup> Salzman, *Understanding Culture*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> This questionnaire will be discussed in further detail in the next section on Appreciative Inquiry.

Another helpful way to think about this research is the leadership concept of “getting on the balcony,” discussed by Heifetz and Linsky.<sup>7</sup> This idea is about getting perspective in the midst of action. It is about mentally moving to the balcony, while physically remaining on the dance floor, in order to gain a broader and more robust perspective of what is going on, paying close attention to both oneself and the other participants. It is about asking the question, “What is really going on here?” and, explain the authors, “trying to see the subtleties that normally go right by us.”<sup>8</sup> In practicing participant observation as leader, I was also trying to “get on the balcony.”

### Appreciative Inquiry Questions

The second form of qualitative research utilized in this project was to ask a group of participants a set of questions. This group consisted of twenty-five people, and responses were received back from seventeen of them throughout the ten-month project, most of them responding numerous times. The questions were asked prior to the first gathering and then again after each individual gathering. The intent of the questions was to better determine whether the social imaginary of Mountainside had been expanded towards missional commitment. In the responses to the questions given, close attention was paid to whether, in light of the new practice implemented, the relational descriptions of the people of Mountainside might change in regards to MYA, or whether there was evidence of a deepening in understanding in Mountainside’s praxis of community or hospitality.

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<sup>7</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 51-74.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

The questions used loosely followed the format of AI. AI was chosen because it holds the same understanding of language presented in this paper. Branson writes, “AI provides an organization-wide mode for initiating and discerning narratives and practices that are generative (creative and life giving).”<sup>9</sup> This understanding is further revealed in some of the assumptions that AI rests upon. Branson summarizes these assumptions, stating:

1. In every organization, some things work well.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Asking questions influences the group.
4. People have more confidence in the journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past.
5. If we carry parts of the past into the future, they should be what is best about the past.
6. It is important to value differences.
7. The language we use creates our reality.
8. Organizations are heliotropic.
9. Outcomes should be useful.
10. All steps are collaborative.<sup>10</sup>

Especially important for the work of this project are assumptions 1, 2, 3, and 7.

Assumption 1 was important because the leadership team was hoping for generative narratives and wanted to focus on things that were working well. Assumptions 2, 3, and 7 get at the importance of asking good questions, as questions play an important role in shifting descriptions and, therefore, potentially expanding the social imaginary of Mountainside. The asking of these questions had the potential to affect the work and outcomes of the project. Using the terminology of this project, it can be said that AI crafts and asks questions that might prompt and uncover the generative memories, hopes,

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<sup>9</sup> Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

and practices of a group, thus revealing its social imaginary, and whether any transformation has occurred.

The questions used in AI follow a general flow, which is described here in terms of Mountainside and MYA. The first question is intended to draw the person into the most encouraging and motivating narratives pertaining to their relationship with people of MYA. The next few questions pursue values or elements that the person thinks are most important in the relationship between Mountainside and MYA, followed by a summary question that attempts to surface the single most important aspect. The final question explores possible futures or hopes for the relationship of Mountainside and MYA, done in the context of the memories shared.<sup>11</sup> In addition to these AI questions, I added a question that attempts to draw out relational descriptions and whether or not shared hospitality was leading to openness to the other.

Three questions (each with one or more sub-questions) have been used for this project. The first is: 1) Remembering your entire experience with MYA, when were you most alive, most motivated and excited about your involvement? The sub-questions are: a) What made it exciting? b) Who else was involved? c) What happened? d) What was your part? e) Describe what you felt? The second question is: What do you value most about our relationship with the students and families of MYA? The sub-questions are: a) What activities or ingredients or ways of life are most important? b) What are the best features of this relationship? c) In continuing to pursue this vision and develop this relationship what from Sunday night seemed to work best? The third question is: Do you have any ideas that might help us in pursuing this vision further? The sub-question is:

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<sup>11</sup> Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations*, 68-69.

Have you met anyone from MYA that you would consider a friend, someone you would interact with if you saw him or her in public?<sup>12</sup>

### **Research and Analysis**

The research and analysis focuses on the four gatherings between Mountainside and MYA, as well as the first four months of relationship between the two groups prior to the first gathering. For each stage, participant observations and AI questions will be discussed. The initial observations in the first four months were gathered after the four-month experiment had been completed and prior to the first re-imagined worship gathering. They serve as a base line for the research of the project.

#### **Prior to the First Gathering: Initial Observations**

The summary given in Chapter 1 provides a thorough description of my observations prior to this initial meeting. My overall sense was that the initial experiment had successfully moved Mountainside across boundaries in our community. Having completed that experiment, and observing a loss of momentum in the relationship, I recognized that our next adaptive challenge was going to be moving from missional experimentation to missional commitment.

