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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

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A CULTURAL SHIFT AND RENEWED FOCUS ON OUTREACH AND  
EVANGELISM FOR EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

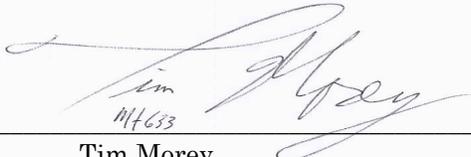
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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary  
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



Tim  
11/16/13

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Tim Morey



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Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: February 1, 2013

A CULTURE SHIFT AND RENEWED FOCUS ON OUTREACH AND  
EVANGELISM FOR EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

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

BY

MATTHEW A. HOYT  
FEBRUARY 2013



## ABSTRACT

### **A Culture Shift and Renewed Focus on Outreach and Evangelism for Eastminster Presbyterian Church**

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Doctor of Ministry

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2013

Eastminster Presbyterian Church is a congregation of people with deep faith and caring hearts. Yet, although Eastminster has a long history of mission work, it is in many ways an inwardly oriented congregation. Over the years Eastminster has lost touch with its local community and abandoned efforts at local outreach and evangelism. Eastminster needs to begin to shift its culture from inward to outward and renew its focus on outreach and evangelism.

This paper has three parts. Part One will explore both the context and identity of Eastminster Presbyterian Church. Attention will be paid to the character of East Ventura as a beach community and agricultural area and the socioeconomic issues that grow from these factors. Focus will also be placed on the growth of the area and the potential for outreach and evangelism, as well as the challenges presented by the religious landscape.

Part Two will develop a theological rationale for Eastminster to shift its culture from inward to outward and renew its focus on outreach and evangelism. First, an outward oriented ecclesiology will be outlined. Second, it will demonstrate how an outward oriented ecclesiology finds its roots in key hallmarks of Reformed theology and conversely how these hallmarks have often led to an inward focused ecclesiology. Finally, the life and teaching of Jesus will be examined as a model for an outward oriented ecclesiology with a focus on outreach and evangelism.

Part Three presents a blueprint for developing leadership, an implementation plan and curriculum for this project. This section will identify the goals, content, timeline, and target population as well as the specifics of the project—a small group experience and a retreat. Finally, this section will include an assessment of the project including evaluation by the church board, questionnaires, and interviews.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD.

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To Melinda

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I want to extend very special thanks to Arlene Inouye for rescuing me when my final project proposal seemed like a hopeless mess and for her compassion and encouragement to keep going when a terrible accident set my timeline back quite a bit. Thank you also to Tim Morey, who served as my content reader. I have appreciated your advice and willingness to help me.

A final thank you goes to my family. Melinda, you have always supported me in everything that I have done and this project was no different. I love you, thank you for being someone I can always count on. This project is dedicated to you. To Bailey, Anna and Ella, my three shining stars, thank you for understanding when Daddy needed to “go do his homework!” I love all my girls. I also want to thank my Mom and Dad who have encouraged and supported me all my life and again during this project. Your prayers and calls and offers to help me get away to write were real gifts. I love you both.

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## INTRODUCTION

With the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tells the story of a young man who takes his inheritance, leaves his father, and goes off to live life on his own terms (Lk 15:11-32).<sup>1</sup> After the son burns through his resources and his big plans for living life on his own terms fail, he decides to return home. Even though the son is contrite upon his return home, we are still surprised that he is greeted by his Father with open arms and without hesitation.

The father proclaims in celebration that “this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” With this parable Jesus not only illustrates God’s grace for sinners, but his heart for lost people. It is a wonderful and powerful story of redemption.

However, at this point, just when the parable appears to be drawing to a close, Jesus introduces a new character and the story continues. Jesus tells of an older brother who is unhappy with the father’s decision to welcome the younger son back into the fold. The older son feels undervalued because he has loyally served the father all along, unlike his younger brother.

The older brother is not just indignant; he is disrespectful to his father in a number of ways as he shares his feelings. He raises his voice to his father, he fails to address him as “father,” and he questions his father’s judgment, all signs of disrespect within Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

culture.<sup>2</sup> The father graciously ignores these slights and pleads with him to understand and accept his decision, but the story ends without resolution. The older brother stands as a symbol of those who will not extend grace to others or share God's joy at their redemption.

Over the years I have thought a great deal about this parable. It seems that what the older brother wanted was to be the favorite son. He wanted the father to reject the younger brother and therefore allow him to remain the sole object of his father's affection and attention. I imagine that he thought this would make him happy and perhaps it would have.

The older brother was clearly more concerned with the father fulfilling his desire than he was in truly knowing and understanding his father's heart. The older brother's focus on himself and his own wants and needs had overtaken his desire to have a fully mature relationship and partnership with his father. This is illustrated by the irony of his proclaiming the virtues of his hard work and loyalty to his father while at the same time treating his father with great disrespect.

In reflecting on the older brother, I have come to identify him with the disposition of many churches these days. Like the older brother, many churches have come to a place where concern for themselves and their wants and needs has blinded them to God's heart for lost people. This blindness then hinders the growth of their relationship and partnership with God.

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<sup>2</sup> The word "Look!" in Luke 15:29 is in the emphatic tense in the Greek which is noted in the English text with an exclamation point indicating a raised voice. Notice also that the younger son always respectfully addresses his father as "father," even when he takes his inheritance and leaves in verse 12.

Churches like this have developed an inward orientation, often leading to a lack of emphasis on mission and frequently to a complete neglect of local outreach and evangelism. In an interview with the *George Fox Journal*, Leonard Sweet said, “A missional church faces outward toward the world. . . . For too long, churches have faced inward, offering religion as a benefits package—something that ‘meets my needs’ or offers good outcomes.”<sup>3</sup>

Inward focused churches are not like the older brother in every way. In most cases they do not share his punitive desire to reject the lost. Yet their apathy toward lost people often grows from a desire to remain the sole object of God’s attention in their sphere of life, clearly mirroring the older brother’s attitude. Like the older brother, their desire to be the “favorite son” becomes a stumbling block to knowing the Father’s heart and developing a fully mature relationship and partnership with him. Further, in some cases, like the older brother, this self-focused attitude may even lead to disrespecting God by ignoring, resisting, or belittling the call of the gospel to reach out to lost people with the message of God’s love and grace.

Eastminster Presbyterian Church (hereafter, Eastminster) has been in some significant ways an inwardly oriented church. Over the last forty years the population of Ventura County, in which Eastminster is located, has grown substantially.<sup>4</sup> The county

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<sup>3</sup> Tamara Cissna, “God Sent a Person, Not A Proposition: A Conversation with Len Sweet,” *George Fox Journal* Vol. 1, No. 3 (Fall 2005), <http://www.georgefox.edu/journalonline/fall05/emerging.html> (accessed June 4, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Censusscope, “Ventura County,” [http://www.censusscope.org/us/s6/c111/print\\_chart\\_popl.html](http://www.censusscope.org/us/s6/c111/print_chart_popl.html) (accessed November 10, 2011); Southern California Association of Governments, “Profile of Ventura County,” <http://www.scag.ca.gov/resources/pdfs/Counties/VenturaCounty.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2011).

also has a growing Hispanic population and the eastern portion of the city, where Eastminster is located, has been the site of new home construction. In contrast to all of these positive trends and the opportunities they represent for outreach and evangelism, Eastminster has not grown during this period of time nor has it come to reflect the increasing racial diversity of the area. At a certain point in its history and development Eastminster turned inward and began to neglect outreach and evangelism to its local community. In many ways the church's main concern became its own community life and discipleship.

Eastminster did remain committed to some world mission involvement and local compassion and social justice missions, but it completely ceased all local evangelism and outreach. The primary motivation for mission became benevolence, and in this way it became more about their identity as "good Christians" than about God's concern for lost people. Further, mission became more and more understood by many church members as something that some mission-minded members engaged in, rather than the explicit call of all believers and something that should be a part of the church's very DNA and therefore reflected in its ministries and programs.

The structure of the mission ministries of Eastminster well illustrates this attitude of apathy toward local outreach and evangelism. While Eastminster's mission ministries have a committee responsible for world mission and a committee responsible for social justice and compassion mission, it has no committee responsible for local evangelism and outreach. In fact, the church has no apparatus at all dedicated to local outreach and evangelism, nor does it have any funds allocated for such endeavors.

To address these issues, this final project presents a strategy to help Eastminster begin to shift its internal culture from inward to outward. A key aim of this shift will be bringing a renewed focus on evangelism and outreach. This shift will be initiated by engaging the leadership and laity in small groups and a retreat experience in which they will explore the evangelistic focus and outward trajectory of Jesus' teaching and ministry as a model for the church's ministry.

Shifting the culture of a congregation is no small task, and this project represents a part of a larger plan for Eastminster. Yet, there is a key sense in which this project represents the heart of that plan. Rather than simply launching the church into more mission projects and programs for equipping in evangelism hoping these things would somehow lead to a shift in the church's culture, it is my belief that significant change of this type must come from a deep place. The complacency that tends to grip most institutions cannot be easily overcome.<sup>5</sup>

It is for this reason that I am seeking with this project to begin a shift in the church's culture by offering a theological rationale from Scripture for that change and educating to that end. Ultimately, it is my belief that the culture of the church will only really change when people begin to understand God and God's call on their lives and the church in a new way and develop a sense of urgency toward change growing from these things.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 35-42.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-46.

This ministry paper will contain three major sections. Part One will explore Eastminster's context. It will provide an overview of the community surrounding Eastminster as well as the identity of the church. Attention will be paid to the character of East Ventura as both a beach community and agricultural area and the socioeconomic issues that grow from these factors. Focus will be placed on the growth of the area and the potential for outreach and evangelism, as well as the challenges presented by the religious landscape.

Part Two will develop a theological rationale for Eastminster to shift its internal culture from inward to outward and to renew its focus on outreach and evangelism. First, the section will outline an outward oriented ecclesiology. Second, it will demonstrate how an outward oriented ecclesiology finds its roots in key hallmarks of Reformed Theology and conversely how these hallmarks have often led to an inward focused ecclesiology. Finally, the life and teaching of Jesus will be examined as a model for an outward oriented ecclesiology with a focus on outreach and evangelism.

Part Three presents a blueprint for developing leadership, an implementation plan and curriculum for this project. This section will identify the goals, content, and target population of the ministry. It will also outline the specifics of the project—a small group experience and a retreat. A timeline, ministry components, and logistics will be given. Finally, this section will include an assessment of the project including evaluation by the church board, questionnaires, and interviews.

My desire with this paper is twofold. First, it is my hope that Eastminster will begin to more greatly share God's heart for the lost people in its local community. It is

my second hope that the culture of Eastminster would begin to turn from inward to outward toward the world as it seeks to reach out to lost people with a renewed vigor for outreach and evangelism.

PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

This chapter will present the unique character of east Ventura, California, as both a suburban-beach community and agricultural area, and the socioeconomic diversity that grows from this dual identity. Key demographic information will be covered concerning that makeup of the community, recognizing the potential for outreach and evangelism. Further, a sketch will be drawn of the religious landscape of Ventura. Emphasis will be placed on strong evangelical presence within the city as well as the consumer mentality of many Christians and the competition between churches, both of which present challenges for outreach and evangelism.

#### **The Two-Part Character of East Ventura California**

Eastminster, PC(USA), is located in Ventura, California, a coastal city situated thirty miles south of Santa Barbara and sixty-five miles north of Los Angeles. Ventura has a long history as both a southern California beach community and as a significant agricultural area. This dual identity gives Ventura a unique character and socioeconomic makeup.

Ventura is a suburban coastal community known for its beautiful beaches and surfing. Both Channel Islands National Park and the Channel Island National Marine Sanctuary lay just off shore, and the Los Padres National Forest is found in Ventura's foothills. The city boasts many hotels and restaurants and is a tourist destination for over 125,000 people each year from around the country and thousands more day visitors from surrounding communities.<sup>1</sup>

Ventura is an upscale suburban community in which the median price for a detached single family dwelling is \$515, 000 as compared to \$361,000 which is the median price for the state of California.<sup>2</sup> The median household income in Ventura County is \$75, 348 as opposed to the state average which is \$60,883.<sup>3</sup> The city has an excellent school system, an active artistic community, and a well-developed and utilized system of parks and recreation. These and many other attributes illustrate the suburban quality of Ventura's community life.

Ventura is also a significant agricultural area. In 2010 Ventura County produced over \$1.9 billion in total crop values placing it in the top ten counties in the United States. The farming industry in Ventura County employs over thirty thousand people and is the

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<sup>1</sup> City of Ventura Website, "Visitor Profile & Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Ventura Tourism 2005/06," <http://www.cityofventura.net/files/file/commdevelop/Economic%20Development/Economic%20Information-Data%20Book/32Vistor%20Profile%20%26%20Ec%20%26%20Fiscal%20Impacts%20of%20Tourism.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Citydata.com, "San Buenaventura (Ventura), CA (California) Houses and Residents," [http://www.city-data.com/housing/houses-San-Buenaventura-\(Ventura\)-California.html](http://www.city-data.com/housing/houses-San-Buenaventura-(Ventura)-California.html) (accessed November 10, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> United States Census Bureau Website, "US Census Bureau: State and County Quickfacts," <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/06111.html> (accessed June 6, 2012).

second largest employer next to the service industry.<sup>4</sup> The agricultural character of Ventura is significantly more pronounced in the eastern portion of the city, hereafter referred to by its local designation, the “East End.” Eastminster is located in the East End of Ventura where the two-part character of the city is a more visible and integral part of the character of the community.

Ventura’s two-part character as both a suburban beach community and an agricultural area create a unique identity for the city that is sometimes in harmony and sometimes in tension. In some respects this two part character integrates seamlessly. The casual and laid-back attitude of the surfing and beach culture matches very well with a similar approach to life found in the agricultural community. There is also a similar interest in and respect for ecological concerns that grow out of these two very different experiences of Ventura’s natural beauty and resources.

However, in other ways Ventura’s two-part character is a source of tension. Ventura has a historic Hispanic population. The official name of the city is San Buenaventura, and the city takes its name from and traces its origins to Mission San Buenaventura which was founded in 1782. A significant part of the Hispanic population of Ventura both historically and presently finds employment in the agricultural industry of the city and county. Ventura experiences some culture clash between its suburban, upper-middle class population and those from the lower socioeconomic strata, many of whom are Hispanic and employed in the agricultural industry.

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<sup>4</sup> Farm Bureau of Ventura County Website, “Frequently Asked Questions about Ventura County Agriculture,” [http://www.farmbureauvc.com/pdf\\_forms/VC\\_Farming\\_FAQ.pdf](http://www.farmbureauvc.com/pdf_forms/VC_Farming_FAQ.pdf) (accessed November 10, 2011).

Ventura has a history of racial tension between Caucasian and Hispanics, and there have been some acts of racially motivated violence in the city and in the schools. The upper-middle class Caucasian community often assigns blame to the Hispanic community for vandalism, crime, and gang activity in particular. Further, certain areas of town which are known as Hispanic enclaves are sometimes spoken of with fear or disdain by Caucasians, and the occupation of farmworker is sometimes disparaged as well.

The divide between the upper-middle class suburban culture and the culture of the poor migrant or local farmworker is very clear at certain points. A major issue for both Ventura County and the city of Ventura is a significant lack of affordable housing for farm workers. The low cost labor that farm workers provide is essential to sustain the economy of the county and city, and yet the low wages that these workers earn make it very difficult for them to find adequate housing.

This lack of adequate affordable housing often leads farmworkers to live in overcrowded, dilapidated, or otherwise unsuitable structures. Living under such conditions is another source of culture clash within the city. These kinds of living conditions often violate city codes and lead to trouble with law enforcement and city government. Further, these situations are looked upon as a nuisance by the upper-middle class suburban community.

### **The East End: Great Potential in a Growing Family Community**

Over the last forty years the population of Ventura Country has grown substantially. From 1970 to 2000 the county's population nearly doubled from 378,497

to 753,197.<sup>5</sup> The population continued to grow steadily between 2000 and 2010 increasing by nearly 70,000 people, in contrast to neighboring Santa Barbara County which grew by only 24,549 during the same period.<sup>6</sup> This solid and continuous growth in population represents a very significant opportunity for Eastminster in terms of outreach and evangelism.

Ventura County also has a rapidly growing Hispanic population. Between 2000 and 2007 the Hispanic population rate surged, accounting for more than half of the overall population growth of the county during that time.<sup>7</sup> Up from just 32 percent in 2007, the total population of Ventura County is now 40 percent Hispanic.<sup>8</sup> Several neighborhoods with large Hispanic populations are located within one to two miles of Eastminster. The growing Hispanic population of Ventura and Eastminster's close proximity to these Hispanic neighborhoods represents another significant opportunity for outreach and evangelism.

The East End of Ventura, where Eastminster is located, was the site of significant new home construction prior to the recession beginning around 2008. This building will likely resume once the economic conditions of the city and state improve. The western and mid-town sections of the city simply do not have the land available for new home construction that the East End has. The agricultural character of this part of the city has

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<sup>5</sup> Censusscope, "Ventura County."

<sup>6</sup> United States Census Bureau Website, "US Census Bureau: State and County Quickfacts."

<sup>7</sup> Zeke Barlow, "Hispanic Population Rate Surges," *Ventura County Star*, (October 23, 2008), <http://www.vcstar.com/news/2008/oct/23/hispanic-population-rate-surges/> (accessed on June, 6, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> United States Census Bureau Website, "US Census Bureau: State and County Quickfacts"

preserved large tracks of undeveloped land. It is likely that many of these tracks of land presently being used for agricultural purposes will be turned into new homes in the future.

Most of the building in the East End has been single-family homes therefore drawing more families to that part of the city. These homes are also attractive as the price of real estate is lower on the East End, meaning that growing families can get more house for their money in that part of the city. A number of the city's top preschools and elementary schools are also located in the East End, further enhancing the area's appeal to younger families.

The presence of so many families in the immediate area and the potential for more in the future indicate the rich potential for Eastminster in terms of outreach and evangelism. Further, two well-regarded elementary schools in the East End are located in neighborhoods that are directly adjacent to Eastminster. The close proximity to these schools represents a great opportunity for relationship building with the school and the families whose children attend them.

In that same vein, Eastminster has a highly regarded preschool and is the site of a tutoring center, run by a local social services agency, which serves over one hundred elementary students per week. Both of these programs represent exciting relational opportunities with families in the area that Eastminster has yet to significantly take advantage of. All of these trends and factors mentioned above make it clear that Eastminster is very well positioned to see great returns if it were to renew its emphasis on local outreach and evangelism in the future.

## The Religious Landscape

The city of Ventura has nearly one hundred churches and fellowships of various kinds. Most of the mainline protestant denominations are represented within the city, many with more than one church. There are also a number of independent and denominational evangelical churches. Further, there is a large and historic Catholic presence in the city as well as a cadre of churches from other Christian and religious traditions.

The mainline denominational presence in Ventura is significant. There are several different types of Baptist churches in the city, while the Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians and PC(USA) are all represented within the city by two churches each.<sup>9</sup> The United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ denominations also have congregations in Ventura.

Most of the mainline denominational churches in Ventura have seen major declines in membership and attendance over the last several decades. These declines in local congregations mirror national trends in the mainline denominations over the last forty to fifty years.<sup>10</sup> Many of these local mainline churches have well located and developed campuses with dwindling congregations. Dwindling congregations are an ominous sign of what the future may hold for these churches. Some have observed that

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<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this paper Baptists have been grouped with the mainline denominations based on their size and history with full recognition that while some Baptists can be classified as part of the mainline, many would fit better under the category of evangelical denominational or independent churches.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the declines in mainline denominations see Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 11-35.

in the next twenty years hundreds of churches will likely close and even some whole denominations come to an end.<sup>11</sup>

Very few mainline denominational churches would be considered among the city's vital churches, and only one, Community Presbyterian Church PC(USA), would rank along the city's larger churches. Many of the mainline denominational churches have long and illustrious histories within the city, yet clearly the importance and influence of these churches is waning.

There are a number of evangelical denominational and independent churches in Ventura. There are three small Calvary Chapel congregations. The Vineyard, Assemblies of God, and Foursquare denominations are also represented. Among the city's largest churches is Missionary Church, which is a part of the Missionary denomination, South Coast Fellowship, an independent church, and Bible Fellowship Church, which describes itself as nondenominational.

Ventura has a very large Catholic population. As mentioned above, Mission San Buenaventura was founded in 1782 and is still an active parish today. There are three other Catholic churches in the city as well. There are also a number of Catholic schools. Of those who attend church in Ventura County about half are catholic while the other half attends evangelical and mainline churches.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Mike Regele with Mark Schultz, *The Death of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 11, quoted in Gibbs, *Church Next*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> David T. Olson, "The American Church in Crisis," <http://www.theamericanchurch.org> (accessed February 29, 2012).

Within Ventura there are a number of churches that could be classified as other Christian or religious traditions. The city has two Jehovah's Witness and Christian Science congregations as well as the Center for Spiritual Living and a Unitarian Universalist Church. There is a sizable Mormon population with eight different churches. The city also has a Buddhist Temple, Sikh Gurdwara, and two Jewish congregations. While these other churches add diversity to the religious landscape of Ventura, apart from the Mormons, these churches have a relatively low profile within the city.

Ventura has a number of church plants from new-styled denominations or associations such as Willow Creek, the City Church, and Reality as well as some independent church plants. These church plants represent the newest trends in worship styles and church leadership structure. Ventura is likely being targeted for so many church plants because the overall church attendance of the county is only about 14 percent in comparison to the national average of 17 percent.<sup>13</sup>

Many of these church plants come with significant financial backing. One church plant has run multiple TV commercials on different cable channels over the last year. Several others have mounted aggressive direct mailing campaigns with numerous high quality publications. Others have also hosted expensive outreach events. One church hosted free movie nights in the park during the summer showing movies that were still in theaters. Another held an Easter Egg Hunt which boasted over eight thousand Easter

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<sup>13</sup> Olson, "The American Church in Crisis."

eggs, many with certificates in side for prizes such as bicycles, electronic equipment, and gift cards to local stores.

Some of these church plants are also supported by members of their mother churches committing to attending the plant for a period of time. One church plant in our area has two hundred people from the mother church that have committed to driving an hour each way to attend the church plant for one year. Another of these churches has large groups of members from their other congregations in the region who attend each Sunday in a rotating fashion.

Ventura has a very strong evangelical community. With the exception of the Catholic churches, all of the city's largest churches would fall into this category as well as a number of the mainline denominational churches, including Eastminster and the other PC(USA) congregation. Many of the evangelical churches put significant emphasis into outreach and on work to support the local community, raising the profile of evangelicals within the city.

