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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

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TO ENGAGE IN THE MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

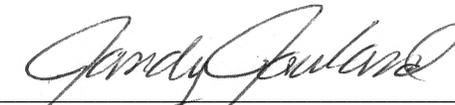
Written by

TIMOTHY R. FULKERSON

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:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Randy Rowland

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: September 2, 2014

A MISSIONAL CALL TO FAITH COMMUNITY CHURCH  
TO ENGAGE IN THE MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

A DOCTORAL PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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

BY

TIMOTHY R. FULKERSON  
SEPTEMBER 2014



## ABSTRACT

### **A Missional Call to Faith Community Church to Engage in the Ministry of Christian Hospitality**

Tim Fulkerson

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2013

This doctoral project focuses on mobilizing Faith Community Church of Elko New Market, Minnesota to become more effective in the ministry of evangelism and outreach through the strategic practice of Christian hospitality with sensitivity to its suburban context. Faith Community Church was planted in this city six years ago with the purpose of reaching people with the gospel. In the midst of this community context, the church has had limited evangelistic success and needs to reimagine how it engages others.

Part One will examine the suburban context of Faith Community Church and seek to analyze the issues, concerns, and needs of the surrounding community. The vision and values of the church itself will also be provided, with specific attention directed toward the church's history of evangelism and outreach efforts. The paper will then explore why change is needed in how it connects with others in the surrounding community.

Part Two will engage the relevant biblical and theological resources which examine the missional character of God, and the call of the church to incarnate Christ as a model for evangelism. It will establish a scriptural, theological, and historical foundation for how Christian hospitality is a unique expression of God's mission to the world. This will also be set within the framework of Wesleyan soteriology and Christian and Missionary Alliance ecclesiology.

Part Three will focus on creating a pilot project that is supported by the theological data. It will establish at least five hospitality groups within the church that will provide helpful training and dialogue on how Christian hospitality can be implemented, and it will call participants to incarnate the Gospel organically in their own social networks, with emphasis on table fellowship. Careful consideration will be given to the timeline, leadership development, resources, personnel, and assessment of this project.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

Word Count: 297

To my wife Amy,  
for your love, support, and sacrifice  
through the process of this degree experience

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## INTRODUCTION

On a cold February winter night in 2007, my wife and I met with three other people in a living room to meet for prayer and discuss the possibility of starting a new church in the growing suburban community of Elko New Market, Minnesota. It was a humble beginning, yet over the months God not only began to grow us in number but also with an increasing passion to reach our community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In November of 2007 we officially launched Faith Community Church at a local township building with about forty people in attendance. Like the parent of a newborn baby, the demands and challenges of pastoring a church plant were at times overwhelming, yet the joy of watching God grow us as a community was also exhilarating. Our growth has been slow and steady, but today nearly 150 people call Faith Community Church their home, with about 110 people on average joining us each Sunday for worship. God has given us much grace and mercy, to which we are grateful.

The mission statement of Faith Community Church is to “love God, love others, and serve the world in the name of Jesus Christ.” The concept of this mission statement was inspired by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger’s book, *Simple Church*. This book encourages churches to “design their ministry around a straightforward and strategic process that brings clarity, movement, alignment, and focus in moving people toward Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Using this simple church model, Faith Community Church has called people to “love God” by being active in Sunday worship, “love others” by participating in a small group Bible study, and “serve the world” by using their spiritual gifts to serve in ministry

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<sup>1</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 64.

to others. Whether adults, students, or children, everyone is encouraged to engage in ministry by following this simple model of discipleship in accordance with God's mission and purpose.

Faith Community Church is affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (hereafter, C&MA) denomination, which has traditionally had a solid evangelical and global mission focus. The roots of the C&MA can be traced to A. B. Simpson, who strongly emphasized God's call to reach lost people by preaching Jesus Christ as "Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King."<sup>2</sup> It is this fourfold message that Simpson preached which is foundational to the ecclesiology of the C&MA. Faith Community Church has sought to build upon this ecclesiology by keeping focused on the centrality of Christ in all things.

Faith Community Church is located in Elko New Market, Minnesota, which is a bedroom community with a population of 4,110 as of the 2010 census.<sup>3</sup> The city is located about thirty miles south of Minneapolis and St. Paul (also known as the "Twin Cities"), along Interstate 35. Because of the easy highway access to the Twin Cities, Elko New Market is a growing suburban community on the outer edge of the metropolitan region. It is appealing to younger families who desire more affordable living with a small town feeling, along with all the amenities of a large metropolitan area. While there are significant advantages for people living in Elko New Market, the city itself in many ways lacks both history and identity. There are relatively no businesses,

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<sup>2</sup> A. B. Simpson, *The Fourfold Gospel: Jesus Christ Our Savior, Sanctifier, Healer and Coming King* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1984), 7.

<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau, "2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File," <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/pl94-171.pdf> (accessed 30 September 2013).

parks, shopping areas, or restaurants in Elko New Market. Everyone seems to sleep in this town and commute closer to the Twin Cities for most social interaction. With these challenges, and many more, the need for real community becomes apparent.

Over the past six years, Faith Community Church has sought to find ways to do outreach in the community, but with only little or moderate success for several reasons. First, a good percentage of the congregation does not live in Elko New Market proper, but in some of the other surrounding cities and countryside. Because of this, it is rather difficult to present a unified vision to reach people in Elko New Market when these parishioners are mostly concerned about people living within their own community.

Second, many of the people who are attracted to Faith Community Church seem to already have faith in Christ and have joined from other existing churches. William Chadwick, in his book *Stealing Sheep: The Church's Hidden Problems with Transfer Growth*, states, "Stealing sheep has prospered far too long under the guise of growth. It must be seen for what it is."<sup>4</sup> He correctly indicates that, "Transfer growth by definition creates no numerical growth in the kingdom of God."<sup>5</sup> Faith Community Church must be careful that it does not facilitate yet another spin on the church merry-go-round through this kind of transfer growth which ultimately does not expand God's kingdom.

The final reason the church has not had significant success in reaching the community and the surrounding area with the gospel of Jesus Christ is because it has only been taught rather narrow ways of "how" to do it. The congregation regularly hears the need to witness their faith to others, but their model for evangelism is largely framed

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<sup>4</sup> William Chadwick, *Stealing Sheep: The Church's Hidden Problems with Transfer Growth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

through a “confrontational style.” Therefore they are reluctant to speak to their friends and neighbors because of the negative stigma this often produces.<sup>6</sup>

Faith Community Church, however, has been blessed with an amazing sense of unity since its founding. It has enjoyed a rather peaceful beginning with relatively few major conflicts or experiences of people leaving on bad terms. This can be attributed to the spiritual maturity of the people and most importantly the grace of God. The problem than can arise out of such a tight bond that people have with one another is that they can often become very inwardly focused. In the late nineteenth century, Simpson dealt with this same issue in his own congregation. As C&MA historian Daniel Ewearitt states, “Simpson wanted his church to give us its narrow exclusiveness and become a center for the evangelization of the masses.”<sup>7</sup> While Faith Community Church would probably not be described as exclusive, in some ways it has lost its sense of missional urgency. In their book, *The Faith Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure, and Courage*, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch state, “A church addicted to security and safety is not the church of Jesus Christ, it is in reality something else.”<sup>8</sup> The greatest challenge Faith Community Church currently faces is the ability to recover this missional urgency and provide an evangelistic model that can be worked into the lifestyle of every person who allows himself or herself to embody the gospel to others.