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<sup>12</sup> While these questions and the means by which they were posed served the purposes of this paper, a more thorough use of AI, including asking these questions in groups rather than individually, would have benefited the ongoing work by utilizing the generative power of asking questions in a more helpful way. Asking questions of individuals can be energizing and can work towards social change, but asking questions in groups where people are hearing the narratives of others as well as themselves, would be much more so.

### Prior to the First Gathering: AI Responses

There were a number of responses to the first question during the initial set of interviews. While a few people were fairly vague in their descriptions, other narratives centered on the two worship events held during the experiment, particular elements of those worship events, as well as tutoring. No one mentioned volunteering or providing a meal on Friday nights. Three people described casual interactions with people of MYA in their neighborhood as their most energizing experiences. The responses to the values and summary questions focused almost completely on the two common worship gatherings with a few people highlighting the sharing of food. The responses to the future question primarily brought ideas about activities such as games, soccer, volunteering, music, school visits, and continuing the worship gatherings. Other responses were about how Mountainside might help newer people at church understand the relationship as well as intentionally communicate to the people of MYA how important they are to the church. One person suggested starting mentoring relationships. The responses to the relational question were answered affirmatively by the three people who had shared casual interactions with people from MYA in their neighborhoods as their most energizing experiences.

### Gathering #1: Participant Observations

This particular evening there was more energy in the room than is usual for Mountainside's worship services. This was likely due to the increased size of the group, the enthusiasm that comes when doing something intentional with shared meaning, as well as the energy that MYA generally brings. MYA's energy stems from their age, their

culture, and Gutierrez, their leader. The people of Mountainside were generally blessed by the increase of energy in the room, though there were a few people who appeared to be overwhelmed.

The first aspect of the evening worth noting was the moment that close to half of the people of MYA showed up all at once, bringing with them an enormous amount and variety of food. While this particular evening was a potluck, the people of MYA provided the majority of the food. The liturgy of the evening was energetic and lively, with people of both groups participating in the music, prayers, as well as the serving of Eucharist. A group of boys from MYA did break dancing and everyone was united in their enthusiasm for their work. Worship was followed by a shared meal. After praying I invited the guests from MYA to move to the food line first. Gutierrez publicly interrupted me, saying, “No, No. This is about sharing hospitality. We don’t need to go first.”

The highlight of the night was playing games following the meal. Two men of Mountainside organized the games and a variety of people from both groups participated. These men were very good at including people, shouting out names so that people could get to know one another, and encouraging people to participate in the work that was going on. At one point during the evening Gutierrez said to me, “We spend all of this time in city meetings trying to figure out how to create community and yet here it is! We have got to do this more often.”

## Gathering #1: AI Questions

For a few people who responded, this particular evening had become their favorite memory with MYA. As for the values and summary questions, responses given focused primarily on the food and games. Regarding the shared meal, one person commented, “Somehow we ended up less intermixed when eating dinner than even during the service, so that did not work as well as it could have. However, it seemed like having dinner together is moving in the right direction.” Another person wrote, “It’s hard to interact over food sometimes if you don’t have anything in common to chat about, but playing rocks!” Another stated, “I had a great time, and I LOVED that both groups shared in the bringing of the food.” Still another wrote, “I would love for us to invite MYA regularly to come and eat with us (food just seems to make introductions and everything less awkward!).” Other comments referenced the games. One person wrote, “It seemed that all were having a good time.” Another stated, “Playing rocks! We have a common thing to focus on so it helps to create trust and relationships. And the fun competition probably helps too.” Another member wrote, “I loved having them there, our service being a bit different, pushing our Mountainside community to step out of our comfort zone, even to play games.” Still another stated, “I thought the whole thing was really great. The games afterward were definitely the highlight for me. It was joyful to see the kids and parents from MYA having so much fun together and with our church family.”

In regards to the future question, one person expressed the challenge of cross-cultural worship, wondering whether this sort of service is sustainable in the long run. He stated, “A very good outcome of these events would be to become trusted friends

sufficiently to be integral parts of the same larger community, to know one another's needs, and to be able to help one another." Another response to the future question was that a language-exchange could be started where people from Mountainside and MYA would teach each other conversational Spanish and English. This idea was shared by a few people involved in a small group at Mountainside which is focused on issues pertaining to immigration.