A group of the evangelical pastors meet together monthly for prayer and at another time for lunch and fellowship. This prayer and fellowship has been an important source of support and care. When one pastor's wife was fighting cancer, the pastors and many of their churches prayed for her, and when she died we mourned her loss along with her family and congregation. I felt this same support six months ago when I fell off of the roof of my house, shattering the bone in my left arm and cracking my pelvis in two places. I was in a wheelchair for six weeks and had to do extensive physical

rehabilitation on my arm. The prayer and support of these pastors and their churches meant a great deal to me during my recovery.

The evangelical churches in town also occasionally fellowship and work together on mission projects or inter-church events. City government has shown an increasing willingness to work with churches on social issues such as homelessness, and the evangelical churches have been the leaders in this kind of partnership. For example, the city worked with a coalition of evangelical churches to rehabilitate an old motel and transform it into transitional housing for families moving out of homelessness. This ministry called “The Kingdom Center” has received a great deal of attention within the community as a positive example of what church and government can accomplish when working together.

Of the nearly one hundred churches in Ventura, the vast majority lay to the West of Eastminster. Only about ten of the city’s churches are located to the East of Eastminster, and none of them is situated in Eastminster’s immediate neighborhood. Further, all of the churches to the East of Eastminster are very small and struggling congregations.

For many people living in the East End of the city Eastminster is one of the few, or possibly the only, church in their immediate neighborhood. Eastminster is also the only thriving church in any of the surrounding neighborhoods. Although Ventura has many churches, these factors make it clear that Eastminster is geographically well located within the city to take advantage of the ample opportunity for outreach and evangelism available to it.

## **A Culture of Religious Consumption**

Ventura has a powerful and contagious culture of religious consumption. Many people pick and choose between the various programs offered by different churches. A family may attend worship at one church, participate in a small group at a different church, while their kids go to the youth group at still another church. A good number of families in town send their kids to the Vacation Bible School programs of several different churches each summer as they are an affordable source of summer activities for their children.

This culture of religious consumption is not limited to simply partaking of the various programs and events offered by different churches. There is also significant movement of people between the churches. It is not uncommon for a family to have been at three different churches within a five year period. One illustration of this came at a memorial service a few years ago for a well-loved man in our community. At the service several pastors from different churches spoke fondly of this man's participation in their congregations over the years.

At the monthly Ventura pastor's luncheon there have been many discussions about who now has what family attending their church. During one such discussion a pastor related a story of how one of these families had openly told him that they enjoyed staying at a church for about two years, or until in their words, "the novelty wears off," and then they move on to a different church. While not often stated quite so boldly, this is an attitude that is shared by a good number of people in the church-going community of Ventura.

As mentioned above, there have been a number of church plants in Ventura in the last few years. These churches plants have factored heavily into the movement of people from one congregation to another. Each new plant has been viewed by some in the Christian community as the exciting new church to attend and therefore drawn them away from wherever they had been worshipping previously.

Often, however, a certain number of those initially drawn to the church plants later move on when they are lured away by another new option. In other cases people have moved on when they encounter some perceived shortcoming in the new church plant's programs. In particular, a number of people have left some of these church plants seeking stronger youth and children's ministries, which are often weak points for new churches.

The movement of people between churches is also driven, at least to some degree, by an atmosphere of competition between some of the churches. It is very common for members of one church to actively seek to draw members away from other churches to their own. While this may or may not be the intent of the leadership of these churches, it is a practical reality. For example, last year our youth group attended a summer camp in which another church from our city also participated. During that week our youth leaders observed this other church's adult leaders constantly trying to get our youth to come to their church.

In some cases there is suspicion that the leadership of certain churches may indeed have the intent to draw people away from other churches as a way of building up their own congregations. A number of pastors have mentioned that this is what they

believe some of the new churches in town are doing in order to build “critical mass” within their congregations. Only when they have achieved this “critical mass,” some further suggest, will these churches begin to truly focus on reaching unchurched people. While this cannot be proven, it is a topic of conversation among some church leaders, adding to an atmosphere of competition and distrust.

An incident that fueled this kind of competition and distrust occurred when one of the new church plants in Ventura introduced itself to the community with a video on its website in which the pastor announced that he and his colleagues had come to town because “Ventura needs a church.” This statement was not well received by the pastoral community and leadership of a number of churches. Many understood the pastor’s comment in the video as a slight to their ministries and as possibly implying that this church might have the intent to draw people from their congregations. The video was quickly taken down, but the distrust that it created continues to linger in the minds of some.

Many churches run programs and events that are in competition with similar events and programs of other churches. This is clearly seen around both Halloween and Easter. During these seasons several churches run similar outreach events, and numerous banners and posters advertising these events can be seen in close proximity to or even side by side one another around the city.

A complicating factor in the competition between churches and the movement of people between them has been the decline of the mainline denominations. Many mainline churches have simply failed to change with a shifting culture and have lost

touch with how to reach and retain people today. Despite the multitude of research and data produced recently on this subject, many mainline churches continue to resist change. Reggie McNeal, in his book, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, states that “the world is profoundly different than it was at the middle of the last century and everybody knows it. . . . But knowing and acting are two very different things. So far the Church in North America has largely responded with a heavy dose of denial.”<sup>14</sup>

Often people depart these mainline churches seeking a more alive religious experience and to escape stale traditionalism and the perceived over concern with denominational issues. However, when they depart, many local mainline churches do not understand their exit in terms of these factors. Instead they often attribute the losses to others churches in town seeking to lure their members away or simply to the culture or religious consumption.

Ventura’s culture of religious consumption presents some challenges for outreach and evangelism. When unchurched people begin to attend church for the first time, they may soon be swept up into the culture of religious consumption and end up moving from church to church or engaging a number of churches at the same time on a superficial level. When this happens they may not develop deep relationships within any congregation and fail to experience the kind of authentic community that is often an integral part of spiritual growth.

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<sup>14</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 15.

The culture of religious consumption can also be disempowering to Christians who are actively engaging in outreach and evangelism. It can feel very defeating to have invested heavily in someone only to have them suddenly drawn away to some other congregation. This can also cause disillusionment with the church in regards to the character of the local Christian community.

Further, in some cases unchurched people are turned off to the gospel when they sense the competition between churches. Recognizing that individuals are vying for them to attend their churches can appear disingenuous and play into the stereotype of Christians as hypocrites. The rhetoric offered as rationales for why a person should choose one church over another can also have a damaging effect. This can happen when individuals cast other churches in a poor light or when they are simply perceived by unchurched people as critical in their opinions, again playing into a negative Christian stereo-type.

This is the context in which Eastminster is located. Being located within a multicultural context and with issues of religious consumption and competition between Churches presents some significant challenges. Yet at the same time Eastminster's context present some exciting opportunities should it become a more outward oriented and committed to outreach and evangelism.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHURCH CONTEXT

This chapter will offer a brief history and introduction to Eastminster. This history and introduction will be set within the context of a denomination in decline. Attention will also be paid to the part that the development of an inward oriented culture may have played in both the decline of the PCUSA and the thirty-year plateau in Eastminster's growth.

#### **A Denomination in Decline**

As noted in Chapter One, the decline of mainline denominations over the last several decades has been the subject of much discussion and research. In 1994 Loren B. Mead wrote,

Those in what have been called mainline churches are feeling particularly defensive and sensitive about membership losses. Fast-growing congregations and denominations look to the traditional bellwethers- Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational- and say, 'Main? More like sideline these days.' Mainliners wince. Sometimes we try to kid ourselves about the numbers by talking about how we think they've bottomed out.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Loren B. Mead, *Transforming Congregations for the Future* (Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, 1994), 1.

Mead was correct in his assertion that the downward trend of the mainline was not abating. These trends have, in fact, continued to the present day. Further, recent statistics on worship attendance suggest that the decline of the mainline since 2001 may be even worse than the losses in membership indicate.<sup>2</sup> It appears that many who have not officially dropped their membership in mainline churches are simply no longer attending.

Over the last forty-five years the PC(USA) has lost over half of its membership, dropping from about 4.4 million members in 1965 to about 1.9 million in 2011.<sup>3</sup> In the last few years the PCUSA has been losing an average of 60,000 members a year.<sup>4</sup> These losses include some congregations which have left over tension regarding the issue of homosexual ordination.

The statistics show, however, that that vast majority of the losses sustained by the PC(USA) did not come from departing congregations or even from individual members choosing to attend other churches. Most of the losses the PCUSA has incurred have been from members who have simply left the Church all together.<sup>5</sup> Gradye Parsons, the Stated Clerk of the PCUSA, has said that “the overwhelming majority of the loss in membership

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<sup>2</sup> Lovett H. Weems Jr., “No Shows: The Decline in Worship Attendance,” *The Christian Century*, (September 22, 2010), <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-09/no-shows> (accessed on September 21, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Presbyterian Church USA Website, “Comparative Summaries- Summaries of Stats,” <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/2011-comparative-summaries-stats.pdf> (accessed October 21, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Sharon Young, “Stated Clerk Releases PC(USA) 2009 Statistics,” (July 1, 2010), <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2010/7/1/stated-clerk-releases-pcusa-2009-statistics/> (accessed October 21, 2011).

is in the category of ‘other,’ which means these are brothers and sisters in Christ who did not die or transfer to another congregation, but probably quietly slipped out the back door.”<sup>6</sup>

In 2011 the PC(USA) opened the door to the ordination of practicing gays and lesbians by essentially making ordination standards the jurisdiction of regional bodies in the church called “presbyteries.” Since that time a new exodus has begun from the PC(USA) with many evangelical churches going to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and a newly formed denomination, the Evangelical Order of Covenant Presbyterians. The departure of these churches should bring record losses going forward and hasten the downward trend of PC(USA) membership.

Not only has the PC(USA) seen a dramatic drop in membership, it is also faced with the aging of its current membership. The median age of PC(USA) member is sixty-one, up from fifty-eight in 2001. Four out of five worshipers in the PC(USA) are age forty-five or older. Related to this trend is a decrease in the percentage of PC(USA) worshipers who have children living at home.<sup>7</sup> All of these statistics indicate a denomination in significant decline.

While there are many factors in the decline of the PC(USA) a key contributor has been the development of an inward focus to the denomination. Once a denomination with a significant focus on Mission, the PCUSA has seen that mission emphasis steadily

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

decrease over the last several decades, not only because of membership declines, but also due to a combination of complacency and an ever increasing focus on internal issues.

Speaking of this matter on a congregational level, Ann Philbrick and Paul Seebeck state in an article on the PCUSA Mission Agency web site, “Many congregations have lost a connection to their community, often without realizing it. . . Much of the work of the PC(USA)’s Church Growth office concerns helping congregations face outward once again and rediscover their passion for caring for those around them.”<sup>8</sup>

This inward focus of the PC(USA) and many of its congregations has also contributed to the church becoming increasingly out of step with the culture. The PC(USA) has an extremely rich history and tradition, however, it has clung so tightly to that history and tradition that it has failed to change with the times. The PC(USA) has continued largely in a formal worship style in an increasingly informal world. It has persisted in making traditional worship its mainstay when younger people are clearly drawn to more contemporary worship styles. Finally, in terms of its identity, the PC(USA) has maintained a significant emphasis on its denominational heritage and traditions, in a world that has lost interest in denominations.

### **A Brief History of Eastminster**

Eastminster was founded in 1964 as a church plant of the Community Presbyterian Church of Ventura, which is located in the western portion of the city.

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<sup>8</sup> Ann Philbrick and Paul Seebeck, “The Outward Facing Church,” <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/today/outward-facing-church/> (accessed on September 21, 2012).

Since this new church plant was to be located in the eastern part of city, the name “Eastminster” was chosen. The name Eastminster was considered fitting since it basically means “church in the East.”

Eastminster’s founding pastor was Neal Steffen. Reverend Steffen had been an associate pastor at Community Presbyterian Church and it seemed like a natural transition for him to be the pastor of this new church development on the East End. Under pastor Steffen the church got off to a very strong start. During that time the congregation quickly grew from seventy-one to one hundred and twenty members and acquired its present property on Telephone Road in Ventura. However, in 1967, after just four years, Pastors Stephen resigned to take a position in the religion department at a nearby university.

In 1968 Reverend Steve Jenks became pastor of Eastminster and the church continued to thrive. In 1974 when pastor Jenks resigned to take a new call, the membership had risen to 186. Following Reverend Jenks departure however, the church struggled a bit and membership dropped to 138 while they were searching for a new pastor.

In 1976 Reverend Dan Stevens was called as pastor. Pastor Stevens brought a new energy and vitality to the church and it began to thrive once again. In 1982 the church built the present sanctuary and by 1989 the membership of Eastminster had grown to 247. It was at this point, however, that the growth of the church leveled off. Since 1989, a period of roughly twenty-five years, the membership of Eastminster has fluctuated between about 250 and 300 people.

In its early years Eastminster had an outward focused culture. The church had been planted to reach the people in the eastern portion of the city and the congregation took that mission seriously. There are many stories of the early pastors and elders walking through the nearby neighborhoods meeting people and inviting them to church. However, sometime in the 1980s the church's culture began to change. Although Eastminster retained some aspects of an outward focused culture, in terms of its continued and significant involvement in world and compassion mission, it turned inwardly and away from its previously strong efforts to reach those in its local community.

Pastor Stevens served the church for twenty-six years, and that period is considered by many longtime members to be the "golden years" of the church. In retrospect it appears that the church had been growing and assimilating people since its inception. However, at a certain point in the late 1980s there seems to have been a shift to a greater emphasis on building up the community life within the church. What developed was a church with a wonderful congregation of caring people who are deeply committed to one another. Yet, this commitment to the inner life of the church also seemed to come at the cost of ceasing to do outreach and evangelism in the local community.

During Pastor Steven's tenure Eastminster experienced a very long period of stability, health and the development of a rich community life. It was for this reason that his departure in 2002, to take a position as president of a mission agency, was considered a great loss to many in the church. This sense of loss was further heightened in 2004

when, while still searching for a new pastor, the church's long-time and much-loved Associate Pastor resigned to take a position as the Senior Pastor of another nearby church. These two events signaled the beginning of a very difficult and long period of transition for Eastminster.

In the PC(USA) the practice is for an interim pastor to assume leadership of the church for a time while the congregation does some self-reflection and searches for a new pastor. In cases where the previous pastor has served a long and successful tenure, as was the case with Pastor Stevens, this interim period is often extended in order to allow time for the congregation to grieve, assess itself and its mission and become ready to receive a new pastor. It was for this reason that the interim period between Pastor Stevens departure and the calling of a new pastor was about three years, somewhat longer than the typical one and a half to two years interim period.

This long interim period was difficult for many in the church and in some ways contributed to their sense of loss. During this period many in the congregation developed an even greater longing for the past than is typical in these cases. They not only longed for their old pastor, but also simply for the stability and normalcy they had experienced during that time.

In February of 2005, after a long search, the church called Pastor Smith.<sup>9</sup> From all accounts Pastor Smith was a good man, but not a good fit for the Church. Eastminster is a highly relational church and Pastor Smith appears to have been somewhat introverted and did not seem to connect with people in the ways and to the degree they desired.

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<sup>9</sup> Not his real name.

Eastminster also has very strong lay leadership and it appears that Pastor Smith was not able to meet the expectations of many lay leaders in terms of partnering with them in ministry.

It also seems clear that Pastor Smith was, to some degree, the victim of having followed the very long tenure of a much beloved pastor. This is a common occurrence in many churches. It is likely that anyone would have had a hard time making their way in those early days after Pastor Steven's departure.

During Pastor Smith's tenure the church began to experience some financial difficulties which led to a rash personnel decision that caused a significant division in the church. A church member of over twenty years who was in the ordination process joined the staff as an assistant to the pastor in the area of pastoral care. This position began as an internship with a fixed end date, but that end date was extended several times and then indefinitely. Late in 2006 as the budget picture for that year worsened, this man was terminated without warning.

Many in the congregation reacted negatively to this decision and to the abrupt manner in which it came about. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the decision was made at Christmas time, which many parishioners felt was callous. Further, this pastoral assistant was a very warm and friendly man who was meeting some of the relational expectations that the pastor was not, which magnified the loss. The matter was made even worse when this man and his family left the church and began attending the other Presbyterian church in town. These events caused many to lash out in anger at church leaders and created wounds that are still not fully healed.

As 2007 wore on the relationship between the church's leadership and Pastor Smith deteriorated steadily. The church board intervened with him, seeking to assist him in correcting the situation to no avail. In November of 2007 Pastor Smith resigned after a vote of no confidence by the church board. Although the actions of the church were approved and guided by the Presbytery, our local denominational governing body, many members of the congregation did not fully understand what had transpired, and again division and wounds were created in the congregation.

After Pastor Stevens' twenty-six years at Eastminster, the church had an interim pastor for three years, then Pastor Smith served for only two years before another one-year interim period. What all of this amounted to was that the church had essentially been in transition for about six years prior to my arrival as pastor. Pastoral transitions are often difficult for congregations. In Eastminster's case things were complicated by the negative events mentioned above that transpired during that transitional period and by its extended length. These events created issues such as division, hurt feelings and damaged trust within the congregation that became a significant focus as they began the process of seeking a new pastor once again in 2008.

Since my arrival at Eastminster as pastor, the church has experienced a time of stability during which much healing has taken place. Finances have been solid and membership and worship attendance have seen modest growth. There is also a very clear sense among the people that the church is entering into a new season of its life and ministry. This knowledge has been met with mixed reaction as is often the case. Some members have embraced the idea of change with enthusiasm while others have been wary

and have expressed some trepidation. However, on the whole there seems to be momentum and excitement growing for the future.

Presently, Eastminster has 281 members with an average worship attendance of 217. Eastminster continues to be a primarily Caucasian congregation with a few Hispanic and Asian members. The largest age demographic within the congregation is those forty to sixty years old. Eastminster is a middle-class church drawing a mix of both blue- and white- collar workers. The church has a full range of ministries from children to senior citizens. The area of greatest weakness is that of college age and young adult singles.

### **An Inwardly Focused Church**

Eastminster is a church with a primarily inward focused culture. Although the church does engage in world and compassion mission, as mentioned in the introduction, the primary motivation for mission for most members has been benevolence and has been more about their identity as “good Christians” than about God’s concern for lost people. Over the years mission has also been understood more and more by many church members as something that a few mission-minded members engaged in, rather than the call of all believers individually and the church corporately.

The development of this inward focus seems to stem from two key things mentioned above. In the 1980s the church seemed to shift its focus from outreach to the local community to developing its inner life and community. In one respect this may have been motivated by the need to assimilate many new people who had come to the

church in that time. However, it also seems to have been a reflection of Pastor Stevens's leadership. Although Pastor Stevens had a clear vision for world and compassion mission, he seemed to prefer a, smaller more intimate, church family. Some of the shift in the culture of the church seems to have been based on this.

Pastors Stevens seemed to like a church of the size where he was able to have deep personal connection with every member. He excelled at pastoral care and personal relationships with members, and the culture of the church seemed to have shifted in part to match these areas of his interest and giftedness. Something that may indicate Pastor Stevens's desire for the church to stay small was that he was opposed to both of the building campaigns that took place under his tenure. In each case, those projects only went forward when the Elders pressed the issue to the point where he seemed to have no choice but to get on board.

The second key thing that seemed to have shifted Eastminster to an inward-oriented culture was the tumultuous period of transition following Pastor Stevens's resignation. The difficult events and issues that occurred during that time consumed the congregation and drew their focus inward. In some respects this was natural and even necessary. The healing that was needed required significant self-reflection and emphasis on reconciliation and trust building within the congregation. Yet, the inward focus that developed did not recede once these issues were sufficiently dealt with.

As mentioned, what resulted from this shift to an inward-oriented culture was the discontinuation of any efforts toward local outreach or evangelism. The best illustration of this, touched on briefly in the introduction, is seen in the makeup of the church's

mission team. Eastminster's mission efforts are split between two committees that make up the Mission Team. These committees are *The Global Mission Committee* and *The Social Concerns Committee*. The Global Missions Committee is concerned with mission and evangelism overseas, and the Social Concerns Committee is focused primarily on local compassion missions and social justice issues. The obvious omission in the makeup of the mission team is that neither of its committees is charged with outreach and evangelism to the local community. The total absence of any structural apparatus to equip and engage the congregation in outreach and evangelism illustrates the lack of interest and commitment in this area.

The internal focus of the church's culture can also be seen in some of its programs, events and practices. For example, years ago the church developed a tradition of closing the summer season by worshipping in a large tent on the church lawn. The tent was a welcomed change of pace that also allowed the congregation to have one service for a time and to beat the summer heat in a sanctuary without air-conditioning. However, when the school district made the start of school much earlier, the church did not shift the dates it was in the tent. The result was that for several years they were still in a summer mode and on their summer program schedule for several weeks after the school year had started. This created a completely disjointed experience for families whose home life was in "back to school" mode at that time.

Another example of Eastminster's inward focused culture has been the habit of failing to publicize key information about events with the unconscious belief that everyone knows those things. For example, on one occasion several new families came

to a BBQ on the church lawn and were surprised when all of the church members showed up with their own beach chairs and blankets to sit and eat on. When these families asked how people knew to bring those things since it was not stated in any of the church's publications for the event, the response was something to the effect that "well, everyone knows that."

Eastminster's inward focus is also seen in the overvaluing of its traditions and internal concerns. Like so many churches Eastminster is enamored with many of its traditions. Often this means that certain things or events must be done in a particular way according to the tradition regardless of its effectiveness.

For example, the annual congregational meeting called "Food, Faces, Facts and Fun" draws its name from a very specific formula. The meeting must consist of a pot luck dinner (food), a slide show (faces), the presentation of the new year's budget (facts) and a game (fun). The problem is that no one wants to organize or lead the "fun" part. The easy answer would be to simply discontinue the game portion of the meeting; many congregations do just fine without playing a game at their annual meeting. However, to drop the game would be to violate the tradition, so each year some new person gets their arm twisted into leading a game which often no one else wants to play.

Eastminster also spends a lot of time quibbling over internal issues of little concern to those outside the congregation. Issues like whether musicians and their equipment should be located in the center of the stage or to the side, what color the cross should be painted and where the communion table should be located consume countless hours of time and a great deal of energy. Members are often unable to see that their

opinions about such things are simply matters of taste rather than gospel truth and for that reason are sometimes unkind to one another as these matters are discussed.