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<sup>6</sup> The term “confrontational style” is one of the six evangelistic styles presented by Mark Mittelberg in his book, *Becoming a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We Live and Do Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2000), 158.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel J. Ewearitt, *Body and Soul: Evangelism and the Social Concern of A.B. Simpson* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1994), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Faith Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure, and Courage* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 46.

This doctoral project focuses on mobilizing Faith Community Church of Elko New Market, Minnesota to become more effective in the ministry of evangelism and outreach through the strategic practice of Christian hospitality with sensitivity to its suburban context. It is a call to the church both understand God’s mission in the world, and to accomplish that mission by incarnating the gospel to others through the practice of hospitality. The aim of this project is not simply to create a program, but to call people to join God’s mission in their neighborhoods. As John Alexander reveals in his book, *Being Church: Reflections on How to Live as the People of God*, “Our task is to develop a church culture that embodies the gospel story.”<sup>9</sup> Only when Faith Community Church has a proper understanding of God’s character and mission in the world, specifically evidenced through the incarnation of Christ, will it learn how to embody the gospel story effectively to others. The thesis of this doctoral project suggests that the ancient practice of Christian hospitality will most effectively address these challenges, particularly within a suburban context and a predominantly postmodern culture.

In Part One of this project, the ministry context of Faith Community Church will be established. It will outline and analyze the demographics of Elko New Market, as well as examine the history and current ministry situation of the church. A significant portion of this section will also take time to elaborate on the characteristics that help define suburbia and the people who live there. It will reveal how the “efficiency (of suburbia) produces impersonality, loneliness, and alienation,” and elaborate on how these issues

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<sup>9</sup> John. F. Alexander, *Being Church: Reflections on How to Live as the People of God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 148.

often make suburban people strangers in their own neighborhoods.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Part One will describe and evaluate the history of the outreach and evangelistic efforts of Faith Community Church, and emphasize why change is needed in order to connect with fellow “strangers” and “aliens” in our community.

Part Two of this project will be focused on theological reflection. Six literary works that are pertinent to the new evangelistic strategy will be carefully examined and evaluated. This chapter will lay the ecclesiastical foundation for evangelism as being rooted in the missional character of God and the essential call of the Church. It will show how “Christian disciples are sent men and women . . . sent out in the same work of evangelism to which the Lord was sent, and for which he gave his life,” as Robert Coleman explains in *The Master Plan of Evangelism*.<sup>11</sup> The Church therefore is called to follow the example of Christ’s incarnation and his willingness to dwell among others. This incarnational model will build the framework for the ministry of hospitality in our context, and the pattern by which Christians must follow in their lifestyle and practice.

It should be noted that much of the soteriology of this project will be distinctly Wesleyan. After growing up Methodist, as well as receiving biblical training at Asbury Theological Seminary, I have a profound appreciation of both the theology and the example of John Wesley. The essence of Wesley’s theology as “faith working by love leading to holiness of heart and life” deeply resonates with my own passion and heart.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 275.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1972), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Wesley Speaks on Christian Vocation* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1986), 19.

The theology and missiology of much of this project will therefore be derived largely from within the Wesleyan soteriological construct. The first of the six literary works to be evaluated in the theological reflection will begin with the works of John Wesley for this reason.

Another significant portion of this section will also be focused on the theological justification for the ministry of hospitality as a legitimate expression of evangelism. It will reveal how Christian hospitality is an outflow of the missional character of God and how that practice has been expressed specifically throughout church history. An important discussion in this section will also revolve around the issue and nature of spiritual conversion. Richard Peace states, “How we conceive of conversion determines how we do evangelism.”<sup>13</sup> Because this is true, this project will seek to evaluate core patterns of spiritual conversion and see it more as a process rather than simply an event. Keeping this spiritual journey in mind, Christians therefore are called to practice hospitality for the purpose of cultivating and engaging in spiritual conversation where Jesus is the focal point.<sup>14</sup> These spiritual conversations shape the way in which we incarnate the gospel story to others.

Part Three of this doctoral project will focus on the ministry goals and plan as well as the implementation process and evaluation. This final section will provide the strategic ministry plan for Faith Community Church to actively engage in the ministry of Christian hospitality. The strategy will involve significant teaching on Sundays which

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 286.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Peace, *Holy Conversation: Talking About God in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 51.

coincide with weekly hospitality groups (hereafter, HGs) within the congregation. These groups will take time to regularly share both meals and stories together. A trained host facilitator will also guide a focused conversation through a prepared training manual that allow for healthy dialogue through engaging questions about the practice of hospitality. Weekly assignments will be given to allow group members to take small steps in the cultivation of this Christian practice. After eight weeks, when the groups are completed, each person will be encouraged and challenged to organically express hospitality as a lifelong practice. The idea of these HGs is not simply to offer a course on the theme of hospitality, but to allow hospitality to be firmly established in the DNA of Faith Community Church and in the practice of its members.

The final portion of Part Three will describe the specific steps that will be taken to implement this strategy. It will detail the timing, process, materials, and personal resources necessary to train host facilitators and launch at least five pilot HGs. It will also provide an assessment plan that will allow for an evaluation of how the participants have actively worked Christian hospitality into their lifestyle once the groups are completed. Richard Pascale, however, offers three guidelines for the process of implementing change in ministry. He suggests, first of all, “*Design, don’t engineer . . .* too much standard church ministry is an attempt to socially engineer certain behaviors”; his second recommendation is, “*Discover, don’t dictate . . .* adopt a posture of discovery”; and his third suggestion is, “*Decipher, don’t presuppose . . .* don’t impose solutions but be adaptive.”<sup>15</sup> With careful consideration of each of these guidelines, the

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<sup>15</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Faith Leap*, 148-151.

goal of this strategy of hospitality is to move Faith Community Church forward in God's mission to reach the people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is wisely said, "A vision without a strategy remains an illusion."<sup>16</sup> The aim of this doctoral project is to provide a practical solution to the current evangelistic and outreach challenges of Faith Community Church. In a real sense, the church must discern and recover its identity and mission within the community and surrounding culture. George Hunsberger correctly indicates, "The greatest vocation of church, is the discernment of God's call. . . . We must give attention to where we are, when we are, who we are, and why we are."<sup>17</sup> Through examining these issues, Faith Community Church will be able to correctly welcome God's call and live in a refreshed vision for outreach and evangelism through the practice of Christian hospitality that is pressed into the fabric of all the activities of who we are. When this happens, the congregation will be empowered with a renewed sense of identity and purpose in following God's mission.

