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This ministry focus paper entitled

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE INTENTIONAL PRACTICE OF
COMPASSIONATE SERVICE AT ZION MENNONITE CHURCH

Written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

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Date Received: February 4, 2013

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE INTENTIONAL PRACTICE OF
COMPASSIONATE SERVICE AT ZION MENNONONITE CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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BY

FREDERICK HUNTER HESS
AUGUST 2012

ABSTRACT

Spiritual Transformation through the Intentional Practice of Compassionate Service at Zion Mennonite Church

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Doctor of Ministry

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2012

The goal of this project is to engage the church board in the spiritual discipline of compassionate service in order to transform their spiritual depth and sense of God's presence. The discipline of service is a natural form of spiritual practice for Mennonite Christians. Service is ingrained in the Mennonite spiritual make-up. Motivation for this project arises from the sense that Mennonite Christians do not perceive themselves to be particularly spiritual people. Yet, their lives belie that belief. Service is one of the keys to spiritual transformation.

The church board members of Zion Mennonite Church were asked to participate in four differing service opportunities. They served a Thanksgiving meal, cleaned a house used to shelter the homeless, packed health kits for developing world countries, and visited Zion shut-ins. Before each service opportunity, they reflect on Scripture chosen to encourage meditation on service. Directly following their service opportunities, they were asked to reflect on the presence of God during the service.

The project appears to have been a great success. The board members responded to the pre-service Bible study with excellent reflections. Their post-service responses show that they experienced the presence of Christ in the service opportunities. Most prevalent was the theme that Jesus was present in the faces and actions of the volunteers as they worked together, building God's kingdom hand-in-hand. There were challenges, such as the fears involved in helping people who are different than we are accustomed to, and the struggle to find time to serve. However, the responses were overwhelmingly positive, and the project will be shared with the broader Mennonite Church.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

Words: 268

To my wife, Grace, who inspires me to be more than I ever believed possible

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Zion Mennonite Church for supporting their pastor in this challenging undertaking. The church board acted as my test subjects and stepped up to make the project a work. Thank you to Kris Lotier for editing and to Abba Schwanda for guiding the process. The greatest thanks go to my wife, Grace, and my children, Olivia, Aiden, and Taylor, for their patience with me as I sat at my computer for hours and hours.

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INTRODUCTION

Every generation and historical era presents different challenges and subsequent opportunities. It appears that one of the great challenges of the Christian Church in the postmodern/post-Christendom era is apathy toward church, Christian spirituality, and discipleship. In the postmodern world there is no longer any truth outside of a particular community.¹ Christian spirituality and discipleship is appropriate for those who are in that community, but they are not, according to postmodernism, the “truth” for all people. In his book, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Stanley Grenz argues, “Postmodern thinkers have given up the search for universal ultimate truth because they are convinced that there is nothing more to find than a host of conflicting interpretations or an infinity of linguistically created worlds.”² Thinking that there is no truth devalues the Christian teaching and encourages the exploration of all sorts of spiritual paths. Not only are people unsure of what to believe, but competing interests and opportunities overwhelm people living in North America. They desire to get ahead in careers, education, hobbies, and the pursuit of leisure. Social media, television, and the Internet have created an incessant call to fritter away hours with little to no growth or mental and spiritual development. The Christian person is bombarded with opportunities and demands that distract from discipleship and Christian spiritual transformation. It is difficult to see the presence of Christ and be moved to growth by God’s grace and love if one does not take the time to notice.

¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 8.

² *Ibid.*, 163.

Most challenges, when considered appropriately, open the door to opportunities. Even as many Christians are living in apathy and are seemingly disinterested in developing their faith in the face of busyness and distraction, there are a growing number of people wondering if there may not be a spiritual reality that they are missing. The pursuit of that missing spirituality, an ever-deepening relationship with God, can be elusive. Christian spiritual transformation involves not only God's Spirit but also our efforts to be open to that Spirit.³ The relationship with God made available by the life and work of Jesus Christ is no exception. If Christians are not deeply intentional with regard to protecting and growing their relationship with Christ, they become susceptible to backsliding into apathy once again. We may never see or experience the love of God if we are unwilling to open our eyes and look. The challenge of this project is to overcome the temptations that lead to apathy by engaging a new attitude toward an old, familiar discipline. That spiritual discipline is the act of compassionate service.

To accomplish this lofty goal at Zion Mennonite Church (hereafter, Zion) in Souderton, Pennsylvania, a minor shift in congregational DNA is needed. Service has always been a part of that DNA, but it has never been the driving force behind spiritual transformation and discipleship. This project will be one of the first steps toward creating a missional emphasis at Zion. In this case, *missional* is defined as a congregational culture characterized by an overarching sense of mission. Theologian

³ Throughout this project the word *transformation* is used to refer to the process that a disciple engages in order to be transformed toward Christlikeness. There is sometimes confusion between the terms "spiritual transformation" and "spiritual formation." Formation is happening to us all the time whether it is intentional or not and whether the Holy Spirit of God is leading it or not. Transformation is what happens when the disciples is transformed by the Holy Spirit and grace of God. This project is concerned most directly with Spirit led transformation.

Darrell Guder explains it this way: “God’s mission is calling us and sending us, the church of Jesus Christ, to be a missionary church in our own societies, in the cultures in which we find ourselves.”⁴ Mission would be evident in every aspect of a congregation’s worship, spiritual transformation, and service. Mission would permeate the entirety of a congregant’s life from his or her church work, into the home, and at the work place. A congregation with a missional emphasis is a place where all members recognize that they are called to participate with Jesus in building the kingdom of God in their circles of influence.

Believing that change begins at the top of an organization, the church board will be the target audience for the project of spiritual transformation and renewal. Zion’s church board is responsible for oversight of church practices and staff. Each individual is a representative of the congregation and extends his or her leadership via participation in church life and mission. The members of the board are split evenly between men and women, and ages vary from the late twenties to early seventies. The goal of this project is to empower a greater sense of God’s mission and presence in each board member’s life. As the members begin to engage Christ’s mission and Christ himself through that mission, their awareness of and relationships with Jesus will grow. As the board members find joy, peace, and hope in those experiences, they in turn will encourage other congregants to get involved. Thus, spiritual transformation becomes contagious. That is the hope leading to the thesis statement of this project, which is: Believing that a prominent spiritual practice of the Mennonite denomination is service, the Zion Mennonite Church board members

⁴ Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 5.

will be encouraged to pursue a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ through the intentional participation in compassionate service.

The church board members of Zion will be encouraged to participate in four different service projects. The first project will be to serve at Zion's annual Thanksgiving meal offered to the Souderton Community. Project number two will consist of cleaning a house that is used to support homeless families. Third, the board will work at the local Mennonite Resource Center, packing health kits to be shared with third world countries. And finally, they will spend a Saturday morning visiting Zion shut-ins, people who are unable to get out to church events due to physical limitations.

Immediately before each service project, the board will be led through a short Bible study focused on Christ's call to build the kingdom of God by reaching out to the marginalized. Following the service projects, the board will meet again to engage in theological reflection. Data will be collected with regard to the board sense of God's presence, and they will reflect on any changes in their perception of service. Results will be measured through the reflective process of examining the experience of participating board members.

The project serves two important purposes. First, it works at congregational identity development. Throughout its history, Zion has experienced several major shifts in its identity and leadership. The congregation was conceived in 1893 as a local church plant in the Souderton Community.⁵ The congregation began with a strong local missional identity. Evangelism and service to the poor in Philadelphia represented the

⁵ Jim Musselman, *A Whisper into the Ear: Hearing God's Call* (Souderton, PA: Zion Mennonite Church, 2010), 28.

main focus of outreach and ministry in the church's early years. Service and missions continued to be major aspects of church life; however, over time, worship, drama, and the music program began to dominate the congregational identity. In 1944, Pastor Ellis Graber's wife, Delpha Graber, took leadership of the music program and the rest, as they say, is "history." Delpha Graber's leadership opened the door for a variety of choirs, oratorios, and programs that highlighted the congregation's identity in the community. In 1968 a new sanctuary, created with concert quality acoustics to accompany the Charles Fisk organ, was finished, and the perception grew that the congregation had arrived at its pinnacle.⁶ The generation that built the new sanctuary and facilities proved to be a group of leaders who impacted the congregation tremendously.

Jumping to 2011, an observer would see a congregation wrestling with its identity. With an important generation aging and the choir dwindling, the congregation seeks a new generation to lead the identity of the church. The original devotion to missions and service has not disappeared nor lost its importance; it simply became overshadowed by the captivating nature of beautiful music done well. Considering the postmodern penchant toward an active faith journey, it is an appropriate time to elevate service and mission to their original place as the main focus of Zion's discipleship and identity.⁷

Second, this project engages the spiritual journey and transformation of the board. By adding Zion's potential return to its missional roots with the need for spiritual transformation and discipleship, the importance of the project begins to take form. In a

⁶ Ibid., 103.

⁷ This statement is evidenced by the number of current "young" theologians writing about an active faith that encompasses all of life. Some of those theologians are Shane Claiborne, Christopher Heuertz, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove.

time period with so many various pursuits distracting our attention from God, spiritual disciplines can be a particularly helpful avenue to pursue a fuller relationship with Christ. Service is a missional spiritual discipline. One grows in relationship with Jesus as one participates in the work of building God's kingdom, and as one engages the compassion that motivated Jesus on his own journey.

As a youth leader at my home congregation in the 1990s, I sensed a call to help others know the reality of Christ. As a child growing up I had heard about Jesus, but he did not seem real to me, and my desire was and is to help others recognize the reality and wonder of the living God, and to know this God. That call led me to study at Eastern Mennonite Seminary for a Master of Divinity degree and to Fuller Theological Seminary to pursue a deeper sense of knowing through the Christian Spirituality cohort. Today more than ever, that calling rings in my ears. My greatest joy in ministry is watching people grow in their faith and knowledge of God; it is the joy that drives this project. Studying spiritual disciplines has opened my journey to the varieties of ways that one might open his or her life to Christ's presence, his grace, mercy, joy, and peace. Spiritual disciplines are a vehicle to deeper relationships with Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit, and other people. Therefore, they contain the potential to open doors to new ways of loving God and humanity.

As a Mennonite pastor, service was an obvious choice for a discipline to practice, and it coincides with my interest in being part of a congregation with a missional emphasis. Mennonites have long been known as a denomination of doers. The prominence on an active faith in Mennonite theology has drawn accusations from

theologians of other denominations of a “works righteous”⁸ theology.⁹ World recognized relief organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service stand as examples of the Mennonite propensity toward service and compassionate care for the marginalized. Therefore, service seemed appropriate for my work with Zion.

The project will be broken into three distinct sections. Those sections are the church context, theological implications, and project strategy. Part One focuses on the current context of Zion Mennonite church. It will analyze the potential impact of location and pertinent demographics. Zion sits in the middle of the community of Souderton, Pennsylvania, located thirty miles northwest of Philadelphia. The context of the church’s location will be important to understanding the congregation.

Part Two begins with Chapter 3, a literature review of five books that will impact the formulation and process of the project. Those books are: *Simple Spirituality: Learning to See God in a Broken World*, by Christopher Heuertz;¹⁰ *The Politics of Jesus*, by John Howard Yoder;¹¹ *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist tradition*, by C. Arnold Snyder;¹² *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes*

⁸ Works righteousness is defined as “the view that human works can have a status before God and can contribute either fully or partially toward salvation.” Donald K. Kim, ed., *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, s. v. “works righteousness” (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 306.

⁹ C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition*, Traditions of Christian Spirituality (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 26.

¹⁰ Christopher L. Heuertz, *Simple Spirituality: Learning to See God in a Broken World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

¹¹ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

¹² Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*.

Lives, by Dallas Willard;¹³ and *Managing the Congregation*, by Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser.¹⁴

Chapter 4 offers an overview of the Mennonite theology regarding discipleship. This chapter processes the Mennonite Confession of Faith, as well as strengths and weaknesses of the theology. Finally, it considers the Anabaptist reaction to Roman Catholicism and the Mennonite focus on the teachings of Christ as foundation for faith and theology.

Chapter 5 narrows the focus onto the teaching of Menno Simons, the namesake of the denomination. His writings are analyzed for insight into his theology of compassionate service in the life of the disciple of Christ. The chapter then turns toward three scriptures from the Gospel of Matthew as well as considering the criticisms of Martin Luther's belief that Anabaptists were teaching a works righteous theology.

The final section consists of Chapters 6 and 7, which analyze the ministry project strategy. Chapter 6 discerns the goals and plan of delicately adjusting the identity of the congregation through the work with the board toward a culture of service. This chapter will begin to lay out the plan, describing people who will be involved in the project.

Finally, Chapter 7 will address the details of the plan, from a description of the initiative to a timeline of events and service projects. The evaluation tools and assessment plan are analyzed, and results will be reported and assessed. The project will

¹³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988).

¹⁴ Norman Shawchuck, and Roger Heuser, *Managing the Congregation: Building Effective Systems to Serve People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

conclude with a final summary and conclusions, including ideas for future service development and a study of the implications of the project.

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1
EXAMINING THE CULTURAL SETTING OF
ZION MENNONITE CHURCH

Every congregation is made up particular people who are influenced by their local culture and settings. Studying those settings and the cultural context of a congregation opens the door to greater understanding. This chapter will offer a glimpse into the setting and culture of the people that make up Zion Mennonite Church.

History of Souderton, Pennsylvania

This project is designed for Zion Mennonite Church in Souderton, Pennsylvania. In order to see the challenges that the church faces and their potential solutions, one must first understand the church's location, history, and cultural climate. This chapter will include a brief history of the Souderton borough; it will examine the current socioeconomic, educational, and occupational setting of its residents as seen through census data. It will also consider cultural trends, with particular focus being given to changes in the Mennonite community. Finally the chapter begins to shine a light on the

current relationship of Zion to other Mennonite Churches and the Souderton borough itself.

A brief survey of local history begins the journey of understanding the congregation. Zion is located on the corner of Front Street and Cherry Lane, in the heart of the borough of Souderton, Pennsylvania. The borough is located approximately thirty miles northwest of Philadelphia. Lenni-Lenape Native American people were the “latest generation of American Indians” that inhabited the area.¹ William Penn bought the land from the local Indian tribes for the sake of immigrants looking for a place to live free from religious persecution.² Local historian Phil Johnson Ruth states, “An inhospitable economic climate drove these Mennonite, Reformed, and Lutheran refugees across the sea to a beckoning New World. By 1732 there were enough Rosenberger, Reiff, Hunsberger, Althouse, Oberholtzer, Moyer, Nice, Funk, and Landis families homesteading in the region to warrant the establishment of a township.”³ That township was called Franconia. The western section of the township was purchased in 1791 by Christian Souder. The borough would take on his name in the nineteenth century.⁴ Souderton was born.

The early settlers were highly religious, farming immigrants. The complexion of the farming community would not last, however. Industry began to grow rapidly when

¹ Phil Johnson Ruth, *Seeing Souderton* (Souderton, PA: Indian Valley Printing Ltd., 1987), 7.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

the railroad came through the small town in 1857.⁵ The railroad connected Souderton to Philadelphia and opened the community to commerce in the city.⁶ The late 1800s witnessed continued expansion as a bank, a library, and a firehouse were built. Ruth argues, “Hard work and entrepreneurship brought Soudertonians to the threshold of incorporation, but religious faith gave their industry meaning.”⁷ This small Mennonite community continued to grow with people and industry through the 1900s.⁸ World War II led to tremendous industrial growth in the textile industry. Ruth argues, “If things were tough emotionally, they were flourishing economically. The clothing industry was experiencing its heyday in the region. While many factories were under contract to the government, others provided much-needed domestic goods.”⁹ As the war ended, the need for textiles and industry began to dissipate, and Souderton gradually transitioned into a residential area.¹⁰ The borough is primarily residential today, with most of the industrial buildings moving out of the borough limits to make way for housing.

Socioeconomic Factors: Affluence and the Current Economic Climate

Souderton is a financially secure community with above average household incomes and real estate prices. According to data from the 2009 census reports the

⁵ Dale W. Woodland, "Souderton and the Railroad," in *Souderton: A Century of Progress* (Souderton, PA: Borough of Souderton, 1987), 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷ Ruth, *Seeing Souderton*, 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31-126.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 106-113.

median household income for that year was \$57,262, approximately \$6,000 higher than the average for the United States.¹¹ The same survey states that the median price of a house in Souderton is \$224,400, which is significantly higher than the national median price of \$185,400.¹² These numbers are evidence of an economically secure community, partially sheltered from economic downturns.

Despite the affluence of the region, the attitude of simplicity and humility of the original German Mennonite inhabitants continues to exist. The people of Souderton are not flashy with their wealth. For example, church parking lots are not filled with luxury vehicles, but practical trucks, family vans, and efficient sedans. Historically speaking, churches and area businesses, quite a few of which are family owned, have been strong supporters of missions in Philadelphia, world missionaries, Mennonite schools, and local programs. However, despite Souderton's financial growth and stability, the borough has felt the effects of the economic crisis.

The recent financial crisis is evidenced by the many local businesses that have closed their doors over the last two years. As businesses shut down operations, the effects are far reaching. For example, one local construction company went bankrupt while owing thousands of dollars to hundreds of suppliers and subcontractors. The failure of that one business influenced the spending power and financial security of each

¹¹ U. S. Census Bureau, "Souderton Borough, Pennsylvania – 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates," http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=Souderton%2C+PA&_cityTown=Souderton%2C+PA&_state=&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010 (accessed March 30, 2011).

¹² Ibid.

of those partnering businesses as well as their employees.¹³ Thousands of local households were affected. It is evident that the recession has leveled a great deal of stress upon the people of Souderton.

As families and businesses struggle, so do the organizations that rely on their generosity. Giving to non-profit organizations has been greatly reduced since the recession began. Churches big and small have been wrestling with budgets, cutting mission giving and staff positions. One large church in the area has cut several administrative employees and one pastoral position, while others have taken out large credit lines in order to keep up with their debts.¹⁴

As churches cut budgets, non-profit mission organizations have been forced to seek new ways of cultivating funding. One such organization is the Keystone Opportunity Center.¹⁵ Keystone offers educational resources, job training, healthcare, and housing to homeless families in the county. In the past they relied heavily upon a few large donors. During the trying economic crisis, they have expanded their efforts by offering multiple community events designed to encourage smaller donations from a broader donor base. The recession has prompted creativity and demanded higher levels of efficiency, putting great pressure on organizations while encouraging new ideas about reaching financial goals and helping people.

¹³ This information was gleaned through an interview of a local building contractor and an accountant. Both asked to remain anonymous. The interview was conducted in February 2011.

¹⁴ This information was gleaned through an interview with a local banker. He asked to remain anonymous. The interview was conducted on February 8, 2011.

¹⁵ This information was gleaned through an interview with Keystone's Director of Development, Brenda Oelschlager. The interview was conducted on March 4, 2011.

Zion tends to reflect its community. Zion is primarily an affluent congregation, yet there are members who have lost jobs and witnessed the demise of retirement accounts. The board has reduced the budget by holding off on building maintenance projects and outreach programs. No staff positions have been cut at this time, nor are there future plans to move in that direction. Zion's affluent membership and the effects of the recession are two realities that are important pieces of information to consider as the project unfolds.

Educational and Occupational Data

This section will examine the implications of the high educational standards and the occupational statistics of the Souderton Borough. Educational data shows that Souderton is slightly above average with regards to high school graduation and college level degrees compared to the national statistics. Of the residents over twenty-five years of age, 87 percent have graduated from high school, which is 5 percent higher than the national average of 82 percent. Of Souderton residents of the same age, 25 percent have bachelor degrees or higher, as opposed to the national average of 22 percent.¹⁶ Flush with cash due to the wealth in the local counties and the high value of housing, which translates into high tax rates, the local high schools are well funded and have developed excellent academic reputations.

With regard to occupations for the Souderton area, the U.S. Census Bureau provides little surprising information. The community once based on farming has very

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, "Souderton Borough, Pennsylvania – Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: 2005-2009," http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=16000US4271856&-qr_name=ACS_2009_5YR_G00_DP5YR2&-ds_name=ACS_2009_5YR_G00_&-_lang=en&-redoLog=false&-_sse=on (accessed March 30, 2011).

few farmers at this time. Between 2005 and 2009 only 1 percent of workers in Souderton were farmers, while 9 percent worked in construction, 14 percent in production, 17 percent in service industries, 26 percent in sales and office jobs, and 33 percent in management and professional positions. The two most prominent industries are manufacturing, in which 16 percent of workers are employed, and educational services, health care, and social assistance, which combined represents 20 percent of the jobs. The occupational numbers show little to no divergent information, as the numbers match very closely with the occupational numbers for the state of Pennsylvania for the year 2000.¹⁷

One occupational statistic that does differ from the rest of the state is that of the unemployment rate. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate of Souderton's broader region, Montgomery County, is approximately 7 percent. This is low compared to 9 percent for Pennsylvania in December 2010.¹⁸ As stated in the previous section, the economy has affected the community, but with regards to job opportunities it has not felt the same pain as other regions.

With regard to residents living in Souderton and attending Zion, pertinent information can be gleaned from this data. Successful educational systems and average occupational settings produce a high level of competition. Souderton, along with much of the Northeastern United States, is very competitive. Parents of young children begin the journey to keep up with others by seeking the "perfect" preschool. The competition begins in the school systems. Tutors are hired for children who already present above-

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ United States Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Mid-Atlantic Information Office," <http://www.bls.gov/ro3/urphl.htm> (accessed March 30, 2011).

average academic records. Highly competitive travel teams are the norm for athletic programs. The best of the best are rooted out at the ripe old age of five or six, and the rest of the children are left to play at the community level. As children mature, physical trainers can be hired to empower a child's full athletic potential. Parents work hard to gain any competitive advantage possible for their children.

The job market is the next level of that competition. Job searches draw dozens of qualified applicants and perpetuate the age-old adage, "It is not what you know, but who you know that counts." The constant pressure to compete creates a harried, anxious, and tired population. Children are pushed to the brink of exhaustion and experience little time to play freely without adult parameters and rules. Adults themselves work longer hours, sleep less, and appear to worry more than generations in the past.

For the harried, the tired, the pursuers of success, church takes a back seat to other needs, such as sleep, catching up on daily chores, playing sports, or finding time for leisure activities. A local grocery store owner says that Sundays have become the most profitable day of the week. Sundays are for sports tournaments and trips to the beach. Sunday has become a day to mow the lawn, paint the kitchen, or wash the car. Not only is there no time for church, but Sunday morning worship has become one more thing on the "to do" list, and one's spirituality is an afterthought. Pastors lament as church attendance continues to dwindle. People appear to find community one way or another. Instead of through church, community is found through the softball team or boating group. But God seems to be missing. It is precisely in the midst of such challenges that spirituality and the pursuit of God are necessary for balance and peace.

People are giving up their prominent spiritual discipline, church. This void is leading to a generation of people yearning for a relationship with God, but little knowledge of how to develop that relationship. Church members continually tell me that they do not know the Bible very well, and they do not have time to read it or to pray. Yet they long for a deeper relationship with Jesus. Congregants want to know Jesus at a deeper level, to live well, to serve Jesus, but they do not have time and are not sure how to do it. It may seem as if service is just one more thing to do, however service as a spiritual discipline fits into the world of doers who want to act and make a difference in their local communities. Service disengages selfish ambition and helps the server step back from the competition to succeed. Service demands sacrifice and the reprioritizing of what is important. The over-worked, overly self-focused people of the world need to rediscover the spiritual other: Jesus and his mission to save the world. Though busyness is a major factor in the Christian spiritual transformation of Zion's members, there are other factors to consider.

Cultural Influences: The Declining Influence of the German Mennonite Heritage

Souderton is an area that would not be known for its cultural diversity; however the German heritage that once stood as the community's primary influence has been losing ground as new residents bring new ideas and old residents wrestle with their faith. The Census Bureau records from 2005 to 2009 state that Souderton is 93 percent white.¹⁹ As for other racial and ethnic groups in the borough, there are small pockets of

¹⁹ U. S. Census Bureau, "Souderton Borough, Pennsylvania – Selected Economic Characteristics: 2005-2009."

Vietnamese and Mexican immigrants.²⁰ Despite the influx of commuters, the community is still widely homogeneous. Zion is primarily Caucasian by race and is of Mennonite origin. A quick perusal of the church directory shows large family groups, as well as several very prominent groups of surnames. The church currently claims one Indian family, a small number of Sudanese young people, and one African-American woman. The homogeneity of the community and congregation alleviates any concern that cultural differences are an issue to be considered for the project. Despite the strong Mennonite history represented in the congregation and made visible by the predominance of Swiss and German surnames, there is a shift happening of note. The Mennonite traditions are becoming watered down by the influence of a broadening non-denominational Christian community, and the impact of the ever-present call of the world upon Christians.

Supporting those observations is challenging. There appears to be no statistical information that tracks the decline of Mennonite influence in the borough of Souderton and its neighboring communities. It would be interesting to have data regarding the declining influence of Mennonite values, such as mutual aid, and generosity on the community. However, the evidence is visible in the continued growth of non-Mennonite businesses, the public school system, and non-denominational churches. In an interview with retired local Mennonite pastor, Willis Miller, he agreed with the assessment that the Mennonite influence on the community has been on the decline.²¹ Just as the statistics of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ This information was gleaned in an interview with Willis Miller, who is a retired pastor from a local congregation, Salford Mennonite Church. The interview was held on July 17, 2012.

deteriorating Mennonite influence on the community are murky, so too are the reasons for the decline.

Pastor Miller argued that the decline in Mennonite influence is due in part to the transition from wearing “plain clothes” to dressing like everyone else. He continued by saying that the transition has made Mennonites less visible in the world. At first glance, this argument may seem a bit absurd. Thinking more broadly, however, it points to a long-term continued watering down of Mennonite practices that made the denomination distinctive. The secular world washes over and corrodes the Christian life, just as water over time carves a path through rock. It appears that a connected reason for the declining influence may be due to the expansion of urban sprawl coming out of Philadelphia. The population has grown with commuters working in the city seeking a more rural setting. They have purchased houses in developments that used to be Mennonite farmland. The greater the population grows with non-churchgoing people, and even Christians of other back grounds, the harder it becomes for the Mennonites to hold onto traditional ways that set them apart. Disillusion with the Mennonite Church itself could be another factor in the decline. Young people leave the Church seeking more contemporary worship or theology. They have been leaving primarily for non-denominational churches, or they are simply staying home.

The two largest non-denominational congregations in the area are both offshoots of Mennonite churches. Calvary Church was once a Mennonite church, and BranchCreek Community Church was a church plant that began with disillusioned Mennonites. Mennonites have left the denomination for a myriad of reasons. Arguments have been

made that the Mennonite Church was once too constricting with regards to dress, worldly behavior, and the use of musical instruments in worship. People left to find churches that appeared to display a greater understanding of God's loving grace. Others left the denomination because Mennonites, known as quiet and humble, were not developing and encouraging evangelism in the ways that the Church once did with tent revivals and crusade meetings. On a more recent note, people have turned from the denomination because of the perceived notion that church leadership is either not conservative or liberal enough depending on their viewpoints.