### **Present Assets**

One of the greatest legacies of Eastminster's former pastor of twenty-six years, Dan Stevens, was the development of an extremely strong tradition of lay leadership in the church. Members are empowered to dream and form visions for new missions and ministry and to take the leading in perusing such things. A number of significant missions were birthed out of Eastminster as a part of this legacy. Eastminster spawned Impact, a mission agency that sends Christians on short term missions around the world. Members from Eastminster also helped found Project Understanding, a local social agency that provides services to those in need in our community.

Eastminster's members also have a high degree of ownership over the church and are very willing to serve and make sure that things get done. A large portion of the maintenance and up keep of the property is performed by members. The willingness to serve and quality of lay leadership at Eastminster is a significant asset.

Eastminster has good facilities that are well located. Most of the buildings were built in the last twenty years and all are in good repair. They are contemporary and attractive, built in a mission style with stucco exteriors and orange tile roofs. Although space is an issue at some of our peak use hours, generally we are well suited for our present ministry needs and for moderate growth.

The grounds of the church are immaculately cared for by the custodian and a number of volunteers. The front of the property has a very large grass area surrounded by beautiful landscaping which gives it the look of a park. Many people in the neighborhood use the lawn like a park bringing children and dogs to play there in the evenings.

Eastminster is located on Telephone Road, one of the two major roads through the East End of the city. Location on this main road gives the church great exposure to the public, particularly those who live on the East End, many of whom will drive by the church a number of times each day. This location also makes the church easy to get to and simple to find as everyone who lives in Ventura knows the location of Telephone Road.

Eastminster has a very healthy financial history and present situation. Most years expenditures have not exceeded income and not at all in the last ten years. This has been a remarkable feat recently due to the recession. There is anticipation among the church leadership that once the economy recovers the church will see even greater giving that will be able to be channeled toward exciting new endeavors.

Eastminster is also debt free, having paid off the mortgage on the buildings in 2009, a full nine years early. This feat is a testament to the faithful giving and financial vitality of the congregation. This last building project raised \$1,100,000 in eleven years, an admirable accomplishment for a congregation of 281 members.

Another key asset of the church is its strong community bonds. Eastminster is a very warm and welcoming church. This is often commented on by new people to the

church. New people are almost always greeted well as they come on to the campus on Sunday mornings and are often invited to lunch after services with members. This friendly, welcoming attitude is an outgrowth of the rich community life of the church.

Eastminster is a congregation that exemplifies the image of the church as a family. Fellowship events are always enjoyable and well attended and there is a wonderful intergenerational aspect to the community. A great example of this is “Grad Night,” a yearly event to celebrate graduates. Rather than just parents of the youth and a few of their friends, Grad Night is attended by the whole congregation. Many people who do not have kids at home or any connection to the youth programs come to Grad Night because of their feeling of connection to the kids who are a part of their church family.

An important part of the community bond of the church is the commitment that members have to care for one another. Although, like most churches, Eastminster has official ministries of care, and these ministries do well at taking care of the people, individual members also proactively care for one another. Those who are in the hospital are likely to be visited by other members as well as their Deacon and a pastor. Members of the congregation will often gather to pray for the needs of other members and are always ready to help with things like meals, child care and errands in times of need.

### **Additional Challenges**

A key challenge that Eastminster faces is that it is a congregation of people who possess a very independent spirit which sometimes hinders working together. In the past

this independent spirit has sometimes led the church to engage in counterproductive practices that were a poor stewardship of time, energy and resources. A key example of this was the past practice of ministries not putting their events on the church's master calendar, therefore enabling coordination with other ministries. This led to many events that conflicted in time and facility use. When this happened some events were poorly attended, leaders were disheartened and resources were wasted.

Yet, when the leadership finally required all ministries to calendar their events in order to coordinate with other ministries, many people reacted negatively. They did not feel that they should have to fill out a form and they did not see the need to coordinate with others. There was a very clear "Who are you to tell us what to do?" mentality.<sup>10</sup>

This independent spirit has also made developing a vision and goals a challenge.<sup>11</sup> Some leaders were against the idea of any goals or vision at all since these things would require that the whole church to work together and therefore limit their autonomy. One Elder, reacting against the idea of developing a vision, asked rather indignantly in a private conversation, "What if we are church that isn't meant to have a vision?"<sup>12</sup>

Another challenge facing Eastminster is the lack of a defined identity, particularly in the area of worship. Eastminster has never been a completely traditional church. This is immediately apparent in the architecture of the worship building which is

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<sup>10</sup> We only seemed to move past this issue when, after several months of struggle, I addressed it directly at a leadership meeting with some pointed words about the biblical principles of submitting to church leadership and of the call to care about others not just ourselves.

<sup>11</sup> To my knowledge Eastminster has never developed a vision or goals prior to this time.

<sup>12</sup> My response to this Elder was that if that were the case, then I was not the right pastor for the church, something I regret saying. What I wish I had done was responded by quoting Proverbs 29:19 "Where there is no vision the people perish" (King James Version).

contemporary in style and in fact that the church does not have an organ. However, in the past Eastminster did embrace a more traditional and formal style of worship than it does at the present time.

Several years ago the church began shifting to a more contemporary style. In time pastoral and choir robes went by the wayside, as did many traditional forms of worship. The church shifted to a blended worship style that leaned much more to the contemporary side. The church also became much more casual. Suits and dresses were soon replaced by jeans and casual shirts and even shorts and flip flops.

As the church made this shift some of the older members have bemoaned the significantly reduced number of hymns that are used in worship. This group feels disenfranchised in this way, which is understandable. However, many of these folks also seem completely unaware that this change was not simply a leadership decision, but is also a reflection of a larger portion of the congregation who now favor contemporary music.

There is also another layer to this issue. Among those who enjoy contemporary worship styles and music, Eastminster has two different camps. One group is happy with the present musical style which, although contemporary in the larger scheme, is somewhat dated. This style of contemporary music is sometimes referred to as “Boomer music” after the Boomer generation who seem to enjoy it most. It is also sometimes called “90s praise” denoting when much of the music was written. These folks tend to be forty and older. The other group of younger people would like to see the church become significantly more contemporary and edgy.

All of these things have caused Eastminster not to define its identity as sharply as is likely necessary to move forward. There are attempts presently to create worship services in different styles and therefore develop some different foci to the church's worshipping identity. Although these may be helpful steps forward, ultimately the church will need to more sharply define its identity in order to refrain from seeking to be all things to all people, which is a significant danger presently.

Another key challenge, particularly in light of the scope of this project, is that most of Eastminster's members seem to have the typical fears about outreach and evangelism that many Christians do. They worry about feeling uncomfortable and making others feel uncomfortable by bring up the subject of religion with people in a society that increasingly sees faith as a taboo or private subject. They are also afraid that they do not know the Bible or theology well enough and will therefore not know what to say if asked questions about these things. In addition, there is also real concern that engaging in outreach and evangelism will require them to put pressure on or coerce people in some way.

A growing challenge for Eastminster is that it is an overwhelmingly Caucasian congregation in a community with a large and increasing Hispanic population. As noted, Eastminster has generally shown a lack of interest in outreaching and evangelism, but particularly to the Hispanic population. While language and cultural differences can make reaching out to this population more difficult, such barriers often seem to be used as an excuse.

For example, Eastminster has both a preschool and a tutoring center on its property. The clientele of the preschool is predominantly Caucasian whereas the clientele of the tutoring center is largely Hispanic. Although church members have not put nearly enough effort into reaching out to either of these groups, they have put significantly more effort into reaching out to the preschool families and almost no effort to reaching out to the tutoring center families.

The final challenge to be addressed, which lies at the heart of this project, is a lack of understanding on the part of church members of the implications of Jesus' evangelistic ministry for the church. There is a "disconnect" in their minds, as with many Christians today, between what Jesus did and what the church ought to do. Church members see the church as being primarily for them and their benefit without recognizing that the church is Jesus' body and should therefore reflect him in its makeup and ministry. They fail to recognize that the church is God's apparatus for sharing the Good News of Jesus with a broken and hurting world.

In conclusion, Eastminster is part of a denomination in decline. It has seen a long term plateau in its membership and the development of an inward oriented culture. However, Eastminster is also vital church with many assets at its disposal to meet the challenges ahead.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review literature pertinent to the thesis in four areas. First, it will touch on ecclesiology in the Reformed Tradition through the writing of John Calvin. It will then examine material relating to the church's need to shift from an inward to an outward focused culture as well as literature pertaining to developing a more Christocentric and missional ecclesiology. Finally, this chapter will cover material centered on understanding and engaging in outreach and evangelism.

#### **The Reformed Tradition**

As a PC(USA) congregation, Eastminster stands in the Reformed theological tradition. For this reason this literature review will begin by examining the ecclesiology of the seminal framer of the Reformed Tradition, John Calvin. Book Four of Calvin's landmark work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, will provide the scope of this examination of Calvin's' ecclesiology.

Book Four of Calvin's Institutes is titled *The External Means by which God Invites Us Into The Society Of Christ And Holds Us Therein*. The title itself offers a first

glimpse into Calvin's ecclesiology. Calvin believed that human beings were too weak, lazy and sinful to grow and remain in faith without assistance. For this reason God provided the church, depositing the gospel within it, raising up pastors to preach and administer the sacraments, and leaving out nothing that would be needed to grow and maintain the faith of believers.<sup>1</sup>

In his first two chapters, Calvin describes the nature of the Church. He pictures it as a mother who nurtures believers and discusses its nature in relation to the Apostles' Creed, finding it to be both "holy" and "catholic" or universal. Calvin's ecclesiology is greatly shaped by what he refers to as the "visible" and "invisible" Church. The visible Church is the manifestation of the particular church in the world, whereas the invisible Church is universal, made up of the elect in all times and places. Calvin sees the visible Church as inhabited by a smaller number of the elect, but cautions that knowledge of such things should be left to God alone.<sup>2</sup>

Calvin's understanding of the invisible Church as the elect is rooted in the doctrine of predestination.<sup>3</sup> Predestination, as well as finding support in scripture, was also the logical extension of the most central doctrine in of Reformed Theology, the

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, MCMLX), 4.1.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 4.1.2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 4.1.8.

Sovereignty of God. Calvin understood God's sovereignty to require that election not only be solely God's choice, but also something that was predetermined.<sup>4</sup>

For Calvin, God has elected whom he has elected by his divine prerogative and these, in the end, comprise the church. Although Calvin affirms that we do not know, nor should we try to judge, who are among the elect, he does offer some assurance. He states that the Church is made up of those who "by confession of faith, by example of life, and by partaking of the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ with us."<sup>5</sup>

Calvin also stresses the importance of believers being united with the Church. If the invisible Church is made up of the elect, then there can be no salvation apart from it. On this point Calvin is clear saying of the Church, "away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation."<sup>6</sup>

Since unity with the church is of such grave importance, Calvin describes the marks of the "true church" so that believers will be able to discern it from false manifestation of the Church. He states, "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."<sup>7</sup> Calvin also stresses that the true Church will be founded on the word of God, biblical worship, the teaching of sound doctrine and freedom from corruption.

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<sup>4</sup> Later reformed theologians, notably Karl Barth, began to move away from Calvin's idea of election as completely predetermined.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.1.4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.1.9.

In chapters three through thirteen Calvin describes the makeup of the Church in term of its offices and ecclesiastical power. Calvin sees Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists as having been temporary offices, while Pastors and Teachers are perpetual offices. The call of church leaders is both internal by the Holy Spirit and external by the church. Elders are elected by the people and ordained with the laying on of hands.<sup>8</sup>

Calvin understands the power of the Church in terms of doctrine, legislation and jurisdiction. Doctrine rests on scripture and guides in matters of faith. Legislation is the law of the church which must be in accord with Scripture, and guides where Scripture is silent. Jurisdiction is two-fold in that it is both decisions that belong to the clergy and decisions that are shared by the clergy and the people. Calvin also stressed church discipline for both clergy and laity, believing that lax discipline puts the church in danger.<sup>9</sup>

In chapters fourteen through nineteen Calvin offers a reformed understanding of the sacraments. The sacraments are visible signs of God's invisible grace which aid us in our faith which is weak. Sacraments include both "word" and "sign" and Calvin recognized only two, baptism and communion, as having been instituted by Christ. These two sacraments are understood as signs of the new covenant which correspond to circumcision and Passover, the signs of the old covenant. Calvin closes with chapter twenty which is dedicated to civil magistrate whom he sees as God's vice-regents, invested with his authority to uphold the law and protect the church.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4.3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 4.5-13.

Calvin's ecclesiology can be seen to fall clearly within the Christendom model, placing significant emphasis on the church itself. This is best illustrated by the fact that Calvin sees no salvation outside of the formal church institution and that the church itself is made up of those God predestined to election. The ecclesiastical focus of Calvin's ecclesiology can be understood as a central contributor to the inward orientation of many Reformed and Presbyterian churches such as Eastminster.

### **From Inwardly to Outwardly Oriented**

If Eastminster is to shift its culture from inward to outward, a rationale will need to be provided. In *The Shaping of Things to Come*, Frost and Hirsch provide such a rationale as they make their case for the need of a missional ecclesiology in the Church. They begin by stating in the introduction that with this book they are "advocating wholesale change in the way Christians are doing and being the church."<sup>10</sup>

With Part One they explain the need for a revolution in the Church with a discussion of the end of Christendom. They assert that the world has changed and increasingly exposed the weaknesses of the Christendom model, which is evidenced by the decline of the Church in every context in which this model has been prevalent. The weakness of the Christendom model grows from the inward focus on buildings and clergy, the prominence of the Church's place in society, its lack of relevance to outsiders, and its failure to evangelize within its own context.

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovations and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003) ix.

In response to these things Frost and Hirsch call for a shift from the Christendom model to a missional model of the Church. Their intent is to reclaim the missional ethos of the early Church which grew from its embrace of the *missio dei*.<sup>11</sup> In order to do this they call for three things; a shift from an “attractional” to an incarnational ecclesiology, a move from a dualistic to a messianic spirituality and a change from a hierarchical to an apostolic style of leadership.

With Part Two, Frost and Hirsch describe the shift from an “attractional” to an incarnational ecclesiology. By “attractional” they mean the Church’s belief that it has an inherently attractive quality that draws people to it. Frost and Hirsch suggest that this attritional self-understanding grew out of a Christendom cultural context which supported Christian faith and church attendance. However, today western culture no longer provides this same support to the Church therefore exposing the myth of attractionalism.

A shift to an incarnational ecclesiology calls the church not to wait for people to come to it, but rather to go out to them, in the same way that Jesus did. An incarnational ecclesiology also challenges the assumption of attractionalism that God is best accessed by non-believers inside the sanctioned church, which effectively turns “out-reach” into “in-drag.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast to this, Frost and Hirsch call for an incarnational church approach in which the church “disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don’t know him.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 12.

In Part Three Frost and Hirsch call for a move from a dualistic to a messianic spirituality. They identify the false division between the sacred and the secular which grew out of the Greco-Roman thought behind the Christendom model of the Church. This dualism leads to a spirituality that is often tied to buildings and certain times of the week and therefore creates a disconnection of faith from the rest of life. Dualism also creates a tension between the church property and people as sacred and the rest of the world as secular or profane. Frost and Hirsch call for a messianic spirituality that sees all of life as spiritual through a Hebraic rather than Hellenistic lens, as Jesus did.<sup>14</sup>

With Part Four Frost and Hirsch argue for a shift from a hierarchical to an apostolic leadership style. They explain that the Christendom model is hierarchal creating a separation between the clergy and laity. They contend that the laity should lead the ministry of the church instead of relying on a top down hierarchical system. Instead Frost and Hirsch suggest an apostolic mode of leadership that recognizes the five leadership functions outlined by Paul in Ephesians six. This model moves away from the top down hierarchal model of Christendom in favor of a “biblical model flat-leadership community that unleashes the gifts of evangelism, apostleship and prophecy as well as the currently popular pastoral and teaching gifts.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Toward a Missional Ecclesiology**

The goal of shifting Eastminster’s culture of from inward to outward is in many ways a move to a more missional ecclesiology. To make such a move theological

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 12.

groundwork will need to be laid. In *The Missional Church, God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* and *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, Darrel Guder, Charles Van Engen and Jürgen Moltmann lay that groundwork.

Darrel Guder begins chapter one of *The Missional Church* by affirming that the Church in North America has lost the privileged position it once held within its culture. The Church also finds itself faced with a “post-Christian mission field” highlighting the need for a “theological revolution in missional thinking.”<sup>16</sup> Guder explains this revolution as a shift from an ecclesiocentric to a theocentric ecclesiology based on the understanding of God as a “sending” God and therefore of the church as a “sent people.” Mission is no longer understood as an activity of the church, but as the essence of a “sent” church.

With chapter two Craig Van Gelder outlines the cultural context of North America, noting the forces which “impinge upon the nature and faithfulness of the church.”<sup>17</sup> He sees modernity giving way to postmodernity, bringing a vastly different understanding of the world. With chapter three Van Gelder outlines the “disestablishment” of the church from American culture and touches on the American Church’s distinctive emphasis on denominationalism and para-church organizations.

In chapter four George Hunsberger states that “the current predicament of the churches in North America requires more than tinkering” and calls for a “reinventing or

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<sup>16</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *The Missional Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998) 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

rediscovering the church.”<sup>18</sup> He traces the way that Reformation and Enlightenment thinking led to an understanding of the church as “a place” instead of a people with a mission.<sup>19</sup> This, he says, has led to a view of the Church as a “vender of religious services and goods” fueling the increasing pervasive culture of religious consumerism.<sup>20</sup> In light of this, Hunsberger calls for a rehearing of the gospel and rebirthing of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. This he says will entail a greater focus on the kingdom of God and the on church as the community, servant, and messenger of the kingdom.

In chapter five Lois Barrett touches on the role of the church in the midst of the political, economic and societal “powers” of this world. She sees the church as offering an alternate message and community when it abandons the Christendom model and understands itself as an apostle to the world. With chapter six Inagrace Dietterich explores the kinds of distinctive communities that are formed by the Holy Spirit when churches seek to be biblical and missional. She calls for a kind of a counter-cultural approach for the church as it lives within its cultural context.

With chapter seven Alan Roxburgh describes the leadership needed in a missional church. The necessary leaderships will be “biblically and theologically astute, skilled in understanding the changes shaping American society, and gifted with the courage and endurance to lead God’s people as missional communities. Ours is a context and a time that require leaders who lead from the front, showing the way toward the recovery of a

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 84.

missional church.”<sup>21</sup> Present leadership practices, he says, have been shaped by the Christendom images of the leader as priest and pedagogue and the modern images of counselor, manager, and technician. Roxburgh prefers the image of the leaders as “equippers” of God’s people for mission.

In chapters eight and nine Guder considers the missional structures that are needed in the local and larger Church. These structures should be scripturally based, but culturally contingent. They should also be flexible, subject to the reordering of the Holy Spirit and should serve the *missio dei*, not the church. Further, the local church has missional connectedness as a "community of communities" with the larger Church, the marks of which are; apostolicity, catholicity, holiness, and unity.

Charles Van Engen begins in book, *God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church*, in the preface with his thesis that “as local congregations are built up to reach out in mission to the world, they will become in fact what they already are by faith: God’s missionary people.”<sup>22</sup> With part one he opens by comparing the Church to a seed, understanding it not only in terms of what it is, but of what it can become. Van Engen calls for a missional ecclesiology because he understands the Church and its mission to be intimately related. He quotes the International Missionary Council in saying “there is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), 17.

world”<sup>23</sup> For this reason the identity of the church only truly emerges as the church embraces its mission. Van Engen states “as it lives out its missionary nature the local congregation discovers itself emerging to become the church.”<sup>24</sup>

In part one Van Engen also discusses modern ecclesiology and its recognition of the need for a new missional paradigm. He believes a new missional ecclesiology will bridge the gap between the visible or human side of the church and the holy or invisible side and provide a greater understanding of the Church as constantly “emerging” in new forms directed by the Holy Spirit.

Further, Van Engen discusses four distinctives which he believes capture the essence of the Church, drawing three; unity, holiness and the call to all people, from the book of Ephesians and adding a fourth: “apostolic” following the lead of the Council of Constantinople. Van Engen calls for these distinctives to be focused outwardly saying “Our concept of church reaches beyond what *is* to what *could be* as we maintain more intimate contact with the essence of the church’s nature. In its essence the church begins to reach out beyond itself. The Church truly begins to be turned ‘inside out.’”<sup>25</sup> Following Bonhoeffer, Van Engen says that the Church is *for* the world and therefore should have a special heart for the oppressed, as well as being dedicated to its witness and to numerical growth

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

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 66.

With part two Van Engen explains that the Church derives its purpose from the Trinitarian God and summarizes the Church's reason for being in terms of *koinonia* (fellowship), *kerygma* (proclamation), *diakonia* (service), and *martyria* (witness). He also sees the Church as living out its purpose by seeking to grow the kingdom of God saying "As missionary people of God, local congregations are branch offices of the kingdom, the principle instrument, anticipatory sign, and primary locus of the kingdom." He sees the people of God carrying this out by playing the roles of prophets, priests, kings, healers, and liberators.

In Part Three Van Engen speaks to how all of these things can be lived out in the local church in practical terms. First, he explains that local congregations, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit, need to make missional goals and plans which begin with visioning. Second, Van Egan calls for the engagement and empowerment of the whole congregation as missionaries. In a truly missional Church, members understand themselves as key role players in what the Church is doing and in the kingdom. Third, he urges the development of missional leadership which will be needed to motivate the congregation toward its goals and plans. Finally, Van Engen wisely calls for the diligence in carrying out the administrative tasks necessary to support the congregation's missional endeavors.

In, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, Jürgen Moltmann explores the nature of the Church. He begins in chapter one by outlining four dimensions of the Church today. First Moltmann sees a deep connection between Jesus and the Church. So much so that he states "Every statement about the church will be a statement about Christ. Every

statement about Christ also implies a statement about the church.”<sup>26</sup> Second, it is the intimate relationship between Christ and the church that give the church its mission. “The mission of Christ creates its own church. Mission does not come from the church; it is from mission and the light of mission that the church has to be understood.”<sup>27</sup> Third, the Church is ecumenical bringing the necessary unity and healthy diversity. Finally, for Moltmann, if it is to serve the messianic mission the church must also be political, as none of life’s dimensions can be excluded from its witness.

With chapter two Moltmann seeks to understand the Church, not in isolation, but in relation to the world because God’s kingdom plan is bigger than just the Church. The Church exists in the world by the power of the spirit and finds its mission to the world in the sending nature of God. The Church is sent because God is a sending God. The sending of Jesus and the spirit illustrate God sending nature.