Two narratives were shared in response to the relational description question. The first was about a long conversation that one member had with an adolescent woman from MYA. The person describing the interaction used the woman's first name and used descriptions like "open," "caring," and "safe" when describing how both women felt. The other narrative was from another member of Mountainside, who wrote about a situation in which she needed to quickly get something inside the local YMCA, and had left her young children in the car while sprinting in to get it. She reported that while she was running in, "a woman smiled warmly like she knows me and says, 'Hi.' She notices that I don't recognize her and says, 'We saw each other at church.' (I then did recognize the man she was with.)" The woman then explained her situation to the woman from MYA that she was in a hurry with kids waiting in the car. In response, the woman offered to watch the kids in the car while she got what she needed. She reported this as a "very cool interaction."

#### Gathering #2: Participant Observations

The liturgical flow of this gathering was similar to the first: food was provided by both groups, there was a good turnout in terms of attendance, there was more energy in

the room than is normal for Mountainside worship, leadership was shared, and there was a time for food and games at the end.

The most important aspect of this particular evening was the fact that a woman whose children are active with MYA shared about her immigration experience. For the previous three months Mountainside had been focusing on immigration in a small group as well as during worship. People had become frustrated with the focus in worship, primarily because of a lack of action or response to what was being shared. Having this woman share her story brought what had been understood as “issues” down into real life. In introducing this woman I shared with both groups about the importance of immigration for Christians living in Southern California based on Mountainside’s conviction that “God seems to show up in the seemingly most God-forsaken places.”<sup>13</sup> I suggested that if Mountainside was going to be about what God is doing in the world, the church needed our friends from MYA to help us. My sense was that this introduction was encouraging and helpful for both MYA and Mountainside. I heard from a number of people from MYA that night and in the days following that issues of immigration are not talked about in churches. This testimony was an important practice of sharing hospitality.

#### Gathering #2: AI Questions

The responses following the second gathering focused largely on the woman’s story that was shared. One person wrote that it was “the most real ‘immigration minute’ we have had and did a lot to help me get a feel for MYA folk.” Another individual stated

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<sup>13</sup> Roxburgh, “Missional Leadership.”

that it was “meaningful.” Still another wrote that the introduction of her sharing was helpful for better understanding. Another respondent wrote that it was “wonderful” and helped to make the “immigration discussion concrete and important.” And another person stated, “I feel more deeply about immigration and justice issues. They bring to life our shared beliefs.”

The responses to the values questions also pertained to the story, the sharing of food, as well as worshipping together. “Diversity” was mentioned as a broad description. One person noted that the value of the gatherings is in what they “represent in terms of a very local and real form of mission” and that it “feels a bit instrumental, but until I get to know the actual people better, I cannot shift to the right sort of valuing of relationships with specific persons and families.” Another person stated,

When we meet with MYA folks, there is a massive, bodily reminder in our midst that life is complex and wonderfully textured and that God’s good work sometimes takes place in circumstances very unlike what we are used to. It reminds us, too, that worship is not about style or correctness or ease, but about yielding ourselves to the sovereign love of God. Further meeting with MYA makes it much harder to forget that God is at work all over the world and that such things as “secularization” are not only over-reported, but also Euro- and ethnocentric. MYA is also a means of grace for us in other ways. Being with them gets us off of ourselves in more ways than I think any of us could articulate.

The future question again solicited responses about the importance of the worship gatherings. One person emphasized this by highlighting the fact that MYA had changed the time of their tutoring sessions, thus eliminating the possibility of most people of Mountainside from participating. Other ideas shared were mentoring and a language exchange.

In response to the relational question one person stated that her interactions with people of MYA around town are the most meaningful aspect of Mountainside’s work,

and that she sensed that these were meaningful for the people of MYA as well. She shared a story about talking with two boys (using their names) from MYA while she was on a run around town. She sensed that it was “valuable to all of us.” The only other responses to the relational question was that people would recognize Gutierrez if they saw him.

### Gathering #3: Participant Observation

The third gathering took place at the YMCA. MYA leadership asked if Mountainside, as well as two other pastors from the area, would come and lead a baptismal service so that people of MYA could be baptized. I was also asked to teach the baptismal class prior to the gathering. In order to participate in this, Mountainside moved its normal worship service to the YMCA. With Mountainside facilitating it, the liturgy for the evening was similar to previous gatherings. While there were no games this time, after the baptisms MYA provided a meal for everyone who came. A couple of people of Mountainside ended up bringing a few items to share.

The baptisms and food were the highlights of the evening. The fact that MYA hosted on this occasion, providing both the space and the food, created opportunity for Mountainside to primarily be on the receiving end of the hospitality. The people of MYA appeared to be much more comfortable in their own space, and I observed them initiating more conversations and connections than they had while worshipping at Mountainside’s location. They conveyed a sense of pride in hosting this particular gathering, celebrating the baptisms, and serving the food.