There are no statistics to back the decline of Mennonite influence on this small community, but it appears to be a real phenomenon. Those leaving the Church tend to be young people. This does not bode well for the future of the Mennonite Church. In years to come, the Mennonite influence will continue to decline, for no other reason than that its membership is dying, literally as well as figuratively. Zion itself witnessed a tremendous loss in membership during a time of pastoral confusion when a co-pastorate relationship failed miserably. That drama was followed by an attempted building project that would have included a multi-purpose room designed to attract and retain young families. Many Zion members left the church for Calvary Church or one of the larger Mennonite churches that appeared to offer more programs for young people and singles. Currently, Zion struggles with an aging population that struggles with letting go of control. It would be a delightful side outcome of this project if the development of a spiritually aware congregation with a missional emphasis actually attracted young families to Zion.

Zion's Relationship with the Mennonite Community

Historically there have been two main branches of Mennonites in the United States. There was the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonites. Churches affiliated with the Mennonite Church conference were called MC churches, and those affiliated with the General Conference were GC churches. Zion was a GC church. The other local Mennonite churches were MC churches. The conferences merged in 2002 to create one denomination called Mennonite Church USA, or MCUSA.

Zion's relationship with the GC created a feeling of separation with regards to other local churches. The relationship also left a lasting impact upon Zion's congregational DNA in terms of its theology as well as its desire to be at the forefront of new thinking and a focus on Christian education. Since its inception, and up until the merger of 2002, Zion has wrestled with a clear sense of its identity regarding the local Mennonite scene.²² Today, relationships with local churches are becoming stronger.

The GC sprouted into existence in the late 1800s when a group of church leaders decided that it would be beneficial to seek and hire seminary-educated pastors for their churches.²³ They also supported the development of Sunday school classes as part of the spiritual maturation process. At the time the common Mennonite practice was to choose pastors from within the congregation via casting lots, and to empower parents and pastors to take the lead in the Christian spiritual transformation of young people.²⁴ Casting lots

²² This information was gleaned in an interview with church historian, Jim Musselman. This interview took place on February 16, 2011.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

was the practice of placing several names in a Bible and having one name pulled blindly, enabling God alone to choose the pastor. The MC conference originally deemed education and Sunday school as something to be avoided due to its worldliness, but it would later change its stance and embrace them.²⁵

At times Zion lived with a certain sense of pride at being different, as the only GC church in the community, and at other times the church has felt very alone in the midst of its own professed brethren. To an outsider, the differences between conferences may have seemed small, but to the one church in the area considered a “GC church,” the differences were significant and often led to judgment. The MC brethren perceived the GC churches to be overly liberal and viewed them through a cautionary lens.²⁶

This perception that the conference might be uncomfortably liberal led the other local churches to look skeptically upon Zion. This skepticism was exacerbated during World War II. Young Mennonite men were banished from church membership for their participation in the military. These same young men who felt called to join the war chose to attend Zion when they returned because Zion turned a blind eye to their service of the country. Along with the stance against serving in the military, the local MC churches lost young Mennonites to Zion for other prohibitions, ranging from television ownership to hanging out on the stoop with friends before the beginning of worship.²⁷

For the most part, Zion and the other local Mennonite congregations live in peaceful proximity. Throughout the years Zion and other churches have worked toward

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

helpful and hopeful relationships. Zion has participated in joint Sunday services in Souderton Park and worked with other churches in Vacation Bible School partnerships.²⁸ In 2002 the two major conferences put their differences behind them, but Zion remains a member of the Eastern District Conference, which is a smaller sub-group of Mennonite Church USA, while the other local churches are primarily a part of the Franconia Conference.²⁹ Both conferences have taken steps to work cohesively, but Zion continues to live with a sense of separation. In recent years, the conferences have begun discussions about a merger. That merger would certainly be a step forward in the relationship between Zion and the other Franconia Conference churches.

Zion's Relationship with the Souderton Borough

With members deeply involved in borough organizations and a mission that focuses locally, Zion views itself as a community church. Before moving three blocks east of the center of town forty-eight years ago, Zion began in the center of the Souderton borough on Broad Street. Its membership is historically involved in the local affairs. Two Zion members currently sit on the borough council, including the council president. One Zion member sits on the zoning commission board, two have served the fire company for well over twenty-five years, and various others have worked in local businesses. Zion built the first public library and the first preschool in the Souderton borough. The church is a pillar of the community, providing a fall festival each October,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Mennonite Church USA, "Historical Committee," <http://www.mcusa-archives.org/archives/GuideAMC.html> (January 21, 2013).

a flea market in the spring, and a home for the area Boy Scout troop. Zion offers community concerts and children's programs throughout the year.

And yet, with its strong connections to the community, church consultant Dan Hess, when looking for the church, asked a local resident for directions, and the resident had no idea where the church was located. At the time of the asking, that resident was on Cherry Lane, the very same street the church calls home. There are multiple churches in the borough, each with its own ministries. In order to differentiate itself, a church needs a particular identity. A potential spin-off goal of this project would be the creation of a missional identity that sets Zion apart from other local churches as an example of the kingdom of God growing and moving.

CHAPTER 2

ZION MENNONITE CHURCH: SEEKING A NEW IDENTITY

Guiding a congregation through even the slightest shift in ministry focus and identity transformation must be undertaken with great care. Congregations are complicated organisms. They tend to be averse to change and short on mercy when a leadership team fails to succeed. One must carefully consider many variables when preparing for such a project. This chapter will begin with the significant history of the congregation, briefly discussing the efforts of pastors who succeeded in guiding and forming Zion into the church that it is today. It also outlines Zion's prior ministry focus and the changes that developed with the building of the current sanctuary and facilities. With the history properly attended to, the current core values and vision statement will offer insight into the current state of Zion and its culture. Current ministries, congregational age demographics, and unwritten theological convictions will be reviewed. Finally the chapter will conclude with pertinent information regarding the focus group of the project, the church board, and a brief review of potential obstacles and opportunities.

Relevant Zion History: Broad Street and Beyond

This section of the chapter will discuss the history of the congregation as it pertains to the project. It will present three of Zion's direction-changing pastors, early mission activities, and the significance of the move into the facilities. This section relies upon the work of church historian Jim Musselman and his book about Zion, *A Whisper into the Ear: Hearing God's Call*.

Significant Pastors

A brief study of the significant pastors in the life of the congregation will offer insight into the types of leaders that affect the direction of the church. G.T. Soldner, Ernest Bohn, and Ellis Graber were three pastors at Zion recognized for their success in directing the path of Zion and its ministries. Each one influenced the culture of the church in his own way.

Grover T. Soldner was the fourth pastor at Zion, and he began his ministry in August of 1923. He would lead Zion for a period of eight years. During his tenure, the congregation saw significant numerical growth. New members came who lived outside of the local village of Souderton. In 1924, for nine hundred dollars the congregation purchased a Chevrolet sedan so that Reverend Soldner could visit families who lived in the country.¹

Reverend Soldner was a proponent of Christian education. He encouraged the congregation's relationship with Bluffton College, which was a GC-related organization. Rev. Soldner's passion for education advanced Zion's own Sunday school programs as they grew under his leadership. He not only preached about the things that concerned

¹ Musselman, *A Whisper Into the Ear*, 64-66.

him, such as the “celebration of war,” but he took proactive steps to see his beliefs heard on a broad stage.² Rev. Soldner invited educators to speak at Zion. Dr. J. E. Hartzler, the former president of Bluffton, preached at Zion and shared a series of eight lectures in 1924. This series opened the door to a relationship with Dr. Hartzler and his connections with Christian academic institutions that would “continue into the 1950’s.”³

Along with the focus on Christian education, Rev. Soldner led the congregation as it developed a strong peace position. On August 20, 1924, Rev. Soldner wrote a letter to President Calvin Coolidge discouraging the commemoration of the United States Military mobilization against Germany in September 12, 1918.⁴ The letter urged President Coolidge not to participate in celebrations that memorialize acts of war that are “anti-Christian” in nature.⁵ Rev. Soldner was concerned that such commemorations would develop a “spirit of militarism.”⁶ The letter was read before the entire congregation on August 17, 1924, and received a unanimous vote to be sent to the President.

Reverend Ernest J. Bohn followed Rev. Soldner as the lead pastor of Zion. He was installed in a reception on July 22, 1931 and served the congregation for twelve years. During his tenure as the pastor, Zion continued to grow in numbers. In 1938, the congregation welcomed thirty-five new members into the fold, and the membership rose

² Ibid., 64-66.

³ Ibid., 82.

⁴ Ibid., 65.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

to five hundred. Rev. Bohn's hospitality and welcoming temperament attracted non-Mennonites while still holding on to the core of Mennonite theology.⁷

His commitment to Mennonite theology was formed out of experience. His peace position was put to the test at the age of eighteen. When drafted into the military in 1918 during the World War, he declared conscientious objector status. The government put him through rigorous testing to examine whether his status was "sincere." The experience had a deep impact upon his life and leadership. Rev. Bohn played a large role in the development of a new denominational statement with regards to non-resistance to violence and the opposition to the war in 1941. Unlike the other faith statements offered by Mennonite churches, this one would not involve any disciplinary conditions. The lack of discipline involved in his statement reflected Rev. Bohn's demeanor, strongly principled, but accepting. This demeanor would open the door for conflict of the heart. Many of Zion's young men entered military service during Rev. Bohn's tenure at Zion. Some believe that Rev. Bohn left Zion because of the decisions of those young men.⁸

Reverend Ellis Graber was the sixth full-time pastor of Zion. He pastored Zion from 1944 through 1959. Rev. Graber was introduced to the congregation through its relationship with Dr. J. E. Hartzler, who knew Graber as a seminary student at the Hartford Seminary. Rev. Graber is most widely known for the energy that he and his wife infused into the ministries and programs at Zion.⁹

⁷ Ibid., 68-76.

⁸ Ibid., 64-67.

⁹ Ibid., 82.

Rev. Graber found in Zion a community that was ready to dive into mission. This suited his personality perfectly. The first program of note was to develop a nursery for the growing congregation's many children. It was argued that the children were disrupting services with chatter so loud that Rev. Graber felt he "could not preach."¹⁰ Delpha Graber, Rev. Graber's wife, quickly took over the music program at Zion, and one choir soon became four choirs with 116 participants. The choirs were challenged to sing often and well as they performed *The Messiah*, *The Seven Last Words*, *The Crucifixion*, and other oratorios with the help of professional musicians from Philadelphia.¹¹ New ministries grew as Rev. Graber encouraged a ready group of young adults to begin relief work gathering shoes, preparing relief kits with hygiene products, and collecting newspapers for recycling. The first official youth group was developed with Graber's leadership.¹² He also started a young couples Sunday school class that would form the core of leadership and ministry at Zion for years to come.¹³

Rev. Graber was a man who made ministry happen. During his tenure, the first library in the borough was developed at Zion, the first nursery school was created, and the land that the congregation currently calls home was purchased.¹⁴ He even negotiated a deal with a local radio station to broadcast ten of Zion's Sunday worship services.¹⁵

¹⁰ Ibid., 83.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 84.

¹³ Ibid., 85

¹⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Zion's programs and activities grew under his leadership beyond what anyone thought possible. However, he may have pushed too hard and too fast. Certain members felt that he had too much power and influence for the good of the church. When returning from vacation with his family in 1959, he was asked to resign his position as pastor of the church.¹⁶ He, as well as many of the young families that had joined the church during his tenure, felt a certain sense of disappointment that he was asked to leave Zion.¹⁷

Of the three pastors named in this report as significant, Graber was the only one who was asked to leave. All three were young when they began their ministry at Zion. They were educated pastors who were confident in their theology and positions of authority in the church. Each was active and vibrant in pursuit of ministry and growing the kingdom of God. The congregation might keep these characteristics in mind as they choose pastors to grow the church in the future, and a current pastor might use that knowledge to enhance ministry as well.

The advice one might glean from this history would be to actively lead with confidence through a well thought out theology, and to stand firm for one's beliefs, while being gracious to others who may not always agree. Rev. Graber's experience displays a couple of final lessons. First, pastors need to continually pay attention to warning signs that might belie potential problems in a congregation. Second, a pastor can push too hard, therefore they should be firm, but allow the congregation to work through changes and "catch their breath" on occasion.

¹⁶ Musselman, *A Whisper Into the Ear*, 93.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

Mission and Outreach

Considering the broad goal of creating a missional emphasis that will empower spiritual transformation and growth at Zion, this section will explore the service projects that gave life to Zion's members in the past. Mission is at the root of Zion's existence and always has been. Zion historian Jim Musselman writes,

By April 9, 1893, the twenty-seven original members of Zion Mennonite Church of Souderton had a charter, by-laws, a house of worship, a pastor, and a vision, which would help transform this small group of "new Mennonites" into a mature congregation. It was the same vision that was crystallizing within the leadership of Eastern District Conference – mission.

We need only look at the building dedication ceremonies in May 1893 to see the direction in which the congregation was being led. On Monday afternoon, the second day of the ceremonies, a two-part discussion was led by a group of pastors. The two parts were "What is, and the necessity of, mission work" and, "What is necessary for mission work."¹⁸

In 1895, the women of Zion formed the Zion Ladies' Mission Aid society with the desire to work at mission. The following statements, from Article two of their constitution, entitled "Its Work," explain their goals: "To awaken and foster interest in mission work both home and foreign by making that the main subject of devotion and exercises at the stated meetings. By instituting special meetings of missionature. By contributing and receiving contribution for the cause of mission and by preparing articles of clothing, bedding, etc. for the mission stations and needy ones."¹⁹ Early mission work was primarily focused toward needy families in the Philadelphia area.

¹⁸ Ibid., 35, 36.

¹⁹ Ibid., 42.

At the turn of the century Zion found itself with new leadership and a new ministry focus. Reverend John Schantz was regarded as a strong evangelist.²⁰ His mission was not one that focused on reaching out in service to the poor, but reaching out to those who were not following Jesus. During his tenure with Zion, the congregation went through a period where the mission of the church focused on tent revivals and the sharing of faith with the local community.²¹

World War I would see another shift in Zion's missional focus. The focus of mission turned from the local community to issues concerning the draft and the broader world. That expanding worldview led to Zion's first cross-cultural missionaries. Samuel Moyer was a Zion member who would heed the call to serve as a missionary with his wife in India.²² This couple expanded the doors of Zion's mission field. Suddenly, the congregation was no longer simply a church helping out the local community, but a congregation with global connections. This trend continued into and beyond World War II, as a few of Zion's members sought conscientious objector status and served overseas.²³ Current member Elvin Souder was one of those "CO's." He served with Mennonite Central Committee, a Mennonite relief organization, in Paraguay.

The World Wars also sharpened Zion's attention toward meeting the needs of those experiencing the devastation of the wars. During the term of Rev. Graber, "the

²⁰ Ibid., 47.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 59.

²³ Ibid., 77.

young people were challenged with relief projects such as collecting shoes and towels to be distributed in recovering war-torn Europe.”²⁴ The youth also began to collect newspapers to be sold to raise funds for relief work.²⁵

In the 1960s, Zion began building a new campus at a site several blocks away from the original building on Broad Street.²⁶ This building project left little time and energy for the creation of new ministries. It appears that upon completion of the project, the congregation entered a time of resting. Certainly, prior ministries were still happening, but Zion needed a time to breathe. The new building gave the congregation the opportunity to enhance old ministries. Musselman states, “The programs instituted during the previous twenty-five years were able to continue and flourish with a new sense of ease.”²⁷

As the programs at Zion continued to take advantage of the new building, the 1970s found many Zion members heading “out” for two-year stints of voluntary service with Mennonite Central Committee and other mission organizations.²⁸ This boom, healthy for Zion’s sense of service to the world, was detrimental to membership and attendance numbers. Many of the young people found homes in places like Canada or Indiana and never came home.²⁹

²⁴ Ibid., 84.

²⁵ Ibid., 85.

²⁶ Ibid., 99.

²⁷ Ibid., 113.

²⁸ Ibid., 127.

²⁹ Ibid.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Zion's mission and outreach remained steady. Members served on Mennonite Disaster Service trips and continued relief efforts driven by Mennonite Central Committee. That work included collecting groceries to be distributed in Philadelphia and New York City, as well as collecting health kits and canning meat to provide nutritional protein to the hungry throughout the world. One new ministry, the Table of Plenty, began in 1997.³⁰ It began as a Thanksgiving meal for the community and grew into a lunch offered three days a week. The Table of Plenty continues to feed an average of twenty people each day, three days a week, and over three hundred people on Thanksgiving and Christmas day.³¹

This brief review of Zion's history of mission reveals a congregation founded on the belief that its main objective requires help to the poor and ministry to the world. Mission is an integral part of Zion's congregational DNA. Leading the church with a focus on mission as the key to its identity and spiritual transformation is truly a move back to its deepest roots.

Vision and Core Values

The vision statement and core values reveal what is most important to a congregation. They are documents that state who an organization perceives itself to be and what it wants to become. This section will engage the values, beliefs, and desires for growth at the core of Zion's personality.

³⁰ Ibid., 160.

³¹ Statistics gleaned during an interview with Janet Hartzel, the director of the Table of Plenty, on November 24, 2011.

Zion's Vision Statement is as follows: "Believing that all people are important to God, we at Zion Mennonite Church desire to grow by welcoming each person, valuing community and nurturing our relationship with Jesus Christ and one another." The vision statement displays certain values that Zion deems ultimately important and which it desires to cultivate. The first phrase of the statement, "believing that all people are important to God," is the foundation of Zion's vision. This short set of words carry important implications. According to the logic of capitalism, each person's value depends upon his or her ability to produce something of worth to others. To believe that all people are important demands that one loves those who offer no potential economic gain. Inherently all people have value, simply because they are children of God. This has nothing to do with their ability to lead worship, buy a new piano for the sanctuary, or make a large donation to the youth auction. The statement implies service and support to those who are less fortunate, particularly offered from a position of humility and respect. The statement in the vision, "all people are important to God," implicitly demands compromise and self-sacrifice. The opening phrase of the vision statement opens a door to compassionate service that should never be closed.

Branching out from the first phrase, the vision reveals Zion's hopes and purpose. That purpose is growth. It does not define what kind of growth is desired. The means of growth, welcoming, valuing community, and nurture, but the end is not completely clear. From the knowledge that Zion is a congregation of business people and community leaders, it would be reasonable to assume that growth in membership is one of the intended goals. The focus on welcoming each person and valuing community would

certainly be two keys to the attraction of new members; however the third focus point leads toward another conclusion.

The call to nurture relationship with Christ and one another implies spiritual growth, not numerical growth. Ephesians 4:11-17 calls for the body of Christ to be built up and growing into maturity of faith, knowledge of Christ, and life in the fullness of Christ. Developing a mature congregation with a solid faith in Christ and the desire to know him must be the highest priority. Relationship with Christ is the foundation of the Christian life and affects every facet of life, including the work of sharing one's faith, offering compassionate service, and inviting others to church. Zion's vision statement recognizes the importance of valuing others, welcoming the stranger, and growing together as a community desiring a deeper relationship with Jesus. The core values support the vision statement in greater detail.

The core values document recognizes that the core values of Zion "tie the mission and vision together and describes what we believe."³² The six value statements are:

- We are a body of Anabaptist believers who follow the teachings of the Bible in the Mennonite Tradition.
- We value worship for its spiritual renewal, fellowship with one another, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- We advocate Jesus' teachings of grace, peace, justice, and non-resistance in our lives and in the world.
- We empower mission work in our community and throughout the world as an outward expression of obedience to God.
- We regard Christian education and a strong youth program as the foundation for growing faith.
- We believe that congregational participation and unity is essential for church growth and wellbeing.³³

³² Zion Mennonite Church Core Values document, June 2004.

³³ Ibid.

A full version of the core values can be found in appendix A.

The values of worship, Christian education, and congregational participation are inward practices intended to grow relationship with Christ. The values of advocating the teachings of Christ and the mission to the community open the door for an outward expression of faith and appear to be a response to the call of Christ, an act of obedience. It appears that one group of values is based on growth in relationship to Christ, spiritual transformation, and discipleship, while the second set is a call to respond to God's love via obedience. Zion appears to hold a distinction between spiritual growth/transformation and obedience. The distinction between the two may not have been intended, but it is evident. Though evident, it is not helpful or particularly true. Worship, teaching others about Christ, and participating in the community are all growth inspiring and driven by obedience. Indeed, this project is dependent on the belief that obedience and spiritual transformation are inseparable.

The final value pertains to congregational participation and unity. Zion is a congregation that emphasizes the importance of active faith. To Zion, following Jesus and the pursuit of Christian spirituality is a process of action over meditation. Members of the church measure their spirituality by their active involvement in mission and church activities. In times of need, Zion members would be far quicker to ask how they can help rather than how they can pray. When a member's house burned down, Zion sprung into action, raising money and cleaning up the mess. Zion's active faith is also witnessed in

its involvement with organizations like Mennonite Disaster Service and Mennonite Central Committee.

One goal of this project is to help the congregation to break down the distinction between pursuing Christian spiritual transformation and actions done in obedience to Christ. The two are inseparably linked. Obedience is a way of pursuing relationship with Jesus Christ. The congregation desires to grow in relationship with Jesus and to be actively obedient to Christ. It is possible to connect the two. This will be attempted through service projects, sermons, monthly newsletter reports, and by living a life of obedience and purposeful transformation.

Range of Current Ministries

Having discussed the history of Zion's missional activity, and examined the core values of the congregation, this section turns toward the current ministries at Zion. The core values state that Zion is focused on mission "in our community and throughout the world." Both community-focused ministries and congregational care and fellowship will be discussed.

Community-focused Ministries

One prominent ministry to the local Souderton community is the annual Fall Festival held in October. This festival includes attractions for everyone. There are car shows for the adults, face painting and inflatable games for the children, and food for all ages. Zion sees the fall festival as a free ministry to the community that creates the opportunity for families to come together on the church campus and possibly see Christ

in the service of the church and the faces of those enjoying the day. In May the congregation also holds a Strawberry Bash. This flea market is simply a toned down version of the fall fest.

Festivals are not the only fun, family-friendly activities that Zion offers to the community. The congregation hosts various concerts throughout the year, hoping to invite the community to worship and to meet Christ in music. The organ is often a focal point of Zion's concert events; however, in 2010 Zion hosted a contemporary Christian band for a Christmas service, as well as a "Jam fest" with local Christian bands and praise teams leading worship under a tent. In July of that same year, the children were the focus as the church invited neighborhood children to come out on Wednesday nights to learn about musical instruments and basic rhythms. The music camp is an ongoing ministry at Zion.

Vacation Bible school followed the music camp, the last week in July. About 50 to 75 percent of the attendees are non-Zion children from the area neighborhoods. Zion works at building the kingdom of God through the arts, developing wholesome family fun, and providing Christian education. However, the kingdom-building that tugs at the heart of the congregation most deeply is for those marginalized by financial struggles, disasters, and emotional brokenness.

David Augsburger reflects on the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he states, "The church is only the church when it exists for others in the practice of agape."³⁴ One of Zion's most cherished ministries is the Table of Plenty, which is a community meal

³⁴ David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 163.

offered to any and all who need a warm meal and fellowship with others. The Table serves around twenty to thirty local community members three days a week. The woman who leads this ministry serves with a great deal of love and compassion. All who enter are greeted warmly with a hug and words of kindness. This lunch opens the congregational eye to the reality that there are homeless in its quaint community.

The desire to help the homeless has also led Zion to partner with the Keystone Opportunity Center. Keystone is a local non-profit organization that works at helping homeless people to develop job skills and find housing. In 2009, Zion purchased a property with a house directly connected to the Zion's campus. A committee was formed to decide what to do with the house. The decision was quickly made to rent the house to Keystone for one dollar a year to aid them in the pursuit of finding homes for the homeless. The house was refurbished by volunteers in the community, and this effort was led by Zion members. Keystone uses the house as a home base for two to three families at a time. In the evening the families sleep at churches. During the day they use the house for showers, to have access to computers for job searches, and to have a mailing address for resumes. The Table of Plenty and Keystone house serve as examples of Zion's mission to the local community; however, practice of agape is not limited to Souderton alone.

One of the broadly reaching ministries that Zion supports financially and with volunteers is the Mennonite Central Committee (hereafter, MCC). The MCC has a Material Resource Center (hereafter, MRC), which gathers relief supplies for third world countries and disaster relief. A handful of Zion's senior citizen members lead a yearly

meat-canning ministry supported by the MRC. MCC provides the canning equipment and volunteer canning professionals, while the MRC provides the meat and volunteers to get the work done. The meat is shipped around the world, providing much needed protein to those who might otherwise go hungry. Zion members also spend time at the MRC quilting, sorting through donated clothing, and recycling paper products. For many in the congregation, the MRC offers the opportunity to serve people all over the world and actively support the mission of God's kingdom here on earth.

Zion is involved with other missional projects as well. The "grocery bag project" involves a yearly food drive for congregations in Philadelphia and New York City. Mennonite Disaster Service calls on congregations like Zion to participate in short-term mission trips that take them into areas of the country and world where disasters have struck. Zion members have gone to Mississippi to clean up after hurricane Katrina and to New York to clean the mud out of homes that were struck by disastrous flooding.

Many of our youth and adults have taken several trips to Guatemala with an organization called Agros International. Agros gives low-interest and interest-free loans to farming communities in third world countries in order to buy land and supplies to plant and cultivate crops. The churches and people that lend the money then follow the progress of the communities for designated time periods by visiting them one to two times a year. As the communities create profits, they pay the loans back. Agros then gives the money to a new community and new projects are begun. Zion is a congregation concerned with the well being of others in the local community and around the world. A rough estimate of the number of Zion members involved in compassionate service

through the many opportunities offered at the church would be around 30 to 40 percent. Mission is a major piece of the puzzle that makes up the congregation's DNA. Yet, as has been mentioned previously, this project is designed to empower that missional character even more deeply. To create change, a healthy community built on trust and strong relationship bonds is crucial.

Congregational Care and Fellowship

The previous section took a look at Zion's missional pursuits locally and abroad; this section will review the activities focused on developing unity within the congregation. In their book, *Managing the Congregation*, Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser argue the importance of fellowship when considering the health of a congregation. A healthy community laughs together. They enjoy being together and are able to be honest with one another. Communities with healthy relationships are able to work through directional changes with fluidity and less traumatic reactions.³⁵ Communities with healthy relationships not only deal with changes more fluidly, but they tend to serve together as well. Zion works at relationships through communal worship, study, and fellowship.

Along with weekly communal worship, Sunday school classes are a primary place for the development of deep and meaningful relationships between smaller groups of Zion members. Classes range in size from five to thirty members and tend to be organized by age groups. Each class develops bonds by learning together as well as providing a place to discuss the complexities of life with others. Several of the Sunday

³⁵ Shawchuck and Heuser, *Managing the Congregation*, 51.

school classes engage in outside activities to strengthen their social bonds. Picnics or brunch gatherings after church are examples of the activities.

Mennonite fellowship usually involves food of some sort or another. During the nine months of the school year, a fellowship meal is held on the first Tuesday of every month. All are welcome to come for a catered meal and to stay for a worship service afterwards. The annual meeting and mid-year church picnic are two more fellowship events that invite the congregation to come to the table for food and fun.