Moltmann turns his attention once again to the Church in relation to Jesus in chapter three. Although he believes ecclesiology must be developed from Christology, Moltmann also believes it must have an eschatological dimension stemming from the resurrection and looking forward to the coming of the kingdom. All who profess Christ are called to the mission of proclaiming his liberating kingdom message. Moltmann also sees the church as political because of the liberating nature of the cross and because

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<sup>26</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Jesus' death was political. He sates "As a crucifixion by the Romans, the death of Christ has an irrevocably political dimension"<sup>28</sup>

Chapter four focuses on the church and the kingdom of God. For Moltmann, in the kingdom lies the "horizon of hope opened up through Christ."<sup>29</sup> God's kingdom hope however, is bigger than the church, it began in the past with Israel and it looks to the future of the whole world. In this way we understand that the church, although representing the kingdom, does not represent its fullness. Rather, "The church in the power of the spirit is not yet the kingdom, but it is its anticipation in history" pointing ahead to God's redemptive plan for the world.<sup>30</sup>

With chapter five and six Moltmann turns his attention squarely to the Holy Spirit. In chapter five he discusses the Church's life in the presence of the spirit. The spirit is the presence of God in the proclamation of the gospel, in baptism, in the Lord's Supper, in worship and in the "messianic way of life," or the present and future hope of the kingdom. Moltmann then moves to the way that the Spirit is the power of God in the Church's ministries and functions in chapter six. When the Church goes about its ministries and functions without the spirit, Moltmann says these things are reduced to "an insipid- a 'spiritless' – kind of civil service."<sup>31</sup> The power of the spirit brings a spiritual vitality and order to the community, ministry and the form of the Church.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 290.

Finally, in chapter seven Moltmann discusses the marks of the Church, drawing them from the creeds as, “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.” These marks distinguish the true Church. In “one” is the unity of the church in freedom. “Catholic” is cast as partnership with the universal Church. The Church is “holy” because it is a “community of the saints.” Its holiness comes from Jesus and Moltmann links it with poverty as solidarity with the poor. Moltmann also understands the church as “apostolic” in terms of suffering which inevitably come when the Church lives out its mission.

### **Outreach and Evangelism**

In order to develop an outward orientated culture with a renewed emphasis on outreach and evangelism at Eastminster, a greater understanding of conversion is needed in order to inform how evangelism will be understood and practiced. This need will be addressed with an examination of *Conversion in the New Testament* by Richard Peace. Further, a fresh approach to the method of evangelism will also be required. This will be provided by Rick Richardson in *Reimagining Evangelism*.

In Part one of the Peace’s massive work he contends that Paul’s conversion on the Damascus road provides the normative model of conversion.<sup>32</sup> In Paul’s encounter with Jesus, Peace sees the three key experiences at the heart of conversion. However, Peace also asserts that the conversion of the twelve disciples, though taking place over a much longer period of time involved the same key experiences seen in Paul’s story.

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<sup>32</sup> Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 11.

The three key experiences that Peace sees at the heart of Paul's conversion, and indeed of all true conversions, are, insight, turning and transformation.<sup>33</sup> Peace describes "insight" as seeing the sad truth about one's self before God and the positive truth of who Jesus really is. It's the experience of this insight that leads a person to "turning." By "turning" Peace essentially means repentance, the turning away from sin and evil and the turning toward God. Turning is what opens one to "transformation" which flows from responding to Jesus and leads to the emergence of a new life in him.

With part two Peace explores the gradual conversion of the twelve disciples as he sees it unfold in the gospel of Mark. He describes it as something that "took place in fits and starts over the course of their years with Jesus."<sup>34</sup> Peace presents the story of the disciples' conversion with a thematic outline of the gospel of Mark. The outline is grouped into two sections around two titles of Jesus, "Messiah" and "Son of God."

In the disciple's story in the Gospel of Mark, Peace recognizes all three of the key elements present in Paul's conversion. As the gospel progresses Peace sees the growing "insight" of the disciples in their deepening knowledge of Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.<sup>35</sup> He sees their "turning" and repentance as they "leave behind both their

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 249.

misunderstanding of Jesus and their hardened hearts.”<sup>36</sup> Finally, he sees their “transformation” as they embrace being disciplined by Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

It is with part three that Peace states his thesis and moves to application. His thesis is that “how we conceive of conversion determines how we do evangelism.”<sup>38</sup> If we understand conversion as an “event” much like what happened to Paul, then we will tend to go about evangelism seeking to prompt such an event in the lives of others. This Peace calls “encounter evangelism.” Encounter evangelism has often looked to tools like big events, mass media and knocking on doors all aimed at creating an encounter moment where someone might make a decision for Jesus.

However, if we understand conversion as more of a “process” as with the disciples, then we will tend to go about evangelism seeking to develop faith in another over time. This approach Peace calls “process evangelism.” Process evangelism often looks to tools like small groups, workshops and the development of spiritual disciplines.

Peace notes that encounter evangelism has been the dominate form of evangelism in the United States for the last fifty years, but goes on to critique it, finding its effectiveness waning, offering some correctives and calling for further innovation. Peace does not pit encounter evangelism and process evangelism against each other, but rather sees values in both approaches.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 286.

In his book, *Reimagining Evangelism*, Rick Richardson offers a fresh approach to evangelism that is desperately needed. Richardson begins chapter one with this statement, "Over the years, evangelism has gotten a bad name. It is sales, manipulation, TV preachers, big hair, pushing people to convert and going door to door. It elicits feelings similar to the intrusive practice of telemarketing."<sup>39</sup> With this insight Richardson names the root of both our fears about evangelism and the reason behind its decreasing effectiveness. Both of these things he sees as stemming, in large part, from shifts in our culture that call for a new approach to evangelism.

Richardson identifies the old image of evangelism that dominated much of the twentieth century as what he calls "Evangelism as Closing the Deal on a sales call."<sup>40</sup> This model led to Christians thinking that evangelism was about dumping information on people, often memorized and impersonal formulas, and then seeking to "close the deal" and make a "sale" by getting them to make a decision for Christ.

Richardson proposes a fundamental shift in our image and understanding of evangelism. He suggests a move away from the salesperson image to that of a travel guide.<sup>41</sup> Rather than seeking to "sell," the travel guide's aim is to encourage and guide people on their spiritual journey. Along the way Richardson also suggest other images as well such as, detective, collaborator, listener, story-teller and matchmaker.

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<sup>39</sup> Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Having stated the above thesis in his opening chapter, Richardson then suggests seven additional shifts in our “pictures and practices” of evangelism. The first shift is from activist to collaborator. With chapter two Richardson calls Christians to understand evangelism, not as the solo endeavors of an activist type, but as something undertaken in collaboration with the Holy Spirit. He makes the insightful point that Jesus was a collaborator with the Holy Spirit and that this was a key thing behind his ability to powerfully evangelize.

With chapter three Richardson calls for a shift from an individual to a community based approach to evangelism. Since for many, he points out, “Belonging comes before believing” the importance of the community needs to play bigger part in our approach to evangelism. In fact, Richardson believes the shift from an individualized approach "to a central focus on community in the process of conversion" is already under way.<sup>42</sup>

With chapter four Richardson pushes for a shift from agenda focused to friendship focused evangelism. A focus on friendship puts the emphasis of evangelism more where it needs to be, on things like building trust and meeting people where they are, rather than on communicating an agenda. This carries nicely into chapter five where Richardson discusses the power of story. There is power in God’s story, in Jesus’s story and in the stories of our own spiritual experiences. Richardson points out that stories compel people in ways that dogma does not and urges for a shift from dogma to story driven evangelism.

With chapter six Richardson pushes for a truer representation of Jesus that highlights his “out of the box” nature rather than relying on the common cliché image of

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

Jesus that often gives people the impression that they already know all there is to know about him. Richardson also suggests a shift from an emphasis on the afterlife to a more kingdom oriented approach to evangelism. His point is that our faith is bigger than just what happens to us when we die and that a kingdom message encompasses God's plan for this world as well as eternity and makes the gospel more relevant to life today. As touched on with his image of the evangelist as travel guide with chapter eight Richardson suggests a shift from describing faith as an event to describing faith as a journey. The goal is not simply to make converts, but to make disciples, followers of Jesus.

The sources covered in this literature review yield useful information in several key areas. This information will be built upon in the following chapters. This is particularly true of chapter four where a theology of the church will be offered and chapter five where a theology of evangelism will be articulated.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

Chapter 4 will present an outward oriented ecclesiology and highlight some roots in reformed tradition which can be seen as strengths to which this ecclesiology can be tied. This chapter will also discuss some weaknesses in the Reformed tradition that have hindered the development of a more outward oriented ecclesiology. Further, the affirmation of evangelism in the polity and confessions of the PCUSA and in the work of John Calvin well documented. Finally, this chapter will examine Baptist ecclesiology and theology and its emphasis on free will, outreach, evangelism and the individual.

#### **An Outward Oriented Ecclesiology**

In response to the inward orientation of so many churches and of Christendom itself, there has long been a need to articulate an outward oriented or missional ecclesiology. This is especially true of mainline churches in America and of the PC(USA) in particular. This is also a specific need of Eastminster.

Great progress has been made in articulating an outward oriented and missional ecclesiology in recent years. Much of the progress in this direction has been made

stemming from the rediscovery of the concept of *missio Dei*. *Missio Dei* is an understanding of God's nature as being inherently missional. *Missio Dei* recognizes that God is a sending God. Further, *missio Dei* is understood to represent the missional focus of the early Church, particularly as it can be seen in the Book of Acts.

In the beginning God, in a way, sent himself. God initiated creation, he came and he created. He initiated a relationship with Adam and Eve, he formed a covenant with Abraham, he appeared to Moses in a burning bush and gave the law and so on. In the fullness of time God sent Jesus to show us how to live, to teach us the truth about himself and to lay down his life for us. Together God and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to guide and empower the Church and individual believers. God is indeed a sending God.

*Missio Dei* however, not only informs our understanding of God, it also informs our understanding of the Church. For hundreds of years mission has been seen as an activity of the Church, but this ecclesiocentric understanding of mission needs to be replaced by a theocentric understanding of mission as Guder has argued. *Missio Dei* makes it clear that God is the initiator of mission, not the Church, and the implications of this not only reshape our understanding of mission, but of the church itself. As Jürgen Moltmann has so famously stated, "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."<sup>1</sup> Since the church does not have a mission of its own, but derives its mission from God, the makeup of the church should reflect that call to mission.

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<sup>1</sup> Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 64.

*Missio Dei* means that the Church itself is sent by God and has a role to play in God's mission. The implications of this are not simply theoretical; it does not simply inform our ecclesiology in an academic setting. *Missio Dei* should shape the self-understanding of local congregations. It should call churches to ask what part they are to play in God's mission in their local setting. It should press each member of the congregation to understand themselves as partners in God's mission in that place through their church.

An outward oriented ecclesiology also finds support and expression in Jesus's mission and ministry in the world. Christ and the Church are deeply and intimately connected. Jesus is the very subject of the Church because it is his body. So, as his body, the Church should reflect Jesus in its make-up and in its ministry. Jesus's mission and ministry in the world had a decidedly outward trajectory. Jesus did not settle in Jerusalem or any other place for that matter, and wait for people to come to him, he went out to the people. The vast majority of Jesus's public ministry was spent on the road reaching out to people.

Support for an outward oriented ecclesiology is also found in the person of Jesus as the incarnation of the living God in the world. In Jesus God breached the boundaries of our world and paid a great personal cost to reach out to us. Jesus's incarnation itself was an outward missional expression of God's nature, one that Jesus continued to live out during his life. Again, as his body the Church should reflect Jesus and take an incarnational understating of itself.

Yet, all too frequently churches persist in not fully reflecting Jesus' mission and ministry to the world or his incarnational nature, and continue to live an inward oriented ecclesiology. Some of this comes from the mistaken understanding of the Church as "attractional" as Frost and Hirsch describe it. This is the mistaken belief that the Church still holds an important place in society and that people want to be Christians and if the Church can just get its "product" right, the music and lighting and decor etc., then people will flock to it.<sup>2</sup> The church must come to the realization that most people are never going to come to it. In order to engage the majority of our society the Church is going to have to go out to them.

The question of how to go out and engage the world leads naturally to another important feature of an outward oriented and missional ecclesiology, the need to develop the Church as an apostolic community. A church becomes an apostolic community when its members begin to embody the outward missional call of the Apostles both communally and individually. The outward missional call of the Apostles was to break new ground for the kingdom of God. This could be done in terms of literally bringing the gospel to places in which it was not known and it could also be done by breaking new ground in the hearts of men and women. An apostolic community emerges when individuals begin to understand this as the call of their church and of their lives.

True Apostolic communities do not find their strength in hierarchy. Apostolic communities grow out of an understanding of the "priesthood of all believers," as it is often referred to. In I Peter 2:9 the Apostle Peter says this of believers, "You are a

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<sup>2</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 19.

chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” An Apostolic community is a group of people who recognize their holy calling to reach out to a broken and hurting world and then begin to do so.

An Apostolic community however, is not simply Apostolic, it is also an authentic spiritual community from which an apostolic call grows. Acts 2:42-47 offers an image of the early Church under the Apostles. Here are seen several marks of the church’s life together which illustrate the kind of spiritual community from which the apostolic ministry of the early Church emerged. Among these marks are, devotion to the Apostles teaching (scripture), fellowship, prayer, worship, celebrating the sacraments, unity and growth (or mission). It is this kind of rich community that fosters the type of discipleship that leads to apostleship.

### **Reformed Roots: Strengths**

When it comes to developing an outward oriented ecclesiology, one finds certain roots within the Reformed theological tradition which can be seen as strengths upon which to build. The most seminal doctrine in Reformed theology is the sovereignty of God. The reformed notion of God’s sovereignty understands God as the initiator of faith. Whereas some other traditions put more emphasis on the individual finding God and making a decision of faith, in the Reformed tradition faith is a matter of God’s providence and election is his decision alone.

Understanding God as the initiator of faith is not far from the concept of the *missio Dei* and of God as a sending God. For God to initiate faith in a person is an action of reaching out, coming to, of sending Jesus and the spirit. A strong tie can easily be made here. Further, if God is the initiator of faith he can also be easily seen as the initiator of the church and its mission.

Another prominent feature of the Reformed tradition which provides roots upon which an outward and missional ecclesiology can be built is “covenant theology.” Covenant theology, in contrast to dispensationalism, understands God as having one covenant of salvation with the people of God. Under the old covenant the people of God were a nation, Israel. Under the new covenant the people of God are the Church.

Within covenant theology, Israel and the church are different manifestations of the same people of God. Further, the new covenant is not a different covenant, but a renewal and expansion of the old covenant. Whereas the old covenant was characterized by the law, the new covenant is characterized by grace. The grace of the new covenant is ours through the sacrifice of Christ.

Covenant theology is consistent with the *missio Dei* in that it sees God as having a redemptive plan for humanity through the messiah. Further, as noted above, God is understood as the initiator of the plan. Covenant theology would not see that plan as giving the church its life and mission as directly as proponents of missional ecclesiology would, but the leap required to do so is not large.

A key hallmark of the Reformed tradition is the centrality of the Word of God within its theology, ecclesiology and worship. Historically the Reformed tradition

adheres to the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, “scripture alone,” understanding the Scripture to be authoritative in all matters of life, faith and salvation. The PC(USA) affirms the authority of the Scripture in a number of its confessions.<sup>3</sup>

Because the word of God plays such a central role in the Reformed tradition, appealing to scripture for support of an outward and missional ecclesiology would be seen as persuasive. It is for this reason that one of the central features of this final project is educating toward an outward and missional ecclesiology from the Scripture. In chapter five scriptural supports for an outward and missional ecclesiology with a focus on outreach and evangelism will be offered.

A final root within the Reformed tradition upon which an outward and missional ecclesiology can be built is its historical commitment to world mission and to compassion and social justice mission. For example, within the PC(USA) this legacy, although in sharp decline, has seen the significant impact of its mission to Korea in the twentieth century. During that time Presbyterian missionaries spawned a church that is now larger than the PC(USA). An example of the commitment to compassion missions is seen in the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance agency which works worldwide dispersing funds in areas touched by disasters of all kinds. Finally, the PC(USA)’s involvement in social justice mission is illustrated by its maintenance of an Office of Public Witness in Washington D.C. to advocate for just and fair public policy.

Although working from a Christendom ecclesiology, the PC(USA) does have a legacy of mission that grows from the Reformed tradition. While severely lacking in

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<sup>3</sup> See, *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Part I: The Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 1999) 3.19, 5.001 and 9.27.

emphasis on evangelism, particularly within its own context, this legacy of mission is a root and strength upon which an outward and missional ecclesiology can be built. Work would need to be done to tie mission more closely to God's redemptive plan for the world, yet the obvious connections are there to be built upon.

### **Reformed Roots: Weaknesses**

Although the sovereignty of God is the most central doctrine of Reformed theology, it is predestination that has, in many ways, cast the largest shadow over Reformed ecclesiology. The idea that election is solely determined by God and that it is predetermined has undercut evangelism in the Reformed tradition. Although, as will be demonstrated later, this was not Calvin's intent, it has nonetheless been the result.

Calvin was a man of deep faith and it was his sincere belief that because God was completely sovereign over all things, even matters of salvation were determined by him. For election to be an open question as the Arminians believed, would mean, in Calvin's view, that God was not sovereign over them and that was not acceptable. Yet, for Calvin, even though election was predestined this did not mean that evangelism was unnecessary. Since human beings did not know who were among the elect no one could be written off and the motivation for evangelism was simply to be faithful to God's call.

However, for believers and for the church the idea that salvation was predetermined had the inescapable effect of making evangelism seem futile. If indeed the fate of all people was already decided then what was the urgency to share the gospel since all who were predetermined to accept it would inevitably do so? The doctrine of

predestination can therefore be seen as a weakness of the Reformed tradition in terms of developing an outward and missional ecclesiology.

Since, according to Calvin, there was no salvation outside the Church and because of the fact that evangelism had been undercut by predestination the Reformed tradition developed, along with much of Christendom, an inward oriented ecclesiology focused on the church and believers. One indication of this is the near total omission of evangelism from the historic confessions of the Reformed Tradition. Calvin himself did stress the need for evangelism, as will be demonstrated, but it was somewhat of a secondary concern and clearly a weakness of the Reformed Tradition. The main focus of the Reformed tradition was on reforming, as it grew out of the reformation, and on building and maintaining the church and on its inner life.

Another weakness in the Reformed Tradition toward developing an outward and mission ecclesiology has been the over emphasis on a corporate understating of theology. This corporate emphasis can be seen in Covenant Theology. The stress of Covenant Theology is on God's relationship to his people rather than on God's relationship to individuals.

Predestination also played into the development of a more corporate understanding of faith and theology in the Reformed Tradition. Because predestination made election to salvation something that God determined rather than the individual, the Reformed tradition did not develop as much emphasis on the individual believer as other traditions did.

An example of this is seen, to some degree, in the practice of infant baptism. While infant baptism is alluded to in the Scriptures, nowhere is it clearly sanctioned.<sup>4</sup> However, the rationale for infant baptism grows in part from a corporate understanding of faith and theology. The child is understood to stand under the covenant that God has made with his people. In the same way that the Jews circumcised infants on the eighth day and understood them as part of the nation of Israel and therefore a part of God's covenant people, so the Reformed tradition baptizes infants seeing them as a part of God's new covenant people, the Church. Further, the child that is baptized is also understood to be under the faith of their parents and of the church community, again a corporate understanding of faith and theology.

### **The Roots of Evangelism and Outreach in Presbyterian Polity and Confession and Reformed Theology**

Evangelism has been a historic weakness for the PC(USA) and is a key contributing factor in its decline. Like many mainline churches that reflect a Christendom mentality, the PC(USA) has lived under the misguided idea that evangelism within its own context was unnecessary.<sup>5</sup> This grew from the mistaken belief that the people within its context were already Christian or that if they weren't that they had the Church in their midst and that was all that was necessary. For this reason evangelism in the PC(USA) was seen as something that was reserved primarily for the mission field.

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<sup>4</sup> Passages alluding to infant baptism: Acts 2:38-39, 16:14-15, 16:30-33, 18:8; I Corinthians 1:16.

<sup>5</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 14.

Within the PC(USA) this failure to engage in local evangelism grew primarily from a culture within the denomination and local church that, although strong and pervasive, was not reflected in the church's polity and to a lesser degree its confessions. Affirmation of the importance and need for evangelism can be found in both. In this regard the church has been willing to say the right things about the need for evangelism, but has simply been unwilling to put its words into practice.

In many PC(USA) churches if the pastor were to state at a church board meeting that the board needed to make evangelism to the local community a key focus, this would be met not only with fear and trembling, but in many cases with outright resistance. This would be an unlikely scenario as many PC(USA) pastors are steeped in a Christendom mentality and the culture of the PC(USA), both of which find local evangelism unnecessary at best and inappropriate at worst.

Yet if the pastor were to do such a thing, it would be totally in keeping with the polity of the PC(USA). In part two of the constitution of the PC(USA), called the Book of Order, the responsibilities of the Session (church board) are listed. In this section the first responsibly listed is "to provide for evangelism to be learned and practiced by the church, that members may be better equipped to articulate their faith, to witness in word and deed to the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and to invite persons into a new life in Christ."<sup>6</sup>

The call to evangelism in the responsibilities of the Session is not an isolated case. Many other places in the Book of Order proclaim the importance of and call for

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<sup>6</sup> *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Part II: The Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 1999), G-10.0102.

evangelism to be practiced. Another explicit example can be found in the Book of Order's Directory for Worship in a section titled "Proclamation and Evangelism." This section states,

- God sends the church in the power of the Spirit
- a. to announce the good news that in Christ Jesus the world is reconciled to God,
  - b. to tell the nations and peoples of Christ's call to repentance, faith and obedience,
  - c. to proclaim in deed and word that Jesus gave himself to set people free,
  - d. to offer in Christ's name fullness of life now and forever,
  - e. to call people everywhere to believe in and follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,
  - f. to invite them into the community of faith to worship and serve the triune God.<sup>7</sup>

It is a sad truth that the PC(USA) can articulate such powerful and articulate theological truth and yet make little effort to put that truth into practice.

Both of the above examples serve, in a certain way, as articulations of "The Great Ends of the Church" which are stated at the opening of the Book of Order. The Great ends of the Church offer six key points meant to describe the mission of the Church. The book of Order states, "The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world."<sup>8</sup>

Part I of the PC(USA) constitution is made up of The Book of Confessions which contain the church's historic and moderns confessions of faith. The confessions are understood to be "authentic and reliable expositions of what the Scripture leads us to

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., W-7.2000.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., G-1.0200.

believe and do.”<sup>9</sup> Although, as noted above, evangelism is conspicuously missing from the historic confessions, the importance of evangelism is lifted up in both of the church’s modern confessions, although only briefly in each case.