On a more personal level, I as a pastor must first take the lead through my own heart and life. In his book, *Organic Outreach for Churches*, Kevin Harney states clearly, "You can't lead what you won't live."<sup>18</sup> This radical call to incarnate the gospel among strangers in suburbia through the practice of hospitality is something that I as a pastor must first do myself. My heart and life must change if I want to lead others effectively. I must first cultivate this in my own home before I can expect Faith Community Church to

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<sup>16</sup> Lee G. Bolman, and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 215.

<sup>17</sup> George Hunsberger, "Discerning Mission Vocation," in Lois Y. Barrett, ed., *Treasures in Jars of Clay: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 39.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Churches: Infusing Evangelistic Passion into Your Congregation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 106.

follow. This project is therefore deeply personal, as it calls me personally to a more radical way of living missionally. Through God's grace, I, along with all of Faith Community Church, can obediently follow Jesus.

PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### FAITH COMMUNITY CHURCH IN CONTEXT

Faith Community Church is one of ninety-nine C&MA churches in the North Central District.<sup>1</sup> The story of Faith Community Church began in the fall of 2006, when three C&MA churches in the south metropolitan area of Minneapolis and St. Paul (the Twin Cities) decided to gather resources to consider planting a church in the city of Elko New Market. Located in a strategic area for growth along the Interstate 35 corridor, Elko New Market was a prime city for a new church plant. Not only was the city growing significantly, but there were relatively few existing churches within the community itself. The three “mothering” churches therefore provided finances, people, and prayer support in order to get the church planted. In addition to this, the North Central District also provided financing for this new church plant through a district missions fund called the “Great Commission Fund.” With these resources, the church had a solid footing by which to build upon for growth.

In early 2007, a core team began meeting for prayer and Bible study in the home of a local family who also attended one of the mothering C&MA churches. Every

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<sup>1</sup> The North Central District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance includes all of Minnesota and the eastern portions of North and South Dakota.

Thursday night this small group began discussing the vision of forming a church congregation for the purpose of reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. After much prayer and interaction, the growing core team began having a clear sense of call that God was forming this group into a new church community. Throughout the summer, new people from both from the community and the existing C&MA churches began to gather to discuss the vision and values of this new church, and began calling themselves Faith Community Church.

The basic idea of this new church plant was to keep things simple. Because the tendency of many churches was to become over-programmed and subsequently understaffed, the vision of this new church was to do a few things well rather than try to do everything. It was decided that the focus would be on the scriptural “essentials” of what church should be about. It would focus on things like biblical preaching, prayer, discipleship, giving, and evangelism. In other words, it would focus on “supracultural principles,” which are considered biblical foundations of the Church in any time and any place in church history.<sup>2</sup> Rather than defining this new church as a “seeker” or “emerging” congregation, Faith Community Church would not allow itself to be defined by a trend, fad, or changing model. Instead, it would keep things simple by basing its ministries on core biblical principles and essential mandates for the Church.

The vision statement for Faith Community Church is simply, “Loving God, Loving Others, and Serving the World in the Name of Jesus Christ.” It is derived from both the Great Commandment found in Matthew 22:35-40 and the Great Commission in

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<sup>2</sup> The term “supracultural principle” is defined by Gene Getz as “doctrinal guidelines that grow out of biblical functions and directives and which can be applied in any culture of the world and at any moment in history.” Gene Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 37.

Matthew 28:16-20. Every member of the church is first called to love God and then love other people as well. Only when love has taken root are Christians able to truly serve others according to God's grace. It should be noted that rather than using the phrase, "make disciples," in the last portion vision statement, the idea of "serving the world" implicitly carries this concept. The aim of serving others is that they too will love God, love others, and serve the world. The vision therefore encourages a cyclical motion, where it both moves the congregation outward towards service, and it also calls those being served inward towards God. Everything is done to the glory and honor of Jesus Christ, who remains the central focus of the Church.

With this clear vision set, the core group of believers began having preliminary meetings on Sundays in an airplane hangar in the fall of 2007. The benefit of using this airplane hangar was that it was heated, and it was also owned by one of the couples on the core team. The problem with this location however was that it was rather inaccessible from the public, being on a back road, and it also lacked parking. Because of this, Faith Community Church moved to the New Market Township building and launched its first official service on Sunday, November 6, 2007. The township building was built earlier that year, and it was a beautiful building located within a picturesque country setting. Two issues emerged as the church moved forward with this location, and these two issues still exist today). First, the New Market Township building is located about three miles to the north of Elko New Market off a county road and does not have great visibility in the community. Second, the building has a maximum seating capacity of only 130, which has become an issue in recent years. This building, however, is really the only

feasible location in the community of Elko New Market for a church, and it has proven to be a decent meeting place conducive for weekly gatherings.

### **Demographics of the Church Community**

When the church initially launched, it consistently had between thirty-five and forty-five people attending, including children. Since then, the church has steadily grown to more than 140 people. Although there is a diversity of people of all ages, the vast majority represented in the church are younger Generation X families with children.<sup>3</sup> Because at least two thirds of the congregation is comprised of Generation X families, and this largely matches the overall demographic of the city of Elko New Market as a whole, some significant insights will be needed in understanding this generation.<sup>4</sup>

Robert Wuthnow, in his book *After the Baby Boomers*, describes seven key trends that help to define Generation X. He states that they often: delay marriage; have fewer children and later; have great uncertainties of work and money and often have dual incomes; have a higher education; have loose relationships; are engaged in a global culture; and are highly influenced by the information explosion.<sup>5</sup> He reveals that “the single word that best describes young adults’ approach to religion and spirituality, and indeed life, is *tinkering*.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, this generation of “tinkerers” seeks to survive and find a

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<sup>3</sup> Generation X is described by Richard Flory and Donald E. Miller as the eighty million Americans born between 1961 and 1981. Richard W. Flory and Donald E. Miller, *Gen X Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> The generational breakdown of Faith Community Church is as follows: 30% new; 16% Millennials; 32% Generation X; 16% Boomers; and 6% Builders.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 20-50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

way of life that is meaningful for themselves and their children. Generation X is also described as “a *hinge generation*, raised in modernity but living in postmodernity. It is therefore a generation of people with two cultures fighting inside them.”<sup>7</sup> Because of these factors, many in Generation X struggle to find their own place in the world. In some ways it is a forgotten generation, overshadowed by both the Baby Boomers who preceded them and the Millennials who follow. It is true, however, that many of the GenX individuals at Faith Community Church tended to spiritually wander when they were in their twenties, but now returned to church once they had families and began to “settle down.” Life transitions such as work, housing, and family all contributed to this pull back to church.