Fellowship building also takes place during service events. Many strong Zion relationships have been developed while driving to Mennonite Disaster Service sites or around a can of paint on a church workday. Busy hands and minds focused on the task at hand tend to eliminate those awkward moments when two in conversation have run out of things to say. Service draws people together with a common cause while developing camaraderie.

One goal of this overall project would be that congregational members might invite one another to serve. While serving together, relationships between members will grow. Those relationships, in turn, empower spiritual transformation as members meet Christ in one another. The relationship between service, congregational unity, and one's relationship with God is circular. One leads to the growth of the other and vice versa.

Age Demographics: What About the Future of Zion?

This section will explore the age demographics at Zion and their potential implications to the project and the congregation's spiritual transformation. Membership at Zion in the year 2011 is approximately 460 people. That number includes regular

attending adult members, children, and shut-ins who are no longer able to attend church services due to deteriorating health.

Of the congregation, 57 percent is over fifty years of age. Within this 57 percent, members aged sixty and above represent 36 percent and members between the ages of fifty and sixty represent 21 percent. There is a significant drop off from the fifty- to sixty-year-old age group to those members who are forty to fifty years old, which consists of 9 percent of the membership. The downward trend continues with 4 percent of members falling into the thirty- to forty-year-old age range, and 7 percent of members in the twenty- to thirty-year-old age range. Members between the ages of one and twenty represent 23 percent of the congregation.

Despite the percentages that point to a young congregation, there is a growing age gap that is prevalent throughout the denomination. Conrad Kanagy, a pastor and sociology professor at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania who has studied changes in the Mennonite Church, reports, “The mean age of Mennonites today is fifty-four, five years older than in 1989. While the aging of Mennonite Church USA parallels national and global trends, the pace of the aging is more extreme than among other religious denominations in the United States.”³⁶ His studies in the year 2006 showed that only 30 percent of Mennonites were under the age of forty-five.³⁷

Looking at the numbers another way, 67 percent of the congregation is older than forty. The spiritual transformation of senior members revolves around Sunday school

³⁶ Conrad Kanagy, *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007), 55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

classes and devotional readings. The senior citizens at Zion have always made church a spiritual practice and rarely miss a week. They grew up reading Scripture daily with their families and were encouraged by parents to read on their own. Those practices have become a part of their lives. While recently teaching a Sunday school class that consisted of Zion members over the age of sixty-five, I asked the question, “How many of you participate in daily devotional readings?” Each member in the class stated clearly that he or she reads daily devotional material every day. One of their favorite devotional books is *Our Daily Bread*, which is a monthly booklet with a reflective story and Scripture reading for every day of the month. As the age of members decreases, so does the frequency of their participation in regular forms of spiritual disciplines. When a class of young adults ranging in ages from twenty-three to thirty-seven had the chance to respond to the same question, not one member would admit to regular daily study.

The senior members of Zion attend church every Sunday. Regular attendance for the class of young adults is closer to two Sundays a month. Weekly worship is a spiritual discipline and part of the transformational process. Again, the seniors are intentionally engaging in this spiritual discipline, while the younger members are less consistent.

The young people of the congregation are attending church less and participating in spiritual practices, such as Scripture reading and prayer, without a regular rhythm. There may be multiple reasons for the changes in practices of seniors versus youth. One could blame the fast-paced, competitive society that leaves no time for spiritual practice. Another reason could be that churches are doing a poor job of teaching people how to read the Bible. Parents do not make Scripture reading a priority, and their children see

that and respond in kind. The reasons are less important than understanding the fact that Zion's youth and young adults are in need of spiritual transformation, as well as a practice that they can embrace and a strategy to empower that transformation. Without the continued spiritual growth of all members, the Christian faith has little future.

Young Adults

The pursuit of daily spiritual disciplines appears to be less prevalent with each generation. This section will argue that compassionate service is a practice with great potential to engage the youth. The argument begins with two presuppositions. First, the emerging generation is interested in spiritual growth and transformation. And second, service is a desirable practice.

By opening one's eyes to current trends in religion and popular culture, one can observe the yearning for spirituality. In recent years, there has been a great deal of growth in the popularity of magazines that specialize in spirituality and the practices that lead one toward a greater sense of the presence of God. Seminaries offer a growing number of courses on spiritual formation. The recent film, *Eat, Pray, Love*, based on the novel by Elizabeth Gilbert, is a story of a woman's pursuit of her spiritual identity. The movie naturally displays the current state of a world in pursuit of spirituality. Young people, including high school youth as well as young married couples in their thirties, are seeking a deeper connection with God and a deeper sense of knowing and understanding God. They are yearning for something more than what the traditional Church has been able to offer in a Sunday service of singing and study of the word.

Not only do they search for something more significant, the emerging generation of young people seeks an active faith that is working to create a better world. In his book, *A Primer on Postmoderism*, Stanley J. Grenz argues,

For the first time in recent history, the emerging generation does not share the conviction of their parents that the world is becoming a better place in which to live. From widening holes in the ozone layer to teen-on-teen violence, they see our problems mounting. And they are no longer convinced that human ingenuity will solve these enormous problems or that their living standard will be higher than that of their parents.³⁸

This set of beliefs creates a group of young people who want to get involved in making a difference in the world. Chris Heuertz, a postmodern author whose focus is compassionate service, states, “At its best, Christian community is the body of Christ, living and active in the world.”³⁹ Young people are seeking a spirituality that is active, compassionate, and betters the world within which they live.

Unwritten Values and Theological Convictions

This section will reflect on unwritten values and theological convictions important to the task of altering the ministry focus of the congregation, which is to develop greater spiritual transformation through service. These values and convictions include individualism, generosity, and a theology that is diverse and “conservatively liberal.” Each of these influences the culture of Zion and could impact whether or not it will be open to deepening its identity as a service-focused church.

³⁸ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 13.

³⁹ Heuertz, *Simple Spirituality*, 51.

Individualism

Zion is a congregation of people who are wildly independent. It is a group of individuals brought together by their common love of Jesus Christ, their church, and one another. Throughout its history, Zion has attracted those who were not comfortable at their former congregations. Due to theological concerns or being asked to leave their congregations, people left their childhood churches and found a home at Zion. In times of war, local Mennonite churches encouraged young men to follow their conscience when deciding to go to war or abstain by declaring conscientious objector status. The churches were fine with the decision as long as the young members' consciences did not lead to war. In the occasions where military service was the choice, the congregations removed those young men from membership. When they came home from their tour of duty, Zion welcomed them. Other young people left their churches because the theology was too conservative. Those congregations had strict policies pertaining to appropriate dress codes and social activities. Zion's openness welcomed new members who felt constricted by those rules. Those willing to leave home churches and their connections to family tended to be confident individuals, free to stand for their beliefs and convictions. This sense of individualism has stayed with Zion throughout the years. In a way, the community is bound together by its desire to welcome one another despite differences.

Understanding the natural inclination toward individuality of the members offers insight into the best way to lead the congregation toward change. Multiple service opportunities must be made available. No one project is going to appeal to everyone. The members of Zion do not follow the crowd; each person will make up his or her own

mind. In order for a new plan to achieve broad acceptance, a project must be explained convincingly and be well organized. If a potentially new program is presented well and makes sense to a broad group of people, the chances of support rise quickly. Certainly that statement would ring true within any community, but at Zion it is imperative, due to the varieties of personal opinions, dreams, and hopes of each member. Consensus is the best case scenario; a unanimous decision is a virtual impossibility at Zion. In leading change one should not assume that one small group of Zion's members will get behind a new project and get everyone else involved. Developing consensus and compromise is a challenge but worth the effort.

Generosity

Zion's individuality and independence create challenges when trying to gain acceptance for something new; however, when members believe a project is worthy, they respond generously. A missionary who was serving a hospital in Africa came to speak at Zion on a Sunday morning, and told a story about a woman who died while riding her bicycle to the hospital. She was in labor and had no other means to travel. Her community in Tanzania did not have an ambulance. By the end of the service, that missionary had received gifts of one thousand dollars from twenty-six different people to purchase an ambulance for the hospital. The congregation was moved by the story and trusted the missionary to succeed in the mission of purchasing the ambulance. Despite the current economic downturn, Zion has balanced its budget each of the last two years, and the church continually supports community and Mennonite missions generously. It seems that giving is a spiritual practice that Zion already embraces.

Considering the generosity of the members of Zion, it would be appropriate to focus attention on the ways that giving is a spiritual practice. Money is a form of power and a tool used to control circumstances and surroundings. Giving is a sign of letting go of one's attempt to control. Giving to those in need engages the giver in the practice of loving the neighbor by making a sacrifice to empower that neighbor's health and wellbeing. Giving then becomes spiritual practice as the giver relies on Christ to control his or her life instead of money, and the giver experiences Christ's presence as he or she participates in building the kingdom through sacrificial love of neighbor. Greater promotion of the incredible value of giving could be accomplished by making time during services to focus on the missions that the congregation supports. Members need to be able to see the growth in others promoted by their gifts and sacrifices. Recipients could even share the ways that the gifts have aided growth of God's kingdom. It would be helpful to hear the stories of the givers as well. As they offer donations, members would be invited to share their stories of blessing and connectedness to God that have grown out of the practice. In a time when participatory service is popular, it is not difficult to miss the importance of financial assistance and the power of sharing what God has given.

Diverse Theology: Conservatively Liberal

Zion's independence and its generosity are both evident in the congregational theology. The independence leads to widely various theological views, which make Zion unique. Zion has welcomed military participants and conscientious objectors. There are members who are deeply disappointed that there is not a United States flag in the

sanctuary or that the staff does not celebrate Memorial Day on Sunday mornings. There are also members who attend annual peace and justice committee meetings at retreat centers, who would leave the church if an American flag was displayed in the sanctuary. The congregation is both liberal and conservative. That statement stands both theologically and politically. In any given Sunday school class, there are bound to be divergent views on any and all topics, including pacifism and the inclusion of gays and lesbians in church membership. One class invited a Muslim man to discuss his faith with the class. One group within the class wanted to hear the similarities that bind Christianity and Islam together, while others wanted to focus on the differences and assure one another of the belief that Heaven is only accessible through the blood of Christ. This dichotomy creates many challenges when trying to make group decisions. However, those decisions are often wisely tested from multiple angles.

Despite the theological divergence, the congregation is fairly connected with regards to mission and care for the community. Love for Jesus and neighbor is the connecting point for all members. Therefore, generosity and mission often draw Zion together. When the congregation bought a house that is located adjacent to the campus property, the decision to rent the house to the Keystone Opportunity Center for the homeless was quickly agreed upon and accepted by the majority of the congregation. The diversity of Zion is both a blessing and a curse. But the congregation has shown that when all sides band together, amazing things can be done, and spiritual growth develops across the board.

Leadership Structure: Church Board and Ministries

This section begins to narrow the scope of the project, offering a picture of the church board as the focus and details of how they were invited to practice spiritual transformation through service. The board sits at the top of the organizational chart. Currently the board is made up of eight members, four men and four women. There are two retired businessmen, two young adults under the age of thirty, one real estate agent, a private school principal, a business owner, and the development director of a local non-profit ministry. The development director is the current board chair, and the business owner is the chair-elect.

Each member is considered to be a representative of the congregation. Board members serve two-year terms and are able to serve three of those terms for a maximum of six years. As members rotate off of the board, new members are selected via a process that begins with nominations from the congregation followed by a discernment process. The process involves group discernment that includes assessing board needs, as well as a nominee's sense of call and willingness to serve. The process comes to a close as nominees encourage one another and either pull their names out of the discernment or choose to back another nominee.

The board is responsible for the budget of the congregation, as well as leading the vision and direction of the church. The board directly oversees the lead pastor, who leads the other staff members and the ministry chair personnel. The board is responsible for capital campaigns, the purchase of land, oversight of the endowment committee and other major monetary decisions.

Monthly meetings involve a review of the financial situation of the church, pastoral reporting, and any other business deemed appropriate for board review. The board members act as caretakers of the vision and encouragers of volunteers. A financial secretary reviews financial records. The board secretary keeps minutes and acts as the church secretary in times where those services are needed. The board chair runs the meetings and the chair elect sits in for the chairperson when needed. Chairpersons hold that duty for two years. The lead pastor represents the staff at the board meetings and participates in all discussions, other than those held during an executive session. Those sessions may involve reviews of the lead pastor or sensitive issues directed toward the lead pastor. The discussions are related to the lead pastor on the morning after the sessions. The lead pastor is not a voting member of the board.

Staff and five ministry chairpersons lead the day-to-day decisions and business of the church. Outreach, Congregational Care, Worship, Stewardship, and Christian Education are the five ministries. The chairpersons act as the main communicators and facilitators over the ministries and their committees. Each ministry has committees that support its mission. The staff members participate throughout all of the ministries at different times as they work at their duties. The lead pastor oversees the paid staff members of the church, leads Ministry Team meetings, preaches three out of four Sundays a month, and provides pastoral care duties. Those duties involve helping the pastor of pastoral care with visiting, crisis care, funerals, and weddings. The lead pastor wears many ministry and leadership hats.

Obstacles and Opportunities of Service as Discipline

The potential obstacles and opportunities of the project are considered in this final section of the chapter. Serving others comes with a unique set of challenges. One potential obstacle is a superiority complex involved with giving aid to the jobless. The board members must not judge those whom they serve. Fears and insecurities could arise while serving people who are “different” from those serving. Those challenges are real; however, it is evident that lack of time will be the biggest challenge to overcome.

This group understands well God’s call to service. Each member is a servant to the congregation by leading on the church board. They also serve in various other capacities in the church and their community via non-profit agencies and serving on other boards. One member is also a borough council member. The most prevalent challenge facing participation is time. Service takes time. Each opportunity will demand the sacrifice of precious minutes that could be utilized fulfilling job duties or spending time with family.

This challenge demands a certain level of flexibility in setting up the times for service and expectations regarding participation. It is assumed that individual board members will miss some of the service opportunities. As the board discusses the importance of compassionate service and dreams together about developing a missional church, it is hoped that service and this project will be a priority. The opportunities are bound only by imagination. Another hope is that the board will be transformed in their journey with Christ through serving people in differing capacities and meeting them face-to-face. The ministry opportunities presented to them are designed to empower

compassion and the understanding of Christ's love for all. It is desired that hope will be spread, and that people will be fed, valued, and nurtured.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW: BUILD THE KINGDOM

This chapter reviews five books that were read and found to be particularly helpful with regards to this project. The first book, *Simple Spirituality*, by Christopher Heuertz, reflects on the heart of service as a spiritual discipline. This book's focus on the importance of engaging the marginalized as a way of meeting Christ will aid the process of preparing the board members for their service projects. It serves as a reminder that service is about people. John Howard Yoder's book, *The Politics of Jesus*, is useful in understanding the overall sense of discipleship of Mennonites. It offers insight into the underlying theology and ethics of the Mennonite Church that have led the Church to be a leader in service and compassionate care. *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, by C. Arnold Snyder, offers a view into the overarching spiritual makeup of Anabaptists and therefore Mennonites. The book discusses the historic spiritual disciplines of Mennonites. The fourth book under review is Dallas Willard's *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. The value of this book is that it lays the foundation for the practice of spiritual disciplines and has a short section on the discipline of service itself. Finally, a book titled *Managing the Congregation*, by Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, offers management wisdom that is useful in examining the congregation. It also considers the overarching concept of

changing congregational direction, and offers guidance for the process of continued assessment that will be a part of Chapter 7 of this project. Many books have been helpful along the journey. The five books reviewed are only a sampling. The following sections of this chapter delve more deeply into the books and each one's value to the project.

Simple Spirituality: Learning to See God in a Broken World, by Christopher Heuertz

Christopher Heuertz is one member of a small group of current writers addressing the Christian call to love neighbor and build the kingdom of God by reaching out to the marginalized of society. The mission of these authors, including Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and Shaine Claiborne in addition to Heuertz, is driven by a study of Scripture and particularly the life of Christ. To them, the words and life of Jesus provide commands that must be followed. If Jesus says that we are to love our neighbor, feed the hungry, and clothe the poor, then that is what a follower of Christ must do. Of the handful of books written by postmodern servants, this book stands out because of its focus on deepening one's relationship with Jesus through service.

Heuertz's thesis statement for the book is not stated explicitly. However, with a bit of sifting through the stories, one can clearly understand his argument. He reveals his first clue in this statement about spirituality: "Mine is the story of a blind man receiving sight."¹ To Heuertz, spirituality is defined by one's ability to see God's heart by seeing

¹ Heuertz, *Simple Spirituality*, 15.

through the eyes of Christ. He writes, “I realized that I desperately needed God’s eyes to help me see the way to God’s heart.”²

If, to Heuertz, spirituality is defined by one’s ability to see the heart of Christ, the heart of Christ is most visible in the lives of the marginalized. In explaining his ministry, *Word Made Flesh*, Heuertz states,

We are covenanted together by a shared spirituality with missional implications. This process and path of discovery takes us all around the world to slums and sewers, refugee camps and red-light districts. We literally live among the dying as an act of solidarity with our neighbors and our God. We don’t assume to have answers, but together in community with and among our friends who are poor we seek to discover Jesus.³

The thesis of the book is that one receives spiritual transformation through God’s leading while serving the marginalized. Living a life based on the five core values of humility, community, simplicity, submission, and brokenness alongside the poor, the hungry, and the lost will lead to spiritual growth and the knowledge of Christ. The book is broken into five chapters based on the aforementioned values. For the sake of brevity, this section will focus on the first three values, as humility, community, and simplicity are values that Mennonites tend to hold in high regard.

Humility to Heuertz is foundational to spiritual transformation. He writes, “It is humility that opens our eyes to the discovery of God.”⁴ Humility is about positioning oneself appropriately before God. Humility recognizes our weakness and empowers a more complete image of God. Along with Jesus being the conquering savior, he is one

² Ibid., 19.

³ Ibid., 20.

⁴ Ibid., 33.

who cares for the marginalized and can be found in their very presence. By positioning ourselves rightly and lowly before God, we see God truthfully. As we see God truthfully, we recognize God's love for the broken (all of us), and intimate relationships with God become enhanced and empowered. Heuertz argues, "Humility is the door through which we must enter to be welcomed into God's presence."⁵ This statement might be clarified by adding that humility opens the door to faith in God, which in turn opens the gate to Christ's presence.

Despite glossing over the importance of faith in one's relationship with God, Heuertz's argument is correct regarding the need for humility in spiritual formation via the pursuit of passionate service. He has experienced firsthand the spiritual transformation found in caring for the lame and the lost during extended times of service with Mother Teresa in India. However, it would have been helpful to read that one should serve the marginalized because one finds Christ in one's neighbor. Heuertz seems to focus on serving one's neighbors because Jesus loves them. That is true, but that is not the only reason or the deepest relational reason to serve.

Chapter two moves from humility into community. It is from a stance of humility that community begins. Heuertz argues that community provides one with both an identity and a source of accountability. One's identity should not be shaped by what one does, how much one has, or other's perceptions. Ultimately one's identity is developed in community with God. Christians are children of God and worthy of the incredible sacrifice that Christ makes on their behalf. Their identities are further developed within

⁵ Ibid., 38.

Christian communities that form and shape and hold them accountable. They are accountable to help each other and to recognize that each person is worthy of their respect and has much to teach them.

Simplicity follows community in Heuertz's list of practices that aid in the ability to see God in this broken world. To Heuertz, simplicity's value is found in letting go. Holding on to "stuff" gives humanity a sense of security and tends to distract the follower of Christ from the job of kingdom building. Christ lived a life of simplicity, and believers should as well. Mennonites are a denomination that preaches simplicity, yet this is still a struggle for most North American Christians. Simplicity creates a great starting point for the project. It is important to start simply with the encouragement to seek spiritual transformation in the practice of service.

One critique of Heuertz's work is that his form of communal living within city slums is not practical or even simple in the minds of most, if any, of Zion's members. It would be helpful to focus on what an average member of a congregation could do. Perhaps that is the role of the pastor.

Overall, Heuertz is an engaging storyteller. In his stories from India, he paints a beautifully heartbreaking picture of the tragic plight of the marginalized and the ways that his relationships with them have formed his understanding of God's love. The overall concept is helpful to the project as board members can be encouraged to find Christ in the faces of those they serve. However, the critique raises an important question: How does the average working parent in Souderton, Pennsylvania engage the marginalized when confronted with the amazing sacrifices that Heuertz has made?

The Politics of Jesus, John Howard Yoder

John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* is a must read for any Mennonite with interest in social justice issues. Yoder is arguably the most read and influential Mennonite theologian in the history of the denomination. This book is regarded as his most significant work. *The Politics of Jesus* offers great insight into the Mennonite penchant toward pursuing the ways of Jesus as literally as possible. To Yoder, abiding by the life of Christ requires compassionate service and love of neighbor.

In the words of Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* "claims not only that Jesus is, according to the biblical witness, a model of radical political action, but that this issue is now generally visible throughout New Testament studies, even though the biblical scholars have not stated it in such a way that the ethicists across the way have had to notice it."⁶ To Yoder, Jesus' divine incarnation designates him as the model human. Jesus teaches humanity how to be truly human.⁷

The Politics of Jesus, as a whole, does not address compassionate service directly. However, chapter four includes Yoder's belief that Jesus was a proponent of the Old Testament practice of the Jubilee year. During the Jubilee year, the fields were to be left unplanted, debts were to be remised, slaves liberated, and all property given back to original owners. The Jubilee year placed everyone on a level financial playing field. Yoder argues that Christ was referring to the Jubilee year when he told his disciples not to worry what they would eat or drink in Luke 12:29-31. The argument is based upon the

⁶ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2.

⁷ Ibid.

wording used by Jesus, as it is reminiscent of Leviticus 25:20-21. He also points to the language of the Lord's Prayer as a Jubiliary prayer, as it calls for the remission of debts.⁸

The rest of the book lays the foundation for the argument that Jesus' words are to be taken very literally and acted upon faithfully. Yoder argues, "I do not here advocate an unheard-of modern understanding of Jesus. I ask rather that the implications of what the church has always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, as true God and true Human, be taken more seriously, as relevant to our social problems, than ever before."⁹ This argument opens the door to the importance of compassionate service, simply because Jesus was a compassionate servant. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus tells his disciples that they are caring for him when they care for and serve others. In John 13, Jesus washes the disciples' feet and encourages them to make foot washing a practice with one another. Agreeing with Yoder's argument, this Scripture should be heeded wholeheartedly as a way of living in today's world. Such messages are not only for the particularly spiritual or even for another day when the Kingdom of God is fully present. Those words of Christ are to be followed by all at all times. Jesus' actions of healing, forgiving, casting out demons, feeding, and confronting sinful behavior in a compassionate and loving manner are examples for Christians to follow.

Yoder continues to argue that not only is Christ's life to be followed to the best of one's abilities, but that Christ was indeed a political figure taking a stand against the violent governments of his time period. This argument belies the heart of Yoder's

⁸ Ibid., 61-62.

⁹ Ibid., 102.

intentions. He argues that Christians must not blindly follow their governments into war as a moral obligation in support of the divine institute of government.¹⁰

Yoder develops a convincing argument for the radical following of Christ as an example of true humanity. His arguments expose the reader to the possibilities of sacrificial love, service, and pacifism in pursuit of the way of Christ. Overall, the book was quite helpful as a book that explains the Mennonite propensity toward radical discipleship and service. As for critical comments, they are minor in nature.

Yoder's arguments in Chapter 4 appear to be a stretch with regard to the Jubilee year. The similar wording in Leviticus and Luke 12 seems shaky. And popular interpretations of the debts being forgiven in the Lord's Prayer are that of debts of sin against one another. There may have been times that those sins were financial exploitations, but Jesus is not clear that he was referring to the Jubilee.

The book is also widely regarded as challenging to read. A simplified version may be more accessible for the average Christian reader, yet his arguments demand a certain level of sophistication. There are times when oversimplification diminishes the impact of the argument, particularly when dealing with issues that are complex. Yoder's book, first written forty years ago, will continue to inform the theology and ethics of Mennonites and like-minded Christians for years to come.

Following in the Footsteps of Christ, by C. Arnold Snyder

C. Arnold Snyder is a church history professor at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Canada. He is an Anabaptist and has written several articles on

¹⁰ Ibid., 194.

Anabaptist history. His book, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, is a part of the Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series, which, according to editor Philip Sheldrake, is designed to enlighten a world yearning for a deeper sense of spirituality through the study of long-standing Christian traditions.¹¹ The series examines many monastic traditions such as the Franciscans, Ignatians, Dominicans, and other groups like the Anglicans and Quakers.

Spiritual disciplines have rarely been a subject at the forefront of Anabaptist and Mennonite thought. Therefore, a thorough study of Anabaptist spirituality has been hard to find. This book appears to be the most thorough attempt to discuss a specifically Anabaptist spirituality. That fact made the book an ideal read for this project.

Snyder believes that many Christians today consider spirituality to be primarily an interior experience. In this book, he intends to look at the entirety of life in relationship with God and Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, and within a community of believers.¹² Spirituality is not simply an inward experience. It is a part of both the contemplative life and the active life as well. For Anabaptists, an inner spirituality has little value if it does not present itself in an outward expression of Christ-led behavior. Snyder states it this way: “What will occupy us, particularly in this volume, is the spiritual understanding and practice that undergirded, nourished and defined the visible Anabaptist witness.”¹³

¹¹ Philip Sheldrake, editor of the Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series, as quoted in Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, 12.

¹² Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

Snyder begins chapter one with a concise yet helpful overview of Anabaptist history. Chapter two begins the spiritual journey for Anabaptists with the idea of repentance and a spirit yielded to God and open to Christ's leading. Snyder states, "The sincerity of one's desire for God's presence is tested by one's efforts to yield to God's will in all things."¹⁴

Yielding to Christ is, in essence, choosing to die to the secular world. The yielding is followed by a rebirth or spiritual renewal. Snyder states, "It is this new birth by God's power, and not faith alone, baptism, or even a new life of discipleship, that stands at the very heart of Anabaptist spirituality."¹⁵ Chapters four and five analyze the theology of baptism and community practices such as the ban,¹⁶ the Lord's Supper, and foot washing. To Anabaptists, it was the power of God and the Holy Spirit that empowered the church to be Christ made visible in the world. God is present through the work of his people.

Snyder continues by naming Anabaptist spiritual practices, such as Scripture study, prayer, communal worship, and discipleship. For the most part, Snyder focuses on the historic practices of Anabaptists.¹⁷ He even devotes a chapter to the ancient practice of martyrdom. The final chapter provides his only discussion of contemporary spirituality.

¹⁴ Ibid., 51.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The ban was a form of excommunication, which was used in hopes of drawing "sinners" back into right relationship with the Christian community.

¹⁷ Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, 111-137.

It would have been helpful if Snyder had included more about common contemporary practices. His viewpoint on what spiritual disciplines lead to the spiritual growth of Mennonites today would have been insightful. Snyder's focus on a life of yielding to the Spirit and living the body of Christ offers a nod toward compassionate service as a potential spiritual practice. Overall, the book was thorough in its study of the theology and history of the sacraments and certain practices; however, it lacked its own sense of life-giving spirituality.