### Gathering #3: AI Questions

Once again there were a couple of people who referenced this gathering in response to the introductory question, one person suggesting that this “was the best gathering ever!” Responses to the values and summary questions highlighted worshipping at MYA’s location. People noted feeling “way more comfortable on their turf, especially to pursue conversations” and “less concerned with being too intimidating.” Another person stated that he felt “like I belong to them.” Still another made mention of the food being “fabulous,” but the respondent felt empathy for the amount of work that some of the women of MYA were doing in preparing it. Other values mentioned were diversity, especially having “adolescents” around, as well as “having fun together and working on things together, like music.” While one person observed that the groups were segregated this time during dinner, another person noted the following:

I think that what I value most about our relationship with MYA would be that we're mingling with the people God has surrounded us with. Instead of separating from our neighbors, we are making a big effort to mix. It's very easy to ignore people around us. This is a very good intentional practice that at times, I must admit, makes me feel like we're trying too hard or something. But growth feels that way usually. We sometimes need to just feel physically challenged to do something different. Different can then become the norm for us and we'll challenge ourselves some more.

The responses to the future question suggested that we continue with the quarterly worship gatherings as well as try to find other ways to connect through food or activity. The relational question again solicited narratives. The first story was about someone from MYA asking a member of Mountainside to teach her how to put dreadlocks in her hair. The second narrative was a long conversation that two city leaders, one from MYA

and one from Mountainside, had about tension going on in their neighborhood stemming from the shootings that happened the year before. The woman from MYA is a friend of two families whose children were killed independently by rival gangs. After sitting with one of the families during the court hearing regarding their child's alleged murderer, the other family was upset with her. That evening the two women decided to approach the city together, asking them to memorialize one of the victims as a sign to the upset family that this woman wanted to support their family as well.

#### Gathering #4: Participant Observations

This particular gathering was the least attended by both groups. In light of the popularity of the games during the first two gatherings, and that there were no games during the third one, the evening began with crowd-breaker activities. These were understood as work done together. Following the games we moved through the liturgy in similar fashion to the other gatherings. The speaker this evening was Rev. Marcos Canales. Canales has extensive experience in pastoral leadership in bilingual contexts as well as in working with Latino adolescents.<sup>14</sup> The plan was to have him preach in Spanish and English so that parents of MYA students who primarily speak Spanish could be more involved. Due to the smaller group of people of MYA in attendance, he ended up preaching in English only.

The crowd-breaker activities worked well. There was mingling and interaction at levels that the previous gatherings had not cultivated. There was also a strong sense of joy and laughter as people moved about the room and conversed. While Canales did a

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<sup>14</sup> Canales had previously led Mountainside in a seminar regarding issues surrounding immigration.

nice job preaching, having him preach in English only may have left people wondering why he had come in the first place. Once again the food was a highlight for people. Though the group was smaller this time, there was wonderful interaction happening around the shared meal. Both groups spent time cleaning up together afterward.

#### Gathering #4: AI Questions

Responses to the questions focused on many of the same themes as previous weeks with one person noting that this gathering was her favorite time with MYA. Responses to the value and summary questions focused almost completely on the crowd breakers. One person noted, “The silliness of the evening made for an easier connection with MYA.” Another wrote, “We still seemed to gravitate to people we already knew—but less than usual.” And still another stated, “The thing about the silliness that works is that it breaks down barriers, since when everyone is a part of the silliness, nothing very serious is expected—and so, it’s way harder to screw up.” One person simply wrote, “Mixers were helpful,” and another stated, “I really enjoyed yesterday.” Other responses to the value and summary questions mentioned diversity of perspectives, “shared intentions toward hope and exploration,” “pushing ourselves as a group”, and that “our church is actively a part of the anti-gang efforts of the community via this relationship.” One final response to the value questions was given by a woman who was raised in Chile: “The energy the MYA people bring (partly because of their age, but also because of their culture) and the Spanish component always makes me feel more at home. It seems like the fact that we are willing to work at this relationship says a lot. They have so much to offer our community and I look forward to sharing with them.”

The future question raised some new responses. These included asking MYA to host again, being intentional about implementing practices that “make it really hard to screw up—and which at the same time throw us together with one another,” doing work “like painting” with them in a more informal setting, continued tutoring, joining the “MYA guys for pick-up soccer,” and “finding ways to hear each other’s particular stories.” The relational questions once again uncovered narratives of conversations during game time—using names in the description, being able to recognize people of MYA outside these gatherings—but not knowing names yet, a story using a girl’s first name who joined the children of Mountainside this particular evening, as well as responses of “no” or “not yet.” One final narrative was the story of a woman from Mountainside who had been given the nickname “Cool Clothes” by a girl of MYA. The woman from Mountainside saw her walking a few days after the gathering and asked if she needed a ride. The girl responded by saying, “Sure, ‘Cool Clothes.’” She gave her a ride.