Although Faith Community Church is associated with the C&MA denomination, many GenXers in the church really have no deep affinity or connection to this particular tradition. Unlike previous generations, this is reality is quite consistent with many younger adults today. As Wuthnow points out, “GenXers tend to play down particular denominational affiliations.”<sup>8</sup> It is most likely therefore that the younger adults who attend are not there because it is a C&MA church, but rather because it is a place where they can both grow in their walk with Christ and also experience community. Because of this, the spiritual backgrounds of many of the members of the congregation are quite diverse.

Faith Community Church can also be described as a regional church. Although geographically it is located in the city of Elko New Market, many of its members come

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<sup>7</sup> Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo, and Graham Cray, *Making Sense of Generation Y: The world view of 15-25 year olds* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), 150.

<sup>8</sup> Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 80.

from throughout the south metro region of the Twin Cities to attend. At least a dozen cities are represented in the congregation, with several families traveling over thirty miles away to attend services. Only about 40 percent of the congregation actually lives within the city of Elko New Market itself. Because of this reality, the identity of the church should not be primarily seen as a “local congregation” but rather a “regional church.”<sup>9</sup> It is also true that most of the people who come from a distance to Faith Community Church come from points south and west. Rather than coming to church from the Twin Cities, people tend to commute to church from further out in the countryside. For the vast majority of the congregation, “both younger and older people alike, church is outside their immediate neighborhood, just as work, schools, and shopping are.”<sup>10</sup>

Another demographic insight into Faith Community Church is that the racial diversity of the congregation appears to exceed the racial diversity of the community of Elko New Market. Because the church attracts people from throughout the south metro region of the Twin Cities, there are families representing the African American, Hispanic, and Ukrainian communities. Several families have also adopted children from around the world, which also helps to make Faith Community Church a more diverse community. As a percentage, the church is about 15 percent non-white, whereas Elko New Market is only about 8 percent non-white.<sup>11</sup> Although compared to an inner-city church this may

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<sup>9</sup> Term descriptions taken from Jack Dennison’s book, *City Reaching: On the Road to Community Transformation* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 65.

<sup>11</sup> US Census Bureau, “US Gazetteer Files 2010,” <https://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/gazetteer2010.html> (accessed October 9, 2013).

not appear to be significantly high, for a suburban regional church it is something to be noted.

One final insight into the demographic makeup of Faith Community Church is that many younger families have chosen to either homeschool or send their children to private school, rather than enroll them in public school. In fact, more than 50 percent of the younger families in the congregation have taken their kids out of the public school. This bit of information is rather insightful into the perspective of many of these younger families for several reasons. First, it shows that parents are deeply opinionated about what is best for their children's educational well-being. Second, it suggests that the congregation is generally both theologically and politically conservative. Rather than trusting government-funded education, parents feel more ownership by doing things their own way with their kids. This goes along with more of a "tinkering" mindset. Lastly, it shows that the members of the congregation are largely isolated from interacting with people in their own communities, particularly from an educational standpoint. While there is significant extracurricular activity happening with the kids, in many ways they are rather insulated from the larger culture around them. Families are therefore more selective regarding whom they interact with.

In summary, Faith Community Church can best be described as a younger, largely GenX congregation with plenty of kids. Although it is located in Elko New Market, it is a regional church, drawing people from throughout the south metro Twin Cities. It is somewhat racially diverse, but it is filled with rather conservative families with parents who feel strongly about their children and their well-being. These families, however, tend to insulate themselves as best they can from interacting with and exposing

themselves to people who have different political, social, and spiritual perspectives. They feel strongly about sharing the gospel and have a vision to serve people, but are often overextended in their commitments and therefore lack the time and energy to put forth concentrated efforts to do so. They are biblically literate and generally have a Christian worldview, but need to find healthy ways to express their faith meaningfully to others.

### **Suburban Trends that Define Elko New Market, Minnesota**

After exploring the history, vision, values, and people of Faith Community Church, this next section will focus on the specific insights into the larger city of Elko New Market, Minnesota for the expressed purpose of both defining and understanding the people who live there. Although a significant percentage of the people of Faith Community Church do not live within the city of Elko New Market proper, they do live within other surrounding suburban communities which display similar characteristics. Because Elko New Market is a suburban community of the Twin Cities, a significant emphasis will be placed on characteristics that define suburban people as a whole, and what motivates their daily lives. Much of the analysis gleaned from this section will provide helpful insights into how suburban people may be reached effectively with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John C. Teaford, in his book, *The American Suburb: The Basics*, states, “The suburbs are an expression of the American desire for freedom and the right to pursue one’s own destiny.”<sup>12</sup> Much of what defines the people of Elko New Market, and

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<sup>12</sup> John C. Teaford, *The American Suburb: the Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 219.

suburbia as a whole, is this quest for freedom. There is a unique appeal to suburbia for many people, simply because of what this context appears to offer. People move to places like Elko New Market to find safety from city crime, good education for their children, larger homes and more open yards, easy access to roadways and shopping, the ability to move around and enjoy green spaces, and a host of other reasons as well.

But overall, it is what David Brooks, author of *On Paradise Drive*, calls an “ideology of potentiality” that largely governs the motivations of suburban people.<sup>13</sup> He states that “[suburbanites] are the moderately affluent strivers, the people who hover over their children, renovate their homes, climb the ladder toward success, and plan anxiously for retirement.”<sup>14</sup> People move to the suburbs because they want order, and they want to be in control of their own lives. Brooks adds, “They have an unbounded faith in the true inner self, where they inevitably have a little voice saying . . . ‘not there yet.’”<sup>15</sup> The authors of *Making Sense of Generation Y* similarly write, “Expectations do not sleep. As long as there is movement there is hope, and the movement keeps the hope alive.”<sup>16</sup> This “ideology of potentiality” drives the imagination of people living in suburban communities like Elko New Market. Brooks states, “Fantasy, imagination, and dreaming play a far more significant role in their psychological makeup than they are accustomed

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<sup>13</sup> David Brooks, *On Paradise Drive: How We Live Now (and Always Have) in the Future Tense* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 136.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>16</sup> Savage, Collins-Mayo, Mayo, and Cray, *Making Sense of Generation Y*, 42, 47.

to acknowledge.”<sup>17</sup> People simply strive for a better way of life because suburbia is supposedly the best place this can happen.

People also move to Elko New Market because of the dualistic lifestyle that this community provides. Because it is located less than a half hour from the Twin Cities and also minutes away from the open country, people here want to enjoy the best of both worlds. They want the ability to have the entertainment and shopping of places like Minneapolis, while being able to take their boats out to the lake. Elko New Market can therefore be best described as a “fringe city.” Tom Daniels, in his book, *When City and Country Collide*, defines the rural-urban fringe city as “not just a geographic area within a metropolitan region, but also a step in the development hierarchy between rural areas and a central city.”<sup>18</sup> In a fringe city, people can enjoy what appears to be the best of both city and country, yet also have lower population density, with houses scattered amid more open spaces. Though Elko New Market may have less sophisticated land use planning and greater growth management challenges from a citywide perspective, from a household perspective it has a lot to offer.