***The Spirit of the Disciplines*, by Dallas Willard**

Hundreds of books have been written to explain, promote, and develop the engagement of spiritual disciplines and practices. This book was chosen because of the inclusion of a section on service and due to the brilliance of the author. Dallas Willard, a philosophy professor at the University of Southern California, is one of the most prolific current writers on the subject of Christian spirituality. Willard clearly states his purposes for the book in the preface:

My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his father.¹⁸

Willard argues that human transformation is possible and should be pursued, empowered by the grace of God, via the practice of spiritual disciplines.

¹⁸ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, ix.

Those disciplines are an active way of living out a life of salvation. To Willard, salvation is a daily occurrence. He fears that salvation has become more about forgiveness of sins than a life of following Jesus. He states, “Salvation as conceived today is far removed from what it was in the beginnings of Christianity and only by correcting it can God’s grace in salvation be returned to the concrete, embodied existence of our human personalities walking with Jesus in his easy yoke.”¹⁹

Not only is life about walking with Christ in salvation, but he argues in chapter four that humanity was created in God’s image, and therefore humanity was created to work with God, to be image bearers of Christ.²⁰ The challenge of being an image bearer is presented in humanity’s desires to find its own way in isolation from God.²¹ That way is the way of sin and stands against God. However, there is hope. By yielding to the grace of God, the way is paved for a transformed life walking in salvation with God.²² Of course, spiritual disciplines are an important part of the believer’s active yielding to God’s grace.

Chapter seven includes a look into the disciplined life of Saint Paul, and chapter eight reviews the history of the disciplines. Service is listed as one of the disciplines in chapter nine, where Willard discusses common day spiritual disciplines. He argues that service may certainly be done for no other reason than to love the other: “But I may also

¹⁹ Ibid., 33.

²⁰ Ibid., 52-55.

²¹ Ibid., 56.

²² Ibid., 92.

serve another to train myself away from arrogance, possessiveness, envy, resentment, or covetousness. In that case, my service is undertaken as a discipline for the spiritual life.”²³ That sentence alone will guide the church board toward the discipline of service and its potential life-changing transformation.

The conclusion focuses on the need for Christians to transform their broken world. It is Willard’s final argument for a life of transformation via the continued practice of disciplines. As believers practice the disciplines, they yield to Christ, opening the door to God’s grace and changing presence. The practitioner becomes more like Jesus, the true human being, and is empowered to serve the purpose of growing the kingdom of God’s peace and joy. This book was particularly well argued and written. Its arguments help to undergird the entire purpose and work of this project, to engage the church board in spiritual discipline that will work for them. Service is a discipline that is familiar and would encourage yielding to Christ.

***Managing the Congregation*, by Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser**

Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser are church leadership consultants and former pastors. This book was chosen as a resource to for directional change. If Zion is to move toward becoming a missional church, the book offers insight into healthy change. The authors state that the purpose of the book “is about recognizing the waves of cultural change that are rolling over all institutions, and understanding how to manage a

²³ Ibid., 182.

congregation in the wake of these all-pervasive changes.”²⁴ A congregation is a complex system. Therefore, church leaders need to be intentional when considering the promotion and development of change within that system. The book is broken into six parts entitled: The Manager, The Congregation and its Environment, The Congregation’s Energy Source, Designing the Congregation as System, The Congregation’s Relationships, and The Learning Congregation.

Part one reflects on the spiritual life of the manager—the pastor. It was notable that the beginning of a leadership book filled with technical, structural language begins with a call to the pursuit of spiritual disciplines. They argue that the spiritual disciplines ground the pastor in the presence of Christ.²⁵ Part two led the reader through the process of evaluating and assessing the strengths of the congregation’s community and its mission. Chapter five, which is a part of section two, was particularly helpful in evaluating the mission of the church. To the authors, mission must answer the needs within a community. By answering assessed needs, the gospel of Jesus is shared.²⁶ The congregation participates in self-sacrificing practices that address those needs of others in the community and world. They argue, “God chose to accomplish God’s divine mission by a Kenosis, a mission of giving away, of emptying, in order that all who are human may be reconciled to Christ and share in God’s glory (see Phil. 2:1-11).”²⁷ This section

²⁴ Shawchuck and Heuser, *Managing the Congregation*, 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 77, 78.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

relates directly to portions of the research found in Chapters 1 and 2 of this project as they assess the potential needs of the Souderton community and the potential for Zion to share the good news.

Part three argues that the energy of a congregation is developed through its vision and spirit. For the most part, the chapter on vision felt overly businesslike. In a congregation with the diversity of Zion, articulating a concise vision statement that envelops the hopes and dreams of everyone can be a challenge. In the business realm, a vision can be more specific, and engagement of the vision can be made mandatory. The authors gave too much credit to the importance of a congregational vision statement. A narrowly focused vision statement is bound to leave some members feeling unsatisfied. An open, inclusive statement has less power to energize anyone.

Chapter seven focused on a congregation's spirit as the force of energy for a congregation. This chapter was particularly helpful. A congregation's spirit is crucial to its ability to energize spiritual growth and advance its mission. They argue that the pastor has great potential and ability to affect the congregational sense of spirit.²⁸ A pastoral leader with the desire to infuse a congregation with the joy of finding Christ in mission must model finding joy, peace, and hope in helping others.

Congregational structure and organization are the foci of part four. Chapter ten was particularly helpful in this section. The authors are seeking a "New Era of Organization Design" through partnerships.²⁹ The idea of partnerships develops a sense

²⁸ Ibid., 125.

²⁹ Ibid., 183.

of togetherness that leads to servant leadership instead of a top-heavy hierarchy. For the church board, the idea of partnering with one another in a servant leadership style to empower the congregation in mission is not new. This section exposes the age of the book; however, it is a lesson that is still valuable. Too often the board can tend to think of an idea for mission or outreach and simply ask someone else to do it. If the church board is going to lead the congregation toward a missional identity, its members must be partners with the congregation. Their role is to participate in mission and invite others to join in the journey.

The theme of partnerships is developed in greater detail in part five. The chapters found within that section focus on the congregation as a family system. All of the parts need to think intentionally about how to resolve conflict and work out their own congregational relationships. Out of those relationships the congregation is empowered to work at mission together.

Part six focuses on continued evaluation. As the congregation moves forward with vision and mission, the assessment process never ends. The authors argue, “Congregations who do not learn from the consequences of their own actions or from the observations of their own experiences disprove the adage, ‘Experience is the best teacher.’”³⁰ The section addresses the last chapter of this project, which will assess the work done with the board and consider ways to expand the missional direction toward the broader congregation. This book was helpful from a broad macro view as the project has been developed.

³⁰ Ibid., 316.

CHAPTER 4
BROAD STROKES: MENNONITE THEOLOGY
AND CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

The Mennonite denominations are an offshoot of the Anabaptist tradition that emerged during the Reformation as a reaction to the doctrine and corrupt practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Menno Simons, the namesake of the Mennonite Church, was a Roman Catholic priest from the Netherlands who was influenced by the movements of the Swiss Anabaptists. He officially broke from the Catholic Church and became an Anabaptist leader in 1536.¹ This chapter will reflect on the history and theology of the Anabaptists and Menno Simons, with a focus on discipleship. Discipleship is the foundation that solidifies the Mennonite propensity for service.

For the purposes of this paper, a *disciple* is one who follows a leader. In this case a disciple is one who follows a particular leader, Jesus the Christ. Being a disciple means that one desires to be responsive to the commands of and to behave like Jesus. Therefore

¹ Harold S. Bender, "A Brief Biography of Menno Simons," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 4.

discipleship involves a focus on those intentional practices of obedience that a follower of Jesus pursues to work towards Christ-likeness.

The Growth of Anabaptism: A Reaction to Roman Catholicism

This section of the chapter will include a brief overview of the beginnings of the Reformation, an outline of Anabaptist history, and an examination of its influence on the ministry of Menno Simons. The Anabaptist reaction to the Roman Catholic Church begins with the Protestant Reformation. Church historian Justo Gonzalez writes of the early sixteenth century: “As the fifteenth century came to a close, it was clear that the church was in need of a profound reformation, and that many longed for it. The decline and corruption of the papacy was well known.”² While many of the factors leading to the Protestant Reformation had a long, simmering history, they boiled over on October 31, 1517.³ That was the date that Martin Luther published his Ninety-Five Theses opposing certain practices of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as certain aspects of its theology. For instance, Luther opposed the sale of indulgences, arguing that the Papacy should share its grace out of love instead of seeking payment for such gifts.⁴

Luther’s concerns with the Church legitimized the questions that others, including Ulrich Zwingli of Switzerland, were also asking. Zwingli stated that his concerns paralleled those led by Luther. Their only influence was the Scripture of the Bible. Zwingli preached against the Roman Catholic laws of fasting, abstinence, and priestly

² Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 2 (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*

celibacy.⁵ Zwingli deeply influenced the first Anabaptists. Their concerns with the Roman Catholic Church grew out of Zwingli's reform. The Swiss Anabaptists, protégés of Zwingli, were concerned that his desires for reform were not going far enough.

Gonzalez argues,

Both Luther and Zwingli were convinced that, in the course of centuries, Christianity had ceased to be what it was in the New Testament. Luther sought to cleanse it from all that contradicted scripture. Zwingli went farther, holding that only that which had scriptural foundation should be believed and practiced. But soon there were others who pointed out that Zwingli did not carry such ideas to their logical conclusion.⁶

Conrad Grebel was one of the protégés who carried Zwingli's mission even further. Grebel was intrigued by Zwingli's personality and knowledge of Greek classics.⁷ However, Grebel and others quickly lost confidence in Zwingli. They criticized Zwingli's willingness to allow the Zurich Town Council to arrange the mass and to decide the proper use of images.⁸ Grebel thought that Zwingli was allowing the Swiss government, the Council, to lead the Church instead of Scripture. Grebel could not live with that decision. Singularly focused on the Bible as the source of guidance for the Church, Grebel and a small group of followers, including a man named George Blaurock, broke ties with Zwingli on January 21, 1525. On that day, the group of "radical reformers" met in Blaurock's home and baptized one another.⁹ Grebel and the rag tag

⁵ Ibid, 49.

⁶ Ibid, 53.

⁷ William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 12.

⁸ John Howard Yoder, "The Turning Point in the Zwinglian Reformation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* No. 32 (April 1958): 138.

⁹ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 13.

band of reformers took discipleship very seriously. For them the Bible was the only true way to follow Jesus. They argued that one must pursue a personal commitment to Christ. In their case, that path demanded adult baptism. Their argument was solely based on the Scriptures; infant baptism was not found in the Bible, therefore there was no reason to participate in the practice.

Menno Simons was also transformed by a singular focus on the study of Scripture to lead the Church. Simons became a Roman Catholic Priest in 1524, the year before Grebel and his companions were baptized in George Blaurock's home.¹⁰ Harold S. Bender, a Mennonite historian, argues that Simons began to have doubts about the Roman Catholic Church's practices as early in his ministry as 1525. He first began to doubt that the elements of the Lord's Supper could really be true flesh and blood as was taught by the Church.¹¹ Simons decided to open the New Testament and give it a thorough reading. Bender states,

Now the decision of Menno Simons to search the Scripture for help in solving his doubts about the mass was not a decision to give up the authority of the church, for he probably hoped to find in Scripture a confirmation of the teaching of the church. The real problem came when Menno, having dared to open the lids of the Bible, discovered that it contained nothing of the traditional teaching of the church on the mass. By that discovery his inner conflict was brought to a climax, for he now was compelled to decide which of two authorities was to be supreme in his life, the church or the Holy Scriptures.¹²

Bender argues that Simons broke completely from the Roman Catholic Church in April 1535, after many years of spiritual wrestling and discernment. He engaged the Bible,

¹⁰ Bender, "A Brief Biography of Menno Simons," 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5, 6.

considered the teachings of other reformers like Martin Luther, and toiled over his commitment to the Roman Catholic Church that had ordained and supported him financially.¹³

The common theme driving the Protestant Reformation was that of *sola Scriptura*, meaning that the Bible alone was sufficient for leading the reformers toward Christ in its theology and practices. It was the careful study of Scripture that led to the break from the Roman Catholic Church, which ruled the spiritual and political landscape of Europe. Opening the Bible was a monumental, life-transforming experience for the reformers and for Menno Simons, in particular.¹⁴ The Scriptures would guide his teaching, his leadership, and the entirety of his life. In turn, those Scriptures formed the foundation of Mennonite christocentricity and discipleship.

Christ Is the One Foundation

The exploration of Scripture developed the foundation of Menno Simons's Christian life and discipleship. That foundation led Simons directly to Jesus. This section will explore Simons's christocentric message. Simons labeled every one of his letters and educational tracts with a title and with the words of 1 Corinthians 3:11, "For other foundation can no man lay that that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." To Simons, if Scripture was the guide to a spiritual life, then Jesus was the lens through which the Scriptures must be read. Jesus was the focal point of the Bible and also of the spiritual life, of faith, and of discipleship.

¹³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

In the first booklet he wrote after leaving the Roman Catholic Church, “The Spiritual Resurrection,” Simons states,

All those who are born and regenerated from above out of God, through the living Word, are also of the mind and disposition, and have the same aptitude for good that He has of whom they are born and begotten. For what the nature of God or Christ is, we may readily learn from the Scriptures. For Christ has expressly portrayed Himself in His Word, that is, as to the nature which He would have us understand, grasp and follow and emulate, not according to His divine nature, seeing He is the true image of the invisible God, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, who dwells in ineffable light, whom none can approach or see, but according to His life and conversation here on earth, shown forth among men in works and deeds as an example set before us to follow so that we thereby might become partakers of His nature in the spirit, to become like unto him. So Christ is everywhere represented to us as humble, meek, merciful, just, holy, wise, spiritual, long-suffering, patient, peaceable, lovely, obedient, and good, as the perfection of all things; for in Him there is an upright nature. Behold, this is the image of God, of Christ as to the spirit which we have as an example until we become like it in nature and reveal it in our walk.¹⁵

Simons argued that those who believed in Jesus were regenerated¹⁶ into disciples of Christ. Each person regenerated by the Spirit of Jesus was given the same mind and disposition to live and be like Christ. Christ’s life was the example to follow in all things. He was the image of what God’s children are supposed to be. Simons did not see the human life and teaching of Christ as something so utterly unattainable that it was not worth pursuing. He did not believe that Jesus’ humanity was only for another time and another place called the kingdom of God or heaven. Instead, he argued that disciples of Christ, empowered by the grace of Christ, would turn from sin, suffer with Jesus, and live

¹⁵ Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 55, 56.

¹⁶ *Regeneration*, to Simons, appears to be a meeting with God’s grace that brings change into the life of the believer upon the decision to follow Christ as a disciple. Today’s language uses the term *transformation* to describe the process by which the Holy Spirit of God changes a believer toward Christlikeness.

as Jesus lived. If one is a believer in Jesus, and hence regenerate, one should follow those teachings as if life depended on it.

Simons looked around his community and saw members of the Roman Catholic Church living sinful lives. In his booklet, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” he states, “Verily you see nothing anywhere but unnatural carousing and drinking, pride as that of Lucifer, lying, fraud, grasping avarice, hatred, strife, adultery, fornication, warring, murder; everywhere hypocrisy, patent blasphemy, idolatry and false worship.”¹⁷ That was how he saw the Christians of the Roman Catholic Church living. The sinful behaviors of the people who attended his services as a Roman Catholic priest grieved him. He believed that the Church must be visible in its holiness, in its Christ-likeness. When Christians find true faith, Christ becomes visible in their lives. In the same booklet Simons states, “By the kindness of my heavenly father, I am come into the world, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, I became a visible, tangible, and dying man; in all points like unto you, sin excepted.”¹⁸ Simons was serious about faith and the life of discipleship. He lived a life of holiness and continually called others to follow Christ with the entirety of their own lives.

Any study of Mennonite theology, discipleship, and faith begins with Christ at the center. Christ’s life and words stand as a model to be followed, empowered by grace, to the best of one’s ability. Understanding the import of discipleship sheds a great deal of light upon the historic actions and movements of the denomination that embraces the

¹⁷ Ibid., 111.

¹⁸ Ibid., 115.

faith stream of Simons. The Mennonite peace position is based on the teaching that disciples are to love their neighbor and their enemy and the “upside down” teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon turned the world on its head as it stated that the down-trodden and broken would be blessed, as opposed to those in the position of power. If a disciple is to live in the world but not be of that world, then a Christian’s life should look different from the lives of those in the secular world. The stance against worldly things explains the historic Mennonite tendency to wear plain clothes, buy black cars, and avoid instruments in worship. Many of those historic distinctions have been slowly carved away by time and perhaps the infiltration of the world itself. Along with the pursuit of peace, the denomination is still focused directly on Christ and the Scriptures that shaped Menno and others. In the next section, the current Mennonite Confession of Faith will be reviewed.

The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective

As stated above, this section will review the most recent Mennonite Confession of Faith, titled *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, with extra focus being given to discipleship and service. In the opening chapter of his book, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, Robert Friedmann argues that Anabaptists and therefore Mennonites are averse to any kind of systematic theology. Friedmann believes that theological systems were too subjective for the early Anabaptists, who argued that the knowledge of God was in their hearts, given by the grace of God upon their Christian rebirth.¹⁹ The Bible and the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ would guide the way. Any human-made ideologies or

¹⁹ Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of the Anabaptists* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 31-33.

assumptions were limited by their inherent humanness and opened the door to trouble. In Anabaptist thought, it was human nature that had led the Roman Catholic Church to stray from a true, living faith based on Scripture. They were not interested in making the same mistake.

Despite their skepticism of systematic theologies, the Anabaptists have always found confessions of faith to be useful. In 1527, Michael Sattler oversaw the first Anabaptist confession. These articles of faith were called the Schleithem Confession. Mennonite historian Cornelius J. Dyck argues that the Schleithem Confession was not the beginning of Anabaptism, “yet Schleithem, particularly the seven articles agreed upon, were and remain of landmark importance for Anabaptism and for Mennonites.”²⁰ The Schleithem Confession was short and simple, yet it created enough controversy to lead to the martyrdom of Sattler. The articles involved reflections and guidance on the following topics: baptism, the ban on church discipline, the Lord’s Supper as remembrance of Christ, separation from evil, the role of pastors, the use of the sword/non-violence, and the forbidding of oath-taking.²¹

The current *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (hereafter, *Confession of Faith*) still contains six of the seven articles that were included in the Schleithem confession. The one article left out is that of separation from evil. The confession is designed to guide congregations in the study of and submission to Scripture. The articles guide the life of the congregation, build unity between congregations, offer

²⁰ Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and Mennonites*, 3rd ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 39.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

material for teaching new members, explain the beliefs and practices of the Church, and help others to understand the Mennonite denomination.²² The 1995 *Confession of Faith* consists of twenty-four articles broken into three parts. The introduction to the Confession states, “The first eight articles deal with themes common to the faith of the wider Christian church. The second set (Articles 9-16) deals with the church and its practices, and the third set (Articles 17-23) with discipleship. The final article is on the reign of God.”²³ A summary statement of the *Confession of Faith* is available in appendix A.

Each article consists of brief statements regarding its focus, with multiple scriptural references. Once again the Bible is the driving force for the content of each article. Following the scriptural references, the *Confession of Faith* includes commentary on current issues and on arguments that might arise pertaining to the article. Each article focuses on what the Mennonite Church believes or confesses according to the study of Scripture. Having offered a brief history of Anabaptist confessions and introduction to the *Confession of Faith*, the rest of this section will be focused on the articles that inform this project. Article seventeen, Discipleship and the Christian Life, and article eighteen, Christian Spirituality, will be the center of attention.

Article seventeen opens with this sentence: “We believe that Jesus Christ calls us to take up our cross and follow him.”²⁴ The article sounds much like the words of

²² The Mennonite Church, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

Simons written so long ago. By God's grace believers are transformed and conformed into the image of Christ. They are committed to the will of Christ and turn from the ways of the world and sin. Again believers see a life of faith that demands the pursuit of Christ-likeness and the belief that it is their job and goal to follow Christ and his teachings in a very literal way. The article states, "True faith means seeking first the reign of God in simplicity, rather than pursuing materialism. True faith means acting in peace and justice, rather than with violence or military means. True faith means performing deeds of compassion and reconciliation, in holiness of life, instead of letting sin rule over us."²⁵ Each step of true faith can be witnessed in the life and teaching of Jesus, the basis of all Mennonite beliefs. Another quote from the article reads, "In all areas of life, we are called to be Jesus' disciples. Jesus is our example, especially in his suffering for the right without retaliation, in his love for enemies, and in his forgiveness of those who persecuted him." This article sums up the Mennonite desire for a faithful life. Mennonites are committed to living and doing the work of Christ.

This life of faith modeled on the image of Christ is impossible if not for the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. This is where article eighteen becomes crucial to the understanding of Mennonite discipleship. The article begins, "We believe that to be a disciple of Jesus is to know life in the Spirit. As we experience relationship with God, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ take shape in us, and we grow in the image of Christ."²⁶ Mennonites believe that the Spirit of God is poured out upon those

²⁵ Ibid., 66.

²⁶ Ibid., 69.

who confess Christ and are baptized. A new relationship with God and new life are possible by God's grace. Sin is still part of the Christian's life; however, the potential, to be an image bearer of Christ is available through the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

With the newfound potential granted by the Spirit of grace, the journey of transformation has begun. As Christians learn to know God and engage in relationship with him, they are continually conformed to the image of Christ. The Spirit's work and God's grace cause the disciple to conform. As article eighteen notes, "We yield ourselves to God, letting the Holy Spirit mold us into the image of Christ."²⁷ Spiritual disciplines and practices, such as going to church on a regular basis, reading Scripture, praying, meditating, and anything done with the intention of yielding to God, are the ways that the follower of Jesus makes room for the work of the Holy Spirit. The article states, "Such disciplines open us to a growing relationship with God and to putting ourselves more completely into the hands of God."²⁸ As believers create that space for the Holy Spirit, their lives conform in its relationship to Christ, and good fruits prevail. As the disciplines engage the Holy Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit are evident, sin garners less control, and the longing for Christ deepens. Compassionate service is one of those Spirit-engaging, life-changing disciplines.

Weaknesses and Strengths—Christ Is the One Foundation

Before the focus falls fully upon service as a discipline, this final section of this chapter will review the weaknesses and strengths of the Christocentric discipleship that

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 70.

provides the foundation of Mennonite faith. Mennonites pursue an active faith life and a radical pursuit of the image of Christ, precisely as they should. However, weaknesses develop when the pursuit of the image of Christ becomes more important than the pursuit of Christ himself.

Mennonites have always focused on the visible life of faith. That visible life involves freedom from sin, the bearing of good fruit, and the spreading of peace, joy, and love. The new “regenerate” life of the confessing baptized follower of Jesus experiences both. Freedom from sin and the bearing of good fruit develop out of meeting with the Holy Spirit, and they also lead to a deeper relationship with Jesus. The avoidance of sin and the bearing of fruit must not be seen as ends in themselves. They must lead toward a deeper relationship with Christ. Salvation is found in that relationship and in that relationship alone. When avoiding sin and bearing fruit become the goals themselves, problems arise in the heart as believers pursue salvation on their own merit.

The Holy Spirit and God’s grace can be easily forgotten when the goal is no longer relationship with Jesus but living a proper life. Martin Luther and others often scoffed at the Anabaptists, alleging that they were trying to work their way to heaven and had forgotten grace. This was never Simons’s intention. He responds to those claims in his booklet on “True Christian Faith.” Simons writes, “The Lutherans teach and believe that faith alone saves, without any assistance by works. They emphasize this doctrine so as to make it appear as though works were not even necessary; yes, that faith is of such a nature that it cannot tolerate any works alongside it.”²⁹ This response appears to place

²⁹ Simons, *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 333.

works over grace; however Simons continually reminds the reader that it is grace and the power of the Holy Spirit that make good works possible. To Simons, the works are the unavoidable response to grace.

Though Simons preached grace, he also understood that living faith produces good works. However, when coupled with the human propensity to try to secure salvation, this encouragement to works can produce dangerous effects. Historically, Mennonites have been short on grace for one another and for sin. There was a time when a lifelong Mennonite could be excommunicated from his or her Christian community for watching television or listening to the radio. Members of such congregations argued that those practices were too worldly and could lead one down a path of sin. Dancing was forbidden as well as the partaking of alcohol for even the slightest of social reasons. Sin was a source of great shame, and sinners were shunned. Guilt is part of the Mennonite mental conditioning. Many Mennonites tend to excoriate themselves for a lack of godly behavior. They never believe that they read the Bible enough, serve an appropriate amount of people, or go to church with enough regularity to secure salvation. Scads of Mennonites are so focused about what “should” be done that they find it difficult to stop and remember that the purpose of all the doing is to be in relationship with Jesus and the Father. A mere thirty seconds of silence in a Mennonite church service can be reason to fidget or at worst stand up and leave the service. It is a major challenge to encourage a congregation to focus on God and receive God’s grace, as opposed to being focused on what they have not done well enough. Grace means that the work is Christ’s work and the goal is to meet Jesus. If a mission trip is not as “successful” as a Mennonite might

hope for it to be, that person must realize that it was not a failure if spirits were lifted and Jesus was present. Saint Paul called the early Church to a life of grace. He recognized the crucial nature of God's work of salvation and transformation in the life of the follower of Christ. Mennonites need to be reminded of Saint Paul's teaching on grace as often as possible.

This is not to say, however, that Mennonites are completely lost. The early Anabaptists and Simons challenged a system that was all grace and no substance. Stuart Murray, author of the book, *The Naked Anabaptist*, explains it this way:

Sixteenth-century Anabaptists embraced a passionately Jesus-centered approach that impacted every aspect of discipleship. They challenged the Christendom tradition, which had found the radical Jesus hard to cope with in a world Christians now controlled. They critiqued popular expressions of medieval piety that spiritualized and privatized devotion to Jesus. And they provoked the reformers, who thundered the centrality of Jesus for salvation but seemed reticent about allowing Jesus' life and teaching to be normative for lifestyle, church, and mission.³⁰

The Mennonite ambition and desire to live in the image of Christ has led to a great deal of good in the world. Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) are two of the most respected relief organizations in the world. Ten Thousand Villages, a Mennonite-connected business, is a chain of stores that sells handmade products from around the world. The vendors are paid a fair wage and empowered to provide for their families in ways they never thought possible.

Mennonites are more than relief organizations. Mennonite missionaries can be found in every continent. They are working for peace and well-being in developing nations. Congregations are filled with people that desire to make a difference in their

³⁰ Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), 55.

local communities. Eastern Mennonite University is the home of a world-recognized peace institute, and recently built the largest solar energy system in the state of Virginia on the roof of its library. Mennonites are small in numbers but mighty in good fruit. Murray argues, “It may be unremarkable today to suggest that discipleship and mission are key components of church life, but Anabaptists were mocked and persecuted for daring to suggest this.”³¹ The fact is that discipleship based on the life and image of Christ is both grace and fruit. Discipleship is impossible without the grace of God and the Holy Spirit’s leading. And discipleship is an active faith journey that blesses others, bears fruit, and challenges destructive sinful behavior.