### **Analysis and Evaluation**

The results of this project were positive overall, as there were changes evidenced in the narratives of the participants. The data also revealed some important caveats of understanding, thus tempering the results of the actual project. This section will provide analysis and evaluation of the qualitative data, highlighting changes in relational descriptions as pertained to MYA and evidence of a deepened understanding of Mountainside’s praxis of community and hospitality. It will do this by analyzing the

responses to the relational questions as well as the future questions.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the analysis, this section will also evaluate the re-imagined worship gatherings, raising questions about size and adequacy, as a way of providing new learning for the ongoing cultivation of Mountainside's capacity for missional commitment.<sup>16</sup>

### Relational Responses

The responses to the relational question were encouraging, some of them even inspiring. A cursory look at the data might lead one to believe that the implementation of the re-imagined worship gathering as new practice had not only expanded Mountainside's social imaginary, but had opened it up completely. Reflecting further on the data provides caution for extreme optimism, while also validating a reserved sense of success.

Data was collected a total of five times during the project; once prior to the first re-imagined gathering and then after each subsequent gathering had been completed. The first collection of data contained three narratives of relational engagement outside of MYA activities, made possible by involvement in the four-month experiment. The next four collections of data contained nine narratives. Of the seventeen responders, there

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<sup>15</sup> This chapter does not analyze or evaluate the answers to the introductory question or the values/summary questions because the initial interviews revealed a deepened understanding of the praxis of community and hospitality, likely stemming from the initial four-month experiment. The answers to these questions following the re-imagined worship gatherings also revealed this deepened understanding. Changes or shifts would therefore be speculation.

<sup>16</sup> Harry F. Wolcott writes, "Give serious thought to dropping the idea that your final chapter must lead to a conclusion or that the account must build toward a dramatic climax. In the dichotomous thinking said to be typical of Americans, research is sometimes portrayed as either decision-oriented or conclusion-oriented. Clearly, some research is decision-oriented, but I am not sure that 'conclusion-oriented' is a proper label for the rest of it. In reporting qualitative work, I avoid the term 'conclusion.'" Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 120.

were eight people who shared narratives (some more than one) in response to the relational question. Five of the eight responders had not shared narratives in the first responses. The other nine people either did not respond, suggested that they would recognize people of MYA but didn't know names, or answered "no" or "not yet." Nonetheless, nine or more stories of personal relational engagement by eight or more people—assuming there were relational experiences among people not questioned—are worth celebrating. The practice of shared hospitality through these re-imagined worship gatherings cultivated interactions in public life that would likely not have been possible without them.<sup>17</sup>

Reflecting further on the eight people who shared narratives provides helpful information when thinking about continued cultivation of missional commitment. The first observation is that of the eight people who reported these experiences, all eight of them live in the city of Monrovia. While some Monrovia residents did not respond with a relational narrative, not one person living outside of the same city of the families of MYA was able to establish any kind of personal relationship with someone of MYA. While it might have been expected that non-Monrovia residents would struggle to engage with someone from MYA outside the gatherings, it is significant to point out that these responders were also unable to connect with someone from MYA during any of the re-imagined gatherings even to the point of learning and remembering their names. This information validates the importance of becoming rooted in one's neighborhood in order to sustain missional life. It also indicates ways in which this obstacle to missional life

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<sup>17</sup> While not wanting to over-generalize, it is also important to note that most of the different people in the different narratives come from very different social locations, thus making these public interactions even more significant.

continues to be a challenge for Mountainside. It raises questions about how the leadership of Mountainside might encourage and equip non-Monrovia residents in engaging the missional work of God in their own neighborhoods.<sup>18</sup>

A second observation in regards to the eight responders is that four of them had shared some other relational context—though not necessarily interaction—with the people they mentioned in their responses. Three of the responders had participated heavily in the four-month experiment with MYA and the other responder had previously met the person in her narrative while participating in a city-sponsored leadership class. While this does not negate the impact of the implementation of the re-imagined worship gatherings, as four people were able to engage with people of MYA without prior relationship, it does temper the results. In light of the fact that only half of the responders reported relational connections with people of MYA and 50 percent of those reporting connections had prior relationship with MYA, a question raised in regards to the re-imagined worship gathering is, “Can reciprocal hospitality be fostered in a group of that size? If not, what is a good size for this work?” This data also suggests that multiple contexts and ongoing interaction are helpful when trying to cultivate missional commitment.

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<sup>18</sup> A non-Monrovia resident responded to the value/summary question by stating, “I value the MYA relationship right now mostly for what it represents in terms of a very local and real form of mission. That all feels a bit instrumental, but until I get to know the actual people better, I cannot shift to the right sort of valuing of relationships with specific persons and families.” These feelings were shared following the second gathering, but after a year of experimentation with the people of MYA. This speaks to the importance of time and location for missional commitment and life.