The appeal of Elko New Market is also strong for younger families with children. According to the 2010 census, of the 1,259 households in the city, 73.9 percent were married couples with 60.4 percent having children under the age of eighteen living with them.<sup>19</sup> These are very high percentages even for a suburban community. This was initially one of the strongest reasons why a church plant was considered in this city in the

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<sup>17</sup> Brooks, *On Paradise Drive*, 199.

<sup>18</sup> Tom Daniels, *When City and Country Collide: Managing Growth in Metropolitan Fringe* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1999), 10.

<sup>19</sup> US Census Bureau, “2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File.”

first place. Families have moved into Elko New Market because it provides what is considered optimal opportunities for their children. As James Kunstler asserts in his book, *Home from Nowhere*, “Americans are convinced suburbia is great for kids.”<sup>20</sup> Adults drive their kids to multiple activities, from soccer games twice a week, to track meets, dance lessons, swimming, and so on, and have essentially become what some call “taxi parents.”<sup>21</sup> The community of Elko New Market can therefore be largely considered a child-centered universe because life is focused on children.

For adults, life in Elko New Market also revolves around paying the bills. Gaylord Noyce, author of *The Responsible Suburban Church*, states, “Suburbia is often newly established and heavily mortgaged. Property values are a source of anxiety.”<sup>22</sup> This is completely true for a significant number of younger families in this community. With the higher cost of living, frequently both parents have to work outside the home to be able to be financially sustainable. Residents are financially strapped because of the lifestyle they lead and because the “consumer culture has trained them to feel entitled to the best.”<sup>23</sup> In his book, *The Suburban Christian*, Albert Hsu contends, “Suburban culture is a consuming culture where the lines between necessity and luxury are

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<sup>20</sup> James H. Kunstler, *Home from Nowhere: Remaking Our Everyday World for the Twenty First Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 55.

<sup>21</sup> The term “taxi parent” is taken from Dolores Hayden’s book, *Building Suburbia* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 192.

<sup>22</sup> Gaylord B. Noyce, *The Responsible Suburban Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 84.

<sup>23</sup> Laura Pappano, *The Connection Gap: Why Americans Feel So Alone* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 43.

blurred.”<sup>24</sup> The strain of finances is significant for many families, and much work time is invested in trying to stay on top of increasing debts. The consumer culture dominates many in Elko New Market, and it contributes to these growing financial challenges for many younger families.

For the majority of people who work outside their homes in Elko New Market, their lives are defined largely by commuting. Because it is a “bedroom community,” most people travel to work northward along Interstate 35 to the Twin Cities, and much of life revolves around fighting rush hour traffic each morning and evening. This is a significant strain on time and schedules for most people in Elko New Market. With more commuting often comes less community. People have less time to devote to community and local activities because of this busy lifestyle. Douglas Morris reveals in his book, *It’s a Sprawl World After All*, “Modern suburbs were built to accommodate cars and commerce, not people. As a result, people no longer walk, casual social interaction no longer occurs, and consequently, genuine communities no longer exist.”<sup>25</sup> He continues, “Noticeably absent in suburbia is the hum of conversation that comes from spontaneous community gathering. As a result, suburbia is almost completely devoid of the replenishing energy of community life.”<sup>26</sup> Because of this commuter culture, people are surrounded by strangers, and in order to connect with others, people have to create “formalized” gatherings such as book clubs, sports leagues, volunteer activities, and other

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<sup>24</sup> Albert Y. Hsu, *The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 74-81.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas E. Morris, *It’s a Sprawl World After All* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Island Publishers, 2005), 19.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

organized events. Morris adds, “Even meeting with our friends is a heavily formalized affair, something we have to plan weeks in advance to accomplish.”<sup>27</sup> Urban sprawl is therefore not only a heavy economic burden on the people of Elko New Market, but it is also a social burden as well. Yet people have still continued over recent years to flock to this community.

Between 2000 and 2013, Elko New Market grew more than 511 percent.<sup>28</sup> Although this growth slowed during the housing collapse in late 2009, it has once again regained momentum as of 2013. The total population at the time of this writing is 4,110, which may appear to be small compared to most of the larger suburbs in the Twin Cities, but for a fringe city it has the feel of a growing new community.

With this growth there have also been a few new challenges. First, the long-term residents find themselves divided between whether or not they want new people in the city. Some of the long-term residents have deplored the growth and want no more, and others see growth as an economic opportunity. This dynamic has been quite visible in community and city planning meetings. Second, with all these relatively new people moving into Elko New Market, the city has lacked a sense of identity and history with the majority of the residents. As Daniels states, “A sense of history and personal roots fade . . . there is no feeling of permanence or enduring purpose to places like this.”<sup>29</sup> Because this is true, in many ways most people feel like aliens and strangers within their own

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that the city of Elko New Market was formerly the two cities of Elko and New Market which were later combined in 2006. In 2000, Elko had a population of 472 and New Market had a population of 332. In 2013, the city population was 4,110. See US Census, “Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File.”

<sup>29</sup> Daniels, *When City and Country Collide*, 17.

community. The reality is that “few call their suburban neighborhood their lifelong home.”<sup>30</sup> The new people of Elko New Market are drawn here because it is an ideal place, yet it also fails because it is so abstract as well. Kunstler explains, “Deep down, many Americans are dissatisfied with suburbia – though they have trouble understanding what’s missing – which explains their nostalgia for an earlier model. . . . They feel vaguely and generally un-well where they are.”<sup>31</sup> Edge city’s problem is history, in that it has none.<sup>32</sup>

In many ways Elko New Market lacks not only history with many of the residents, but it also lacks a sense of diversity. Economically the majority of people here are middle class, where there is relatively little social competition. Nobody here is socially far above or below each other. As Brooks reveals, “The outer ring suburbs have very few poor people, and relatively few rich people.”<sup>33</sup> People mostly live in the same type of neighborhoods with generally the same type of houses. Not only does Elko New Market have economic and architectural similarity, but it also has racial homogeneity. With 92.5 percent being white, the community really lacks racial diversity.<sup>34</sup> This sameness which identifies much of Elko New Market is clearly articulated by Roger Silverstone in his book, *Visions of Suburbia*. Silverstone writes, “Suburbia is a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly at uniform distances, on uniform

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<sup>30</sup> Arthur DeKruyter and Quentin J. Schultze, *The Suburban Church: Practical Advice for Authentic Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>31</sup> Kunstler, *Home from Nowhere*, 37.