The overriding theme of the Confession of 1967 is reconciliation. The confession sees the church and individual believers as agents of reconciliation. It is in calling for reconciliation between human beings and God that the confession says that the “witness” of believers “is the Church’s evangelism.”<sup>10</sup> Further, the Brief Statement of Faith calls for believers “to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior”<sup>11</sup>

Where the PC(USA) has excelled in mission has been in the areas of compassion and social justice missions. One reason for the lack of “word” evangelism in the PC(USA) is that it has understood the witness provided by compassion and social justice mission as evangelism. Worship is also understood by many in the denomination as evangelism. The commitment to missions of outreach to the world also finds support in the polity of the church. The Book of Order describes the following as part of the evangelism of the church,

- Participating in God’s activity in the world through its life for others by
- (a) healing and reconciling and binding up wounds,
  - (b) ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the powerless,
  - (c) engaging in the struggles to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger and injustice,
  - (d) giving itself and its substance to the service of those who suffer,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., G-14.0206c.

<sup>10</sup> *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Part I: The Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 1999), 9.37.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 10.4.

(e) sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world.<sup>12</sup>

While this commitment to social justice and compassion mission and outreach is a great legacy and these things can legitimately be seen as evangelism in some respects, the lack of accompanying word evangelism is so common in the PC(USA) that such efforts are often viewed more as humanitarian aid rather than Christian mission.

As mentioned above, although Calvin articulated the reformed doctrine of predestination, he did not believe that it diminished the importance of, or need for, evangelism. Calvin states, “We are called by the Lord on this condition, that everyone should afterwards strive to lead others to the truth, to restore the wandering to the right way, to extend a helping hand to the fallen, to win over those that are without.”<sup>13</sup> Since God has chosen to share the message of salvation in Christ through human beings Calvin felt that evangelism was the duty of believers and that belief that election was predetermined did not eliminate this duty.

Calvin also made it clear that since we cannot know who the elect are we must share the message of Christ with all people. This for Calvin even added a sense of urgency to the matter of evangelism. Calvin put it this way,

Since we do not know who belongs to the number of the predestined and who does not, it befits us so to feel as to wish that all be saved. So it will come about that, whoever we come across, we shall study to make him a sharer of peace. Hence as far as we are concerned, salutary and even severe rebuke will be administered like medicine, lest they should perish or cause others to perish. But

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<sup>12</sup> *The Book of Order*, G-3.0300.

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), Commentary on Hebrews 10:24.

it will be for God to make it effective in those whom He foreknew and predestined.<sup>14</sup>

Although Calvin saw the need for evangelism and encouraged it as the duty of all believers, he was always careful to explain that whatever was achieved by human evangelistic efforts came only by the power of God. Calvin says “When an opportunity for edification presents itself, we should realize that a door has been opened for us by the hand of God in order that we may introduce Christ into that place and we should not refuse to accept the generous invitation that God thus gives us.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Ecclesiological and Theological Insights from the Baptist Tradition**

In seeking to articulate an outward oriented ecclesiology certain insights from the Baptist tradition are helpful, particularly in their contrast to Reformed theology and ecclesiology. To begin, Baptist theology and ecclesiology have a decidedly missional focus. Kärkkäinen states that churches in the Baptist tradition “have lived for and out of mission and evangelism. Mission has not been *a* task of the church but rather *the* purpose of all church life.”<sup>16</sup> Central to this focus in distinction from the reformed tradition is that this focus includes not only mission, but specifically “witness” which involves all members of the congregations.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (London: James Clarke and Co., Limited, 1961), 138.

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 2:12.

<sup>16</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical, and Global Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 66.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

One of the foundational reasons for the emphasis on mission and specifically on evangelism in the Baptist tradition is its Arminian or “free will” understanding of salvation.<sup>18</sup> Whereas the Reformed belief in predestination undercut evangelism, making it seem futile since election was predetermined by God, Arminianism understands election to be primarily based on the decision of the individual. Since, in this case, the eternal fate of individuals hangs in the balance; evangelism is infused with a much greater urgency. This sense of urgency has clearly been reflected in the vigilant pursuit of evangelism in the Baptists tradition.

Another key distinction of both Baptist theology and ecclesiology is an emphasis on the individual.<sup>19</sup> Theologically this individual emphasis is seen in the Arminian view of salvation being primarily an individual choice. This is further evidenced by the Baptist belief in the necessity of believer’s baptism. Since the decision for Christ is seen as one made by the individual, the individual needs to be of an adequately mature age to understand and execute that decision therefore making believers’ baptisms a necessity.

The emphasis on the individual in Baptist ecclesiology is easily seen in its congregational polity. In contrast to the hierarchy of the episcopal model as seen in the Catholic and Episcopal traditions for example, or the hybrid of Presbyterian polity which employed a kind of representative democracy, Baptist tradition is decidedly congregational, employing a directly democratic system of decision making.

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<sup>18</sup> E.A. Livingstone, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 53.

<sup>19</sup> Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical, and Global Perspective*, 63.

This emphasis on the individual, paired with Arminian theology is a key reason that in the Baptist tradition individuals have been more personally motivated and committed to mission and evangelism. It is also a significant reason that Baptist churches tend more commonly to reflect on outward oriented ecclesiology and culture. These insights highlight some of the weaknesses of Reformed theology and ecclesiology and offer possible correction toward embracing a more outward oriented and missional ecclesiology for Eastminster.

## CHAPTER 5

### THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM

Chapter 5 will develop a theology of evangelism as a rationale for Eastminster to begin to shift its internal culture from inward to outward with a renewed focus on evangelism and outreach. The central point of this chapter will be an examination of the evangelistic focus and outward trajectory of Jesus' teaching and ministry as a model for the church's ministry. The chapter will also discuss how, as Christ's body, the church should reflect his ministry and teaching.

#### **Evangelism Defined**

Any serious discussion of evangelism must confront the fact that there has been confusion over the precise meaning of this word, leading to widely divergent methods of application. One of the reasons that evangelism is understood in such different ways by different people is that there is indeed confusion about what the word actually means. A key reason for this stems from the word itself. In Greek the word "gospel" and the word "evangelism" have the same root. In Greek, the word "gospel" or "good news" is

*euangelion*. *Euangelion* literally means “good news,” but it can refer to the message of Jesus, or the “gospel.”

The word evangelism is the verbal form of the word gospel. Gospel is *euangelion* and evangelism is *euangelizomai*. However, what must be realized is that the English word evangelism is not a translation, it is a transliteration. Transliteration simply changes the Greek characters into English letters to create a phonetic equivalent, whereas translation is finding an English word with an equivalent meaning. One can visually observe that evangelism is a transliteration by looking at the words next to one another; euangelizomai, *euangelizomai*, evangelism. The first iteration is the Greek characters, the second is a direct transliteration into English letters and the third represents a smoothing of the transliteration into an actual English word.

The reason is that *euangelizomai* was transliterated instead of translated is that there is simply no English equivalent for this word. Therefore, it should be no surprise that there is confusion over what evangelism means since, in a way, it has no defined meaning. It's for this reason that the word evangelism is not used in most English translations of the Bible.

All of this leads to the question of what this word *euangelizomai* means. A very literal translation would be something like “to gospelize” or “I gospel to you.” Because even this literal translation is difficult to understand, most of the time in the Bible where the word *euangelizomai* appears it is translated as “preach.” However, the problem is that there is a Greek word for preach *kerusso* that is used frequently in the Bible. So if

the New Testament writers had meant “preach” they would have simply said that.

Therefore, *euangelizomai* clearly means something different than “preach.”

Sometimes in the Bible *euangelizomai* is translated as “proclaim,” which is better than “preach.” However, the problem with both “preach” and “proclaim” is that they clearly imply that evangelism is limited to the spoken word. Both words leave out the important point that *euangelizomai* or evangelism can also mean giving witness to our faith by doing things like loving God and one another.<sup>1</sup>

Having taken all of the above into account the preferable translation of the word *euangelizomai* would be either “to communicate” or “to share the gospel.”<sup>2</sup> These two phrases give the clearest understanding of the term. However, between these two choices, “to share the gospel” seems to fit best with the way Jesus interacted with others and calls believers to reach out to others.

Having defined what the word evangelism means it is also important to define what the goal of evangelism is. The goal of evangelism has often been understood as leading an individual to make a decision for Christ. The stress has frequently been on conversion as consent to a certain set of intellectual ideas or beliefs in a particular group of spiritual principles about Christ. These concepts of evangelism and conversion reduce faith and miss the wider aspects of God’s call. What is needed is a more expansive

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<sup>1</sup> Richard B. Cook, “St. Paul- Preacher, Evangelist or Organizer?” *The Expository Times*, (March, 1982), vol. 93 no. 6, 171-173. <http://ext.sagepub.com/content/93/6/171.extract> also Joel B Green, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (accessed on May 5, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms defines evangelism using the word “sharing” as well. See Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 96.

understanding of evangelism which the author believes can be found in the concepts of the kingdom of God.

Howard Marshall has stated that “it is universally agreed by New Testament scholars that the central theme of the teaching of Jesus was the Kingdom of God.”<sup>3</sup> The kingdom of God was central to Jesus teaching because it was and is central to the way that we should understand not only our faith, but evangelism. Evangelism is surely calling people to believe, but it is also a call to participate in the kingdom of God. It is a call to surrender our stronghold and to submit our resistance to this kingdom and its king, but it is also a call to live for and serve this king and his kingdom.

### **The Outward and Missional Trajectory of Jesus’ Ministry**

One of the ways in which the evangelistic emphasis of Jesus’s ministry can be seen is the outward and missional trajectory of his ministry. Jesus was ever moving outward seeking to reach people with the Gospel message. This trajectory can be observed in numerous passages in the New Testament.

In Luke 4 Jesus goes down to Capernaum where he preaches and drives demons out of many people. The next day he rises early and goes out to a solitary place, likely to pray. While he is there however, the town’s people come looking for him and realizing that he is planning to move on try to convince him to stay with them. At this point Jesus gives them not just a response to their request for him to stay, but an insight into his

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<sup>3</sup> Howard Marshall, “Preaching the Kingdom,” *The Expository Times*, (October, 1977), vol. 89 no. 1, 13-16, quoted by Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998) 59.

ministry. In Luke 4:43 Jesus says, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.”

In this encounter Jesus makes it clear, as he does in many places in the Gospels that he was “sent” by God. Jesus did not come to the earth out of happenstance or by his own will, he was sent by God with a mission. In this we see not only the sending nature of God, but also the “sentness” of Jesus that caused him to have an outward trajectory to his ministry. Jesus was ever pursuing the people to whom he was sent.

One of the key truths about Jesus’s ministry that frequently seems to be overlooked in the Church is the fact that Jesus spent the overwhelming majority of his time in public ministry on the road. During his three year ministry, Jesus spent most of his time traveling from place to place preaching and teaching and doing ministry of all kinds. Jesus was, in many respects, an itinerant evangelist.

Recognizing this simple fact about Jesus helps illuminate the outward and missional trajectory of his ministry. Jesus did not stay in one place waiting for people to come to him; instead he went out to the people. This was the clear and consistent way that Jesus went about his ministry and this is the example that he set for believers and for the church.

The outward and missional trajectory of Jesus’s ministry can also be seen in his training and preparation of the disciples. Two events in the Gospel of Luke highlight this in particular. In Luke chapter 9, after having followed Jesus for a relatively short period of time, Jesus sends the twelve out on a missionary journey without him. He

commissions them to go two by two and gives them power and authority to cast out demons, heal people and preach the gospel.

This action illustrates that the outward and missional trajectory of Jesus's ministry points even beyond Jesus himself. The disciples are being groomed to carry the kingdom message outward in every direction and to continue to do so after Jesus is gone. In Jesus' preparation of the disciples we see a key piece of God's redemptive plan unfold; the message of salvation will be carried forth by the believers, by the church. God has chosen to deliver his message to the world in this way.

Emphasis on this piece of God's plan is created in Luke 10 when Jesus sends out seventy-two of his followers in the same manner. In this we see that the sending of the twelve was not an isolated event. The increase in the number of those sent out illustrates the growing emphasis on an outward missional trajectory; many workers will be needed to be sent out to the far corners of the world.

Finally, we see the outward and missional trajectory of Jesus's ministry grow to include all believers. With the Great Commission in Matthew 28, Jesus commissions the church and all believers to go out into the world to make disciples. Both the church and believers are to understand themselves as key role players in God's redemptive plan to reach the world, and this will entail continuing along the trajectory that Jesus set.

### **The Evangelistic Focus of Jesus Teaching**

The evangelistic emphasis of Jesus' ministry can be seen in his teaching. At the beginning of Mark's gospel, after proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God, Mark briefly

explains how John the Baptist paved the way for Jesus and baptized him. At this point Jesus speaks for the first time in Mark's Gospel. Mark says that "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' [Jesus] said. 'The kingdom of God is near, Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mk 1:14-15).

Most scholars regard Jesus's words here as a summary of the message he preached according to Mark.<sup>4</sup> Since Jesus preached many more things, for Mark to pair his message down to these three key statements places significant emphasis on them. Mark clearly saw these three things as capturing the heart of Jesus's message, the "good news," which is *euangelion* in Greek and also means "gospel."

The first of these three statements is that "The time has come." Here Jesus proclaims that God is doing something new. The word for "time" here isn't the typical Greek word *chronos*. Instead Jesus uses the word *kairos* which refers to an age or period of time. Jesus is saying that a new age is dawning. This is what he means when he says, "the Kingdom of God is near."

The Old Testament spoke a day when the Messiah would come from God and establish God's kingdom. Jesus is the son of God; the Messiah has come; it is a new day. Jesus is proclaiming that the kingdom of God has begun to break into this world. While the kingdom will not be fully realized until Jesus returns and fully subdues the earth, God's reign has begun.

Jesus then calls people to live into that kingdom. He says, "repent and believe the good news." The Greek word for repent, *metanoia* literally means to change your mind

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<sup>4</sup> For an example of this view see, Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: A & C Black, 1999), 53.

or direction. Repentance is the call for us to turn away from sin and to turn to God. Jesus doesn't say that when we sin we are lost and can never change, Jesus says "repent" because he's come with the Good News that God loves and forgives and can give us the power to change and can heal the wounds that sin causes.

One of the key concerns of Jesus evangelistic preaching and teaching was lost people and God's desire for them to be found by him. The best example of this emphasis is found in Luke 15. Luke 15 contains three parables of Jesus, all of which are concerned with lost people being found.

In the first of these parables God is pictured as a shepherd who leaves his flock in search of a sheep that has gone astray. God pursues the lost desiring that they will be found and when they are he rejoices and we are struck by God's love for the lost. In fact we are told that "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Lk 15:7).

In the second parable God is like a woman searching for a lost coin. This poor peasant woman frantically lights a light and sweeps the floor trying to find the coin which is clearly of great value to her. When she finally finds the valuable coin she calls her neighbors to celebrate with her and, as in the first parable, there is rejoicing at the lost being found.

With the final parable, God is the father of a wayward son. The son turns his back on this father and goes his own way, only to soon find that his way leads to despair. So the son returns to the father with a repentant heart and is forgiven and received by the father, and for a third time in the chapter there is rejoicing as the lost are found.

Yet, here Jesus adds one more thing, an older brother who does not rejoice at the lost being found. This son disrespects the father and disregards his will, illustrating how God perceives those who do not welcome the lost. The older brother is a clear negative example. The reader is not to be like him; they are to have the father's heart and to seek after and welcome the lost back with grace. In this way believers and the church are challenged to align their values with God's values in terms of seeking and welcoming the lost.

Another key part of Jesus's evangelistic teaching was his instruction of all believers regarding their role in God's evangelistic ministry. In Matthew 28, with the Great Commission, Jesus clearly teaches that all believers are called to "go" into the whole world and "make disciples" (Mt 28:19). We see this emphasis again in Jesus' post resurrection appearance to believers in the book of Acts. As the disciples are gathered in Jerusalem following Jesus' death he appears to them and instructs them that when the Holy Spirit comes on them they are to go and serve as his "witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

### **The Outreach Focus of Jesus' Ministry**

In addition to the specific evangelistic focus of Jesus' ministry, there was also a very clear mission of outreach with which it was paired. Jesus often reached out to a hurting and broken world with acts of compassion and by seeking social justice. Although these two aspects of Jesus' missional focus are discussed separately here, it is understood by the author that these things should not be understood in isolation from one

another. The evangelistic or “word” mission is often given its best expression through the mission of “deeds” and conversely our “deeds” often need to be interpreted with the “word” so that the glory of those deeds will be given to God and not the human agents of those deeds.

An example of the fact that deeds of outreach were also a central focus of Jesus ministry is seen in Matthew 4:23-25. This Scripture is understood as a summation passage. It offers a synopsis of the activity of Jesus during a certain period of his ministry. This passage may also be understood to typify much of Jesus’s ministry. Here Matthew explains that as Jesus traveled though Galilee, not only was he preaching and teaching and proclaiming the good news, but also that he was “healing every disease and sickness along the people” (Mt 4:23). Matthew goes on to add that as news about him spread “people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures and the paralyzed and he healed them” (Mt 4:24).

Not only did Jesus model acts of compassion and social justice as ways of reaching out to the world, he also called believers to do the same. In Luke 10, with the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus challenges our tendency to care only for those who love us or are like us. An expert in the law, wanting to justify himself, asks Jesus for a clarification of the Law’s call to “love your neighbor as yourself.” The man’s motivation is seeking to define the limits of his responsibility. He wanted to know exactly to whom he did and did not have to extend love. This was likely driven not only by his human

self-interest, but also by the fact that the Rabbis in that day had ruled that a “neighbor,” as spoken of in the Law, was defined only as other Jews.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus obliges the man with an answer in the form of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In the parable he teaches that the standard for those who follow him is to reach out to all people with acts of love and kindness. The outward and missional trajectory of Jesus’ ministry is seen again here with the call to care for others not simply with words, but also with deeds.

Another example of Jesus’s call for believers to be focused on reaching out to others with missional acts of love and good deeds is seen in Matthew 25:31-46. In this passage Jesus speaks about his return at the end of time and of the final judgment. As he does so he explains with very vivid imagery the fact that when we care for others, particularly those in need, it is as if we were caring for Jesus himself saying “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 15:40).

Conversely, Jesus also says that when we fail to care for others, particularly those in need, it is as if we had refused to care for Jesus himself saying “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (Mt 25:45). Adding extreme emphasis to this teaching, Jesus further explains that those who have not cared for others will be sent away to “eternal punishment” (Mt 25:46).

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<sup>5</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, New Testament Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 217.

## **The Cross Cultural Component of Jesus' Ministry**

One of the elements of Jesus's evangelistic ministry that does not always seem to garner adequate attention is its cross cultural component. It is understood that Jesus's mission was first to the Jews and then to Gentiles. However, much of the time the common thought is that the Gentile mission only began with Paul and the other disciples following Jesus's death. While it is certainly true that the vast majority of the Gentile mission did take place after Jesus's death, it is a mistake to overlook the many precedent-setting cross-cultural elements of Jesus's ministry. Four examples are offered here.

The first example is Jesus's exchange with a Roman centurion in Matthew 8. The Jews despised their Roman oppressors and longed for a day when Israel would be a free nation once again. Further, as Gentiles, the Jews regarded the Romans as unclean and sinners by definition. With this backdrop it can be understood that for Jesus to engage in a conversation with a Roman Centurion would have been provocative from the outset. What would have significantly raised the level this level of concern was Jesus' offer to go to the Centurion's home to heal the sick servant on whose behalf he had come. To enter a Gentile home would have made Jesus unclean, something no Jew wanted, least of all a Rabbi. This offer would have been viewed very negatively by other Jews and the religious establishment.

It is, however, Jesus' words in response to the faith of the centurion that would have been viewed most negatively and yet best demonstrate his clear understanding that God's plan included all who would come to him by faith. Jesus says of the Centurion, "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith" (Mt 8:10). Jesus then goes on to

explain how many people will come from all over the world to be a part of God's kingdom by faith and that because of their lack of faith some Jews may be left out (Mt 8:11-12).

A second example of the cross cultural aspects of Jesus's ministry is his conversation with a Samaritan woman in John 4. Because the Jews loathed the Samaritans, regarding them as racially impure and viewing their religion as a perversion of Judaism, they avoided Samaritans whenever possible. Many Jews would not travel through Samaria when going north or south, even though it was the shortest route. Instead, they would go around Samaria which made the trip much longer.

As the passage opens John says that Jesus "had to go through Samaria" (Jn 4:4). However, since many Jews did not travel through Samaria the reader must ponder the question, "Why?" It may be that Jesus "had" to go through Samaria because he was in a hurry, although the text does not say this. Or, is it that Jesus "had" to go to Samaria for another reason? It is the author's contention that Jesus "had" to go to Samaria to illustrate the future inclusion of the Samaritans in God's redemptive plan, something that would be realized very shortly after Jesus' resurrection with the ministry of Phillip.

While in Samaria Jesus meets a Samaritan woman. She is drawing water at mid-day, a sure sign that she is a social outcast, a woman with a poor moral reputation. In initiating a conversation with this woman Jesus traverses, not only the formidable racial and cultural barrier, but also the gender and religious-moral barrier. The woman herself is surprised that Jesus does so. Through his conversation with her, the woman comes to faith as do many people from her town, establishing Jesus' desire for their redemption.

Further in the course of his conversation with her, Jesus affirms that in the future the barriers he traversed to reach her and her people will fall and that worshipping God in “spirit and truth” will be the mark God’s people, again demonstrating his understanding that God’s plan included all who would come to him by faith (Jn 4:23)

The third example of the cross cultural elements of Jesus’s ministry is seen in his interaction with a Syrophenician woman in Mark 7. In this passage Jesus travels to Tyre which lies outside of Israel to the North. While there he encounters a tenacious Gentile woman and engages in a kind of verbal sparring with her that was common in Jewish culture at the time.<sup>6</sup> In doing so Jesus again traverses gender and cultural boundaries.