## Future Responses

The responses to the future questions revealed a deepened understanding of both community and hospitality, and therefore some expansion of Mountainside's social imaginary beyond the boundary of functional rationality and *askesis* for the sake of desire. The first responses focused primarily, but not entirely, on activities that Mountainside could provide for MYA, thus revealing functional rationality. Examples given were providing students of MYA breakfast prior to school, volunteering in MYA programs, mentoring, tutoring, and inviting them to more of Mountainside's worship services. Reciprocal activities were also mentioned such as sharing food, playing soccer, and hosting a dance, these likely indicating some deepening of understanding in regards to community and praxis due to the four-month experiment.

The response to the future questions following the re-imagined gatherings showed significantly more evidence of a deepened understanding of community and hospitality. Suggestions for moving forward included a variety of ideas that reveal movement beyond functional rationality and *askesis* for the sake of desire, and therefore an expansion of Mountainside's social imaginary. The idea that came up the most, stemming from the immigration group, was the idea of a language exchange. The idea was presented as a way for people to learn conversational Spanish or English as a complement to their primary language. One person highlighted this idea by stating that "with a language exchange, everyone is a teacher and everyone is a student." Other ideas that reveal a similar understanding were "finding other ways to spend time together centered around food or activities," asking MYA to host one of the gatherings again, joining the men of MYA in a weekly soccer game that they already participate in, doing a work project

together, as well as “finding more ways to hear one another’s personal stories.” While ideas such as tutoring and mentoring were also mentioned, the dominant theme in the suggestions was reciprocal hospitality.<sup>19</sup>

When thinking about how to continue this work into the future, it will be important to remember the role that the small group focused on immigration played in the expansion of Mountainside’s social imaginary. Just as the responses to the relational questions depended on work being done in other contexts, these responses also depended upon the complementary work being done outside of the re-imagined gatherings within a smaller group of people. This once again raises the question of whether or not the type of work being done in this project necessitates multiple contexts of engagement as well as similar work being done in smaller groups. It is unlikely that the changes in response would have been as significant if these other engagements and learning contexts were not happening along with the re-imagined worship gatherings.

### Summary

In summarizing, it can be concluded that Mountainside’s social imaginary was expanded through the work of this project and that there was also movement towards missional commitment. It must also be stated that while expansion did happen, functional rationality will continue to be a boundary to missional commitment for Mountainside. Hopefully the work of this project can serve as a generative memory in this regard as Mountainside continues to move forward in committed missional life. It

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<sup>19</sup> It must again be noted that offering tutoring and mentoring are wonderful initiatives that churches and Christian organizations should participate in. The emphasis on the other activities is not meant to deny the value of this work, but to highlight the expansion of Mountainside’s social imaginary beyond functional rationality and *askesis* for the sake of desire.

must also be remembered that along with these re-imagined worship gatherings, there were other engagements of reciprocal hospitality going on as well that helped support the success. It may be that multiple initiatives of hospitality and learning are necessary for this type of work. Finally, the work of this project reinforced the conviction that a critical aspect of committed missional life is being rooted in the neighborhood one lives in. It is very difficult to cultivate missional commitment, or interest for that matter, when people are participating in neighborhoods that they do not indwell.

A final word on the obstacles to missional life described in Chapter 2 must be mentioned. It is not an overstatement to say that all three of these obstacles are related to a posture of disengagement or being closed off to the other. As was already stated, missional life requires being rooted in one's neighborhood. The results of discontinuous change will continue to make this a challenge and therefore efforts to confront this obstacle must be developed and employed. The work of this project validated this obstacle as much as it overcame it. Secondly, consumerism and the effects that it has on public life will continue to be an obstacle for any church in the West. The results of this project show that engaging neighbor in embodied acts of what has been described as community and hospitality can go a long way in uncovering the "we need" in all of us. Finally, only time will tell if Mountainside is able to confront the obstacle of Ideal Type Romanticism. While I pray that some of the successes of this work can serve as generative memories for Mountainside, I also pray that Mountainside's waning interest and momentum, due to unmet expectations in the initial experiment, will serve as a generative memory as well. May God bless the congregation with the courage to engage neighbor, even when one's ideals are not met.