<sup>32</sup> Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Brooks, *On Paradise Drive*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> US Census, “2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File.”

roads . . . inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same TV performances, eating the same pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold.”<sup>35</sup>

People are mostly like one another.

The religious trends of most of the people of Elko New Market are quite similar to most suburban communities. The people tend to view going to church like they view shopping: they look for churches that provide goods and services that meet their own needs. Subsequently, suburban churches tend to be more like restaurants.<sup>36</sup> A good percentage of people within Elko New Market and the surrounding area are loosely associated with a local church, traditionally Roman Catholic and Lutheran, and they mostly commute toward the Twin Cities to find a place of worship. The reason for this is because Elko New Market has relatively few churches to begin with, having only four including Faith Community Church. Although attendance may be sporadic for a large percentage of these churchgoers, most in the community would identify themselves as being spiritual. Wuthnow reveals, “Young people are more likely to be attracted to new congregations than to old ones, but the influences that reinforce religious participation are weaker than they were a generation ago.”<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the main reason why many in Elko New Market attend church is because it provides the “community” that they so lack in their own neighborhoods. As Wuthnow explains, “Congregations may be especially

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<sup>35</sup> Roger Silverstone, ed., *Visions of Suburbia* (London: Routledge Press, 1997), 143.

<sup>36</sup> DeKruyter and Schultze, *The Suburban Church*, 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 70.

attractive as places to experience community, when community is harder to find.”<sup>38</sup> In many ways, people are not so much looking for salvation as they are looking for love.

When looking at the demographics and the key characteristics of the people of Elko New Market, perhaps the deepest issue that most people deal with in this community is the struggle with loneliness. Although this might not be the most apparent on the surface, underneath all the busyness that is pervasive in so much of suburban life, people long for a sense of community and love. Laura Pappano, in her groundbreaking book, *The Connection Gap: Why Americans Feel So Alone*, reveals why it is most people feel lonely. She states,

We cannot always control our physical space, but we seek to control our mental space by tuning out and shutting out those around us. We routinely ignore other people or do not see them when we look at them. In a sense, many of us are placing ourselves in self-imposed solitary confinement. We are filtering out the stimuli of everyday encounters, willingly collapsing the possible interactions and explorations around us in our effort to cut through the day in the most efficient manner possible.”<sup>39</sup>

It is this striving for efficiency that dominates much of suburban life, which actually contributes to further isolation and loneliness. She continues, “Our homes, like our lives, today are more airtight, more impermeable, more sealed off from the outside world. . . . We’ve left the streets and gone indoors. Unlike yester-years, it’s now considered ‘rude’ to drop in.”<sup>40</sup>

Technology also contributes to this growing sense of loneliness in our culture. Pappano writes, “We’d rather deal with a computer, phone, or machine instead of a

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>39</sup> Pappano, *The Connection Gap*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 105-118.

human . . . because there's something trying, even exhausting about human interaction."<sup>41</sup>

With the dawning of the technological age, people are simply not as attuned, or as connected, to the places they inhabit, or to the people or history those places represent. As a result, Brooks reveals that "the problems we're more likely to observe during our drive through suburbia are withdrawal, segmentation, and disunion."<sup>42</sup> People may be more connected to social networks throughout the world through social media like Facebook, than they are to their own neighbors. Rather than interacting with others, many residential neighborhoods like Elko New Market have become what *Crabgrass Frontier* author Kenneth Jackson calls "a mass of small, private islands; with back yard functioning as a wholesome family oriented, and reclusive place. There are few places as desolate and lonely as a suburban street on a hot afternoon."<sup>43</sup> Most people are simply not engaged in the social networks of their own neighborhoods, and the high usage of the Internet, smart phones, and other technological advancements has not helped but rather hindered this type of human interaction.

The final two factors which may contribute to loneliness for many of the people of Elko New Market are the issues of winter hibernation and the lack of public space. For nearly six months of every year, Minnesota winters can be quite brutal and cold. As a result, many people hibernate within their homes during the winter months. Unlike warmer places in the United States, Minnesotans cannot enjoy community events outdoors for a good portion of the year. This contributes to a growing sense of loneliness

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>42</sup> Brooks, *On Paradise Drive*, 74.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 280.

and depression in many people who cannot get out and interact with neighbors. To compound this issue, Elko New Market lacks a significant number of public parks that allow for interaction even when it is not winter. While there are a few local parks where children can play, most people have to travel to the next city to find any decent-sized park for recreation and entertainment. This significantly diminishes opportunities for social interaction in Elko New Market. People here simply do not feel connected with one another and loneliness and isolation is the result.

### **Outreach Efforts and Vision for the Future**

Faith Community Church has both unique challenges and opportunities in reaching out to the people of Elko New Market, Minnesota. While the people in this suburban context are quite busy with their work and children, the congregation has sought ways to build bridges to connect with the various needs of people within the community. Because suburbia is a child-centered universe, one of the most effective ways in which the church has been able to reach families is through their kids.

Every summer the people of Faith Community Church have put on a Vacation Bible School (VBS) in the one local park, with very successful results. For nearly seven years, VBS has grown from just a couple dozen to nearly ninety kids who come to hear the gospel in both fun and creative ways. As a result of this ministry, many families have attended the church and have seen the high quality children's ministry in action. As a church plant, Faith Community Church realized quite early that reaching families was going to be contingent on reaching kids. Through VBS, through the Sunday program called Faith Kids, and also through the recently started mid-week ministry called Basic

Training, more and more children have had a chance to participate in the children's ministries. But clearly the most effective outreach for the church has been the summer VBS.

Faith Community Church has also sought to do outreach within the community in other creative ways. In years past, events like free car washes, dinners for families with disabled children, welcome gift bags for new residents, Christmas caroling, fishing tournaments, and various service projects have all been done for the purpose of connecting with people and sharing God's love. They, however, have largely been met with limited success. While each of these events has allowed for positive interaction with people in the community, they have not produced the long-term connections that were intended. The other issue is that outreach has tended to become more of an event or program rather than a lifestyle, and it has proven to be more difficult for it to be worked more into the DNA of the congregation. As Darrell Guder states in his book, *Missional Church*, "Mission is not just a program of the church. It defines the church as God's sent people."<sup>44</sup> While these events have been positive, and should not be abandoned, what is needed is more of a missional way of living among the people of the church.

Early in the planting of the church, the congregation was introduced to an evangelistic program established by Ray Comfort and Kirk Cameron called *The Way of the Master*.<sup>45</sup> This eight-week DVD series became a significant emphasis early on in the church plant, as it was used regularly as a strategy and format of how the congregation

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<sup>44</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 6.

<sup>45</sup> The theology and philosophy of this program is articulated in Ray Comfort's book, *The Way of the Master: How to Share Your Faith Simply, Effectively, Biblically, the Way Jesus Did* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 2003).

could witness to other people. On a number of occasions, those who have attended this program have gone to the parks and area malls in some of the surrounding communities in order to witness to complete strangers. On a few occasions several people have gone door to door within Elko New Market. The effectiveness of this program, however, was quite limited.