The message on works that is stated above applies even to spiritual disciplines. The disciplines are actions taken to make space for the Holy Spirit and relationship with God. There is always the danger that the disciplines will become the goal, that some believers will wrongfully imagine that reading their Bible every day for fifteen minutes is the goal of spirituality and therefore the key to salvation. The disciplines, like the works of the Anabaptists, need to seek grace and hold relationship with God as the ultimate goal. It is through grace and in relationship with God that one finds salvation. As this project turns toward the discipline of service, it becomes imperative to remind the church board members of this fact. The goal is relationship with God and Jesus—the completion of tasks is not paramount.

³¹ Ibid., 98.

CHAPTER 5

COMPASSIONATE SERVICE

In this chapter the focus on service narrows further to substantiate that service is a practical spiritual discipline ingrained in Mennonite practice and theology. The first part of the chapter will give attention to the teachings of Simons pertaining to service by reviewing several of his writings. The treatises that will be examined are: *Meditations on the Twenty-fifth Psalm*, *The New Birth*, *True Christian Faith*, and *Confession of the Distressed Christians*. These writings provide evidence that Simons was deeply concerned with the mission to serve others and one's community.

This chapter will then provide a brief exegetical look at two Scriptures from the Gospel of Matthew. Those Scriptures are Matthew 5:14-16 and Matthew 22:34-40. The purpose of studying those Scriptures is to offer a brief look at the biblical calling to service. Simply representing a small piece of the many scriptural references pertaining to service that are available, they expose the overall tone of the Scriptures well.

In order to provide a well-rounded view of the theology of service, another Reformer's views on service will be helpful. Martin Luther was a critic of the Anabaptist focus on works; however he was not averse to aiding his neighbors. Section three will

examine Luther's statements and teaching with respect to social ministry. Finally, section four will outline the history of two examples of Mennonite service organizations. Those organizations, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), epitomize the Mennonite commitment to service in the world. A brief study of these organizations provides insight into the ongoing Mennonite penchant toward service.

Menno Simons on Service

The Mennonite denominational faith stream begins with the early Anabaptists of Switzerland. It is however, the name of Menno Simons that the denomination claims as its own. Due to his powerful teachings, which focused on turning from sin toward a new life of discipleship, a community of followers was birthed. No doubt Simons would have been opposed to a denomination designating itself with his name. Yet he brought stability to the Anabaptists by opposing violence and by responding to critics with level-headed biblical arguments. His writings form the basis for the Mennonite theology, and therefore his beliefs with regard to service and love of neighbor are deeply important to this project.

“Meditation on the Twenty-fifth Psalm”

It is believed that Menno Simons wrote his prayerful meditation on the twenty-fifth psalm in the year 1537.¹ Throughout the meditation, Simons responds to each verse of the Psalm with heart-felt prayer. Those prayers reveal the foundation of his theology

¹ Simons, *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 64.

and open the door to an enhanced understanding of Simons's view of service. The meditation is deeply and powerfully confessional. Simons clearly wrestles with his sinful nature and offers those sins to Christ repeatedly. To Simons, God's anger toward the sinful nature of humanity is to be feared. Only God's grace can make one righteous. By today's standards, Simons is downright depressing and a bit sadistic with his focus on sin and its deadly consequences. But, to Simons, the duel between sin and forgiveness is a life or death struggle. He states, "Few are they who fear thy name. Paul says, to be carnally minded is death. The sentence is already passed. If we live according to the flesh we must die. So teach the scriptures. If we do not repent there is nothing more certain than thy fierce anger."² Sin is death. Sin fills his life and the world around him. The reader must wake up to this deadly reality and get right with God.

He recognizes that the path of Christ is narrow, and he fears for those around him. Simons says, "On this way the whole world walks unconcerned and without fear. Men have preferred things perishable to that which lasts, evil to good, and darkness to light. They all walk on the evil, crooked way, they become faint in the way of unrighteousness, and know not the way of the Lord."³ He fears for his life and the lives of those around him. The path to Christ is repentance and reliance on God for righteousness, for guidance, and for strength.

Upon one's confession and reception of Christ he or she is made new—
regenerated into new life. Simons claims,

² Ibid., 67.

³ Ibid., 68.

Although I resisted in former times thy precious word and thy holy will with all my powers, and with full understanding contended against thy manifest truth, taught and lived and sought my own flesh, praise, and honor, more than thy righteousness, honor, word and truth; nevertheless thy fatherly grace did not forsake me, a miserable sinner, but in love received me, converted me to another mind, led me with the right hand, and taught me by the Holy Spirit until of my own choice I declared war upon the world, the flesh and the devil, and renounced all my ease, peace, glory, desire, and physical prosperity and willingly submitted to the heavy cross of my Lord Jesus Christ that I might inherit the promised kingdom with all the soldiers of God and the disciples of Christ.⁴

Simons would give all the credit to God and his grace, by which he was able to turn toward the right path of Christian understanding and faith. He would argue that the proper response to that grace is to live rightly. The believer will follow the will and way of Christ, empowered by grace and the Holy Spirit. When believers are following Christ, it will be evident in their words and deeds.

The life lived in the will of Christ is filled with peace, mercy, and love of neighbor. Simons writes, “O Sovereign Lord, thy path is the pathway of peace. Blessed is he that walketh therein, for we find mercy, love, righteousness, humility, obedience, and patience in her ways. She clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, gives drink to the thirsty, entertains the needy, reproveth, threatens, comforts, and admonishes.”⁵ Like a phoenix rising out of the ashes, the sinner becomes new and lives rightly, pursuing the will of God upon receiving the grace of Christ. In his article, “The New Birth,” Simons fleshes out the theology of new creation in greater detail.

⁴ Ibid., 69.

⁵ Ibid., 73.

“The New Birth”

This treatise was also written in 1537 and was revised in 1552.⁶ Again, Simons is concerned with the sinful lives of those living around him. He is calling sinners to follow Christ and be born again. Simons calls particularly upon those people who rely on sacraments for their eternal security while living lives of sin. He writes, “We must be born from above, must be changed and renewed in our hearts, and must be transplanted from the unrighteous and evil nature of Adam into the true and good nature of Christ, or we can never in all eternity be saved by any means, be they human or divine.”⁷ Simons called this rebirth *regeneration*. Regeneration is only possible via the word of God, and it must be empowered by the Holy Spirit, inevitably leading to a renewed life.⁸ He continues, “The regenerate, therefore, lead a penitent and new life, for they are renewed in Christ and have received a new heart and spirit. Once they were earthly-minded, now heavenly; once they were carnal, now spiritual; once they were unrighteous, now righteous; once they were evil, now good.”⁹

The new regenerate followers of Jesus not only live lives that are heavenly minded and righteous, but they seek to love their neighbors. Simons writes, “They do not seek merely their own good but that which is good for their neighbors both as to body and soul. They feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty. They entertain the needy,

⁶ Ibid., 88.

⁷ Ibid., 92.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 93.

release prisoners, visit the sick, comfort the fainthearted, admonish the erring, are ready after their Master's example to give their lives for their brethren."¹⁰ The regenerate Christian is to follow in the loving footsteps of Christ himself. Christ is the savior and the example of a life lived rightly. Finally Simons states, "We are to fear, serve, and love the Lord with all the heart and walk in His commandments, and we are to assist our neighbor, comfort and serve him as much as is in us, and the like doctrine of instruction."¹¹ It is clear that service to neighbor was to Simons a clear and inevitable response to a regenerate life. Service was not something to be done with the hopes of gaining favors, but a true response to the grace of God and the desire to be like Jesus. In "True Christian Faith" this argument is reiterated, showing that Simons did not change his position over time.

"True Christian Faith"

This article is believed to have been written in 1541 and revised in 1556.¹² J. C. Wenger, who edited the *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, claims, "Menno himself reveals what his purpose was in the writing of this book: it was to clear his brotherhood of the charge of legalism, and to show that he and his brethren held evangelical views of faith and justification."¹³ Simons begins the treatise with a section stating the importance of God's grace and follows that section by commenting critically on three faiths streams:

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 101.

¹² Ibid., 322.

¹³ Ibid.

the Roman Catholic faith, the Lutheran faith, and the Reformed faith. He follows those sections by describing his idea of the “true Christian faith” and provides ten studies of biblical persons of faith. He ends with a call to repentance and, of course, true faith. Ultimately this is an article that focuses on a life of righteousness empowered by the grace that comes with true faith. However, Simons realized that good fruits and love of neighbor go hand in hand with repentance and freedom from the sinful life.

This writing reads as a sermon, and Simons’s passion for the subject is palpable. Simons is deeply concerned about the sinful plight of the world. He sees all around him people who proclaim to follow Christ but who live in ways that betray that faith. The article prophetically calls the reader to a true faith that will be evident in the fruits of a righteous life. He states, “It is all in vain to boast of faith where the godly new fruits and works of faith are not in evidence.”¹⁴ To Simons, as fire burns and water produces moisture, so too true faith can only produce good fruits. “For as fire in its nature can produce nothing but fire and flame, the sun nothing but light and heat, the water yields moistness, and a good tree good fruit after its implanted nature, so also genuine, evangelical faith produces true evangelical fruit and that after its true, good, evangelical nature.”¹⁵ True faith has no other option than good fruits and a life of righteousness.

An aspect of the good fruits not to be missed is that of keeping God’s commandments. One of those commandments is to love one’s neighbor. Simons argues,

Once more the Word of the Lord teaches, If thou wilt enter life, keep the commandments. And this is his command: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God

¹⁴ Ibid., 328.

¹⁵ Ibid., 343.

with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Mark 12:30. Now examine yourselves again. If you love God, you will gladly keep His commandments and you will do to your neighbor as you would have him do to you.¹⁶

To Simons a “true Christian faith” demands a pure life. Again, that pure life implies love of neighbor and right treatment of others. This quick study has provided a view into the life and theology of Simons. Next it is important to consider how this theology of sin, regeneration, and service translates today.

Simons engaged the fear of God and fear of sin with far greater seriousness than Mennonites do today. Despite the fact that Europe was primarily Christian via baptism as infants, Simons saw sinners at every street corner and yearned to teach them a new way of life with Christ. Simons was deeply critical of his own sin and the sin of the world around him. Sin concerned him in a powerful way. Today’s religions, and even current Christian theology, tend to overlook sin and focus on the goodness of the world.

At times, through the course of my readings, Simons’s fear of sin and the evils of the world were so drastic that I was uncomfortable with what I perceived to be his sense of self-loathing. However, it is quite possible that I, like the current culture, do not take sin and its effects seriously enough. Just as today’s culture devalues the impact of sin, so too it tends to belittle the life-changing power of God to regenerate people’s lives and hearts. Simons believed in God’s grace and the power of grace to change the life of the believer forever.

¹⁶ Ibid., 394.

Exegesis of Two Scriptures Important to the Call to Compassionate Service

In this section two Scriptures will be exegeted and analyzed for their teaching with regards to service. Both Scriptures have been deemed important to the understanding and call of mission and service in the Bible. The first is Matthew 5:14-16. This Scripture is a part of the Sermon on the Mount, which has always been near and dear to the heart of Mennonite theology. The second Scripture is Matthew 22:34-40. The Scripture regards Christ's command to the disciples to love their neighbor, another seminal Scripture to Mennonites.

Matthew 5:14-16

The Beatitudes lay down the theme of joy and blessing that will come for struggling humanity as it chooses to follow Jesus. In its entirety, Matthew 5:3-12 states,

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.¹⁷

Matthew 5:14-16 comes at the end of the Beatitudes, and lays the foundation of call and mission for those followers of Jesus.

¹⁷ All Scriptures will be quoted from the New Revised Standard version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes this concerning the Beatitudes: “The disciples are called blessed because they have obeyed the call of Jesus, and the people as a whole because they are heirs of the promise.”¹⁸ He then goes on to argue,

The call of Jesus makes the disciple community not only the salt but also the light of the world; their activity is visible, as well as imperceptible. “Ye *are* the light.” Once again it is not, “You are to be the light”; they are already the light because Christ has called them, they are a light which is seen of men, they cannot be otherwise, and if they were it would be a sign that they had not been called.¹⁹

Frederick Dale Bruner points out that the “you” and the “your” throughout the verses are to be understood as plural.²⁰ It is the calling of the Christian community to be a light to the world. The community lights that world through mission and service. That is the call of God’s people.

That calling began with Adam and Eve, who were created to have dominion over the creatures of the earth in Genesis 1:28. The calling is continued as God initiates a covenant with Abram and Sarai in Genesis 12. God promises to bless Abram and Sarai’s offspring while they are called to be a blessing to the world. When many generations of their offspring failed to live up to the call, Jesus comes to display the true way of blessing. Jesus, as the image of God, comes to exemplify the call to bless the world and to initiate that call once again. The Beatitudes and verses 14-16 demonstrate that the original

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 107.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁰ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary, Volume 1: The Christ Book* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 190.

promised blessing of God's children has come in Christ. And the original call is to be lived by following Christ and doing as he did.

In essence, Christ is the light of the world, blessing and guiding the way to full life. In Matthew 4:16, Jesus is the light that will bring about a new day. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright argues, "He was the salt of the earth. He was the Light of the world: set up on a hill-top, crucified for all the world to see, becoming a beacon of hope and new life for everybody, drawing people to worship his father, embodying the way of self-giving love which is the deepest fulfillment of the law and the prophets."²¹ The Gospel of John also refers to Jesus as the light of the world. John 1:5 reads, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." And in John 8:12 Jesus states, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Jesus is the light in the darkness, providing hope and guidance to all who seek him. If Jesus is the light of the world, the disciples reflect that light as they turn toward Jesus and enter his presence. The disciples become bearers of the light.

Bruner writes, "Jesus himself had been called the Light of the Nations; now the Light passes on the light to his disciples. In the disciples' reflection of Jesus, like the moon's reflection of the sun, the disciples are something too, and when they face him they reflect his light into the world."²² In Matthew 5:16, the light presents itself in the image of "good" works that bring glory to God. Bruner argues that the word for "good"

²¹ N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part One* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 41.

²² Bruner, *Matthew*, 191.

in this case is not about the value, but about the attractiveness of the works. Therefore it matters how things are done. The Beatitudes lead the reader to believe that the good deeds are to be done with mercy and compassion. It is not simply enough to serve others for the sake of serving, but to serve others to shine the light of God and bring glory to God through that service. Just serving others is not the point, but shining the light in a loving way is crucial to missions.²³

The disciple should recognize that there is great worth to being a light bearer. The light is placed upon a hill for all to see. However, as Eugene Boring argues, the disciple should not become too happy about this position of prominence; it is deeply important to remember that Christ is the source of the light.²⁴ It is God who gives the disciple the light, and it is God that gives the disciple worth. The good works are God's works, and they are a gift from God to be used for God's purposes. And as Bruner writes, "The purpose of life is the glory of God."²⁵

In summary, Jesus is the Light of the world. He has come to glorify God by bringing light in the midst of the darkness. When human beings meet Christ and choose to follow him, they become light bearers and participate with Christ in the mission of lighting the world and glorifying God. Mission, service, and lighting the world is what disciples are called to do. Upon choosing to turn to Christ, participating in mission is inevitable. This sounds like a confession that would have made Simons smile.

²³ M. Eugene Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 182.

²⁴ Bruner, *Matthew*, 192.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

Matthew 22:34-40

In Matthew 5:14-16, the disciples are called to be a light in the world by performing good works and glorifying God.

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

This Scripture moves beyond calling to a command. In this version of the exchange, the Pharisees seem to be testing Jesus by challenging him. Jesus answers appropriately, deferring to the Scriptures by stating that the greatest law is to love God; however, he also gives the Pharisees more than what was asked. Jesus adds the second command to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

Jesus calls the second command “like” the first. Matthew commentator Frederick Dale Bruner argues that this “likeness” gives equal value to the second command, but does not lump them together as one.²⁶ The key is that the first command again turns the disciple toward God, where the relationship with God, faith, and discipleship begins. The ability to love one’s neighbor is empowered by the love for God. Bruner explains it this way: “Love of God gives to the love of neighbor the fuel, warmth, resources, motivation, and purpose that neighbor love so constantly needs.”²⁷ Love for God is where love for neighbor begins.

²⁶ Frederick Dale Bruner, Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary, Volume 2: The Christ Book* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 415.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 412.

As the two commands are “like” one another, they work off of one another. The love of God empowers love of neighbor, and love of neighbor is love of God. Linking back to the Sermon on the Mount, the disciple glorifies God by reflecting Christ’s love. The disciple loves God by glorifying God. Therefore, shining the light of Christ, loving one’s neighbor is, in essence, an act of love toward God.

Jesus saw the two commands as being inseparable and eternally linked, and he lived them out as such. Both commands invoke images of Jesus and his ministry. In his perfection and righteousness, Jesus honored and glorified God completely. In his healing ministries, in his love of children, and in his concern for the marginalized, his love of neighbor was evident. In Boring’s commentary he simplifies the commands to one word: love. He then asks what love means and argues that Jesus shows the way of love. “When Christians use the word love with reference to God, to the deepest human relationships, and of the stance they are called to exercise toward the world, the content of this word is not to be filled in from the supposed meaning of a special Greek word, but from the understanding of God’s nature made known in Christ.”²⁸

Jesus tells all who are listening that these two commandments undergird all of the rest. It is love that guides the ministry and mission of God and Jesus. Therefore it must be love that guides the mission of disciples and the Church. Service and care for the broken, the marginalized, the poor, and the outcasts is what disciples are called to do. By loving God the disciple is empowered to love his or her neighbor. And by loving the neighbor the disciple participates with God in God’s mission to renew the world, thereby

²⁸ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 425.

loving God. The two commands work in a circular nature, empowering one another. There can be no calling greater than to live into these two commands. There can be no calling greater than to love. Having set the foundation for service from a scriptural viewpoint and considered the works of the Mennonite Church's founding father, the next section will consider the service of one of Simons's critics.

Examining Anabaptist Critic Martin Luther: Luther's Social Ministry

Having laid the foundation for service from the Mennonite and biblical perspectives, this section will consider the social ministry of one of Anabaptisms greatest critics. Luther was deeply concerned that the "radical reformers" were teaching a theology of salvation through works. In his article, "The Meaning of Good Works: Luther and the Anabaptists," Egil Grislis argues, "Luther's stand against the Anabaptists was outspoken and negative. Given the information that was available to Luther in his day this need not be surprising, particularly if one takes into account that Luther defended such central doctrines as infant baptism, two kingdoms, and *sola gratia* versus 'works righteousness' (merits gained by good works)."²⁹

Grislis argues that Luther's concern regarding Anabaptists began with early Anabaptist leader Thomas Müntzer. Müntzer felt that the Protestant Reformation would have to be carried out via the means of violent revolution.³⁰ If that were not enough to arouse Luther's suspicion, an Anabaptist-led uprising in the German city of Münster

²⁹ Egil Grislis, "The Meaning of Good Works: Luther and the Anabaptists," *Word and World* 6, no. 2 (1986): 170.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

convinced Luther that the Anabaptists were not to be trusted.³¹ Finally, theological differences made the “radical reformers” intolerable to Luther.

Salvation for Luther always moved into the person’s experience from the outside first. It is God’s first initiative first. The inward experience of grace is only available after God has moved into the life of the Christian. Luther believed that the Anabaptists were far too focused on the inward movement of choice. He understood the Anabaptist as saying that one chooses to follow Jesus of one’s own free will as opposed to grace making the first move. In other words, he argued that the Anabaptists gave themselves far too much credit for the choices made and personal actions that would lead to salvation. Luther’s concerns arose from the early Anabaptist pursuit of violent revolution, the Anabaptist dismissal of anything to do with the Roman Catholic Church, and adult baptism. To Luther, these were all signs pointing to a works-based conception of righteousness, and therefore a serious problem.

Grilis argues that the violent nature of those early Anabaptists opened the door to Luther’s concerns. It was perceived that the early Anabaptists involved in the overthrow of Münster attempted to use violence to bring about the kingdom of God. Grilis writes, “Unruly mobs translated violent thoughts into angry deeds. This, Luther believed, was a clear case of works righteousness, that is, an attempt to accomplish by human works what can only be done by the divine word.”³² Those early Anabaptists were quickly refuted

³¹ There is no relation to Thomas Müntzer and the city of Münster or the violent outbreak in that city.

³² *Ibid.*, 173.

for their actions. Simons was a pacifist. However, Luther would not be so quick to dispose of his views.

The next concern for Luther arose as the Anabaptists turned so clearly from the ways of the Pope. Anabaptists believe that all people are called to be missionaries and agents for Christ. In other words, priests were not considered to be a people that had any special connection to God or power over the people. Grilis argues that Luther was disturbed by the Anabaptist rejection of the priestly position and garb. He quotes Luther,

What think you now? Is it not a fine new spiritual humility? Wearing a felt hat and a gray garb, not wanting to be called doctor, but Brother Andrew and dear neighbor, as another peasant, subject to the magistrate of Orlamünde and obedient as an ordinary citizen. Thus with self-chosen humility and servility, which God does not command, he wants to be seen and praised as a remarkable Christian, as though Christian behavior consisted in such external hocus pocus.³³

As is visible in these words, Luther had concerns about the Roman Catholic Church, but he was not nearly as oppositional as the Anabaptists.

Adult baptism was also a major conflict for Luther. The idea that believers would choose to be baptized when they made a decision to follow Christ reeked of works righteousness to Luther. For Luther there was nothing worse than works-based righteous behavior, which, he believed, devalues God's work and grace in the salvation of Christians. Grilis continues, "In other words, works righteousness is so very destructive, that it cuts one off from grace, faith and justification. Whoever reverses the order of salvation ends up losing his or her soul."³⁴ Luther was opposed to anything that implied that works preceded grace. The Anabaptist focus on discipleship, on overcoming sin, and

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 175.

on bearing good fruit also appeared to be focused on works over grace. This is not to say that Luther rejected social ministries. Indeed, Luther was a strong proponent of love for neighbor and communal sacrifice.

Carter Lindberg, a professor of church history at Boston University School of Theology, argues, “Martin Luther has been portrayed in numerous ways, often tinted by social and political conservatism but rarely as a social activist. Yet social and political activism was integral to his pastoral and theological life and thought.”³⁵ Lindberg goes on to say that Luther’s writings and the Augsburg Confession led to a greater understanding of Luther’s “road map” of social service. He states, “Christians are called to responsible service in the world, socially and politically as well as in other ways, for the sake of the well-being of others.”³⁶ Lindberg believes that it was God’s grace for Luther that opened the door to love of neighbor. Upon receiving God’s grace, the Christian has no reason to seek other means of salvation such as political power or money. The Christian is freed by grace to make sacrifices for others.

Lindberg continues to argue that Luther saw Christ as the head of the Christian community. The people who made up the community were responsible to seek the best for the other Christian brothers and sisters within that community of faith.³⁷ Lindberg quotes Luther,

³⁵ Carter Lindberg, "No Greater Service to God Than Christian Love: Insights from Martin Luther," in *Social Ministry in the Lutheran Tradition*, ed. Foster McCurley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 50.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 51.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 53.

The fellowship of the communion of saints is like “a city where every citizen shares with all the others the city’s name, honor, freedom, trade, customs, usages, help, support, protection, and the like, while at the same time he shares all the dangers of fire and flood, enemies and death, losses, taxes, and the like. . . . Here we see that whoever injures one citizen injures an entire city and all its citizens; whoever benefits one deserves favor and thanks from all the others. . . . This is obvious: if anyone’s foot hurts him . . . the whole body bends over to it, and all are concerned with this small member; again, once it is cared for all the other members are benefited.”³⁸

Luther visualized a community of Christians seeking out the best for everyone in brotherly love. Poverty was to be combated.

In the end it would seem that Luther and the Anabaptists were not so far apart in their theology of mission and service. For Luther grace empowered Christian freedom to serve the Christian community. Simons would not have argued with that belief. Both reformers gave thanks to God for the grace that opened their hearts to serve others. Simons was unwilling to use the local government for such things and placed a greater emphasis on service as a sign of faith. Luther encouraged government welfare as well as laws and regulations to assure the common wellbeing of the community. It is too bad that the two men had no time to argue their positions face to face. Luther was knee deep in holding Germany together, and Simons was on the run. Years later, the heart of the gospel, God’s life-giving Spirit and grace, is visible in both men’s teaching. Christians are called to shine a light in the world and to love their neighbor. On that statement there would be no dissent.

³⁸ Ibid, 54.

Mennonite Service Today

To this point service has been analyzed at several levels. Service has been studied through the works of Menno Simons, a small set of Scriptures, and Anabaptist critic Martin Luther. This section of the chapter will examine two mission organizations that have grown out of the Anabaptist theology on service. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) are two contemporary organizations that stand as examples of Mennonite service.

MCC formed in the 1920s when a group of Mennonites came together with the goal of providing mutual aid to hungry people. This quote from their website gives a glimpse of the goals and purpose of MCC:

Through the years, MCC has worked to follow the call of Matthew 25:35-36 to reach out to those who are hungry, thirsty, ill or in prison and to welcome strangers. Many Mennonites have experienced war, hunger and refugee flight and long to respond to people facing crises today. “This donation is given in thanks for help we received many years ago,” writes one woman. “When I was a child in Russia, I was fed by MCC. When my husband was a prisoner of war after World War II, he received help from MCC. We never forgot.”³⁹

MCC’s vision statement notes, “Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, share God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationships with God, one another and creation.”⁴⁰ MCC explains its process as such: “MCC approaches its mission by addressing poverty, oppression and injustice—and their systemic causes; accompanying

³⁹ Mennonite Central Committee, “About MCC—History,” <http://mcc.org/about/history> (accessed November 1, 2010).

⁴⁰ Mennonite Central Committee, “About MCC—Purpose,” <http://www.mcc.org/about/purpose> (accessed November 1, 2010).

partners and the church in a process of mutual transformation, accountability and capacity building; building bridges to connect people and ideas across cultural, political and economic divides; and caring for creation.”⁴¹ MCC resource centers across the country gather clothing, Sunday school materials, health kits, and school kits to hand out to the peoples of third world countries. The MCC meat canner provides protein-rich meat in cases of disaster relief and to countries facing food shortages.

MCC is the parent organization of MDS and another Mennonite service-oriented ministry that is known throughout the world. The MDS website offers historical context for the organization:

For generations prior to 1950, mutual aid was an informal practice performed by Mennonites and other Anabaptist groups who felt that their faith was best expressed in the day-to-day actions of caring for one another. Through spontaneous gestures of assistance such as the well-known barn raising and the lesser-known harvest bee, the Anabaptists put their faith into action when fellow church members or neighbors faced calamity. In the event that a family lost their barn to fire, tornado or flood, the surrounding church community would band together to build them a new one. In a flurry of activity the women would organize food preparation as the men set to framing and erecting the new structure. After one day of work, a new barn would stand to represent the love of Jesus Christ and the power of collaboration.⁴²

In 1950, at a picnic in Hesston, Kansas, a group of Mennonites discussed taking their mutual aid for those afflicted by disasters to another level. They responded to a series of tornadoes in Oklahoma and flooding in Manitoba, and the organization initially known as Mennonite Service Organization began to grow. Later the organization changed its name to Mennonite Disaster Service to better reflect the focus of its efforts. Before long, other

⁴¹ Mennonite Central Committee, “About MCC—Vision Statement,” <http://mcc.org/purpose-vision-statements> (accessed November 1, 2010).