The woman comes seeking for Jesus to drive an evil spirit out of her daughter. In response Jesus offers a verbal challenge to her creating an opportunity for her to demonstrate her faith. Jesus essentially points out that the time had not yet come for his mission to Gentiles to begin. He uses the image of the Jews as children eating at the household table and of the Gentiles at this time being in the position of the dogs under the table. There was clearly something edgy in likening her and her people to dogs, but it was not intended as an insult, but as a challenge. In response, the woman takes up the verbal challenge, seeing it for what it was, and gives Jesus a deeply faithful answer. She basically says to Jesus “Doesn’t God have some little bit for people like me who believe?” Jesus is thrilled with her faithful response saying, “For such a reply, you may

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<sup>6</sup> The exchange between Jesus and this woman can be understood as a challenge-riposte. For a description of challenge-riposte see, Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary of the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 41-41.

go; the demon has left your daughter” (Mk 7:29). Jesus affirms that God has a place for all people who put their faith in him.

The final example of the cross cultural elements of Jesus ministry has already been touched on. It is that Jesus, on several occasions, traveled outside of Israel to preach and teach. His travel to Tyre was mentioned above, however, it should be noted that Jesus also traveled to Decapolis on at least two different occasions (Mk 5:1-20, 7:24-8:13). These travels outside Israel demonstrate Jesus’ desire to set the stage for God’s redemptive plan for all people to go out from Israel to the entire world.

### **The Church as the Body of Christ**

As Jürgen Moltmann and many others have established, there is a deep and intimate connection between Jesus and the Church. So close is this connection that, as noted in chapter four, Moltmann states that “Every statement about the church will be a statement about Christ. Every statement about Christ also implies a statement about the church.”<sup>7</sup> In the literature reviewed the understanding that God’s redemptive mission through Jesus creates the church has been well established. Yet, there is another connection between Christ and the church that deserves attention. The connection between Christ and the Church also grows from the fact that the Church is understood in the scripture to be Christ’s body.

The understanding of the Church as Christ’s body is most deeply developed in 1 Corinthians 12. In this chapter believers are pictured as parts of the body, the Church. The value of each of the parts is affirmed as well as their contributions to the functioning

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<sup>7</sup> Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 6

and mission of the body. The unity of the body is also held up as a key value. Paul defines the nature of the Church as Christ's body clearly saying, "Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor 12:27). Paul closes this chapter on the body of Christ calling all believers to actively exercise their gifts and talents in service of the Church.

Paul also affirms the understanding of the Church as Christ's body in Romans 12. Here he says "So in Christ we who are many form one body" (Rm 12:5). In this passage Paul again stresses the importance of the unity of the body as well as the call for all believers to be active in using their gifts to serve the body. The image of the church as the body of Christ is also used in Ephesians 3:6 and Colossians 1:18, 24.

That the Church is Jesus' body means that the Church should reflect Jesus in its mission and ministry. Christians have long understood Jesus as the model for personal lives of faith and ministry, yet somehow the church has often failed to make that connection and see Christ as its model. Beyond this, even when believers and the Church have indeed understood Jesus as the model, they have frequently been very selective in which parts of Jesus' life they choose to emulate and reflect. The most glaring examples of this are commonly in the areas of outreach and evangelism. Somehow believers and the Church itself have been able to look at Jesus' ministry and often to ignore one of the most central, if not the most central element.

As the body of Christ, the Church should endeavor to reflect Jesus in its make-up, in its mission and ministry and in every facet of its life. For any church to seriously seek to do this will require that it delve deeply into outreach and evangelism as these were

central aspects of Jesus' ministry. While the failure to do just this has been a central feature of the decline of the church in America, it also represents a significant opportunity. If the church can recapture this element of its mission and ministry perhaps renewal and revival may follow. This is my hope for Eastminster.

PART THREE  
MINISTRY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER 6

### GOALS AND PLANS

This chapter will outline a ministry plan to address the inward oriented culture of Eastminster and its lack of commitment to outreach and evangelism. The plan is comprised of a small group experience that will be capped by a retreat. This chapter will also describe the goals, content and strategy of the plan, the role of the author as curriculum developer and ministry facilitator, and identify the project's target population.

#### **Theological Implications for Eastminster**

The project at the heart of the ministry focus paper targets a number of desired outcomes on a congregational level. The first of these outcomes is for the congregation as a whole to more greatly understand and embrace the *missio Dei*. This would mean growing the congregation's understanding of God as a sending God with a redemptive plan for the world. While this notion would not be totally unknown to many, coming to a greater understanding of the *missio Die* would represent a reshaping of their understanding of God to some degree.

While members of Eastminster would affirm that God has a redemptive plan for the world, many would see the idea of God being a sending God as more of a secondary attribute of his nature. Most members would probably ground their primary understanding of God in his loving nature, yet they would do so with somewhat of a disconnection from his sending nature. They would affirm that God loves all people and has a desire to be in a relationship of love with each individual, yet many would not connect God's sending nature to his love. In this way, they would fail to see God's sending nature as the natural and logical way for him to pursue the ends of his loving nature.

This thought process is often reflected in the Church. While the members of Eastminster understand that believers and the church are called to love all people, they often fail to connect loving others with the need to share the gospel with them. Interestingly, they more often make the connection between the call to love and meeting physical needs such as food or shelter with acts of compassion mission and outreach. However, a part of the genuine love for others that the gospel calls for should also compel believers to seek to share with those who do not know it, the message of God's love, grace and salvation.

This same disconnected thought process can also be seen in that, on some level, members of Eastminster recognize the call to proclaim the gospel, yet frequently fail to connect this call to the church's missional call, or to their own call to mission. This grows, to some degree, from an attractional mindset discussed previously, which has often led to the belief that people will somehow come to the church on their own without

benefit of outreach or evangelism. Many members of Eastminster seem to believe that they have fulfilled their missional call to evangelism simply by, as the church, being theoretically available to anyone who was to come to the church seeking spiritual guidance.

The larger change for the congregation in coming to more greatly understand and embrace the *missio Dei* would be in terms of its implications for the church. The congregation's understanding of the church grows squarely from the Christendom model. For the most part, members view the church as an institution, albeit a holy institution, but an institution none the less.

From this view, members have generally understood mission as one of the many activities of the church. Although the congregation supports mission as one of the important ingredients of the church, it has not been understood by many as being any more important than a number of other ingredients. Because mission is understood as one of the many activities of the church, many members have come to view mission primarily as the domain of a small group of mission oriented, or specially gifted people, rather than as a calling for all believers.

The desired outcome in regard to the *missio Dei* would be for the congregation to understand God as a sending God who has sent Eastminster into the world to participate in his redemptive mission. In turn, the hope is that this knowledge would inspire the church to increase its missional efforts, and specifically, to renew its commitment to local outreach and evangelism. Finally, it is also desired that with the knowledge that the Church is "sent," each member of the congregation would come to understand

themselves as “sent” and therefore an integral part of God’s missional intent for the church.

One of the weaknesses of the North American church is the area of discipleship. In fact, the situation is so problematic that Dallas Willard has coined the term “nondiscipleship,” calling it the norm in many congregations and the “elephant” in the church. Willard states, “It is now understood to be a part of the ‘good news’ that one does not have to be a life student of Jesus in order to be a Christian and receive forgiveness of sins.”<sup>1</sup>

Willard aptly describes a significant cross section of the church. Yet, there is another problem with discipleship that also needs to be addressed. It is the pursuit of a kind of discipleship that is always focused inwardly on the spiritual growth of the disciple, and never turns outward toward the world. These Christians remain like baby birds, with their mouths open, endlessly squawking something to effect of “feed me, feed me, feed me.”

It is not enough to simply be committed to discipleship; the church also needs to be committed to discipleship that leads to apostleship. When Jesus called the first disciples, he called them saying “come follow me,” meaning “come and be my disciples.” However, Jesus also said that as they followed him, he would make them “fishers of men” (Mt 4:19). Jesus would train them in a kind of discipleship that would lead to apostleship.

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<sup>1</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 11.

True spiritual maturity does not lead to an inward focused spiritual life, it leads to replication, it leads to mentoring, it leads to an outward oriented life, it leads to apostleship. One has only to examine the spiritual giants of the New Testament in a cursory fashion to see this. Virtually all of the key figures in the New Testament were involved in apostleship, because this was the place to which true spiritual maturity had led them. The church needs to seek this same kind of discipleship.

Eastminster has a mix of those who have basically ignored discipleship and of those who have sought a kind of discipleship that has led to an inward focused spiritual life rather than to apostleship. Another desired outcome is for Eastminster would be to develop an understanding of the need for the church to develop into an apostolic community. This would mean cultivating a rich community life that develops spiritually mature believers who understand the apostolic call to go out and play a part in God's redemptive plan for the world.

A third desired outcome on a congregational level would be for this project to provide the congregation with a theological rationale for shifting the culture of the church from inward to outward. Congregational change is not easy, and, as stated in the introduction, it is the belief of the author that deep change of this nature requires the congregation to begin to understand God and God's call on their lives in a new way. This project is designed to bring about that kind of understanding as well as to serve as a catalyst for change.

It is for this reason that this project not only touches on key theological concepts, but is also deeply rooted in scripture. The last chapter illustrated the extensive study and

exegesis of Scripture that serves as a key foundation for the project. This foundation stands behind the ideas presented in the paper and in the small group curriculum which lies at the heart of the project.

Other key elements that are at work here are the educational and relational aspects of this project. To simply provide a theological and scriptural rationale for change is not sufficient. The opportunity to educate toward a rationale with a multi-week curriculum is essential to gaining understanding of and support for it. Further, the relational aspect of the small group setting is also helpful, allowing participants to work through the material and process it together. Often significant learning and growth takes place when members of a small group wrestle with Scripture and theological concepts together.

To provide a rationale for changing the church's culture and then to educate toward its being understood and internalized as a foundation for change is time consuming and difficult. Because of this, it would be all too easy to simply seek culture change in the church by rushing head strong into missional and evangelistic events and programs hoping that these things would result in culture change. This approach has been taken by many in the Church as well as in the business world, and it normally does not work because the complacency of organization is generally too strong.<sup>2</sup>

Programs and events rarely lead to lasting change unless they are preceded, by or accompanied with, deeper thought which creates a compelling sense of urgency. It is the sense of urgency that serves as a catalyst for individuals to begin to think and act

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<sup>2</sup> Kotter, *Leading Change*, 35-42.

differently.<sup>3</sup> Organizations only change when the individuals who comprise them begin to change.<sup>4</sup> The desired outcome is that this project would accomplish this end.

The preferable future that these outcomes would lead to is for Eastminster to become an outwardly oriented and more missional focused church with a renewed commitment to outreach and evangelism. This would entail members understanding the Church as sent by God and called to participate in God's redemptive mission for the world. It would lead members to regularly seek to discern God's call for how Eastminster should live out its mission. It would cause members to ask questions like "Since God has sent us to this place and to these people, what are we to do?" "How are we to reach these people in this place?" "How may we be called to reach outside the church to these people and this place?"

In this preferable future, understanding the sent nature of the Church would shape the make-up and ministries of Eastminster. It would bring radical changes to the way events and programs are conceived of and to the ways that plans and budget are made. It would lead to focusing more of the church's energy and resources outwardly on growing the kingdom of God.

The preferable future that these outcomes would lead to would also mean the cultivation of a deep and rich inner life to the church. This quality inner life would cultivate disciples who have kingdom focus rather than a self-focus. Rather than always seeking only spiritual nurture for themselves they would seek to grow others as well, they

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 42-46.

<sup>4</sup> Robert E Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publisher), 3.

would understand themselves as models and mentors and have apostolic hearts in this way.

Another element of the preferable future would be for Eastminster to renew its commitment to outreach and evangelism. This would mean actively seeking to reach out to the local community in an incarnational and relational manner cultivating authentic relationship with people. These relationships would then become opportunities to organically and appropriately share the faith. This sharing would not be an information dump or a sales-like pitch, but a genuine sharing. There would be a true back and forth movement of listening, learning and caring about the other; the kinds of things that happen in actual authentic relationships.

This project is aimed at beginning a movement within the congregation toward this preferable future. Clearly, other steps will need to be taken, and many in fact are already under way to reach this goal. However, this project will lay the groundwork upon which many other things will build.

### **Strategy Goals for Small Groups**

The small group curriculum for this project will trace the life of Jesus from the beginning of his ministry to the cross. The focus of this study however, will not be on the details of Jesus' life, but rather on trying to see the intent of his message and ministry. The study will constantly prompt small group participants to ask, "Why did Jesus do what he did, and what implications does the example he set have for each of us and for the Church?"

Among the key goals for the small groups is for participants to understand the evangelistic focus and outward trajectory of Jesus' ministry and teaching. Coming to a new or renewed understanding of this aspect of Jesus's ministry and teaching will be foundational to the sort of shift in Eastminster's culture this project is designed to help bring about. As Jesus is the model for the believer's life and faith, seeing Jesus in this new or renewed way should provide impetus for personal change and congregational change.

A second goal for small group participants, which would grow from the first, would be a new or renewed commitment to outreach and evangelism. The hope is that by focusing on the intent behind Jesus's message and ministry and more greatly understanding its outward trajectory, small group participants will be inspired to emulate Jesus in this way. A part of this goal would also be that members would have a greater openness to cross cultural outreach and evangelism, seeking to reach out to all people that they encounter, just as Jesus did.

A third goal for small group participants will be to understand that the Church, as Christ's body, should reflect his ministry and teaching. Eastminster, like many churches, has somehow been able to look at Jesus' life of outreach and evangelism and not connect this to the church's ministry in some key ways. However, since the church is Jesus' body it should reflect him, his character, his ministry, and his teaching. Grasping this truth would provide a rationale for changes needed in the makeup and ministry of the church that would be a part of the hoped for change in the church's culture.

Each of the goals for small group participants stated above coalesce into the greater goal for the project, which is to provide a rationale for, and to gain support and momentum toward, a shift in the church's culture. The desire is that this small group experience would serve as a catalyst for this shift.

### **Strategy Content**

The content of the strategy to begin a shift in Eastminster's culture from inward to outward with a renewed focus on outreach and evangelism has two components.<sup>5</sup> The first and larger of the two is the small group experience mentioned above. Participants will engage in a six week small group experience using a curriculum aimed at the ends discussed above.<sup>6</sup>

Session One of the small group curriculum focuses on the concept of God as a sending God and on Jesus as having been sent by God with the Good News of the Gospel. It also introduces the themes of the kingdom of God, repentance and discipleship as key aspects of Jesus's preaching and teaching. Participants are asked to consider what it means that Jesus was sent for the world and for them personally.

Session Two explores the fact that as Jesus was sent, we too are sent by him with the Good News of the Gospel. Participants are also asked to consider the sent nature of the church and the implications this may have on its makeup and ministries. The challenges of being sent are also touched upon.

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<sup>5</sup> A third component was added to this plan which falls outside of the scope of this paper. A three week sermon series was preached leading up to the retreat. This series focused on outreach and evangelism and touched on some of the themes around building an outward and missional ecclesiology.

<sup>6</sup> The complete small group curriculum for this project is presented in the appendix A.

The third session is aimed at illuminating the outward trajectory and missional focus of Jesus's ministry. This is illustrated by the fact the Jesus spent most of his ministry on the road proactively reaching out to those to whom he was sent. Jesus is presented as an itinerant evangelist and participants are asked what implication this may have for the church and individual believers.

Session Four touches on the significant cross cultural aspects of Jesus's ministry. The clear intentionality of Jesus's engaging in cross cultural outreach and evangelism is highlighted. The session also points to Eastmsinter's lack of ethnic diversity in contrast to the community in which it is located.

The fifth session covers the evangelistic focus of Jesus's teaching drawing heavily on the three "lost" parables in Luke 15. It calls participants to recognize God's heart for lost people. It also calls for believers and the church to rejoice more in the lost being found than in those who have already been found.

The sixth and final session examines the cross as Jesus's greatest outward and missionally focused act. Jesus's death and the cross are seen as acts *for* believers, *for* the church and *for* the world. The session closes with the irony of the fact that what looked like defeat in the eyes of the world was actually victory, challenging our ideas about how God works in the world.

Each session of the curriculum also contains an application section where participants are encouraged to put what they have learned that week into practice in some cursory ways. A key application that participants are encouraged to take part in was to think of someone they might invite to church, and to pray for that person during the

season of Lent. Then at the end of Lent and the small group study, they were encouraged to consider inviting that person to attend church with them on Easter Sunday or a Sunday soon after.

Another key application of the study is that each week the group is instructed to read together in unison a short summary of the gospel message. This exercise is designed to familiarize participants with a concise version of the gospel. It is hoped that greater familiarity with a short version of the gospel message would make it easier for participants to be able to share that message with others.

Although, as stated, application was a part of the small group curriculum, the major thrust was education. The key aim was to bring participants to a new or greater understanding of Jesus's ministry as a platform upon which to encourage the desired changes in the church's culture inward to outward. It was further desired that this new or greater understanding of Jesus's ministry would in itself be a significant catalyst toward that change.

The second major component of the project was a retreat at which the major themes of the small group experience were reemphasized. A guest speaker was used at the retreat to provide a fresh voice to speak to these same issues. A speaker with credentials in the area of mission was enlisted in order to lend further credibility to content of the project by essentially providing another "expert" opinion in regard it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Part of the goal in using an outside speaker was to counter the contention among a small group in the congregation that the missional focus of the author was more of a personal preference or agenda for the church rather than an intent grounded in research and supported by many church leaders and scholars.

The retreat also served to begin bringing some greater application aspects to the project. Along with reinforcing the themes of the small group study the speaker offered some practical examples of how the church can become more outward and missionally focused. The speaker also offered some introductory training on how to begin to share the faith with others. In particular, stress was placed on how participants can learn to share their own story of faith with others as a starting point for evangelism.

Leading up to the small group experience a training session was held for small group leaders to familiarize them with the curriculum and to define their role as facilitators of group discussion. Both the desired theological outcomes for the congregation and the small group strategy goals mentioned above were covered in the training session. Care was taken to help the small group leaders fully understand the intent of the study as a hoped for rationale and catalyst of personal and congregational change.

Specific attention was given to lifting up the outward trajectory and evangelistic focus of Jesus's ministry and teaching. The concepts of *missio Dei* and the sending nature of God, the desire for the church to become an apostolic community and the need for the church to reflect Jesus were also highlighted. The other main features of the curriculum noted above were covered as well.

Finally, attention was given to the ways in which people come to and grow in faith based on Richard Peace's work, *Conversion in the New Testament*, with a brief conversation of event versus process conversion. Use was also made of Richardson's image of the evangelist as a travel guide rather than as a sales person in *Reimagining*

*Evangelism*. This was seen as a way for group leaders to understand their role and also as an image for how participants might begin to picture their future evangelistic work.

### **Leadership and Target Population**

The author served as the curriculum developer for the project. The curriculum grew from the author's course work in the Doctor of Ministry program over the last six years, from the goals defined in the final project proposal and from the study of relevant Scriptures. Special attention was also given to the particular personality and needs of the congregation.

The author also served as the chief facilitator of the project. This involved gathering the necessary leadership and resources to implement the project. Approval was gained from the church board, the cooperation of key staff members was secured and the help of lay leaders was recruited.

Eastminster has a discipleship team lead by two Elders. The discipleship team oversees the church's small group ministry. The team and its two Elders agreed to partner with the author in the implementation of the project. In preparation for the project the Discipleship team agreed to have all existing small groups participate in the project and to create several new groups in order to seek as much participation within the congregation as could be gathered. This required coordination with existing small group leaders as well as significant effort to create the new groups and to recruit and train leaders for them.

This project was designed to take place during the season of Lent. Eastminster has a history of using special Lenten small group curricula during Lent and also of creating small groups during that season. Both of these things made garnering support for and participation in the project easier as it was in keeping with some traditional practices of the congregation.

The target population of the project was both the leadership and laity of the congregation. The goal was to get as many members of the congregation to participate in the project as possible. For the culture of the church to change individuals need to change, so the participation of as many individuals as possible was the direct targeted. The desire was that even those who did not or could not participate in the small group part of the project might be drawn in through the retreat experience.

There was also, however, a secondary target. The hope is that the project will have a “ripple effect,” meaning that even those who did not directly participate in it might in time be affected by its content through contact with those who did. In this way the desire is for the project to serve as a catalyst for change in the whole community of the church, not simply with a few individuals.

## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter presents the implementation and evaluation of the plan designed to help Eastminster begin to shift its internal culture from inward to outward with a renewed focus on evangelism. The chapter opens with a summary of the project. A detailed timeline is then offered along with a description of resources and key persons who were involved. Finally, an evaluation of the project is presented including data from both pre- and post- small group questionnaires, input from interviews, and the assessment of the Session.

#### **Project Summary**

The project began with the author seeking the support of the Church Board (hereafter, “Session”). This entailed educating them about the project and its goals. This primarily took place during the one hour period normally set aside at each Session meeting for devotions. Key themes such as the *missio Dei*, the importance of becoming an apostolic community, the outward and mission trajectory and evangelistic focus of Jesus’ ministry, and the importance of the church as Jesus’s body to reflect Jesus’s

ministry, were covered along with Scriptures relevant to each area. The outcomes and goals of the project were also covered in detail.

It was agreed upon by the Session that the season of Lent provided the right opportunity for the execution of this project. The reason for this was that a number of the things the project called for had been done during the Lenten season in the past. Specifically, the congregation has used Lenten study materials with its small groups in prior years with success. There had also been the practice of creating small groups for the season of Lent in order for people to participate in the Lenten study materials together.

These semi-traditional aspects of Eastminster's Lenten practices meant that the project could be rather seamlessly incorporated into the life of the congregation. Yet, at the same time, there was also a sense of desiring something new for Lent this year, having done similar things over that past few years. For this reason, the idea of a study guide written by the pastor with intent toward the vision of the church infused the Lenten season with a new energy and excitement. Members also seemed genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of learning about and supporting the pastor's Doctor of Ministry project.

The small group curriculum was then developed by the author. This was done drawing extensively on the bibliography and goals presented in the final project proposal as well as previous course work in the Doctor of Ministry program. Other factors that were included were the needs and personality of the congregation and the fact that the curriculum was to serve as a Lenten study guide.

The next step was to gather and train the leadership needed for the project. The discipleship team was recruited to be co-implementers of the project as it fell within the scope of their ministries. The discipleship team gathered the support of existing small group leaders and recruited leaders for several new groups that were created specifically for the project. Small group leaders were then trained and leaders assigned to the new groups that had been formed. There were also some people who, for various reasons, completed the small group study individually.

Extensive publicity was done within the congregation to encourage as much participation from members as possible in the project. Signups were taken for a number of weeks for those seeking to join a small group to participate in the project. Finally, the study guide was assembled and made available on Sundays on the church patio and in the church office during the week for several weeks leading up to the beginning of the project.