## CONCLUSION

At the Last Supper, Jesus was with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. This was his final opportunity to share with them about the reign of God that had been ushered in through him. In John's report of these concluding instructions, Christ said, "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15). Commenting on this significant passage John McKnight writes,

Finally, Christ said you are *not* servants. You *know*. You are *friends*. Perhaps beyond the revolution of Christian service is the final revolution, the possibility of being friends. Friends are people who know, care, respect, struggle, love justice, and have a commitment to each other through time. Why friends rather than servants? Perhaps it is because He knew that servants could always become lords but that friends could not. Servants are people who *know* the *mysteries* that can control those to whom they give "help." Friends are people who *know each other*. They are free to give *and* receive help.<sup>1</sup>

With a similar sentiment, encapsulating much of what this project has been about, Father Greg Boyle states, "Service is great and can even be helpful at times. But we must always remember, that service is just the hallway to the great banquet room of kinship."<sup>2</sup>

One of the advantages of taking a year to write this project after completion of the research is that it has provided time to see what would come of this attempt at cultivating missional commitment. As with the results of the project, the results have been encouraging, but there has been new learning as well. The re-imagined worship gatherings did not continue following the last one on March 21, 2010. Nor did any

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<sup>1</sup> John McKnight, *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Father Greg Boyle (paraphrased), in an address given January 25, 2010, at Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA.

mentoring or tutoring continue with MYA. Also, after pursuing it for a few months, the language exchange has not come to fruition yet either.

On the other hand there have been ways in which God has used Mountainside's efforts as a means of his grace. Shortly after our last gathering, MYA was granted permission by Mountainside's host church to host their summer program in the building we worship in. Mountainside and MYA decided to work together in painting the now shared space and a few people of Mountainside participated in the program. Shortly after the summer program ended, a Spanish-speaking congregation in our town, of which many MYA families are a part, needed a new space to worship. They also were granted permission by our host church and we now have three churches working together, sharing space and ministry.

Another significant shift that has taken place is that Mountainside was able to hire someone who is a member of both the new church and MYA as a part-time administrative assistant. This has been mutually beneficial for all three organizations. Finally, in the simplest and yet perhaps most profound shift, there are now multiple people within our congregation who, upon seeing someone from MYA in the neighborhood, will stop and have a friendly conversation. While this may not seem like much, it is new creation. Once again, Charles Taylor's quote on what a change in social imaginary entails is helpful:

What exactly is involved when a theory penetrates and transforms the social imaginary? For the most part, people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices. These are made sense of by the new outlook, the one first articulated in the theory, this outlook is the context that gives sense to the practices. Hence the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn't

before. It begins to define the contours of their world and can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention.<sup>3</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 29.

## APPENDIX A

### **Abbreviated Timeline of the Work of this Project**

June-July 2007	Missional Action Surveys Taken
August 24, 2007	Listening Group Facilitator Training
August 26, 2007	Feedback Seminar with Mark Lau Branson
Sept-Dec 2007	Listening Groups
Nov 2007-Feb 2008	Race-Based Gang Violence Claims Four Lives
January 13, 2008	Gutierrez shares with Mountainside regarding MYA
January 31, 2008	Ecumenical Prayer Vigil at YMCA
Feb 29-Mar 1, 2008	Spiritual Discernment Retreat- Adaptive Challenge Discovered: How do we share reciprocal hospitality with MYA? Missional Action Team (MAT) Established
March 9, 2008	Gutierrez meets with MAT and church members interested in participating with MYA
Mar-June 2008	Four-Month Experiment in Sharing Hospitality with MYA led by MAT.
July-Nov 2008	Relationship continues with loss of momentum
Nov 5, 2008	Meeting with MAT to address new adaptive challenge of cultivating missional commitment.
Feb 5, 2009	MAT meeting 1
March 30, 2009	MAT meeting 2
May 17, 2009	Re-Imagined Worship Gathering #1
June 19, 2009	MYA Graduation: MAT attends
August 9, 2009	Re-Imagined Worship Gathering #2

August 29, 2009	MYA Back to School Event: Mountainside Member Leads Session
November 19, 2009	MYA Baptism Class
November 22, 2009	Re-Imagined Worship Gathering #3 (Baptisms at YMCA)
March 21, 2010	Re-Imagined Worship Gathering #4
May 2010	Weekend Painting in preparation for CORE Program
June 12, 2010	Mountainside/MYA Softball Game
June-Aug 2010	CORE Program

## APPENDIX B



### MOUNTAINSIDE COMMUNION

“A Community of Followers of Christ desiring to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.”

#### Core Values

**HOSPITALITY:** *We seek to be known by our welcoming and gracious spirit and our friendly and generous deeds.*

In a world that is becoming more and more impersonal, we strive to be a community that is personal. We follow the example of the Good Samaritan—we are a place for the traveler, the outsider, those that are different, and those that need a place of safety.