⁴² Mennonite Disaster Service website, “About us—History,” http://mds.mennonite.net/about_us/history/ (accessed November 1, 2010).

relief organizations began seeking MDS: “By 1966 Red Cross officials expected MDS to show up at the scene when natural disasters occurred.”⁴³ MDS currently “involves more than 3,000 Mennonite, Amish and Brethren in Christ churches and districts.”⁴⁴ MDS currently focuses its mission on efforts toward cleaning up and rebuilding areas afflicted by natural disasters in the United States and Canada. It has been involved in the reclamation and rebuilding of cities affected by floods in New York, tornadoes in the Midwest, and cities afflicted by Hurricane Katrina.

The two organizations provide a glimpse into the Mennonite commitment to service and social justice as it has been practiced for years. Mennonite churches and conferences are well known for getting involved with peace and justice issues, from the war in Iraq, to the oppression of dictatorial governments, to immigration in the United States. Mennonite Church schools build peace and justice into their curricula. They see expanding a young person’s worldview as part of a successful education. Service and social justice are part of the Mennonite DNA.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

PART THREE

STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

KNOWING GOD THROUGH MISSION

Thus far, this project has considered the history, culture, and traditions of Zion Mennonite Church. It has discussed discipleship from a Mennonite perspective, as well as reviewing the Mennonite sense of call to mission and service. This chapter will focus on intentional spirituality. Particular attention will be given to examining the spiritual discipline of service as a strategy to encourage congregational spiritual transformation.

The chapter begins with a brief review of John 17:3, which is a foundationally important verse for understanding Christian spiritual transformation and Christian spirituality. The next section examines service as a spiritual discipline by engaging the writings of well-known Christian spirituality writers Richard Foster and Dallas Willard. The third section, which advocates for the preferred future of the church, contemplates the impact of developing a service-minded, missional atmosphere in the congregation. The final section applies the foregoing principles to the test subjects of this project, the Zion church board.

And This Is Eternal Life

John 17:1-3 is particularly engaging because it is part of a prayer that Jesus prayed on behalf of the disciples. The verses state, “After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.’” There are many instances in the Bible where Jesus prayed, but this is the only one where the reader gets to hear the words that came from his mouth. In her commentary on the Gospel of John, Gail O’Day argues that the timing of the prayer is related to Jesus’ farewell to his disciples before his betrayal.¹ As Jesus is closing in on his death and resurrection, his purpose is becoming clear. He is to serve two roles that go hand in hand. He is to glorify God and to make God known. O’Day writes, “In Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, the glory of God—God’s identity—will be made visible (cf. 8:28).”²

By glorifying God, Jesus helps humanity to know who God is and what God is about. Knowing God, as verse 3 states, is the key to eternal life. As the God-ordained revealer of God and God’s glory, Jesus holds the key to eternal life for those who follow him. O’Day states, “To know this God is to have eternal life. This verse does not emphasize knowledge per se, but emphasizes the revelation of God in the incarnation.”³

¹ Gail R. O’Day, “The Gospel of John ” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 789.

² Ibid., 789.

³ Ibid.

Therefore, knowing God revealed in the life and incarnation of Jesus is to know eternal life. Saint Paul might be asking, “What about grace?”

Many theologians argue that grace alone leads to eternal life. But that statement produces a new question about the definition of grace. Grace is more than forgiveness. Grace is that which God does to draw humanity into his loving presence. One of God’s greatest acts of grace is the creation of the Bible. The Bible is God’s self-revelation. God reveals himself through his actions in the Old Testament and ultimately through the life of Christ. This revelation gives the reader insight into who God is, and it empowers the reader’s knowledge of God and of his redeeming presence in the world. If knowledge of God is the pathway to eternal life, then God’s work to reveal himself is a form of grace. There can be no doubt that forgiveness is an aspect of God that is revealed in Christ; however, forgiveness does not allow a full picture. Therefore, God’s self-revelation (of his character, purpose, and love of the world) and God’s self-glorification (through the actions of Christ’s incarnate life, his teachings, and the sacrifice on the cross) are activities of God’s grace that lead the way to eternal life.

If knowing God is connected to grace and provides the route to eternal life, then knowing God becomes the ultimate mission of any person of faith. Wright argues that this eternal life is something that is available in the current time and should not be considered a goal for a distant future. In his commentary on John, Wright states,

This “eternal life,” this life of the coming age, is not just something which people can have after their death. . . . The point is, rather, that this new sort of life has come to birth in the world in and through Jesus. Once he has completed the final victory over death itself, all his followers, all who trust him and believe that he

has truly come from the father, and has truly unveiled the father's character and purpose—all of them can and will possess “eternal life” right here and now.⁴

This eternal life is available through the revelation of God. The journey to knowledge of God is a narrow pathway. Knowledge of God in biblical terms is not about an intellectual knowledge alone. Biblical knowing is concerned with the disciple's relationship with God. This relationship engages the mind, body, and soul. It is not enough to simply know that Christ exists; one must also know Christ as Lord. The Christian faith journey is not simply about intellectual knowledge, even though it demands study and practice. Relationship with the almighty God is the ultimate goal of spiritual transformation and the Christian faith journey. In her book, *Invitation to the Jesus Life: Experiments in Christlikeness*, Jan Johnson argues that the word for *knowledge* in John 17 denotes a deep relationship. She states, “It is not just a mental assent to Jesus' divinity. It refers to personal interactive relationship with us.”⁵ Johnson argues that this relationship is possible and, furthermore, that it is what humankind is created for: “We can build this transforming soul-friend relationship with God even as we live here on Planet Earth because we were ‘made for heaven’ after all. This friendship with God is what we've been looking for all our lives.”⁶ A relationship of this magnitude demands vigilant attention.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone Part Two: Chapters 11-21* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 93.

⁵ Jan Johnson, *Invitation to the Jesus Life: Experiments in Christlikeness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008), 16, 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

In any relationship, getting to know the significant other demands some effort and a great deal of trust. The disciple of Christ might begin the journey of knowledge and relationship by pouring over the pages of the Bible, God's most prominent form of revelation. The disciple also finds God revealed in communal worship, as others share their own experiences of relationship with God through stories, prayer, and song. God also makes himself known in private experiences. Silent meditation is one of those experiences. Disciples meditate in silence, placing themselves in God's grace, as they listen for the quiet voice of God. Quality time with God in meditation, worship, and study empower the relationship with God. Ultimately it is God's grace, God's Spirit, and God's work that makes knowledge of God, and therefore a relationship with God, possible. It is the disciple's job to be open to grace and to be aware of God moving in the Bible, in the life of worship, and in the day-to-day activities that fill time. The spiritual disciplines, pursued with the right goals of making space for God to reveal himself, can become a life-giving factor in the Christian journey of spiritual transformation.

A Vision for the Future

In this section the plan for the project will begin to develop more concisely and clearly. A theological summary will review the undergirding thoughts behind the vision and project. The next step is to consider the vision for the future: a congregation growing in its knowledge of Jesus Christ by acknowledging and responding to the call to shine Christ's light and love one another and their neighbors in an active and missional manner. With the vision of a missional future at Zion, it is time to develop the strategy of the

project. This strategy will conclude this chapter and lead to Chapter 7, which will focus in greater detail on the project itself.

Theological Summary

The theological summary will briefly consider three layers of theology that carry implications for understanding this project. Those three layers are the grace of God, spiritual regeneration, and the mission of Christ. The theological summary appropriately begins with God's grace. It is grace that precedes all things theologically. Grace is defined in this project as all God does to empower relationship with humanity. Bible scholar Charles Scobie argues, "The term "grace" not only speaks of the love and mercy of God; it also stresses the divine initiative, as well as the underserved nature of the gift. Since 'grace' summarizes all that God gives through Christ, it is the greatest thing one could wish someone to know."⁷

The divine initiative, God's grace, precedes any human movement toward God. God is moving to bring humanity into relationship with him. The Bible is the story of God's gracious interactions with humankind. It relates God's attempts to correct the relationship between a Holy, righteous God and a self-centered, broken humanity. The Bible is the story of God's love and grace. God's grace is evident in the stories that unfold, beginning in the creation accounts. In Genesis 1:26, God creates humankind according to his own likeness. God calls Abraham into a covenant relationship to bless the world in Genesis 12. And God continually blesses the lives of Abraham and Sarah

⁷ Charles H.H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 131-132.

and their children as they journey and become a people. God's grace is evident in the Exodus accounts as he grants the Israelites freedom from slavery to the Egyptians. The Holy Spirit mediates God's grace during the time of nomadic living in the Book of Judges. When Israel needs God's assistance, God acts through judges empowered by the Holy Spirit to lead in the face of adversity. Grace is visible in the ordination and coronation of the kings, who were to be more permanent mediators of that relationship between God and the people. Even the exile of the Hebrew people from Jerusalem is a part of God's grace. The sense of separation from God during the exile acts as a constant reminder that life is not as it should be. This reminder called the people to repent and rely upon God for blessing, security, and hope. Ultimately God's grace is made most clear and visible through Jesus.

A. W. Tozer writes, "Grace takes its rise far back in the heart of God, in the awful and incomprehensible abyss of His holy being; but the channel through which it flows out to men is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen."⁸ Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the greatest of God's efforts to right the relationship between himself and humanity. The death of Jesus is God's move to destroy the separation created by humanity's disobedience and sinful ways. The resurrection is the gracious sign that God has power over death and sin. There is hope for relationship with God, knowledge of God, and, in turn, eternal life through the reception of God's grace. All good spiritual transformation begins with God's initiative, God's grace.

⁸ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1961), 146.

The implications of these meditations for this project are simple. No good service or spiritual practice will lead to transformation toward Christlikeness without the power of God's Holy Spirit and initiative of grace. Spiritual transformation is God's work, not the work of the board or the pastor leading the assignments. The service projects will be performed with the intention of opening space for the Holy Spirit to move, to change, and transform. The service is the open door, the sign of submission to the work of God. As Willard asserts, "Well-informed human effort certainly is indispensable, for spiritual formation is no passive process. But Christlikeness of the inner being is not a human attainment. It is, finally, a gift of grace."⁹ It is grace that leads the way to spiritual transformation. As stated earlier, Simons referred to this Christian spiritual transformation as "regeneration."

Spiritual Transformation

This section will study spiritual transformation from a Mennonite perspective. Simons and the Anabaptists originated the theological stream from which the Mennonite denomination and this project have drawn their resources. That theology is not only focused solely on Scripture, it is also particularly Christocentric. As stated previously, every letter and pamphlet that Simons wrote included 1 Corinthians 3:11 on the opening page: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." It is Jesus who exemplifies true life. Jesus leads the way to relationship with the one and only true God. His teachings are to be obeyed, and his life

⁹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 23.

is to be imitated, even if that imitation means martyrdom. The very basis for Mennonite theology begins and ends with Jesus. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were the means by which God would save the world. His life teaches the believer how to be a blessing to the world. His death atones for the sins of the sinner and makes the sinner clean and righteous before God. His resurrection is proof of new life in Christ. Disciples are to live that life of blessing, die to self, and be regenerated into new life. Spiritual transformation, according to Simons, was the process by which the grace of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, transforms sinful humanity into visible right-living disciples of Christ. The disciples of Christ are to die to self and be reborn in Christ as new, unblemished beings.

The regenerate disciple's life, Simons argued, would be made visible to the world through repentance for disobedience to God and by the pursuit of righteous activities. Simons believed that he was living in a world where the Roman Catholic Church promoted a lifestyle in which people professed Christ but had no concern for sin. To Simons, faith without good fruit was proof that faith was lacking. To him, one who has turned his or her life over to the grace of God will be made new, regenerated into a new being. Mennonite theology recognizes Jesus as the ultimate example of what humanity is supposed to be. To be a disciple meant that one would follow the ways of the leader, practice the teaching of the leader, and take on the character and ways of that leader. Willard argues, "Spiritual formation in Christ moves toward a total interchange of our

ideas and images for His.”¹⁰ Simons’s new regenerate disciple was to think like and act like Christ.

The journey to Christlikeness is one of dedication and sacrifice. A life of confession, embracing the Bible and God’s grace, transformed the pathway to Christlikeness for Simons. Disciples do not live without sin, but they should be continually transforming through repentance, confession, and the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Disciples are on a journey toward Christ, leaving sinful ways behind. Repentance is a way of turning toward God in recognition of human brokenness and the need for grace. A repentant heart, filled with confession, is open to receiving grace and the transformation that comes with it. Confession, to Simons, is a spiritual practice designed to make space for grace and regeneration. Free from the encumbrances of sin, the disciple, empowered by grace, in turn bears fruit in the living of a righteous life of love for God and neighbor.

The disciple and collectively the church should be visible to the world in right living and in the bearing of good fruit. If there were a formula for the Christian faith journey, it might look like this: God’s grace calls the broken human; moved by grace the broken human confesses; his or her confession of sins opens the door to the reception of greater amounts of grace; and that grace begins the process of healing and transformation toward Christlikeness. It is a circular formula that must continue throughout the life of the believer. The more a believer becomes aware of grace, the more she or he will be

¹⁰ Ibid., 102.

transformed into Christ's likeness. The more she or he becomes like Christ, the more aware of grace she or he will become.

Jesus himself states the process of spiritual transformation more simply. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is, he responded with two commandments. Jesus stated that the first commandment is to love God, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself. Loving God is the human response to God's grace. God first loves us. Our response is nothing less than love for God. The Christian love of God deepens within the pursuit of relationship with the God of love. As that love grows, empowered by God's blessing and grace, Christian faith and hope develops, and the disciple becomes more and more a reflection of Jesus. As the disciple begins to reflect God's grace, the love of neighbor and of self takes root and begins to flourish. The disciple shines Christ's light in the world through the love of neighbor. Through the participation in that work of compassionate service, the disciple learns in greater depth the love of God for the world. Once again, this is circular. Jesus states this transformational commandment with a simplicity that belies the difficulty of the task. The broken nature of humanity makes the equation much harder than it may appear to Christ. Humanity in the Bible and our world tends toward selfish behavior that denies love of neighbor or God. Again, humanity has no hope without God's first movement of grace. It begins with God loving us. The implications of the commands are powerful: one loves God, new life grows, and spiritual transformation develops. That process of transformation is at the core of this project.

The goal of the project is to create space for the grace of God to lead the board members step by step into a closer relationship of love with Christ. Willard states, “If we—through well-directed and unrelenting action—effectually receive the grace of God in salvation and transformation, we certainly will be incrementally changed toward inward Christlikeness.”¹¹ It is that “incremental change” that drives the passion of many pastors. Each church member is on a journey toward Christ. There can be no greater joy to a pastor than to see a church member make a connection that draws him or her near to the heart of Jesus. The moment of recognition may come in a Sunday school class, during a pastoral visit, or at a funeral. It is beautiful to experience. It is a moment of hope, joy, or peace that bubbles up out of a challenging situation or difficult question. It is the realization that Jesus is walking with humanity, and that His presence is all one needs. Those moments of realization are the times that re-energize pastors who are weary from church politics and stubborn human behavior. The payoff of being a pastor is seeing the spiritual growth in the congregation. A quick study of the mission and ministry of Christ exposes a Jesus who was invigorated by the same desire to see the disciples grow in faith, being made new, regenerated, and formed in Christ.

The theology of spiritual transformation, or what Simons would call ongoing regeneration, applies directly to the project at hand. The goal of transformation is to become more like Christ, the image of true humanity. The journey to get there involves repentance and grace. The spiritual disciplines open the door to that grace. The discipline of service is simply the most prevalent discipline pursued by Mennonites today.

¹¹ Ibid., 82.

The goal of this project is to encourage regeneration and transformation through the practice of service by participating in the mission of Christ.

Jesus' Mission

In Matthew 3, Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming the presence of the kingdom of heaven. God's kingdom is coming in the grace-filled form of Jesus. Through the mission of Christ, humanity has the opportunity to grow in knowledge of God and God's hopes for humanity. Jesus will begin the process of God's ultimate restoration of the creation. His next step is to call the disciples to follow him. From that point on, every word and every action of Jesus is a teaching point for the disciples. They were being prepared to take the mantle of Christ into the future and share the good news of the coming kingdom on God's behalf.

The ministry of Jesus is filled with hope, joy, and peace. A quick perusal of the Beatitudes found in the Matthew 5 displays Christ's mission to the marginalized. Through Jesus there will be hope for the "poor in spirit," the mourners, the "meek," the downtrodden who "hunger for righteousness," the "merciful," the "pure in heart," the "peacemakers," and those who are "persecuted for righteousness' sake." Jesus exemplified the words of the Beatitudes via his healing ministries. Jesus healed many lame, lepers, and blind people. His mission was one of hope. The demon-possessed and the sinful were set free through the power of Christ's presence and forgiveness. Jesus fed the hungry and cherished children. He was a living example to the disciples, teaching and living the kingdom of heaven. Jesus lived the two commandments that he professed to be the greatest. The love for neighbor is obvious and ever present. The love for God

is present in that love for neighbor. Jesus loved and glorified God as he cared for creation, lived a life devoted to prayer, and responded to his calling to light the world and build the kingdom of God.

Ultimately the mission and purpose of Jesus is revealed in his death and resurrection. In the death of Christ the never-ending pursuit of making right the relationship between God and humanity is made visible. The death of Christ reveals God's grace in its clearest form. The kingdom of God demands sacrifice of one's own will for that of God. In the kingdom of God, God's will and God's protection prevail. The resurrection creates hope for regeneration, spiritual growth, and the day when the fullness of the kingdom of heaven will be revealed in all of its glory. Jesus led by example. The disciples were watching as he lived as an example of the kingdom of heaven and gave his life to reveal God's plan for humanity.

Turning the pages of the Bible all the way back to Genesis 12, it is evident that humanity was always supposed to be a partner in the coming kingdom. Abram and Sarai were invited into a covenant relationship with God. God would bless them with his presence, protection, sustenance, and land. Abram and Sarai were to be a blessing to the world that God created. However, their descendants tended toward selfishness and failed to uphold their covenant with God. Jesus came to restore this relationship and get humanity back on track. His disciples were the group through which the Church and the blessing would grow. The disciples were to be followers of their leader, Jesus. They were to act and think like Jesus, to heal and to cast out demons in the same way that Jesus did. Despite Christ's presence and teaching, the disciples struggled to grow. They

appeared to be stuck in their broken existences. Instead of trusting Jesus to work through them, they worried about how they could heal and confront demons on their own. They continually fought over who would be the greatest. They looked like a hapless bunch with a doubtful future. When Jesus was crucified, they hid in a dark room, lost and hopeless. They could not hope to live up to Jesus on their own. At that moment Jesus appeared in their midst and everything changed.

In John 20, the disciples are locked in a house, lost and afraid without Jesus. Suddenly, Jesus appears in the room and breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. From that point forward, the grace of God would journey with the disciples, mediated through the Holy Spirit, and the disciples would never be alone in their journey toward Christlikeness. Empowered by God's grace through the Holy Spirit, the disciples found the power to live up to the calling of the Great Commission, to make disciples of all nations, and to stand up as representatives of Christ. The disciple's fear was transformed by grace on that night through that meeting with Christ. And from that day forward their journey of ongoing transformation had been initiated. The disciples were empowered by grace to become people who would reflect Christ in the world.

The Gospel of John refers to Jesus as the light that will guide the world. In the Gospel of Matthew, in the same chapter as the Beatitudes, Jesus encourages his disciples to reflect his light throughout the world. The disciples were handed the purpose of Christ. They were encouraged as followers of Jesus to live with the same passion, compassion, and humility as their leader. The disciples were called by God to love the Lord their God

and to love their neighbors. They were not to hide their calling but to share it with the world.

Simons believed that the Church is called to be a light to the world following the purpose and footsteps of Jesus. He desired to see the Church visibly bearing good fruit, loving neighbor, and glorifying God. Service to the neighbor is an act of worship to God. Service is also an act of discipleship, following in the sacrificial footsteps of Jesus. The disciples' service—healing casting out demons, feeding the poor, and reaching out to the lost—was one of the most powerful ways that the disciples learned to know who Jesus was and to understand his purpose.

Service, building the kingdom of heaven, is certainly the calling of the follower of Christ. However, service is also a doorway to knowledge of Christ and God. Practicing the discipline of service, empowered by the grace of God that led Jesus and transformed the disciples, will lead to Christian growth and Christlikeness. As the board members serve, they will be participating with Christ in the work that he set out to do. They will have the opportunity to engage the compassion that Jesus had for the marginalized neighbor, to reflect on what it means to be a light in the world, and to practice humility as they see the face of Christ in those whom they serve. In those activities, empowered by grace, they will take incremental steps toward Jesus.

The Preferred Future of Zion—Awareness of All Things God

This section of the chapter begins to narrow the scope of the project from the broad view of theology and history toward a micro view of how Zion can grow in its collective spiritual faith. The desired future for Zion would be a community growing in

relationship with Christ that shines the light of Christ in its mission and purpose. The church must become more aware of Christ's presence and expect to see him moving. A continued focus on Christ's commandments to the disciples and awareness of God is where love of God begins. Love of neighbor begins with the awareness of Christ's call to build the kingdom of heaven.

Awareness of God's Presence

In its most basic form, this journey begins with the simple awareness of God. In order to build a relationship with God, to follow Jesus and his calling, one must recognize that God is both present and moving. Jesus was deeply aware of God's presence. In John 5:19 Jesus states, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the father is doing; for whatever the father does, the Son does likewise." To further demonstrate the importance of being aware of God, John 17 is useful. Knowledge of God is eternal life and knowledge begins with awareness. Any strong relationship demands a deep knowledge and awareness of the significant other. A congregation that is aware of God's presence is filled with vitality, hope, and a sense of expectancy. It is a congregation that knows grace and God's power to change, console, lead, and teach.

A congregation that is aware of God will come to worship together with an expectation of meeting God in a new way through the songs that are sung, the prayers that are prayed, and the sermon that is preached. Stories of God's unexpected presence will be shared freely in small groups and from the pulpit. As a congregation becomes comfortable with the idea of God's life-giving presence, the expectancy and the

wakefulness of the congregation arise. The congregation will see and know God with greater detail, and the life of Christ will become more evident in everything that the Church does. A congregation that is aware of God opens itself to the grace of God and is made alive with Christ.

One of the goals of spiritual disciplines is to develop the awareness of God. The discipline of service, in particular, will empower the congregation to be aware of God's love and care for the marginalized and broken in its community. As the servant cares for others, the opportunity arises to reflect on the ways that God cares for each, including the server. God is present in the rebuilding of communities and lives with the help of the servant, and God is equally present in the faces of those being blessed by the service. God's presence and activity in the world is an act of God's grace in the life of the disciple of Christ. Awareness of God allows that grace to come into the life of the disciple. That grace and the knowledge of God is the key to the eternal life of hope, love, and peace. As the congregation comes into greater awareness of the presence of God, the recognition of his calling will follow.

Awareness of God's Call

The second great commandment is to love one's neighbor. Awareness of God will inevitably lead one to a greater awareness of the neighbor. Jesus was a man that understood his calling from the time that he was baptized until his death on the cross. Jesus lived with a purpose and sense of call. Another quote from Jesus, found in John 8:28, states, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but speak these things as the Father instructed me. And

the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.” Jesus understood that he was sent and that he was carrying out the purpose of God, who sent him. Jesus was constantly aware of God’s call, doing nothing on his own. God was guiding Jesus, and Jesus was listening with great awareness.

Being God incarnate, Jesus was not only called; he was also one who called and sent others. The ministry of Jesus began with the proclamation that the kingdom of heaven was near. He then began calling the disciples to participate with him as fishers of men. In Matthew 10, Jesus sent his disciples out on missions to heal the sick, proclaim the kingdom of heaven, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons. Matthew 28 includes a pericope called the “Great Commission.” In this interaction with the disciples, Jesus commissions his disciples to go out and make disciples of all nations. Similarly, in John 20 Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit onto the disciples and says, “Peace be with you. As the father sent me, so I send you.” It is God’s nature to send and call. The life of Jesus makes this point unmistakable. It would be impossible to claim the name “disciple of Christ” without seeking to be aware of God’s call. That call inevitably involves others and demands the disciple’s response.

A congregation that is moving toward Christlikeness is aware of and responsive to the call from God to love one’s neighbor. The Church is called to support the ministries of Christ, to love its neighbors, and to build the kingdom of God. Each disciple must live in a constant search for God’s call for him or her. Children are called to learn and grow; as the disciple matures, the calling often involves others, and that call does not dissipate until that disciple’s time in this current age comes to a close. Zion’s young people must

recognize that they are called and can build the kingdom, empowered by grace no matter what their age may be. Seniors who have served God for years must be aware that service does not always mean physical service. The seniors are called to pray, to teach, and to encourage the next generation. As the members recognize their calling, the congregation must become aware of its own call to support ministry as a whole. A congregation is made of many small parts, but never truly becomes the body of Christ until the body draws together, motivated by a common cause.

Zion is a congregation that clearly senses the call to serve its community. Ministries such as the Table of Plenty, the MRC, and other forms of local mission through the church stand as witness to that calling. Yet, until every member senses a call of some sort or another, there is room for growth. The vision for this project includes every single member heeding the voice of God and his call for their lives. The congregation must find ways to continually develop the discipline of service. As the congregation answers the call to serve, members can share those experiences with one another.

Project Strategy

The project itself will be described in this section. First, the target population for the project, the church board, will be presented. The ministry plans involving the board will then be described in detail.

Initial Target Population—The Church Board

This section will examine the church board as the initial target population. The board was chosen for the project for several reasons. The board is a representative population of the church and offers a wide range of church members, while keeping the numbers at a manageable level for a project of this scope. The eight-member board represents differing Sunday school classes, career backgrounds, and ages. It also consists of an equal split between males and females. The board members offer varied personalities and thinking styles. Each member displays a high level of commitment to Zion and a strong, personal relationship with Christ.

The board meets monthly, and the members are involved in differing roles throughout other church ministries. These monthly meetings and other involvements create multiple opportunities for me, as Lead Pastor, to be in contact with board members. Therefore there are opportunities for discussions about spiritual disciplines both in one-on-one contexts and as a board community at monthly meetings. Not only does the board present a group that is accessible for teaching, but they are enthusiastic about my Doctor of Ministry studies and want to help. As the membership group responsible for overseeing my growth as the Lead Pastor, the board has a vested interest in the success of this project as a learning tool. That interest will encourage them to attend the service projects despite their busy personal lives and church commitments.

Not only is the board available and invested in the project's success, but they also act as the visionary body of the church. As the visionary body, the board is the proper team to share the potential new vision for the project and the implications as they pertain

to the future of Zion. Board members develop the church's yearly theme and discuss Zion's ministry initiatives and daily business through the lens of the church mission statement. It would be their job to agree with, tweak, or oppose a ministry movement that is contrary to the heart of Zion as a congregation. The board members also lead the congregation. Trusting that leadership personalities and practices are observed by the congregation, the board creates the obvious first step in the process of creating a spiritually aware, missional congregation.

Review of the Project Strategy

The church board was asked to participate in four service projects. Before each project the board studied Scripture together as a community of faith. The Scriptures invoked discussions about service, love for neighbor, and participation with Christ. The board members served in four different ways. They participated in serving a Thanksgiving meal to three hundred local Souderton residents at the Table of Plenty. They cleaned a house that is used as a day center for homeless people attempting to get their lives back on track. The board prepared health kits at the local MRC. These kits will be sent to developing nations to empower healthy hygiene practices for people who otherwise would have no way of brushing teeth, trimming nails, and washing hands and feet. Finally the board members went out in teams of two to visit shut-ins from Zion.