The small group portion of the project ran for six weeks during the season of Lent concluding the week before Easter. Both the curriculum and the small group experience were very well received by the congregation. The project, as hoped for, generated a lot of discussion among members regarding Jesus's ministry and its implications for believers and for the church. It also led to a lot of conversation regarding the future and vision of the church.

About three weeks after the small group experience concluded, a retreat was held to reinforce the themes of the project. Significant coordination with the retreat leadership team was carried out to ensure that it met the needs of the project. The retreat was a

weekend experience with four teaching sessions as well as small group and personal devotional time built into the schedule.

Mike Gaston, Mission Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Santa Clarita served as the retreat speaker. Pastor Gaston's theme for the retreat was "The Church Has Left the Building." This theme had a missional thrust that was coordinated with the author in order to assure that the content of the retreat messages cover the same ground as the small group curriculum, but in new and fresh ways. The retreat also carried the project a step further by beginning to touch on application. Specifically, the congregation was asked to begin to think about what an outwardly oriented and missionally focused congregation might look like.

As part of this, Pastor Gaston presented a number of creative program and event ideas that challenged people to think about outreach and evangelism in new and different ways. Some were things that his congregation was successfully doing, others were ideas that he had taken from other churches. Many of the ideas he presented pushed the boundaries of how members at Eastminster had traditionally understood outreach and evangelism, and in turn, how they had understood the church itself.

Pastor Gaston also spent time offering some practical training on how to share the faith in non-threatening ways. In particular, he led the group through exercises designed to help individuals organize their own story of faith in a way that would make it easier for them to share. He also led another exercise that helped people to organize the gospel story in a simple way that would be easy to remember and share. Both of these exercises were well received.

## **Project Timeline**

The earliest steps in preparation for the implementation of the project were undertaken in the fall of 2011. This began in September with the education of the Session on the themes of the project, and with securing their permission and support. Subsequently, other teams and committees were educated on the project as well. Also during this time frame, the small group curriculum was being developed by the author including the pre- and post- project questionnaires.

In December of 2011 publicity for the project began within the congregation, including both the small group experience and the retreat. Publicity efforts ran right up until the beginning of the project in February of 2012. Shortly after the publicity began, the tasks of recruiting participants and the creation of new small groups were undertaken in conjunction with the discipleship team. Like the publicity, these efforts ran right up until the beginning of the project in February 2012. Some individuals were even added to groups shortly after the project began.

In mid-February, with the start of the Season of Lent, the small group experience began. As stated, this included all preexisting small groups as well as a number of small groups put together specifically for the project. The small groups ran through the first week in April, ending just prior to Easter 2012. The last weekend in April 2012 the retreat was held to reinforce the themes of the small group experience.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned above a three week sermon series on outreach and evangelism that was not a part of this final project was preached by the author in the period between the end of the small group experience and the retreat. In this series again key themes from the small group curriculum were touched upon as well as the more practical aspects of outreach and evangelism.

From May through June of 2012 evaluation of the project was done. Information was collected through assessments made by church leaders, interviews of project participants, and the collection, tabulation and comparison of data from the questionnaires. Evaluation of the project was done based on these inputs, bringing the project to its conclusion

### **Leadership**

In preparation for the implementation of the project, steps were taken to gather the necessary leadership. This began with the author seeking the support of the Session. This entailed educating them about the project and its main themes and goals. As the thrust of the project is aimed at changing the culture of the church, gaining the support of the Session was an essential step before moving forward.

Once the Session had approved the project, it was then shared with the church staff and relevant teams and committees in order to gain their support and buy in. Education was also done at this level. Plans for coordination between ministries were also made at this level where needed.

The church's discipleship team was then recruited as a co-facilitator of the project along with the author. This was a necessary and helpful step as the discipleship team oversees the church's small group and education ministries. The discipleship team provided key support and leadership in implementing the project with existing small groups as well as with creation of new small groups for the project.

Finally, the cooperation of the church retreat leadership team was secured. Eastminster holds an all church retreat every other year, so the retreat for April 2012 was already in the long term plans. Once the retreat leadership team was assembled, the author approached the team about making the focus of the retreat a part of this project. The team enthusiastically agreed well before any specific plans for the retreat had been made, therefore enabling them to partner with the author from the beginning of the planning process.

### **Resources**

A key part of the implementation of the project was securing the necessary resources. First, this involved scheduling time with key groups for education. For the most part, this took place at the regular meetings of these groups. Second, space on campus needed to be reserved for training events and small groups that would be meeting on the church campus.

Another type of necessary resources was in the area of administration and publication. The printing and assembling of the small group curriculum needed to be scheduled with the office staff. Further, a publication plan was formed with the church publications coordinator. This plan included publicity of the project through articles in the church newsletters, and information placed in the Sunday bulletins, church mass emails, and on the church Facebook site.

### **Additional Personnel**

In addition to the leadership noted above, the help of a few other individuals and groups was enlisted. Eastminster has a retired pastor, called a Parish Associate, who serves on staff part-time assisting with pastoral care, seniors, and Deacons. The Parish Associate was recruited to promote the project with the seniors and others in his sphere of influence.

The help of Eastminster's publicity coordinator was enlisted to create a publicity plan. Her help was invaluable in setting a publicity timeline. She was also a tremendous help in illuminating the many ways that the project could be publicized including the use of social media, which is a fairly new thing for our church.

Eastminster has an active prayer ministry and the prayer team was also recruited as a partner in the project. They were asked to pray for the project during each of its stages. They readily agreed and were diligent in doing so.

### **Evaluation**

One hundred and fifty small group study guides were distributed to the congregation and an estimated one hundred and twenty people participated in the small groups. This represents about sixty percent of Eastminster's Sunday morning worship attendance. Of those who participated in the groups, fifty-nine people filled out and returned the pre-study questionnaire and fifty-five filled out and returned the post-study questionnaire, representing nearly fifty percent of those who participated.

The post-study questionnaires indicated that all but one of those who returned it had attended at least three sessions of their small group. However, forty-five of the fifty-nine indicated that they had attended at least five sessions. The high attendance of group sessions by the vast majority of those who gave feedback offers assurance that their responses take most of the small group curriculum material into account.

Comparison of the data from the two questionnaires' indicated a strongly positive result from the small group study experience. To begin, the data showed that those who felt that ministries of the church focused on "outreach" and "sharing the gospel" should be a high priority rose from forty-two to sixty-seven percent. This represents a dramatic shift of opinion with significant implications for the church's ministries.

The number of participants who said they felt that they could play an important part in God's plan for the world also rose dramatically from only 23 percent to 65 percent. Further, those who indicated that they did not think they could play an important part in God's plan for the world dropped from 17 percent to one single respondent. Finally, 100 percent of participants reported that the small group experience had increased their level of interest in participating in ministries that focus on outreach and evangelism "somewhat" or "very much."

In the pre-study questionnaire 35 percent of the people indicated that they were "not at all" comfortable with talking about their faith with others. In the post-study questionnaire, however, all but one person reported that the small group experience had made them "somewhat," or "very much" more confident about talking to others about

their faith. Similar results were also seen in the numbers concerning people's comfort level with talking to others about their church, or inviting people to church.

In the pre-study questionnaire 23 percent of the respondents indicated that they were "not at all" comfortable with talking about their church with other people. In the post-study questionnaire, again, all but one respondent reported that the small group experience had made them "somewhat," or "very much" more confident about talking to others about their church. In the pre-study questionnaire 37 percent of the respondents indicated that they were "not at all" comfortable with inviting people to church. Whereas in the post-study questionnaire, while two respondents left the question blank, all but two others reported that the small group experience had made them "somewhat," or "very much" more comfortable with the idea of inviting people to church.

Following the small group experience the number of those who indicated that they knew the gospel message "very well" doubled from 27 percent to 54 percent. Along with this, the number who indicated that they could articulate the gospel "very well" to others rose from only 12 percent to 56 percent. Conversely, the number who had previously indicated that they could not articulate the gospel to others very well dropped from 50 percent to a single person.

As a part of the small group experience, participants were challenged to pray for an individual and then to invite that person to church on Easter. While only three people indicated that they actually did so, all but one respondent reported that they were "somewhat" or "very" likely to invite someone to church in the next few months. This represents a dramatic shift in thinking.

In addition to the questionnaires, following the project, interviews were conducted with small group participants as part of the evaluation process. A formal interview was conducted with a group of about twenty participants and several less formal interviews with other individuals. The feedback concerning the small group study was very positive, mirroring the data discussed above. Some specific comments that were made in the interviews that indicated growth toward the goals and objects laid out in chapter six were as follows:

Several participants commented on how, prior to the small group study, they had tended to think of Jesus as a teacher. Whereas following the study, they had come to see Jesus much more as an evangelist or missionary. This grew, they said, from recognizing the outward trajectory and evangelistic focus of his ministry for the first time.

Other participants noted that although they had previously recognized the sending nature of God and of Jesus (*missio Dei*) to some degree, they had not really understood its implications for the church prior to the small group experience. One man in particular stated that the fact that the church is Jesus's body and should therefore reflect his ministry was so simple and logical that he was surprised it had never occurred to him before. Others made similar comments.

A number of participants reported that the exercise in the small groups of reading together a short summary of the gospel message each week was very helpful to them. This exercise, they stated, had allowed them to commit a simple version of the gospel message to memory, which they now felt they could communicate to others. This practical application seemed to be empowering to a number of people.

Participants also expressed the realization that the church needed to be more outwardly focused and missional, particularly in terms of local evangelism. In this, they expressed the desire to grow a kind of community within the church that empowers and equips people to go out and engage in ministries of outreach and evangelism. They did not use the term, but this could be understood as a desire to become an apostolic community.

Several participants expressed concern about Eastminster's lack of cross cultural ministry in light of the small group study. Having seen Jesus's commitment to reach out to people across cultural lines, they had a desire for the church to be more involved in doing so. Participants noted the large and growing Hispanic population in Ventura and the close proximity of many pockets of this community to the church. They viewed the opportunity to reach out to this group of people as an exciting proposition, but were also very aware of the difficulties inherent in doing so, such as language and cultural differences.

Some interviewees expressed their feeling that a richness would be added to the church's community life by become a more multicultural congregation. There was also an awareness of the challenges that this would present. Others expressed their belief that the church needed to be faithful in seeking to reach out across cultural lines even if it was not ultimately successful in the endeavor.

Some critiques of the small group experience offered by interviewees were that the material was more than some groups were able to get through on a weekly basis. Others felt that the author should have provided answers to the small group questions in

order to better facilitate conversation. One person questioned whether believers really needed to reflect Jesus's evangelistic activities to the degree that the curriculum indicated. It was this person feeling that perhaps it was indeed the clergy and church leaders who should undertake such ministries.

The Session also assessed the project. They too felt that it was a success. They were pleased with how fully the church embraced the project and with the fact that, in their opinion, it achieved its goals and objectives. Most Session members personally participated in the project and so were able to give first hand insights to the assessment process.

Many of the Session's comments reflect those reported above. In addition to those however, Session members valued the application elements of the curriculum. They were also very pleased with how seamlessly it was integrated into the Lenten theme. The mission Elders appreciated that while the study called for greater emphasis on evangelism it did not undercut, but in fact undergirded, the missional endeavors that the congregation was already involved in.

The Session critiques of the study reflected those mentioned above. In particular, some echoed the opinion that the material was too much for some groups to cover fully in a week. In a private conversation, one Session member expressed concern that the study was too academic and challenging for some congregation members. A different Session member reported, in another private conversation, that some people in the congregation were worried that the study implied that in the future all members were going to be expected to engage in personal evangelism.

Nearly two hundred people attended the retreat in April 2012. This represents about 85 percent of the church's Sunday Worship attendance.<sup>2</sup> The evaluation of the retreat was very positive. There was a strong feeling among the leadership and participants that the retreat did a great job of reinforcing the themes of the small group study as well as venturing further into the area of practical application in a helpful way. There was also recognition that the retreat drew in some people who had not participated in the small group study and therefore grew the impact of the project in that way.

In interviews after the retreat, some of the following observations and comments were made by participants. Several people reported that they did not fully comprehend some of the themes of the small group study until they had the opportunity to revisit them on the retreat.<sup>3</sup> Others found hearing an outside speaker confirm many of the themes of the study helpful. A number of people particularly appreciated the obvious move toward greater practical application that was a part of the retreat. Some who were especially compelled by the small group study were excited that more people were being exposed to the materials through the retreat, seeing this as a positive step toward future change in the church.

Some critiques of the retreat were also offered by interviewees. A few participants felt that the retreat was a little redundant because it focused on many of the same themes as the small group experience. Others expressed disappointment that the

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<sup>2</sup> A worship service was also held at the church that Sunday which was attended by about eighty people.

<sup>3</sup> Some noted that the sermon series preached by the author between the conclusion of the small group and the retreat offered similar help.

retreat did not focus on themes that were, in their opinion, more directed to their personal spiritual growth and renewal. This seemed to be an expectation based on previous retreat experiences. At least one person who had not participated in the small group study reported that they were disappointed with the retreat because they did not have interest in mission or evangelism.

The Session's evaluation of the retreat was also positive. They felt that it met the goals of reinforcing the themes of the small group study and venturing into more practical application. They were pleased with the number of people who attended the retreat in light of the difficult economic conditions at this time. This had been a significant concern leading up to the retreat. The Session was also impressed with the fact that a number of newer families to the church attended the retreat. Their main concern regarding the retreat was financial, as the church had significantly underwritten the cost in order to encourage participation.

Overall the evaluation of the project was very positive and the results indicated by the questionnaires were better than expected. Both the small groups and the retreat were well received and the critiques offered did not indicate any major flaws in the design of either. The effort put into the evaluation process itself was appreciated by a number of people ending the project on a positive note.

## CONCLUSION

This project was a success. The data collected was more positive than I had expected. The evaluations of participants and church leaders were all very positive. Some helpful critiques were made, but the weaknesses they pointed out did not undermine the overall effectiveness of the project. The project did what it was designed to do. It provided the rationale for a shift in Eastminster's culture from inward to outward with a renewed focus on outreach and evangelism as well as serving as a catalyst for that change.

As stated in the introduction, this project is a part of a larger plan for change at Eastminster, yet, in a very real way represents the heart of that plan. For this reason the success of this project should also be measured in the light of other changes in the church that this project has helped bring about. In conclusion, I will touch on three changes that have been made at Eastminster that have grown, in part, from this project.

The first of these three changes is that on October 14, 2012 Eastminster officially changed its name to Orchard Community Church. This change came after a year of discussion and several congregational meetings. The reason that the church made this change was primarily because of a growing desire to better reach out to the unchurched people in the local community.

As the desire to reach out to the local community has grown within the church there was the realization that our name was somewhat of a hindrance. It was a name that simply did not resonate with the people to whom they were seeking to reach. Although

many people were attached to the name, they made this significant sacrifice in order to be more outward focused.

A second change that came about recently at Orchard Church is that a new mission statement was drafted. This statement is, “Orchard Community Church is a community, passionate about knowing Jesus, enthusiastic about sharing His love and committed to spreading His Good News.” This new mission statement reflects the movement toward an outward orientation illustrated in the outward and missional focus of the last two lines. The last line also shows a new and growing emphasis on evangelism.

Along with this new mission statement has come a commitment to actually put it into practice. The church has had other mission statements in the past, but for the most part they were simply generic statements about what any church ought to be, and no real effort was put into pursuing them. The church is now committed to living out this mission statement and has begun to fashion goals aimed at this end.

A third change is that Orchard Church recently formed a local outreach committee. As mentioned, the church has had a committee focused on world mission and another on local compassion and social justice mission, but no committee responsible for local outreach and evangelism. This new committee has only just begun to meet and make plans, but its very formation is another key indication of the shift in the church’s culture to a more outwardly focused orientation.

Eastminster, now Orchard, has come a long way and this project has been a significant help, but there is still a great deal to be done. The church is moving toward

being more outwardly oriented and focused on outreach and evangelism. Now the challenge will be to actually go out and begin to do those things. There is sure to be much fear and trepidation along the way, but stepping out in faith is not about doing the easy thing, it is about heeding God's call, and that is what we aim to do.

APPENDIX A

***Following His Footsteps***  
***EPC Lenten Study Guide 2012***

*“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” I Peter 2:21*

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## **Introduction**

The season of Lent is a time of preparation for Easter. Lent is a time to reflect on our lives, a time of study and prayer and renewal, a time to refocus on Jesus, especially on his life and death, all in preparation for the celebration of Easter. As we do all of these things we can also think of Lent as a kind of spiritual journey.

This study has been prepared to guide you along your Lenten journey toward Easter this year. I Peter 2:21 reminds us that Jesus set an “example” for us and calls us to “follow in His steps.” As we journey toward Easter we are going to seek to do just that, follow in the footsteps of Jesus. This study will follow the life and ministry of Jesus to the cross. The focus of this study however, will not be on the details of Jesus life, but on trying to see the intent of His message and ministry. We will be asking, “Why did Jesus do what He did and what implications does the example that He set have for each of us and for the church, which is His body, as we seek to follow in his footsteps?”

**Pre Study Questionnaire**  
**Lenten Small Group Study: Walking in His Footsteps**

1) I can play an important part in God's plan to reach the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

\_\_\_\_\_ disagree                      \_\_\_\_\_ agree                      \_\_\_\_\_ strongly agree

2) How high a priority should ministries that focus on reaching out to people and sharing the Gospel be for the church?

\_\_\_\_\_ low                      \_\_\_\_\_ middle                      \_\_\_\_\_ high

3) What is your interest level in participating in ministries that focus on reaching out to people and sharing the gospel?

\_\_\_\_\_ low                      \_\_\_\_\_ middle                      \_\_\_\_\_ high

4) How comfortable are you:

a. talking about your faith with people?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all                      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat                      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

b. talking about your church with those who do not go to church?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all                      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat                      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

c. inviting people to church?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

5) How well do you feel that you know the Gospel message?

\_\_\_\_\_ Not very well      \_\_\_\_\_ adequately      \_\_\_\_\_ very well

6) How well could you articulate the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to someone?

\_\_\_\_\_ Not very well      \_\_\_\_\_ adequately      \_\_\_\_\_ very well

7) How many friends have you brought to church in the last few years? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating in this study and for filling out this questionnaire. Please return it to MaryAnn in the Eastminster Church office.

## Session 1: Jesus Was Sent

*“When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me.  
When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.”  
—Jesus (John 12:44-45)*

*Theme: Jesus was sent to us with the Good News*

**1) Opener:** Introduce yourself to the group and answer one of the following questions....

- What is the most interesting, strangest, best or worst place you’ve ever been sent?
- Beside the gospel message, what’s the best news that you’ve received?
- What is something or someone that you follow (i.e. a sports team, or a person on twitter, etc.) and why?

*(Also take a just few minutes to fill out the pre study questionnaire. Please return all questionnaires to MaryAnn in the Eastminster Church office.)*

**2) Prayer:** Have someone offer a prayer asking God to inspire your study of the scripture and bless your fellowship and sharing.

**3) Scripture:**

***Mark 1:1-13***

Introduction: We will begin walking in Jesus’ footsteps today where the gospel of Mark begins, at the start of Jesus’ ministry. A key theme of Jesus’ teaching was that he came not of his own volition, but that he was sent by God (see Matthew 10:40, Mark 9:37,

Luke 4:43, John 5:24). Mark's writing style is brief and often compressed, so he tends to pack a great deal of meaning into a small number of words. The first passage we will read covers some key things that God did to prepare for and validate the ministry of Jesus, the one He had sent. Notice how many important things Mark touches on in just two paragraphs.

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup>It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way"—

<sup>3</sup>"a voice of one calling in the desert,

'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.'"

<sup>4</sup>And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup>John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup>I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." <sup>12</sup>At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, <sup>13</sup>and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

### ***Questions for Interpretation:***

In v.1 Mark begins by announcing who it is that God has sent. Who does Mark say that Jesus is and how does he describe the story about Jesus that he is about to tell?

The word translated as "Gospel" (euangélion) also means "Good News." What is the "Good News" or the "Gospel" message? (See the last page of the study)

What things do we see in this passage that God did to prepare the way for Jesus' arrival? After sending Jesus, God offered an endorsement of him. Where do we see this and what does it consist of?

Mark also tells us about a time of testing that Jesus endured in v. 12. How does Jesus' dealing successfully with this time of testing and temptation serve to validate and further endorse him as he is about to begin his ministry?

### ***Mark 1:14-20***

Introduction: This next passage covers the initiation of Jesus' public ministry, describing his message and telling the story of the calling of his first disciples. Again, keep in mind Mark's brief and compressed writing style noting the many things Mark mentions in just a few verses.

<sup>14</sup>After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup>"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" <sup>16</sup>As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>18</sup>At once they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup>When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup>Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

### ***Questions for Interpretation:***

As John's ministry ends, how does Jesus' ministry begin in v. 14? Most scholars feel that v. 15 is a summary of Jesus' preaching offered by Mark. What are the three parts of this summary?

Keeping in mind all the things that God had done over thousands of years leading up to His sending Jesus, what do you think that Jesus meant when he said, "The time has come"?

The “kingdom of God” is a phrase Jesus used to describe the coming reign of God. In saying that “The Kingdom of God is near,” Jesus was indicating that God’s Kingdom was breaking into our world in a new way. How was that happening?

Does the word repent simply mean to feel sorry for what we’ve done wrong, or is there something more to it? In Greek the word “repent” (metanoeo) literally means “to change your mind, purpose or direction.” The word repent calls us to turn or change the direction of our lives, what is Jesus calling us to turn away from and what is he calling to turn to?

As Jesus walks along the Sea of Galilee he begins to gather his disciples using the phrase, “Come follow me.” What kind of relationship does that phrase imply? What was it about Jesus that made you choose to follow him? What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “I will make you fishers of men”?

#### **4) Application:**

What does it tell us about God that He sent Jesus? For the world? For you personally? (See John 3:16)

One of the key themes of Lent is repentance. This is illustrated by the fact that Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on which ashes are imposed on the foreheads of believers as a sign of repentance. Jesus also mentions repentance as a key part of the Good News. Remembering that to repent means to “turn,” what are some things that you need to turn away from to grow your spiritual life during this Lenten journey? What are some things you might need to turn toward?

The phrase “come follow me” was a common phrase that Rabbis used when calling people to become their disciples. It was a call to relationship and to a new way of life, a life of following the Rabbi and learning from him. How could you take step forward toward following Jesus more closely as his disciple during this Lenten season? During Lent people frequently adopt a special spiritual practice or give up something as a

discipline in order to seek spiritual renewal and focus more clearly on God. Perhaps this might be a way for you to take that step forward in follow Jesus during Lent.