**AUTHENTICITY:** *We strive to be real, honest, and genuine, as individuals, as a congregation, and in our ministries.*

We pursue the mission that God has given us. We want more than slick productions and nice appearances; we want to encourage people to be authentic with God and with one another. We do not hide our rough edges and struggles. We know that we all stumble every day in many ways, so we encourage one another to ‘fall in the light’—to readily admit our mistakes, not to hide or try to cover them up.

**COMMUNITY:** *We strive for ‘mission through community,’ believing that mission is essential to community, and community to our mission.*

For us, church is not just a disconnected crowd of people who attend public programs together. Balancing community and mission takes time, effort, and vulnerability. It takes people being willing to serve and be served, challenge and be challenged, forgive and be forgiven, teach and be taught, give and receive, encourage and be encouraged. It takes people laughing, crying, working, communicating, resting, and serving together, in relationship with God and one another in a dynamic community of faith.

**DIVERSITY:** *We will try to reach out to a wide variety of people.*

We will allow those who worship with us to progress in their spiritual journey at their own pace, exploring their questions in an open atmosphere. It is our goal to learn to welcome all sorts of people with their unique blends of experiences, gifts, challenges, and insights, believing that we will be enriched as a community by the contributions of each individual. We believe that without a conscious pursuit of diversity we will tend to fall back into our ‘looks like me’ comfort zone.

**CREATIVITY:** *We strive to hold our traditions lightly, to remain flexible and be ready to change.*

We serve a creative God! The splendor and span of God's creativity call us to creative innovation. This value keeps us moving forward as a community. Jesus said only new, flexible wineskins could hold the new wine of the Spirit, so we are committed to remaining flexible and teachable.

**WISDOM:** *We strive to grow in wisdom and Christian maturity.*

We believe that maturity involves growing in the balance, simplicity, humility, and practicality, of wisdom, not endless complexity, pride, controversy, and abstraction. As a result, we focus with wholehearted commitment on those essential truths and practices that are made clear in the Bible, that Christians across the ages have held in common, and that most effectively nourish spiritual vibrancy. We recognize that wisdom comes from recognizing our dependence on God and on one another, so to grow we must listen and learn. In addition, wisdom guides us toward synergy instead of competition within our community, so we will always attempt to consider how any decision impacts the whole community of Mountainside Communion, not just one area or part.

**SPIRITUAL VIBRANCY:** *We embrace the wonder and mystery of the Creator and all of creation and celebrate, enjoy, and experience the goodness of God.*

We recognize that this world, life, and God are all too profound and complex to be reduced to simplistic formulas or to be neatly packed and catalogued in boxes. We value spiritual disciplines to help us grow in spiritual vibrancy, including the study of Scripture, prayers, worship, fasting, feasting, fellowship, silence, and service. In light of the awesome mysteries of our faith, and strengthened through spiritual disciplines, we seek to live 'life to the full' in Christ Jesus.

**COMPASSIONATE ACTION:** *We strive to enter creatively and compassionately into the pain and injustice of a suffering world.*

We believe that issues of justice are close to the heart of God and therefore they are close to our hearts as well. We as a community are committed to practicing justice and compassion in our speech, actions, planning, and spending.

## APPENDIX C

### Compassionate Action

Criteria for Compassionate Action Funds Distribution:

**Relational:** Because Jesus calls us to *love our neighbors*, our church body is encouraged to be connected to those around us who are in need. C.A. funds are available (upon approval) for our members who have identified a need with clarity, regarding a neighbor, friend, or family member. This requires consistency in relationship and persistence in follow-up. It is the responsibility of the person requesting funds to investigate the immediate need through the existing relationship. Assisting our own Mountainside members who are in need also falls into this category of relationship.

**Geographical:** Because Mountainside Communion maintains a visible and active presence in its own community of Monrovia, Compassionate Action funds are available (upon approval) to support local initiatives that serve people in need. These local organizations or events do require Mountainside member's involvement or ongoing relationship. Examples of geographical financial aid: Ongoing relationship with the Monrovia Youth Alliance, Habitat for Humanity and Elizabeth House. Isolated events: Monrovia Walk for Life and Monrovia car show (water distribution).

**Global/Relational:** Although Mountainside emphasizes a focus on local mission; its leaders maintain a global perspective with a desire to contribute to the needs of our world's most vulnerable people. C.A. funds are available (upon approval) to support global ministries that involve Mountainside members somehow. The global giving must have a relational connection. Examples:

- members of Mountainside traveling abroad to lead in long or short term ministries
- support for family members serving abroad where a major natural disaster strikes
- support for sister churches with ongoing sustainable ministries domestically or in developing nations (example: Ministries for Christ w/ Wade, Jan's brother)
- support through the Nazarene denomination for Global Compassionate Ministries and missions
- An international project developed by members of Mountainside Communion (example: 2006 well project for Darfur)

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