After each individual project was complete, the board members convened again to briefly discuss the ways that God was moving and to share their stories of service. Each project was an act of participation in a spiritual discipline. Before proceeding to the next

section, the value and purpose of spiritual disciplines in the life of the follower of Jesus will be discussed.

Spiritual Disciplines: A Pathway to Knowing and Being Like Jesus

A spiritual discipline is an intentional activity performed with the desire to turn toward God, to open space for grace, and to achieve a deeper knowledge of God. As one opens the door to his or her life to grace and God's presence, spiritual transformation is likely to follow. The grace of God is formative by nature. Traditional Mennonite theology focuses upon the new birth of the believer. There is a new birth, or as Simons would say, a regeneration of faith and life when the sinner has an encounter with God and God's grace. The goal of the discipline should be to make space for that encounter. Johnson states, "Our task is not to transform ourselves, but to stay connected with God in as much of life as possible. As we connect with God, we gradually begin acting more like Christ."¹² The transformation is in God's hands, and out of the disciple's control.

Traditional disciplines would include but not be exclusive to Scripture reading, meditation, contemplation, fasting, and prayer. Books like Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* and Dallas Willard's *The Spirit of the Disciplines* help to broaden the list of disciplines. That which defines a practice as a spiritual discipline is its ability to turn the follower toward God, opening the door to grace and knowledge in a healthy manner. Willard argues, "A discipline for the spiritual life is, when the dust of history is blown away, nothing but an activity undertaken to bring us into more effective cooperation with

¹² Jan Johnson, *Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 7.

Christ and his kingdom.”¹³ Career and relationship successes demand practice and focus. So too does the relationship with God demand practice. The spiritual disciplines might be considered faith practices. Practice is the effort that leads to a greater goal or purpose. Much like practice for a sport or a presentation, disciplines are not always fun, and they are not always immediately successful. Their goal is to make space for God’s presence, not necessarily to demand it. God is not to be manipulated. The disciple practices, and therefore creates, an open opportunity for God to enter into one’s life. It is up to God’s mysterious will whether the disciple will encounter a heart-warming experience of his presence, the recognition of sin and subsequent repentance, or even a spine-tingling visit or vision. Spiritual disciplines are training for Christian faith and transformation. Practice can be a good thing, when pursued for the right reasons and performed properly.

There are potential pitfalls to the spiritual disciplines that demand a bit of caution and reflection. The disciple must continually consider the goals of the discipline. One might mistakenly perceive that the discipline’s outcome becomes the means of salvation. Spiritual growth will grow the capacity to love God and receive grace, but it does not take the place of the work that Christ has done in redeeming creation. It is easy to fall into a pattern of discipline that appears to lean toward works righteousness when the goal of the discipline skips over God and becomes transformation itself. The transformation, however, is not salvation. For example, in full righteousness, a Christian might desire to become more generous. She or he might, therefore, decide to practice a discipline to encourage generosity, such as giving. This would appear to be an appropriate goal for a

¹³ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 156.

follower of Jesus. The danger in such a circumstance arises if generosity is seen as the road to salvation as opposed to the grace of God serving that role. Becoming generous like Jesus is a natural by-product of relationship with Christ, but it is the grace of God that leads to relationship that saves. Jesus is the key to salvation; behaving like him is not. The transformation is the result of God's work, that is, grace.

Another potential pitfall to spiritual disciplines is that the practitioner may think that the discipline itself may be the means to salvation. The disciplines are not a law that must be followed to assure righteousness. Johnson notes, "Spiritual exercises must be done with the goal of connecting, not for any sake of their own or any desire to check them off a list of to-do items."¹⁴ It is the motivation driving the disciple that matters. Jesus is unconcerned with the number of times that one prays or reads her or his Bible. Jesus desires to have a relationship with his followers on a deeply emotional level. He certainly is not counting the number of spiritual disciplines practiced. When the disciple finds that the discipline is just one more chore on the to-do list, or that the discipline has become a life-reducing burden and lost the ability to invite God's presence, it is time to reevaluate the practice.

Practicing spiritual disciplines with the proper focus, goals, and motivation should be a faith-building experience, even if it takes a lot of practice. Knowledge of God, and thus, the finding of eternal life, is empowered by the practice of the disciplines that turn the practitioner toward Jesus and God's grace. It is precisely through contemplating the Old Testament stories of God's love and Jesus' God-glorifying life, death, and

¹⁴ Johnson, *Spiritual Disciplines Companion*, 9.

resurrection that the disciple can ever hope to know God more fully. Service empowers the knowledge of Christ as it puts the practitioner squarely in the middle of his mission, glorifying God through love. The next section will explore service as spiritual discipline.

Service as a Spiritual Discipline

Willard begins his thoughts on service with this statement: “In service we engage our goods and strength in the active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world.”¹⁵ The discipline of service enables the servant to see others through the eyes of Jesus. Chris Heuertz, whose book was reviewed in Chapter 3, shares a story of reaching out to help a beggar in India: “Praying for that man, the Lord opened my eyes to the hidden treasure that had been standing before me. That crazy man, naked and dirty, also was a ‘hidden treasure’ that Jesus loved so much that he gave his all for him.”¹⁶ Not only are the servant’s eyes opened to see like Jesus, the disciple also begins to understand the mission that drove Jesus. Recently I served with MCC by canning meat that would be dispersed throughout the world to those who are hungry. I was surrounded by hardworking Mennonites who were stuffing cans full of raw pork, weighing the cans, and preparing them for the cooking process. Caught up in the moment, I asked out loud, “What does canning meat tell us about Jesus?” After a long and very awkward silence, one man said, “Jesus cares about the hungry!” The answer was so simple but profound in the disciple’s understanding of Jesus’ passion and calling in the world. Service engages Jesus’ passion and mission physically as well as mentally. Seeing Christ’s mission as

¹⁵ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 182.

¹⁶ Heuertz, *Simple Spirituality*, 47.

love, Johnson argues, “Practice love through service. Get inside acts of love and find the traps of self-importance. That’s how service stretches us and forms us as people. God doesn’t need our service; we need to serve.”¹⁷

Service stretches the disciple to recognize the importance of the other, and it forms humility. Willard argues, “Service to others in the spirit of Jesus allows us the freedom of a humility that carries no burdens of ‘appearance.’ It lets us be what we are— simply a particularly lively piece of clay who, as servant of God, happens to be here now with the ability to do this good and needful thing for that other bit of clay there.”¹⁸ Foster states, “In the discipline of service there is also great liberty. Service enables us to say ‘No!’ to the world’s games of promotion and authority.”¹⁹ Several pages later Foster adds, “When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is, for the most part, a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirits.”²⁰ Service performed with the right purposes will grow one’s humility and rightly order one’s priorities. Foster not only mentions the benefits of service, but also warns of the potential pitfalls of service.

His concern is “self-righteous” service that seeks to be recognized for impressive deeds, that picks and chooses where to serve, and that is affected by one’s moods.²¹ Any discipline can potentially lead to a self-centered focus, but service appears to be

¹⁷ Johnson, *Spiritual Disciplines Companion*, 57.

¹⁸ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 184.

¹⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 127.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

particularly dangerous in this regard. Foster argues that service should be done in private. However, that is often difficult to do. One must enter into service with the desire to serve God, to grow in relationship with God, and to serve the needs of others. Service is no discipline at all if there is any goal other than answering the call to love neighbor and to seek God's grace. The next section will begin to summarize the goal and plan of the project for the overall community of Zion.

Goals

In this section of the chapter, the goals of the strategy will be discussed. The simple strategy is to lead the church board through four sessions of service, which function as opportunities to practice spiritual disciplines. On a micro level, the first goal is that the board would become more knowledgeable of spiritual disciplines and their potential to promote growth. On a deeper level, the goal would be the ongoing spiritual transformation of the board members. That transformation might include (but not be bound to developing) the following: a greater sense of call to love one's neighbor, a deeper awareness of and faith in the God who sent them to build the kingdom, and a growing sense of self-sacrificial humility. On the macro level, the goal would be that the learning and transformation of the board would take root and spread throughout the congregation.

Goal number one is that the board would become more comfortable with the idea of spirituality and the pursuit of Christlikeness through the discipline of service. There are some Mennonites who have lost connection with their own tradition, and see contemporary spiritual disciples as belonging to the Roman Catholics rather than being

legitimate practices of the Church's own Mennonite ancestors. For some Mennonites, engagement with what is wrongly perceived as Roman Catholic Church practices is complicated by a history of persecution that the early Anabaptists experienced. Anything that appears "Catholic" in the eyes of Mennonites will be considered with skepticism. It is important to recognize and remember that Simons himself deeply engaged the discipline of Scripture reading and study. Mennonites are also a practical people, and the idea of spiritual disciplines is foreign to many of them. Zion Mennonite members are notorious for the claim, "I am not very spiritual." The board will learn that disciplines are more than prayer and Scripture reading. Though traditional spiritual disciplines may seem unnatural, service is familiar to Mennonites. Service is ingrained in the Mennonite way of discipleship, as evidenced by the work of Mennonite service agencies. The discipline of service fits the comfort zone of the board members. Hopefully, service as a discipline will begin to open the board members' minds with regards to what it means to be spiritual beings. The practice of one spiritual discipline done with intention and consistency can have great potential to open new avenues of knowing the God of grace and mercy.

That discipline of service practiced well may lead to the potential of incremental transformation toward Christlikeness. The deepest goal and hope of the project is to know Christ and to be like Jesus. The board members will be encouraged through pre-service meetings to be aware of the ways that they see a bit of Jesus in the people that they serve. They will wrestle with the ways that they grow in knowledge of Christ by participating in the very work that Jesus himself performed. By visiting, feeding,

preparing health kits, and even cleaning the living space of the other, the board will participate in building the kingdom of God. As a spiritual discipline, the board members will be intentionally seeking to meet Jesus and be exposed to grace in the midst of the service. In what ways they may be changed, one cannot say; that is the work of the Spirit. Foster and Willard would argue that growth in humility would be unavoidable, but other changes will almost certainly emerge as well.

As the board members, empowered by grace, grow in their knowledge and awareness of the movement of God in their lives and those of their neighbors, it is hoped that they will pass the new revelations on to others. Each board member is a participant in a different Sunday school class and has influence in multiple areas of the church. In class and on committees, they will be encouraged to share their experiences with spiritual disciplines and with service. As the visioning body of the church, the new knowledge of Christ gathered by the board members is already presenting itself through the expression of the yearly theme. The theme for 2011 was, "Calling one another to Christ." The theme reflects the board's understanding that God is calling each member to participate in inviting others into a deeper experience with the living God. The theme for 2012 is "Sharing our stories." The board is encouraging the congregation to share their stories of God and the ways that Jesus is moving in our midst. The board members at Zion are people of influence within the congregation. Not only are they leading in vision, but they also lead in practice and in conversations about God. It takes a community to grow a community, to shift that community in a new direction, or to encourage the community to embrace an old direction.

CHAPTER 7

PROJECT COMPASSIONATE SERVICE: THE IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter will consider the process involved in the development and implementation of the project. The first section will include the fundamentals of the project, including a description and details of the four service opportunities. This section will also include a timeline for the project and identification of the personnel involved. Finally, this section will analyze the resources needed to successfully complete the four service opportunities. The second section of the chapter will focus on the assessment of the project. The tools for evaluation will be considered as well as the creation of the assessment plan. Finally, the last section of Chapter 7 reports the results of the service opportunities and wrestles with idea of “success” of the project.

Implementation and Process

In this section the planning for each ministry opportunity is laid out in detail. At the time of writing this section, the ministry opportunities have already been completed. Therefore, this section on planning will be written in the past tense. The plan was to offer four different service opportunities through which the board members may experience service as a spiritual discipline. As they served together, it was hoped that

they would learn more about the mission and compassion of Christ to love and care for the world. Each opportunity had differing challenges and potential for spiritual growth.

Serving at the Thanksgiving Meal

The first service opportunity was held on Thanksgiving Day, November 25, 2010. Zion holds an annual dinner for the local community each Thanksgiving. The dinner serves approximately 325 meals to residents of the local community. The meal is open to all people. Many of the guests have no other place to go or lack the ability to make their own meal for the holiday.

On this project, service opportunities abound. Food preparation began on Wednesday and did not conclude until the meal was served. Table set-up and fellowship hall decorating began at 7:30 a.m. Thursday. Punch and hors d'oeuvres were served from 11 to 11:30 a.m. As guests enjoyed hors d'oeuvres, volunteers gathered in the library for a brief overview of service etiquette and to be organized into serving groups. At 11:30, the entire fellowship hall, including both guests and servers, sang a few Thanksgiving songs. A Thanksgiving prayer was offered and the chaos ensued. Tables were served family style. Typically Zion serves approximately two hundred people at one time in the fellowship hall. In addition, volunteers packaged roughly 125 take-out orders for pick up or delivery.

The church board members served food to the guests. As servers, the board experienced the opportunity to participate with Christ in the act of feeding God's children. They were encouraged to offer the peace of Christ to the guests with warm smiles and

words of blessing when the opportunity presented itself. Their day began with a time of group devotions held in the reception room of the church at 10:15 a.m.

The devotional time consisted of one half hour spent reflecting on Matthew 25:31-40, which includes the verse, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,” and 1 John 4:11-12, which reads, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” For each passage, the board was asked to reflect on three questions. The first question asked, “What does this Scripture tell us about Jesus?” Question number two read, “What does this Scripture tell us about humanity?” And finally, “What does this Scripture call us to do?”¹ Those questions and the discussion of the board members with regard to the Scripture prepared them for their time of service. A short prayer of sending ended the devotional time, and the board members went out to serve. After the service, the board members reconvened in the reception room for a final debriefing, which will be discussed in greater detail in the coming section on assessment.

The key personnel to this service opportunity were, of course, the board members. As Lead Pastor, I facilitated the pre-service discussions and the post-service debriefing. Logistic details were minimal. The meal was already in place, and the Table of Plenty leadership carried out the main preparations. They were notified of the number of servers that were to attend. The greatest challenge was convincing a representative number of board members to give up their Thanksgiving Day to serve the community. The next

¹ Project questionnaires are available in appendix B.

service opportunity was held on a non-holiday Saturday morning, which made it friendlier to the board members' schedules.

Cleaning the Front Street House

The second service opportunity was held on Saturday March 19, 2011 at 8:00 a.m. This service took place at the Front Street House, which is owned by Zion and leased to Keystone Opportunity Center (hereafter, Keystone) for one dollar a year. Keystone is a local non-profit organization whose mission is to aid and empower the homeless in the Souderton community. Keystone offers a variety of services: "English as a second language" training, job training, resume development, a food pantry, and short-term housing for homeless people. When a homeless family enters the program, the family sleeps at local churches and receives meals provided by church members. During the day they are designated to a house that is used as a home base to provide an address for job applications, as well as a place to shower and connect to the Internet for the purposes of searching for job openings. A counselor is provided for each family to help them to work at building life skills, such as balancing a checkbook and interviewing for jobs.

Keystone uses the Front Street House as a day center. Zion purchased the house, updated the interior, and reconditioned the exterior of the property. Keystone also provided volunteers from the community for painting and clearing exterior debris. When the house was handed over to Keystone, most of the daily upkeep became their responsibility. However, they asked the Zion congregation to participate in a thorough spring cleaning. This cleaning was chosen to be the second board service opportunity.

Following the same pattern of the Thanksgiving service, the board met at 8:00 a.m. in the house's dining room for pre-service devotions. The Scripture for meditation came from Isaiah 58:6-8 (NIV):

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then you righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

Once again the board members were asked to reflect on what this passage says about God and Jesus, what the Scripture reveals about humanity, and what the Scripture is calling the board to do. Upon closing in prayer, the board began cleaning the house from top to bottom. The bathroom and kitchen were focal points of the efforts. The cabinets, appliances, shower, vanity, and toilet were sanitized. The woodwork around windows and doors were scrubbed, the floors washed, and the windows cleaned. The board was encouraged to consider the ways that the house is used to set the oppressed free and break the yoke of homelessness. The cleaning became an act of humility as the board members literally bent down onto their hands and knees to cleanse the messes made by others. It was perceived that seeing Christ's presence in the act of cleaning was the greatest challenge faced in this particular service opportunity. Those challenges were discussed in detail as the cleaning concluded at 11:30 a.m. to allow for a half-hour debriefing.

The personnel included the board members and the lead pastor as facilitator. Each board member was asked to bring his or her own cleaning supplies and equipment. They were told to wear clothing appropriate for the occasion. The date was set up

through Keystone director of Day Housing, and the doors were unlocked by a Keystone employee. The Day Housing director asked that the families using the house stay clear for the cleaning, but some of the residents arrived before the board was finished. The board members were encouraged to engage them appropriately but to remember that the house is the residents' personal space. The board members should be respectful of that space. It is the residents' home. The first two service opportunities focused on the local community, and the third focused on serving the poor of the developing world.

The Material Resource Center: Filling Health Kits

On April 19, 2011, the board members met at the MRC in Harleysville, Pennsylvania to watch a brief video displaying MRC activity, to perform service, and to hold a short board meeting. The MRC is a local shipping and packing center used by area Mennonite Churches to support the work of MCC. The MRC is a warehouse with stations set up to store and bundle donated clothing, cardboard, and books for resale and recycling. Volunteers make quilts for resale in the quilting area. All of the funds that are raised through the sale of used clothing, cardboard, and quilts go toward the purchase of materials for kits that are sent to developing nations and people in need. School kits are filled with supplies for children. Health kits are filled with band-aids and hygiene supplies, such as toothpaste and soap. Baby kits are filled with clean warm blankets, diapers, and other infant essentials. Additional funds are used to purchase meat for the MCC meat canner. The canner comes to the area once a year for a week of canning pork. The canned meat is sent out to countries in need of healthy protein. Retired seniors who serve as volunteers form the foundation of the MRC's production during the day-time

hours. In an attempt to attract younger volunteers, the center is open on Tuesday evenings. That open night provided the opportunity for the Zion board to get involved.

At 6:30 p.m., the board members watched a ten-minute video offered by MCC to detail the work being done at the facilities and throughout the world.² The pre-service devotional time followed that meeting. The verses for reflection came from Matthew 6:31-33 (NIV): “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Board members were asked to reflect upon the same questions that have been mentioned in previous devotional times. What does this text say to us about God and humanity, and what does it call the reader to do? They were given an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the MCC video. Following the devotional time, board members toured the facilities and the packing station where the hygiene kits are filled. Each kit was to be packed neatly and precisely. One tooth brush, a finger nail clipper, a bar of hand soap, and a tube of tooth paste were neatly wrapped in a hand towel and placed in a handy drawstring pouch. As the board members packed the items, they were encouraged to consider the needs of the people of the world and the ways that the kingdom of God is being built through the sharing of simple hygiene products. It is easy to miss the importance of hygiene when one lives in a society that is relatively sterile and hygiene is

² Mennonite Central Committee, “Sharing God’s Love and Compassion” video, <http://www.mcc.org/stories/videos/sharing-gods-love-and-compassion> (accessed October 1, 2012).

an expectation. At 8:00 p.m., the board reconvened in the MRC conference room to debrief. A short board meeting followed at 8:30.

The MRC project demanded a higher level of logistical consideration due to the need to follow their schedule. The director of the MRC was asked to approve the date and times for the use of the conference room and service. She made herself available at 6:30 to answer questions, present the video, and offer a tour of the center. Volunteers were scheduled to lead the board through the packing process and to find other tasks. Board members were told to wear warm comfortable clothing. The doors were locked at 9:00 p.m. The board was asked to turn off lights and shut the doors upon leaving. Completion of this service opportunity left one more for the board to attend.

Visiting Shut-ins

The final service opportunity for the church board members was scheduled for June 11, 2011. Feeding people, cleaning, and preparing health kits helped the board to engage mission for others outside of the church community at Zion. This opportunity to serve was designed to focus on the Zion community itself, and it offered a more intimate experience. Members were paired to visit shut-ins. Zion has shut-ins living in five different senior care facilities and several who still live in their homes, either assisted by family members or by health care agencies.

A list of these shut-ins was made available to the board members ahead of time. They were encouraged to find a partner and choose a shut-in or two for the visit. Because the shut-ins rarely appreciate surprise visits, it was the responsibility of the board members to call their chosen shut-in and set up the visit times on their own. The pre-

service devotions began at 9:30 a.m. in the reception room at the church. The Scripture for reflection was Matthew 22:34-40, which is highlighted by Jesus' answering a question about the "greatest commandment": "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

This final opportunity to reflect on the questions of God, humanity, and call was concluded with prayer and the members were sent out to visit. The only instructions given to the board members were to be themselves. The volunteers were encouraged to introduce themselves to the shut-ins and explain why they were visiting. They were asked to be considerate of the health condition of the persons and pay close attention to signs that would help them to assess when to leave. Some of the church's shut-ins love to be visited, and others become tired very quickly. If possible, the board members were prompted to take the opportunity to pray for the needs and concerns of the shut-ins as they visited. Each pair was given an hour or less to visit, convening back at the church between 11:00 and 11:15 a.m. At that time, they participated in the final post-service debriefing for assessment purposes.

Logistically, this service opportunity was challenging. The list of shut-ins is not difficult to attain; however the board choices for visits needed to be approved by Beth Rauschenberger, Zion's pastor of congregational care. Beth is completely aware of the health conditions of those on the list and assured the avoidance of members who would not be a good fit for a visit due to health concerns or dementia issues. The potential

persons being visited needed to be called in advance and needed to approve of the visit and time. The conclusion of the last ministry opportunity leads directly into the area of assessment and the question of how the “success” of the project might be assessed.

Project Compassionate Service: Assessment

Assessing the value of the project as a tool for developing a deeper relationship with Christ is the focus of this section. Assessing the depth of relationship growth and concurrent development of Christlikeness involves a few challenges. Measuring productivity in spiritual transformation is challenging. Measuring a beginning level of spiritual maturity and assessing the growth is highly subjective. A scientific study might have measurable outcomes and immediately visible effects. However, measuring success with numeric calculations is all but impossible in this situation. Assessment of spirituality and Christian character is something most prevalently witnessed with the benefit of hindsight and personal relationship. The benefits may not be immediately apparent and may take time to become manifest. Different people will display growth in different ways. Pastoring a congregation for a length of seven years has afforded me the joyous opportunity to witness spiritual growth in members of the congregation over time. However, this project does not afford the luxury of a seven-year gestation period.

Considering the personal nature of assessing one’s spiritual development and the lack of appropriate time for deeper observation, there may not be a better way to assess than to simply ask exploratory questions. Asking questions of the board members during

their time of post-service debriefing will engender the best conclusions with regards to success.³

The first set of questions attempts to decipher the depth at which the servant might have learned of or experienced Christ's love. In an attempt to offer a question that can be measured, the first question for each service opportunity asks the board members to assess the depth of which the opportunity to serve aided or empowered their understanding of the love of Christ. They were asked to evaluate this growth with a response of one through five, with an answer of one stating that the service aided their understanding of God's love very little, and five representing a response of "far more than I could have ever imagined." Of course that data is far from scientific and will need to be explored further. The second question involves the invitation to respond more fully to the first. The board members were asked to share a story or explain their responses, and for future considerations, whether there an aspect of the service that might have helped them to engage the love of Christ more fully.

The next set of questions directly pertains to the fears involved in serving. In my pastoral experience, I have found that some Christians are held back from serving others because of certain fears. They may, for instance, fear a perceived lack of ability to perform a certain task. They may be afraid of physically touching people who are different from what they might be accustomed to on a day-to-day basis. The fear of praying out loud or of saying the wrong thing in a pastoral situation often arises with laity. Fears are never in short supply when working with laypersons in a service setting.

³ The questions of response to the service opportunity can also be found in appendix B.

Therefore, each of the service debriefing worksheets involves a question about what fears or uncertainties were felt as the board members prepared to serve. They were asked: Did those anxieties change? In what way did they do so?

The next sequence of questions refers to the sense of God's presence. Where is God present in the service? Recognizing the presence of God in one's daily life is an essential aspect of any Christian spiritual journey. Christ may be witnessed in the faces of those who are served. He might be found in the camaraderie of serving with others, or simply in the heart of the server, creating change and developing a sense of inner peace. It is up to the follower of Christ to recognize that presence.

As humans, this experience of God can often be missed. The distractions of life so often get in the way of the spiritual journey and the witness of God's presence. The final question on each worksheet asks the board members to consider the places where they may have missed noticing God's presence. They were encouraged to reflect on what roadblocks were set in the way. What might have given them a greater sense of God's presence? Recognizing the distractions to their own spiritual lives will open the door to a fuller experience of Christ in the future.

After each service opportunity the board was given time to reflect on these questions together. Hopefully they will learn from one another and learn to see Christ in new ways as they hear the group's story of service. This method of evaluation and assessment is limited by the commitment and engagement of the board members. It has a low level of measurability. The responses may be highly subjective and open to

interpretation as far as “success” is concerned. However, the difficulty of the task must not hinder the effort.

Serving at the Thanksgiving Meal

As expected, it was a challenge to find participants on Thanksgiving Day. However, five of eight board members were able to participate. The pre-service time of reflections appear to have been helpful in preparing the board members for their time of service. Providence was a prominent word in the discussion. God provides for the needs of God’s children. Humanity is called to be a part of that providential care. As one board member stated, humanity is to “be the hands and feet of Jesus.” The board members shared a strong sense of calling to active service. “Action is important,” was a quote from one of the board members. We are called to “provide the needs of others—no matter who they are—in love without judging—to put others before ourselves in all we do and treat others as though they are Christ—which they are, part of his family.” The time of Scripture study set the stage for the service.

As the time came to serve, the board members worked to welcome and seat guests. Upon completion of a prayer for the meal, chaotic serving ensued. There is no other way to serve 250 people in a compact room at one time. Servants rose to the occasion. The board members jumped right into the action. Their familiarity with the building and space was obvious as they served with a greater degree of confidence and initiative than others who were not Zion members. As their pastor, I was delighted with their engagement and felt God’s presence through their service. It was a joy to participate with them.

Following the service, the board convened once more in the reception room to discuss the happenings. All five of the participants said that serving the meal “significantly” empowered their understanding of Christ’s love. The average number on the scaled first question was four. That denoted a significant experience of God’s love and mission. Serving the meal created the opportunity to “share with others” and to “show care” for the stranger. The guests were treated as “members of Christ’s family.” God was working through the board members to love their neighbors. The board members sensed God’s love for themselves as well. If God could love the guests through the board, then God would surely love the board members through others if the board members were ever in a place of need. God’s love abounds.

Regarding the issue of fears, the board members’ fears developed from the idea that they may have to talk to someone different from them. There was certainly a bit of apprehension about participating in a new event. Rare are the people who enjoy being in an unknown situation. However, their fears were put aside and seemed to dissipate quickly. The Thanksgiving meal reflection sheet had a second scaling question that referred to the extent to which this service alleviated the anxiety of serving. The average response was 4.7. That response demonstrates that trying something new tends to create anxiety for some, but stepping out and serving often changes those feelings quickly. Each participant admitted that he or she would gladly serve again if needed. God was present, and this far outweighed the discomfort of a new setting.