Turn to the last page of this study guide and read the Good News aloud together.

**5) Sharing and Prayer:** Close your time together by sharing what's going on in your lives and praying for one another.

## Session 2: We Are Sent

*“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”  
-Jesus (John 17:18)*

*Theme: Jesus sends us to others with the Good News*

**1) Opener:** Begin by having each person answer one of the following questions....

- What is the best vacation or trip that you've ever taken?
- What is one place that you'd like to take a trip to see? Why?
- Have you ever been on a Mission trip? Where did you go and what did you do?

**2) Prayer:**

**3) Scripture:**

***Luke 9:1-6***

Introduction: In last week's study we examined the idea that Jesus was sent to us by God with the Good News. As he called his disciples he told them that he would make them "fishers of men" foreshadowing the fact that just as Jesus was sent, he would in turn send those who followed him. This week as we follow in Jesus' footsteps we will explore the fact that we are too are sent. We will begin with a passage in which Jesus sends out the disciples to preach and minister without him for the very first time.

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, <sup>2</sup>and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of

God and to heal the sick. <sup>3</sup>He told them: "Take nothing for the journey--no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. <sup>4</sup>Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. <sup>5</sup>If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them." <sup>6</sup>So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

***Questions for Interpretation:***

What pivotal decision does Jesus make here about his ministry? What risks does He take by doing this?

What does Jesus' willingness to send the disciples out to preach and minister without him tell us about his confidence in them?

Why do you think that he told them not to take anything with them for the journey (v. 3)?

How do you think the disciples felt going off to do ministry without Jesus for the first time?

Jesus says that if people do not welcome them they are to shake the dust of their feet and leave that town. Why doesn't Jesus want them to stay where they are not welcome? What might happen if they were to ignore that advice?

***Luke 10:1-11***

Introduction: Because we read and hear so many stories about Jesus with the twelve disciples it's easy to develop an image in our minds of Jesus walking around with just this small group of men. The truth is however, that much of the time there were many other disciples following Jesus as well (see Matthew 4:25, Mark 2:15, Acts 2:21).

<sup>1</sup>After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. <sup>2</sup>He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. <sup>3</sup>Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. <sup>4</sup>Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. <sup>5</sup>"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' <sup>6</sup>If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup>Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. <sup>8</sup>"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. <sup>9</sup>Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' <sup>10</sup>But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup>'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.'

### ***Questions for Interpretation:***

By choosing to send the disciples and many others out to do ministry this second time, what does Jesus confirm about this strategy to reach people? What does the fact that most of those sent out this time were not Apostles indicate?

What do you think Jesus meant when he said in v. 2 "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few?" Why are there so few workers? What is sad about this?

What do you think Jesus meant when he said in v. 3 "I am sending you out like lambs among the wolves?"

#### **4) Application:**

Jesus was sent and a part of following in his footsteps is realizing that we too are sent. What does it mean to be sent and how can we live as sent people? Who are we sent to and what are we sent with? (See Matthew 28:19-20)

How is our being “sent” integral to Jesus’ plan to reach people with the Good News? What does the fact that we are sent tell us about God’s confidence in us? Who is someone in your life that you may be sent to? During Lent pray about that relationship and how God may be planning to use you.

Since Jesus was sent and the church is his body, this means that the church is also sent. What implications does this have for the church? Why has God sent EPC here? What is God calling EPC to do and to be? How do we live as a sent church?

Turn to the last page of this study guide and read the Good News aloud together.

**5) Sharing and Prayer:** Close your time together by sharing what’s going on in your lives and praying for one another.

## Session 3: On the Road

*“Foxes have their holes and the birds of the air have nests,  
but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” -Jesus (Matthew 8:20)*

*Theme: The outward trajectory of Jesus’ ministry*

**1) Opener:** Begin by having each person answer one of the following questions....

- What’s the longest car trip you’ve ever taken? Where did you go and why?
- When was a time that God used you to help another person?
- Who is someone that you’d call a Good Samaritan? Why?

**2) Prayer:**

**3) The Word of God**

*Matthew 4:23-25*

Introduction: This Scripture is what’s known as a summation passage. It offers a synopsis of the activity of Jesus during a certain period of his ministry. This passage in many ways typifies much of Jesus ministry. As you read it think about the way that Jesus went about his ministry, but also try to consider how he might have gone about things in a different way.

<sup>23</sup>Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. <sup>24</sup>News

about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. <sup>25</sup>Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

***Questions for Interpretation:***

V. 23 says that “Jesus went throughout Galilee...” This phrase illustrates the fact that Jesus spent most of his three years of public ministry on the road traveling. Why do you think Jesus did this?

Why didn’t Jesus set up a home base somewhere and just wait for the people to come to him? How might this relate to the idea that Jesus was “sent” that we covered in session 1?

As Jesus traveled around the countryside he didn’t just preach and teach. What else does this passage say that he did? What kinds of needs did he meet? Why did Jesus do these kinds of things?

Jesus reached out to people with word and deed. How do these things complement one another? How did the miraculous healings that Jesus did serve to illustrate and punctuate the gospel message?

***Luke 10:25-37***

Introduction: Our second passage for this session also concerns life on the road. The parable of the Good Samaritan takes place on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, but it invites us to examine how we will live for God along on the road of our lives. The call to

“love your neighbor as yourself” was a part of Jewish law (Leviticus 19:18). The problem was that the Jews believed this extended only to other Jews, whom they understood to be their “neighbors.” For different reasons the Jews had developed an inward focused mentality. They became enamored of their position as God’s chosen people and lost sight of God’s call for them to be light to the world for their God and to reach out to and care for others in God’s name. With this parable Jesus illustrates how a life lived for God calls us beyond our natural inward focus on ourselves to embrace an outward concern for others.

<sup>25</sup>On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup>"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

<sup>27</sup>He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

<sup>28</sup>"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

<sup>29</sup>But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

<sup>30</sup>In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

<sup>36</sup>"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

<sup>37</sup>The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

### ***Questions for Interpretation:***

In seeking to be justified (v. 29) we see that this man’s eyes were focused on himself. This is further illustrated by his asking, "And who is my neighbor?" What exactly is he asking Jesus with this question?

Of all the people that we'd hope would stop to help an injured person, it would be a priest and a Levite (a temple worker/assistant priests). Why didn't either of them stop (See Leviticus 21:1-13 and Numbers 19:11-22)? Whatever the specific reasons may have been for the priest and Levite not stopping, what was the bigger picture that this showed they had lost sight of?

The Jews despised the Samaritans because they regarded them as racially impure and viewed their religion as a perversion of Judaism. Why do you think Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of the story?

How does this parable answer the question "And who is my neighbor? How is the call to "Love your neighbor as yourself" integral to the faith that Jesus calls us to? Who is a Samaritan to you?

**Application:**

What is the example that Jesus' life on the road sets for us? Does it mean we need to become traveling preachers and healers too? How might we live with a "life on the road" attitude?

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." How do this verse and the passages above illustrate the outward trajectory of Jesus' ministry? In what ways was Jesus outward focused? How are we called to be outward or outreach focused?

How are we called to be good Samaritans? Discuss some specific ways that we can do this? What are some ways that you/we are already doing this?

Hasn't the church in America mostly taken the opposite approach that Jesus did and set up shop in a particular location with the expectation that people will come to us? How can we break out of that mold? How does this relate back to the idea that each of us individually and the church collectively is sent?

Turn to the last page of this study guide and read the Good News aloud together.

**5) Sharing and Prayer:** Close your time together by sharing what's going on in your lives and praying for one another.

## Session 4: Sent Wide

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.  
-Jesus (Matthew 11:28)*

*Theme: The Cross Cultural Component of Jesus Ministry*

**1) Opener:** Introduce yourself to group and answer one of the following questions....

- Growing up, who were the people you were told to stay away from? Why?
- As a teenager who were outsiders at you school?
- When was a time that you experienced or witnessed racism?

**2) Prayer**

**3) The Word of God**

*Mt 8:5-13 (The Roman Centurion)*

Introduction: Today we will follow in Jesus' footsteps by focusing on the wide variety of people that He interacted with and called to faith. In our first passage we will read about Jesus' encounter a Romans soldier. During Jesus' life Israel was under Roman occupation. The Jews despised their Roman oppressors and longed for a day when they

might one day be a free nation once again. Further, as Gentiles (non-Jews) the Jews regarded the Romans as unclean and sinners by definition.

<sup>5</sup>When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. <sup>6</sup>"Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." <sup>8</sup>The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup>For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." <sup>10</sup>When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. <sup>11</sup>I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>12</sup>But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." <sup>13</sup>Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

***Questions for Interpretation:***

How would the Jews have felt about Jesus associating with the Roman centurion? What made Jesus' offer to go to his house surprising? What does this say about Jesus?

What point was Jesus trying to make about who we might think is on the inside and who we might think is on the outside with God with his harsh sounding words in vv. 11-12?

When Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith," what do you think the Jews thought about that? What does this statement say about people and about faith?

***Read John 4:1-15 (The Samaritan Woman)***

Introduction: The Jews loathed the Samaritans. They regarded them as racially impure and viewed their religion as a perversion of Judaism. During its history Israel had been conquered a number of times and when this happened the conquering nations deported many Jews and then settled their own people in Israel. This was a tactic used to assimilate new territory. When this happened in Samaria the Jews left there intermarried with the foreign settlers and adopted some aspects of their religion, both of which were strictly forbidden by the law. The Jews in Galilee to the north and Judea to the south refused to intermarry or incorporate foreign religion when they were under occupation and despised the Samaritans for doing so. Because of this Jews avoided Samaritans whenever possible. Many Jews wouldn't travel through Samaria when going north or south, even though it was shortest route. Instead, they'd go around Samaria which made the trip much longer.

<sup>1</sup>The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, <sup>2</sup>although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. <sup>3</sup>When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

<sup>4</sup>Now he had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup>So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

<sup>7</sup>When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup>The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. )

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

<sup>11</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" <sup>12</sup>Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

<sup>13</sup>Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

<sup>15</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

***Questions for Interpretation:***

V. 4 say that Jesus "had to go through Samaria." What do you think Luke meant by this since we know that many Jews avoided Samaria all together? Was he in a hurry? Did he go there on purpose to make a point?

Jewish men generally didn't interact with women other than their wives, especially Rabbis. Social contact with women could bring shame on a man and open him to charges of impropriety. Further, it was widely understood that a woman drawing water at this time of day did so to avoid contact with other women due to her bad reputation. Why would Jesus risk his own reputation by talking to a Samaritan woman with a bad reputation? What does this tell us about Jesus?

How did the woman respond to Jesus at first in v. 9? What is Jesus response to her? What does Jesus mean when he offers her "living water"?

If we were to read the rest of this story (John 4:16-42) we would find that this woman not only came to faith in Jesus, but that many people in her town also came to believe because of her testimony. What message did that send to the Jews?

### ***Mark 7:24-30 (The Syrophenician Woman)***

Introduction: In this passage we see Jesus travel to Tyre which lies outside of Israel to the North. While there he encounters a tenacious Gentile woman. Remember that the Jew considered Gentiles to be unclean and sinners by definition. Jesus engages in a kind of verbal sparring that was common in Jewish culture at the time. Jesus offered a kind of verbal challenge to her and she responded with a wonderful answer.

<sup>24</sup>Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. <sup>25</sup>In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. <sup>26</sup>The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup>"First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." <sup>28</sup>"Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

<sup>29</sup>Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

<sup>30</sup>She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

***Questions for Interpretation:***

With v. 27 Jesus says that the time had not come for him to begin a ministry among the Gentiles. Why do you think that Jesus waited to start this ministry?

Also in v. 27 Jesus uses an image of children eating at the table and the dogs licking up the crumbs below. Although the word Jesus used for dog meant something like "little house puppy" he still did liken her to a dog which had a definite edge to it. Jesus did this to challenge her. Why? What was Jesus looking for?

Jesus was pleased with the woman's answer to his challenge. For one thing it was clever response, but more than being clever what did the woman's answer show Jesus? (See Matthew 15:28)

**4) Application**

Not only did Jesus reach out to people of different races and cultures during his travels around Israel, but Jesus also made several trips outside of Israel to preach and minister (see Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 7:31-8:13) Why do you think Jesus did this? What example does this set for us? What example does it set for the Church?

Sunday morning has been called the most segregated hours of the week in America. Why do you think that is? How do you think that God feels about that?

What are the minority groups that are a part of our community that are not well represented in our congregation? Why do you think that is? How might we be more welcoming? How might we better reach out to these people? What specific opportunities to do this can you think of? Why would Jesus want us to do this?

Turn to the last page of this study guide and read the Good News.

**5) Sharing and Prayer:** Close your time together by sharing what's going on in your lives and praying for one another.

## Session 5: Sent Teaching

*"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."  
-Jesus (Luke 5:32)*

*Theme: The outreach and evangelistic focus of Jesus' teaching*

### 1) Opener:

- What's the most important or valuable thing you ever lost? Did you find it?
- When was a time that you got lost? How did you get found?
- When was a time when you experienced being forgiven?

### 2) Prayer:

### 3) Scripture:

*Luke 15:1-10 (Parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin)*

Introduction: As we seek to walk in Jesus' footsteps today we will examine one of the major themes of his teaching which was that he had come to seek the lost, that is, those who did not know God or had strayed from him. In Luke 15 Jesus offers three parables about those who are lost.

<sup>1</sup>Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. <sup>2</sup>But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." <sup>3</sup>Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup>"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and

go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup>and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' <sup>7</sup>I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

<sup>8</sup>"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' <sup>10</sup>In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

### ***Questions for Interpretation:***

What do vv. 1-2 say prompted Jesus to begin teaching with these parables? What was the point of their "muttering? How is what Jesus teaches here related to their "muttering"?

In both of these parables what role does God play? What does this illustrate about God? How is this consistent with the idea that God "sent" Jesus?

What do these parables illustrate about God's feelings for us?

Jesus said "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." What do you think He meant by this?

### ***Luke 15:11-31 (The Parable of the Lost Son)***

Introduction: While the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin focus on how God loves and seeks after us, the parable of the prodigal Son makes it clear that we are free to make our own choices. We can stay with God or we can walk away from him. God does not force us to have a relationship with him.

<sup>11</sup>Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup>"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup>After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup>"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup>I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' <sup>20</sup>So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup>"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

<sup>22</sup>"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup>"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup>'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup>"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup>But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!

<sup>31</sup>" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup>But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

### ***Questions for Interpretation:***

What do you think caused the younger brother to want to leave home? How is this indicative of our nature?

For the son to ask for his inheritance early was a very hurtful thing to do to his Father. If you were the Father would you have given it to him? Why do you think that he did?

Jewish men did not run in public. To do so required them to hike up their robes in order not to trip. If they did this it exposed their bare ankles which was considered shameful and humiliating. So, what motivated the Father to do this?

What is key about the son's attitude in v. 21?

In vv. 28-29 the older brother speaks to his father in an angry and disrespectful manner. How was the older brother lost in his own way too?

#### **4) Application:**

As we grow in our Christian lives we tend move past understanding ourselves as lost sheep or prodigal son's and begin to think of ourselves as shepherds and fathers who seek after and receive others who are lost, but do we even fully shed those roles in relation to God's? What are some ways or areas of your life in which you feel lost and still in need of being found by God?

Since Jesus' teaching placed such an emphasis on reaching out to and seeking the lost, how important should we understand this idea to be to how we live our faith and how the church understands its mission?

How should Jesus' words that "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" shape our values and the values of the church?

What are some ways that you/we are already seeking after and reaching out to lost people?

What are some new ways that we might begin doing this?

Turn to the last page of this study guide and read the Good News aloud together.

**5) Sharing and Prayer:** Close your time together by sharing what's going on in your lives and praying for one another.

## Session 6: The Cross

*“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” -Jesus (Matthew 20:28)*

*Theme: Jesus gave his life for us and for our salvation*

**1) Opener:** Begin by having each person answer one of the following questions...

- Growing up who would you least have preferred to have been punished by; Mom, Dad, a grandparent, a teacher, a coach, etc.?
- We have had a number of high profile trials in our nation over the last several years. Did one of those cases change your thoughts about our legal system? How?
- When was a time that the death of another person affected you deeply, either someone who knew personally or a public figure?

**2) Prayer**

**3) Scripture**

*Matthew 27:11-31(Jesus before Pilate)*

**Introduction:** Today we seek to follow in Jesus footsteps they will lead us to the cross. Jesus' preaching and teaching challenged the religious power structure of the day. Jesus came preaching a new way to understand God and he was constantly reaching out and

sharing his message with people that the religious establishment rejected. As Jesus and his message became more and more popular he was perceived as a greater and greater threat to those who feared losing their power and position. Because of all of these things Jesus was seized by the Jewish leaders and put on trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. As you read this passage notice Pilate's reactions to Jesus and the charges against him.

<sup>11</sup>Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

<sup>12</sup>When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.

<sup>13</sup>Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?"

<sup>14</sup>But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of the governor.

<sup>15</sup>Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. <sup>16</sup>At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. <sup>17</sup>So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" <sup>18</sup>For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.

<sup>19</sup>While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

<sup>20</sup>But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

<sup>21</sup>"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered.

<sup>22</sup>"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!"

<sup>23</sup>"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

<sup>24</sup>When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

<sup>25</sup>All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" <sup>26</sup>Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

### ***Questions for Interpretation:***

The charge against Jesus was that he claimed to be a king which was illegal under Roman law. Did this charge honestly represent the problem that the Jewish religious leaders had with Jesus? So, why did they bring this charge against Jesus before the Romans? Did Pontius Pilate appear to want to execute Jesus? Did he find Jesus guilty of any charges? How did he try to get out of executing Jesus? Why didn't his plan work?

What is it in v. 24 that causes Pilate to give the people what they want and have Jesus crucified? Why do you think that Pilate gave in to them?

If Jesus died for us, who is really on trial here? What are they on trial for?

### ***Matthew 27:32-54 (The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus)***

Introduction: Crucifixion was an extremely brutal method of execution that the Romans used to display their power and strike fear into those who might oppose it. Those who were crucified were nailed by the hands and feet to a cross and left to die. Most who were crucified suffocated as gravity pulled their bodies down and compressed their lungs. The Jews also believed that anyone who was crucified was cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:23).

<sup>27</sup>Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. <sup>28</sup>They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup>and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. <sup>30</sup>They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. <sup>31</sup>After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

<sup>32</sup>As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. <sup>33</sup>They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). <sup>34</sup>There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. <sup>35</sup>When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. <sup>36</sup>And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. <sup>37</sup>Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the king of the Jews. <sup>38</sup>Two

robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>39</sup>Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup>and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

<sup>41</sup>In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. <sup>42</sup>"He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. <sup>43</sup>He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' " <sup>44</sup>In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

<sup>45</sup>From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.

<sup>46</sup>About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "'Eloi, Eloi," "lama" "sabachthani?"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

<sup>47</sup>When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

<sup>48</sup>Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. <sup>49</sup>The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

<sup>50</sup>And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

<sup>51</sup>At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. <sup>52</sup>The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. <sup>53</sup>They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

<sup>54</sup>When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

### ***Questions for Interpretation:***

Why do you think that the soldier mocked and beat Jesus? Why did Jesus need someone else to carry his cross? What other groups of people mocked Jesus? What do you think motivated each different group who mocked Jesus?

Why did God allow Jesus to die in such a horrible way?

On the cross Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1 and cries out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" in v. 46. Jesus had come to the cross to die a sinner's death for us. What aspect of that kind of death do these words represent (see Isaiah 59:1-2)?

Having witnessed the amazing things that happened a Jesus dies, what does the Roman centurion say proclaim (v. 54)? How do those amazing events help us to understand these passages?

#### **4) Application:**

Read John 10:17-18. How does what Jesus says here help us to understand his death? What do his words make clear about his death in relation to each one of us? What does it mean to you to know that Jesus died for you? How does that affect the way you understand Easter?

The passages that we have read are filled with irony. What looks to the world like defeat is actually victory. How might this challenge our ideas about how God works in our lives? How might this provide hope in hard times?

Where in your life do you need hope? What would it take for you to find that hope in God? In these last days of Lent pray that God would fill you with hope as we approach Easter and the life changing reality of Jesus' resurrection.

In session two of this study you were asked to think about someone in your life that you may be sent to and to pray about that relationship during Lent. Consider giving that person an invitation to come to church with you on Easter Sunday.

Turn to the last page of this study guide and read the Good News aloud together.

**5) Sharing and Prayer:** Close your time together by sharing what's going on in your lives and praying for one another.

*(Please take a just few minutes to fill out the post study questionnaire. Please return all questionnaires to MaryAnn in the Eastminster Church office.)*

**Post Study Questionnaire**  
**Lenten Small Group Study: Walking in His Footsteps**

1) How many of the small group meetings did you attend?

\_\_\_\_\_ 1-2                      \_\_\_\_\_ 3-4                      \_\_\_\_\_ 5-6

2) Did participation in this study increase your understanding of how high a priority ministries that focus on reaching out to people and sharing the gospel should be for the church?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all                      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat                      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

3) Did participation in this study increase your understanding of the importance of the part you can play in God's plan to reach the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all                      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat                      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

4) Did participation in this study increase your level of interest in participating in ministries that focus on reaching out to people and sharing the gospel for the church?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all                      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat                      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

5) Due to this study I grew more comfortable:

a. talking about your faith with people?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all                      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat                      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

b. talking about your church with those who do not go to church?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

c. inviting people to church?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

6) Did participation in this study increase how well you feel that you know the Gospel message?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

7) Did participation in this study increase how well could you articulate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to someone else?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

8) Did you invite a friend to church during the course of this study? \_\_\_\_\_

9) How likely are you to invite a friend to church in the coming months?

\_\_\_\_\_ not at all      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat      \_\_\_\_\_ very much

Thank you for participating in this study and for filling out this questionnaire. Please return it to MaryAnn in the Eastminster Church office.

## The Good News

God created us good and loves us. He created us for relationship with Him. Because God wanted our love for him to be real and true, should we choose to love him, he also created us free. But the same freedom that makes our love for God authentic also gives us the ability to do wrong and sin. Every one of us sins and falls short of God's best for us. We all fail to live the right life that God has called us to. We all become entangled in sin that leads us away from God.

For this reason God has continued to reach out to us in order to draw us back to Him. He did this first with the law and then with the prophets and finally at the right time God sent Jesus to us. Jesus came and lived the right life that we're supposed to live and then he offered his right life to God on the cross in the place of our broken and sinful lives. In doing this Jesus took our place, earned our forgiveness and fixed what was broken between us and God. And all we have to do to receive all of this is to repent of our sin and invite Jesus Christ into our hearts to be our Lord and Savior.

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