After presenting this program for several years, a number of issues began to emerge. First, it was acknowledged that this series was based on a “confrontational style” of evangelism that made approaching people quite intimidating. Second, it was usually not received well as it felt rehearsed like a sales pitch. It reduced, as Richard Peace explains, “Christian conversion into a kind of telemarketing campaign for Jesus.”<sup>46</sup> Third, it did not allow for effective follow-up or the ability to have continuing conversation. It felt rigid and did not allow for real questions by the recipients to either emerge or be addressed. Fourth, only the men in the church began to participate, as many of the women did not feel comfortable approaching strangers in public. Finally, it was largely ineffective. While eternal consequences may have taken place, there were no official conversions during these interactions. In the end, it was helpful to do this program to learn the purpose of God’s law and how it could be used to expose sin and help others see the need for a Savior, but it limited evangelism to a “confrontational” pitch that had to be rehearsed and memorized. It felt wooden and it made it difficult to really connect with people.

*The Way of the Master* continues to be the default evangelistic program and strategy for a good percentage of people in the church, particularly those who have been

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<sup>46</sup> Peace, *Holy Conversation*, 9.

attending for a while. In recent years, however, the class has not been offered and relatively few opportunities have been given to “go witnessing.” The church does continue to hand out Bible tracts put out by this ministry at the local parade on the Fourth of July and also during Halloween. As a result of using this particular program, much of the way people have viewed evangelism has been defined through the lens of this confrontational approach to witnessing. The mood among a growing number of people in the church is somewhat souring to this style, and there appears to be a willingness to explore other opportunities and ways of doing outreach and evangelism. On the other hand, if a new way of doing outreach and evangelism were introduced at Faith Community Church, it will probably find the most resistance from the few people who still cling to *The Way of the Master* as the only way to share the gospel biblically with others. What will be needed is to provide people with other models for witnessing and outreach that are clearly articulated biblically.

In light of this, Faith Community Church must determine how to move forward. In one sense the answer is simple: it must stay focused on the essentials of what God calls the Church to do and be. It must keep focused on Christ and not reinvent the proverbial wheel. On the other hand, however, the answer to this question is a bit more complex. Faith Community Church does have a number of challenges it must address if it is going to fulfill its God-given mission to “love God, love others, and serve the world in the name of Jesus Christ.” Before it can move forward, it will need to seriously consider its challenges, and develop a new perspective for outreach and growth. It will also require not only the ability to “reframe” but also the ability to “break frames” of how it

understands the purpose and function of the Church as a whole.<sup>47</sup> It may require the ability for the church to think more about why it exists and how it can be used to fulfill God's mission. These challenges will need to be considered and addressed thoroughly.

In his book, *Mission-Shaped Church*, Graham Cray writes, "Start with the Church and the mission will probably get lost. Start with the mission and it is likely that the Church will be found."<sup>48</sup> The overall basic need for Faith Community Church is the recovery of a missional urgency. While the congregation has been involved in evangelistic and outreach efforts within the community since its inception, in many ways it needs to broaden its theological and missional horizons and look for new opportunities amidst the various challenges within its suburban context. The model of evangelism needs to move beyond the confrontational style and allow for greater interaction and conversation, which allow for real life change. In addition to this, a deeper understanding of the nature of conversion itself needs to be articulated in order to provide for a more effective model for evangelism within the community. The people of the church also need a better understanding of the missional character of God in order to be able to incarnate that mission before others.

Faith Community Church has a number of unique challenges which can prevent its ability to reframe and reestablish this missional identity. For one, there are physical challenges. Being that the church does not yet have a building, there are limits to how and when the people can gather together corporately. The significant advantage of this

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<sup>47</sup> Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Graham Cray, ed., *Mission Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (Brookvale, NSW: Willow Publishing, 2005), 116.

physical challenge is that homes are likely being used more frequently as a result of necessity. The problem is that it is hard for everyone to gather as a large group throughout the week, and it also makes providing additional ministries more challenging when there is not a regular facility to use. Another physical challenge is that the New Market Township Building that is used on Sundays for worship is physically outside of Elko New Market by several miles. In some ways it feels more like a country church than a community church. The final and perhaps most significant physical challenge is the geographical location of the congregational members. Being that so many cities are represented in the church, a new model for evangelism and outreach will need to be applicable to a number of different community contexts.

Faith Community Church also has conceptual challenges that also need to be addressed if it is to move forward with a new outreach strategy. It will need to have a better understanding of who God is, what God has done, and what God has called the Church to do and to be. It will need to have a thorough understanding of the nature of spiritual conversion and how it informs evangelistic efforts. It will also need to recover more of an incarnational way of doing ministry. Rather than doing more programs or events, it will need to cultivate new life habits that can be daily practiced. In moving toward this incarnational approach to outreach, it will subsequently need to move away from an attractional approach, which has been its tendency. Rather than perceiving the church service as the “main event” and thus the central locus for Christian life and activity, it will need to move into the neighborhood.<sup>49</sup> Instead of being so involved in

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<sup>49</sup> Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford, *Right Here, Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 216.

church activities, the call is to move outward and to be engaged in the surrounding culture. In his book, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, Dan Kimball states, “We’re too busy inside the church to know those outside the church.”<sup>50</sup> This will be a radical conceptual shift for a number of people within the church, but it needs to happen. As Kimball clearly reveals, “[The church] has responded with heavy infusions of denial, believing that the culture will come to its senses and come back around to church.”<sup>51</sup> Faith Community Church will therefore need to address these concepts and look at new ways of being a church.

In addition to both physical and conceptual challenges, Faith Community Church also has spiritual challenges as well. God must do a work in the hearts of the people of the congregation so that they will have a passion to fulfill the missional mandate. Just because a new strategy for outreach is presented does not mean that real change will happen in people unless God first does the work in people’s hearts. In *Organic Outreach for Churches*, Kevin Harney states, “Organic outreach is not about a program or a plan. It is about orienting our hearts toward God and letting Him lead us. It’s about seeking the direction of the Holy Spirit. It’s about being ever ready to respond when God open a door.”<sup>52</sup> Only when a church sees God first as a missionary will they be able to respond with a willingness to become missionaries themselves in order to reach others. This is a work of heart before it ever becomes a work of life.

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<sup>50</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2007), 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> Harney, *Organic Outreach for Churches*, 109.