The board members responded quickly and with a sense of excitement when asked about the sense of God’s presence at the meal. God found in community was a

theme that wove its way through the reflections of all the participants. When the servers touched guests as a gesture of friendship, or allowed the time to engage guests in conversation, God was present. One of the board members expressed God's sense of presence as one of the volunteers offered a reassuring touch to a guest grieving the recent death of a close friend. There was also sense of incredible gratitude in the room on that day. Guests were grateful for the meal and time with community. Joy, song, and laughter filled the room with God's presence. It quickly became clear that God's presence was a highlight of the service opportunity. With this success, there were still challenges.

The board at Zion is a hard-working and efficient group. It comes as little surprise that some members were distracted by the perceived lack of efficiency in the event. The board members found themselves distracted by thoughts of how things could have been done better. They agonized over management details. The meal is a reflection of Zion, and board members want to see that Zion is represented well. One board member was distracted by the desire to be a public face for the church. Desiring to be the perfect hostess for the event challenged her ability to reach out in a personal way to certain guests. Another board member relished more time to spend with the guests. The meal is a truly amazing event, but it is chaotic and moves quickly. The board member was reminded that chances to bring a bit of the love and grace of Christ into the lives of one's neighbors must be deeply intentional because the opportunities may be fleeting. This service opportunity was filled with challenges and wonderful joys. The next project, cleaning the front street house, also had its own set of joys and challenges.

Cleaning the Front Street House

Five of eight board members woke early to gather their cleaning supplies and perform a spring cleaning on the house on Front Street. For three of the board members, this was their first experience with the project. The two others had participated in the Thanksgiving meal service opportunity. The session began with reflections on Isaiah 58:6-8. The Scripture was used to prepare the board to intentionally seek Christ in the service. Christ is in the mundane task of cleaning, but it takes a bit of extra intentionality to notice that sometimes. The Scripture clearly states that God cares for his own children. One of the board members recognized that she is incredibly blessed in her current place in life, but one day she might indeed be the naked and poor needing to lean on others. Humanity is filled with brokenness and oppression. Therefore, we must help our neighbors, as we would want to be helped by them. Believers are called by God to serve the children of God and break “free from injustice and oppression.” In this case, that meant that the board members were to “clean this house.”

With that final phrase as the prompter, board members mixed water and cleaning products in buckets, plugged in the vacuum cleaners, and cleaning commenced. The bathroom and kitchen demanded top priority. All of the woodwork was washed around windows and doors. Floors were swept and the laundry room was also cleaned. The board worked quickly and diligently with a playful attitude and a sense of joy that came from working side by side. This was a very comfortable assignment for this crew. That comfort and joy was reflected by the comments in our review and post-service debriefing.

The scaled first question produced a response of 3.3. This shows a significant

drop-off from the previous service opportunity. Two of the board members that responded stated that the service empowered their knowledge of God's mission significantly. One member, however, was unsure. She felt that cleaning and serving others was such an integral part of her life that she could not say that this opportunity in particular had any major affect. Two others did not answer this question. It appears that the everyday aspect of cleaning created an atmosphere that was less conducive to new understandings of Christ. As stated earlier, this service was easy for the board members, and presented no fears or concerns coming into the project. One comment made was that this opportunity was "effortless." Cleaning was second nature to the board. But that does not mean that Christ was not present.

Christ's presence impacted each respondent, "in fellowship with others gathered for a common task/purpose." Everyone mentioned working together. It was a bonding experience and the board had a lot of fun. It is hard to imagine that fun and cleaning can be mentioned in the same sentence. For one member, the sense of God's presence caught him as he took the time to reflect on the ways that the house is used to help the homeless with resources and safety in times of struggle. God was present in the fellowship. The only disappointment or distraction to God's presence was found in a desire and longing to do more.

One board member was disappointed that there was not more work to do on the exterior of the house, stating, "It would have been nice to work outside a little; [I] always feel closer to God when I'm outside." Another stated, "In my mind it went too quickly. [I] would have enjoyed doing more." Time constraints were mentioned by a third. One

board member actually works for Keystone and felt that her familiarity with the house may have distracted her to some degree. The service was so familiar that it lacked a sense of excitement for this board member. The joy of fellowship and the desire to do more were the markers for this opportunity.

Material Resource Center: Filling Health Kits

Seven of eight board members met at 6:00 p.m. on a Tuesday evening to watch a video featuring the work of MCC, to serve, and to have a short meeting. After viewing the video, the board discussed the two Scriptures presented in preparation for the service time. The passages from Matthew and 1 John have been mentioned previously. The Scriptures led the seven board members to wrestle with their cumulative sense of materialism and unproductive worrying about perceived “needs.” The 1 John passage empowered a sense of togetherness in the service with God. One member said it this way: “If we love and help each other, we are letting him [Jesus] live within us.” Service is an act of love for the God who first loves us.

After watching the video and reflecting on Scripture, the board members were taken on a quick tour and put to work. Five people helped to package health kits, while two others were taken into the warehouse to bundle clothing and cardboard for resale. The total service time lasted for about one hour, at which time the group reconvened for the post-service debriefing and a short meeting to discuss church business.

When asked to rank the level at which this project empowered their understanding of God’s love, the responses were mostly positive. The scale averaged 4.2, which is a response of significant empowerment. Three members claimed that they felt God’s love

far more significantly than they ever imagined. Two others responded with the choice, “somewhat.” The seventh did not respond to this question. The group felt that watching the movie before serving was very helpful as it gave a face to the service. The movie imparted a greater sense of the reality to the plight of those living in poor nations without proper health care. This recognition encouraged a greater sense of God’s love in the midst of a monotonous task. Several of the board members mentioned being deeply impressed by the level of ongoing support and commitment of MRC volunteers. Abe Landes was mentioned as an inspiration. He has been a leader at the MRC for many years and gives countless hours to the organization. Overall, serving at the MRC was a comfortable experience for the board members. They came to serve that night with few reservations.

Once again, the sense of God’s presence was most clearly witnessed in community. One board member noted seeing God’s presence “in working with a group of friends to help and knowing how this will help people.” At every service opportunity, comments were made about finding God’s presence in community and working together for a common cause. There seems to be a strong correlation between witnessing God’s presence and serving together. That should come as no surprise. Another board member experienced God as she prayed for the people that would receive the health kit that she was packing. That comment touched me deeply. Simply serving is important; adding prayer for those in need to the physical work incorporates a deeper sense of spirituality. This service was comfortable and enjoyable for the board members.

As for distractions, there were few for the board on this night. One member noticed a touch of competitiveness as she was packing the kits; she was trying to pack the fastest. But the board was predominantly focused on God this night. The MRC is well run and efficient. With little to distract them, the attention was on God alone. One member said, “He [Christ] was with us the entire night.”

This project in particular seemed to move the board members more deeply than the previous two. This could be explained by the familiarity involved with serving through MCC, a long-time Mennonite service organization. The board trusted MCC as an organization that is making a difference in the world and by helping developing nations with every day needs. The pre-service movie appears to have also elevated the sense of connectedness to the service and the task. Seeing where the hygiene kits were headed and the people that would benefit from them in the movie increased the connectedness to the service. The final service opportunity pushed the introverts out of their comfort zone and forced the board members to serve face to face with real people.

Visiting Shut-ins

Six church board members met at 9:30 a.m. for the pre-service reflections. Reflections focused on Matthew 22:34-40 and 1John 4:11, 12. The focal point of the Matthew text was the commandment to love one’s neighbor. Each board member mentioned the call to love as being desperately important to understanding the mission and person of Christ. One board member argued that love for God and love for the other is the root of spirituality. They all suggested that God created humanity with the goal of loving one another. One board member considered service to be the key to that love,

saying, “Service is the way we actively show God’s love for us to others.” Another noted that the foundation for all relationships is love, and that love extends even to people who seem strange or different. Still another stated that love is the pathway toward immersion in the life of Christ. As they reflected on God’s love, they were sent out to share that love by spending time with church members lacking the ability to fully engage in church activities due to age and illness.

The board members went out in pairs to visit shut-ins whom they chose from a list provided by the pastoral staff. One pair visited a former church financial secretary in the dining hall of a nursing care facility. Another pair went to the cottage of a long-time member and Sunday school teacher who is dealing with back pain and other physical disabilities. The final pair visited a former Mennonite pastor and his wife who had recently come home to Zion to settle into retirement. After visiting for about an hour, the group reconvened at church for the post-service debriefing.

As has been the pattern, the experience rated highly as an activity that empowered the understanding of the love of Christ. The average for the scaling question was 3.9, a significant tool for understanding God’s love. Three participants rated the visits as “significantly” impacting their understanding of God’s love, and another was a bit more tentative with a rating of “somewhat.” The board members all experienced that sense of God’s love through the appreciation that was received from the shut-ins whom they visited. One pair both mentioned listening to the person they visited tell stories of her life and her current sense of peace in the midst of a painful physical existence. Another board member mentioned sensing Christ’s love in the way that her shut-in talked about

her love for Zion and the staff of the church. Several participants mentioned feeling relief at how well the visits went.

Concerns arose for some of the introverted board members who were concerned about meeting new people who are in a different stage of life. There was concern that conversations would be awkward and difficult. Another board member mentioned a discomfort with nursing homes. Joyful conversations and the shut-ins' strong show of appreciation for the visits quickly alleviated those concerns. The pair that visited the pastoral couple mentioned that they could have easily spent another hour visiting.

God was present for the board members in hearing the stories of their shut-ins and in hearing the appreciation. There were, however, a few distractions in the process. The setting of a busy cafeteria was distracting for one pair. Another pair felt the desire to pray with their shut-in, but neither was comfortable following through with that calling. They were a bit disappointed with themselves. One board member felt like the visit was not really an act of service, as though he felt as if he had to get his hands dirty to love his neighbor. Overall, the experience was another good one for the board members who responded. With the service opportunities finished and results reported, it is time to assess the perceived success of the project. The final section of this chapter will cover that assessment.

Assessing "Success"

Upon first review, I was concerned that the "success" of the project was minimal. Conversations with board members after the service opportunities were positive, yet measured. It was not evident that the service opportunities were truly drawing the board

toward Christ in any new way. Several of the board members never seemed to engage and held back their reflection sheets for one reason or another. Service appeared to be something that was so familiar that it did not engage a new response. However, a quick perusal of the reflection sheets that were handed in offered something more.

The majority of respondents related that the service projects “significantly” helped them to experience a greater understanding of the love of Christ. Board reflections displayed a high level of engagement. The board members were thinking and reflecting on God’s presence as they were knee deep in the acts of service. A greater sense of awareness was infiltrating a practice that was deeply familiar to each of the board members. That awareness is truly a sign of “success.”

This familiarity with service created a spiritual practice that was accessible and comfortable to the board members. In hindsight, the perception that service would be a great start for the presentation of spiritual disciplines appears to have been proven correct. Zion is a congregation that thrives on hospitality, love of neighbor, and mission to the world. Service was a great choice and provides a stable foundation for the continued efforts to expand spiritual disciplines in the congregation. It would be a mistake to think that the service alone led to greater awareness and success in the project.

The reflection on Scripture before the service and group debriefings afterwards were fundamental. They helped develop the awareness of God’s presence in each opportunity to serve. The Scripture study set the stage and opened the door for the Holy Spirit to guide the service. The times of group reflection empowered the board to process God’s presence. During these times, the members affirmed one another in their

experiences of God and Christ in community. There are times when people need others to help them to make sense of their own thoughts, feelings, and emotions as they process God moving in their lives. In the end, my humble assessment is that this project was a huge success. It substantiates a vision of developing service opportunities enrobed in Scripture and group reflection for the future of Zion as a congregation.

CONCLUSION

In this final section of the project, there will be a summary of the outcomes and insights gained and a look at the next steps and plans for the future as they begin to take form. The implications of the project for the larger Christian community and the Mennonite church will also be discussed. As mentioned previously, the Zion church board was invited to participate in four differing service opportunities. The service times were preceded by a short period of group Scripture study and concluded by post-service reflection on the presence of Christ found in the activities. The board members who engaged the reflection time appear to have appreciated the experience and their sense of awareness of Jesus and his mission grew. They most prevalently witnessed Christ in one another as they worked hand in hand as a team.

Service appears to have been an excellent way to engage Mennonites in spiritual disciplines. The project left me with three prominent questions that might be helpful for further consideration. First, why did the project engage so deeply a few, but not all of the board members? And what might help to entice a deeper engagement from those members in the future? Secondly, to what extent did the pre-service and post-service reflections play a role in the project? Would it have been as successful without them? And finally, since spiritual practices are often considered to be personal experiences, how was the sense of community so significant in the midst of this project?

Wrestling with the Questions

What roadblocks discouraged the involvement of certain board members? Time undoubtedly played a major role that challenged the project for some members. The first service opportunity fell on Thanksgiving Day. There were board members with family obligations, dinners of their own to attend, and preparations to be made. It was clear that this project would be difficult for some schedules. Two other opportunities were offered on Saturday mornings. One board member had missed the house cleaning service with praise team practice, while another had a prior work obligation. Service is seldom easy to schedule and demands the sacrifice of time in the midst of terribly busy lives. It was understood that time would cause issues. Yet, there was something else that surprised me.

It is possible that Mennonite humility may have been a problem with regards to members' willingness to share about their service with others. The board members of Zion are a relatively mature group of Christians. They serve the church on many levels, and attend Sunday services regularly. They care passionately about the church and Christian growth. Yet it became apparent in the midst of the unfolding process that not every member was willing to recognize his or her own spirituality. Two members mentioned that they were not very spiritual, and that the whole process of discussing spiritual disciplines was uncomfortable. If the measure of one's spirituality can be witnessed by his or her Christ-like behavior, I can attest that none of Zion's board members are lacking in spirituality. As stated above, Mennonites as a whole are not well versed in the ways of traditional spiritual disciplines other than Scripture study. Mennonites are a practical and humble people. It may have been helpful to use more

accessible language. Possibly, “spiritual disciplines” could have been “practices for Christian transformation” or simply “discipleship training.” Pursuing the discipleship angle, the whole project may have been aided by a time of reflecting on Scriptures that referenced knowing Christ, growing in maturity, and witnessing Christ in one another. Finally, it might have made a difference if I had been more demanding about full participation, but that would not have felt very gracious and may have produced forced reflections and hard feelings. As successful as the project seemed to be, there is room for improvement. The times of reflection seemed to be one of the aspects of the project that led to success.

At what level did the pre-service reflections affect the experience for board members? I can only speculate that the pre-service reflections were vital to the experience of God during the service opportunities. The overwhelmingly deep and thoughtful responses to the reflection on Scripture revealed that the board members were engaged in the process. By engaging Scripture in that time together, the members were given the opportunity to step outside of their busy lives to focus on Christ. On any given day, each board member’s life is filled with worries, challenges, and things to do. The reflection time offered the opportunity to step away from the constant calling of life and to consider the calling of Jesus.

Each person was given ample opportunity to reflect on God and God’s gracious love for him or her. They were encouraged to imagine what the Scripture exposed with regard to humanity, and to consider the calling of God to him or her in that very moment. The pre-service reflection on Scripture took on the role of priming the spiritual pump for

the board members. It aided the project by mentally preparing the members for a meeting with Christ in the service opportunities presented to them. The Scriptures reminded the board members of the love of Christ for them and for others and reinforced their sense of calling to the world and response to God's love. Coaches of athletic teams often share a pre-game pep talk to help the players to focus on the task at hand. In a way, that was the purpose of the pre-service reflection on Scripture. I believe that the service times would have been fruitful without this time of reflection, but the focused study together amplified the experience and exposed the presence of God in clearer detail. The group reflections also aided bonding and helped to draw the community together.

As the reflections began the group process, a final insight of significance emerged. Serving as a group clearly became a significant theme with regard to the recognition of God's presence. Over and over, the board members claim to have seen Christ moving in community. The benefits of serving together as a team were exposed in the reflection time and during the "work." In the group reflection times, one person's thoughts often spurred on those of another board member as well, thus offering a multiplied process for imagining fuller images of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Mennonites feel the most comfortable studying Scripture in the presence of the Christian community of accountability. This basic tenet of faith was accentuated in the pre-service reflections. The benefits of community and group participation did not end with those moments before the service began.

Joy, hope, and love are aspects of the Christian life that were visible in and through one another as the board served together. During service, board members

laughed together and helped one another to accomplish tasks that they could not hope to do on their own. As they served, cleaned, and filled health kits, the board members discussed their lives, learned about one another, and reflected prayerfully about those who would be empowered by their collective work. Knowing the truth of one another's busy schedules provided a sense of unified sacrifice. Christ was visible in those sacrifices and in the active response to the call of God made known in the Scriptures presented. Zion board is a team that prayerfully seeks to lead the congregation on the path that Christ provides. By serving together the board has become more aware of Christ. They have developed as a team that enjoys working as such. I believe that the project has drawn this group together and empowered the process of seeing God. The project has prepared the board for their continued work of seeking the guidance of Christ for Zion.

Next Steps

The goal developing from the project is to use the significant insights found to empower growth in the church. Those insights, the need to change the language used with regard to disciplines, the importance of preparation via Scripture reflection, and the value of serving together are vital understandings to developing future programs of service and growth. It appears that the project was received with a level of success that deems the continuation of a focus on service for the board and an expansion into the broader Zion community. A plan for continued service once or twice a year will be proposed to the board. God's love and presence was experienced in the service opportunities. As the board is to guide the future vision and plans of the congregation, it

will be beneficial to continue to cultivate a deeper knowledge of Christ through service together. In the past, the board has contemplated finding a way to retreat with one another to seek God's leading and to develop relationships. This project succeeded at both of those goals. Further service projects will be developed on a yearly basis with the goals of creating team unity and seeking the presence of God. The time of pre-service Scripture study and post-service debriefs will continue, led by the lead pastor. The board was the focus group for the project. The insights gained by working with them are the foundation for engaging the church.

With the board research complete, it is time to expand the scope of the project and begin to engage the congregation with the "spiritual exercise" of service. As noted several times previously, time will be the greatest limitation. Due to my own busy schedule, the new project will begin slowly. It is my goal to negotiate one evening per month that Zion's members would be invited to serve at the MRC in Harleysville. Efforts must be coordinated through the MRC director to assure that there is ample work available and efforts are organized. The date and time must be determined and made available to the congregation through the bulletin, web page, and emails. A time of pre-service reflection on Scripture will be made available. This is not the only avenue of expanding "discipleship transformation" through compassionate service.

Devotional material will be developed for church groups heading out to serve areas devastated by disaster through MDS. Zion's youth group recently served in Kentucky in the summer of 2012. Daily devotional materials focused on the ministry and call of Jesus on the Christian life were developed, and time was spent each morning in

prayer and reflection as they went to patch houses and built additions. A sermon series on service and God's call would be another avenue to continue the work that has begun. The road to developing a missional church is one that will take careful planning and time. This project was the first step. The findings from this project are the foundation of the work ahead. We will continue to seek the will of God for our church and seek to hear and answer Christ's call through the Holy Spirit.

Implications for the Mennonite Church

Believing the findings that have grown from this project are worth sharing, it will be important to spread the findings beyond the walls of Zion. There may be several ways to share and encourage others to make service an intentional practice for spiritual transformation and discipleship making. The Mennonite Church gathers every other year for a church conference. Throughout the week, seminars are available and offered to share new ideas. The findings of this project can be shared as one of those seminars. At this point, the seminar would focus on developing board communication, community, and spiritual depth through the practice of serving together. Another option is to write a review of the project and share that with the Mennonite mission organization for their newsletter *Missio Dei*. This letter focuses on sharing the stories of mission throughout the organization with churches that support missionaries. An article on service as spiritual practice for continuing spiritual growth would fit their mission perfectly. The Mennonite magazine for worship leaders, called *Leader*, invited me to write a letter for their fall 2012 issue. The focus of the issue was adult spiritual transformation. That article was a tremendous opportunity to share the findings of this project. A final option

for broader Mennonite exposure is to simply tell other pastors of the findings. If they are interested, I could preach a sermon focused on service for their congregations. The project was very simple on one level, and has huge potential on another. Service is what Mennonites do well. Therefore it is simple. Yet, the world is yearning to see God in action and service is a powerful way to share the love of Christ. Therefore, the potential is great.

Young theologians and activists like Shaine Claiborne, Christopher Heuertz, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove promote a Christian life of active service and the pursuit of Christian justice. If they truly reflect the ideas of young people today, then the future of the Church is one with a proclivity toward service. I believe that this is a good sign. Jesus was a servant. He called his disciples to follow in his steps, to actively deny themselves, and carry the cross. Jesus expects his followers to reflect his light into the world. That cannot be done apart from active love. However, actions and service without the careful attention to the spiritual life can grow into self-serving habits. Service detached from our sense of call to know Christ and glorify him opens a door to self-aggrandizing agenda and the belittlement of those being served, and it misses the entire point of the Christian faith journey. Knowing Christ and the grace of God is eternal life. The future of the Church must involve open eyes and ears to the movement of Christ in service and in worship and all of life.

APPENDIX A

CORE VALUES AND ZION VISION STATEMENT

Zion Mennonite Church Core Values Statement

Values - (ties the mission and vision together) Describes **what we believe**

We are a body of Anabaptist believers who follow the teachings of the Bible in the Mennonite tradition.

We believe in:

- Calling people to Christ and Believer's baptism
- Discerning God's Will through worship and study
- Teaching peace and non-resistance
- God's Word as the essence of life's lessons

We value worship for its spiritual renewal, fellowship with one another, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

We value worship as:

- Time of praise, renewal, inspiration, and warm fellowship with one another
- A variety of ways to serve the Lord according to one's gifts and interests
- God's possibilities waiting for us as individuals and as a congregation
- Nurture of a personal, intimate relationship with Christ

We advocate Jesus' teachings of grace, peace, justice, and non-resistance in our lives and in the world.

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. [Micah 6:8]

We advocate:

- Grace - [Ephesians 2:8]
- Peace - [1 Timothy 6:6]
- Justice - [Luke 4:18-19]
- Non-resistance - [Matthew 5:38-42]

We empower mission work in our community and throughout the world as an outward expression of obedience to God.

We empower mission work through:

- Providing opportunities for service to the Lord
- Giving our time, talents and treasures to local and worldwide needs
- Participating in local community and wider church activities
- Supporting mission trips

We regard Christian education and a strong youth program as the foundation for growing in faith.

We regard as important:

- Teaching, relating and applying Bible stories to children
- Mentoring youth and young adults
- Fellowship with one another in Sunday School classes
- Growing closer to Christ through prayer
- Learning to put our faith into action

We believe that congregational participation and unity is essential for church growth and well-being.

We believe:

- Members are to be accountable to each other and to support each other
- People should be involved in more than just Sunday morning worship services
- People should connect in a personal and caring way
- Member's gifts should be recognized and utilized

We strive to make Jesus smile by being a welcoming church, valuing our community, regarding all people as important to God, desiring to meet people where they are, and believing that together we can connect Jesus Christ and to one another.

June 2004

Vision Statement for Zion Mennonite Church

Believing that all people are important to God, we at Zion Mennonite Church desire to grow by welcoming each person, valuing community and nurturing our relationship with Jesus Christ and one another.

APPENDIX B

MINISTRY REFLECTION SHEETS

Front Street House Reflections

Is. 58:6-8 “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the
oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor
wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn
away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly
appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD
will be your rear guard.

1John 4:11,12 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one
another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us
and his love is made complete in us.

What does Is 58 say about God?

What does this scripture say about Humanity?

What does it call us to do?

In essence this morning we fast of our time. Anyone of us could be doing something else. We are here. Let us offer this time to God and shine our light.

Post Service Debrief – Front Street House

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

What did you learn about Jesus in your service today?

At what level would you say this service has empowered your understanding of Christ's mission and love – your knowledge of Christ' compassion?

- 1 – Very Little
- 2 – Unsure
- 3 – Somewhat
- 4 – Significantly
- 5 – Far more than I could have imagined!

Please discuss your answer – what helped you to know Christ what might have been more helpful – Examples are helpful to me!

What concerns or worries did you bring to this project today if any? Did those concerns change or grow?

Where did you most prominently feel Christ's presence – see Christ in today's service?

Where did you miss seeing or responding to Christ today? What distracted you or got in the way?

Material Resource Center Reflections

Matt. 6:31-33 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

1John 4:11,12 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

What does the Matthew text tell us about Jesus?

What does this scripture say about us – humanity?

Considering 1 John and Matt together, what do these texts call us to?

Watch the video – How are we making the kingdom come this evening?

Post Service Debrief – Material Resource Center

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

What did you learn about Jesus today?

At what level did tonight's service help you to understand the love of Christ?

- 1 – Very Little
- 2 – Unsure
- 3 – Somewhat
- 4 – Significantly
- 5 – Far more than I ever imagined!

Please discuss your answer? What helped you to know Christ? What might have been helpful?

What concerns or issues do you have with serving at the MRC before coming tonight? Did serving help alleviate your concerns?

Where did you most prominently sense God's presence tonight?

Did you miss seeing or responding to Christ tonight? What distracted you or got in the way of your experience with God?

Visiting Shut-ins Reflections

The Greatest Commandment Matt 22:34-40

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

1John 4:11,12 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

What does the Matthew text tell us about Jesus?

What does this scripture say about us – humanity?

Considering 1 John and Matthew together, what do these texts call us to?

Post Service Debrief – Visiting Shut-ins

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

What did you learn about Jesus today?

At what level did tonight's service help you to understand the love of Christ?

- 1 – Very Little
- 2 – Unsure
- 3 – Somewhat
- 4 – Significantly
- 5 – Far more than I ever imagined!

Please discuss your answer? What helped you to know Christ? What might have been helpful?

What concerns or issues do you have with visiting a shut-in before coming today? Did this visit help alleviate your concerns?

Where did you most prominently sense God's presence in the visit?

Did you miss seeing or responding to Christ today? What distracted you or got in the way of your experience with God?

Thanksgiving Reflections

Prayer – May the Spirit of Christ guide and draw each of us near to you Jesus. Help us to see you in scripture, and in the faces of those we serve. Empower our knowing that we might understand your compassion, love, and mission. Settle upon us and guide us. In the name of Jesus – Amen.

Matt. 25:31-40 NRSV

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

1John 4:11-12 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

What does this scripture tell us about Jesus?

What does this scripture tells us about Humanity?

What does it call us to do?

As you serve today, take time to look for the Christ within those you serve. Push yourself beyond getting work done and make connections – smile, eye contact, a pat on the shoulder. You are serving Christ and shining the light of Christ found in you simultaneously – have fun!

Post Service Debrief – Thanksgiving Dinner

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

What did you learn about Jesus in your service today?

At what level would you say this experience has empowered your understanding of Christ's mission and love – your knowing Christ?

- 1 – Very little if at all
- 2 – Unsure
- 3 – Somewhat
- 4 – Significantly
- 5 – Far more than I could have ever imagined!

Please explain - Examples can be helpful

At what level did this experience alleviate your fears and uncertainties about serving the stranger? Would you do it again?

- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Please explain if you are willing -

Where did you most prominently see Christ in today's experience?

Where did you miss seeing or responding to Christ today?

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