With these unique challenges considered, Faith Community Church has a fundamental decision to make: whether it will be a “bridging” or inclusive church, or whether it will be a “bonding” or exclusive church.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, it must determine whether it will be a church that is willing to reach out to others for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, or whether it will seek to settle with good fellowship with each other at the exclusion of God’s missional call. The strategy proposed in this doctoral project—to mobilize Faith Community Church to become more effective in the ministry of evangelism and outreach through the strategic practice of Christian hospitality with sensitivity to its suburban context—is an attempt to answer these questions. It is a call for the congregation to be a bridging church which seeks to include others in whom God has put within the social networks and spheres of influence. It is a call to recover its God-given identity to be witnesses through faithful practice and holy conversations. Only when Faith Community Church either recovers or discovers this missional identity will it be able to renew its call to reach out to others for the glory of God.

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<sup>53</sup> The concepts of “bridging” and “bonding” are derived from Robert Putnam’s book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 22.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of chapter two is to examine literature pertinent to the development of a new evangelistic strategy for Faith Community Church. This section will lay both an ecclesiastical foundation for evangelism and outreach, and it will also provide a model for those efforts as being rooted in the incarnation of Christ and his willingness to dwell among people. This incarnational model will build the framework for the ministry of Christian hospitality within the suburban context of Faith Community Church.

The first section of this chapter will use the theology of John Wesley as a basis for understanding the missional character of God, as well as Ross Hastings's book, *Missional God, Missional Church*, to provide a soteriological basis for how the mission of God shapes the mission of the Church. The second section will use both Alan Hirsch's book, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, and Rick Richardson's book, *Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, to demonstrate that the purpose of God's Church is to fulfill the missional call to evangelism through organic outreach as an outflow of the character of God. The third and final section of this chapter will use both George Hunter's book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, and Christine Pohl's book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, to reveal how the incarnate Christ is the

model for organic outreach and that Christianity hospitality is a legitimate expression of incarnational ministry that can be applied to the context of Faith Community Church. In many ways, each of these authors and theologians is a “conversation partner” who will help provide a solid ecclesiastical framework for this doctoral project strategy. Their insights will directly link Christian hospitality to the missional character of God, which forms the theological justification of this project.

### **The Works of John Wesley**

Of all the theologians who have influenced the teachings and practices of Faith Community Church, John Wesley has probably played the most significant role. While this influence is not as overt as most people in the congregation would recognize, it does govern much of the teaching on Sunday mornings. While there still are a wide variety of theological influences within the congregation, Wesleyan theology has been the predominant soteriological position among the leadership and staff. Wesley’s call to “practical holiness,” as a viable way of doing theology in its orientation to the mission of the church and its attentiveness to the realization of scriptural truth, fits the identity of the congregation.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley’s call to communicate the gospel and guide others into holy living became the dominant passion of his life, particularly after his Aldersgate experience in London.<sup>2</sup> Albert Outler describes Wesley’s Aldersgate change as a “conversion from passion to

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<sup>1</sup> The term “practical holiness” is used to describe Wesley’s theology in Kenneth J. Collins’s book, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>2</sup> John Wesley’s “Aldersgate experience” took place in London on May 24, 1738, after he listened to a Moravian preacher speak on Martin Luther’s preface to the Romans, and felt his heart “strangely warmed.” Albert Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1971), 18.

compassion as his dominant emotion, his change from a harsh zealot of God's judgment to a winsome witness to God's grace."<sup>3</sup> This type of change also needs to happen at some level within many at Faith Community Church, as it moves beyond simply zeal for evangelism, to a heartfelt love and compassion for people.

The theology of John Wesley is vitally important to the scope of this doctoral project, as his understanding of God's nature as being "holy love" provides the foundation for outreach and evangelism. Prominent Wesleyan scholar Kenneth J. Collins describes "holy Love" as the principal conjunction in Wesley's theology, as he states, "No true Christian holiness can exist without the love of God for its foundation."<sup>4</sup> God will always act in a way that is consistent with perfect holiness and love, and if Christians are called to be obedient to the will of God, they must act toward others in a way that is consistent with that same holy love. Understanding God's character therefore sets the basis for hospitality and outreach. On the importance of love to the Christian life, Wesley states,

Let love not visit you as a transient guest, but be the constant temper of your soul. See that your heart be filled at all times, and on all occasions, with real undissembled benevolence; not to those only that love you, but to every soul of man. Let it pan in your heart; let it sparkle in your eyes; let is shine on all your actions . . . every one that is born of a woman has a claim to your good will. You owe this, not to some, but to all.<sup>5</sup>

Because God is holy love, he calls his children to walk and live in a manner that is consistent with his own character. Scaring someone into saving faith was a strategy

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<sup>3</sup> Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 8.

<sup>5</sup> John Wesley, "On Pleasing All Men," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 7-8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 144.

Wesley would not endorse. He offered these suggestions in his “Advice to the People called Methodists:”

Above all, stand fast in obedient faith, faith in the God of pardoning mercy, in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath loved you, and given himself for you. Ascribe to him all the good you find in yourself, all your peace, and joy, and love, all your power to do and suffer his will, through the Spirit of the living God. . . . Abhor every approach, in any kind or degree, to the spirit of persecution. If you cannot reason or persuade a man into truth, *never* attempt to *force* him into it. If love will not compel him to come in, leave him to God.<sup>6</sup>

Wesleyan theology is therefore missiological in nature, as it always is the redemption of the other. The charge to Christians is to glorify God by becoming servants of all people. Paul Wesley Chilcote states, “The primary question of the Methodist is not, am I saved? The ultimate question is, for what purpose am I saved? For the Wesley’s the answer was quite clear – “*my neighbor*” is the goal of my redemption, just as the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are oriented toward the salvation of all humanity. The self-giving love of Christ must therefore become the goal, purpose and style of our lives.”<sup>7</sup> Although Wesley rarely used the term “evangelism” explicitly, he did use the terminology of “offering Christ,” which involved loving others in both word and deed, in proclamation and action, as a way of connecting the gospel to the world.<sup>8</sup> Christianity was therefore not just an inward religion, but also a social religion that involved telling others the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ expressed in tangible ways. Wesley had little interest in theology for its own sake, but rather for the purpose of transforming personal life and social relations. Another student of Wesley, Randy L. Maddox, writes,

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<sup>6</sup> John Wesley, “Methodist Societies,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 7-8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 22. Emphasis added.

<sup>7</sup> Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision*, 101.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

“Conversion, for Wesley, did not just change one’s ‘status’ before God; it changes the person and the community.”<sup>9</sup>

Evangelism for Wesley was based on the inclusive nature of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. As Wesley famously stated, “I look upon all the world as my parish . . . this is the work which I know God has called me to.”<sup>10</sup> God did not just want to save a few, as Wesley’s Calvinist contemporaries advocated, but he wanted all people to come to salvation. The gospel was therefore not exclusive but rather inclusive, as Christians are called to fulfill God’s missional mandate to offer Christ to everyone. God’s “prevenient grace” was working to draw all people unto himself as they respond in faith.<sup>11</sup> This “prevenience” is not a stage of grace, but the crucial aspect of grace in all its manifestations. It signifies the divine initiative in all spirituality, in all Christian experience.<sup>12</sup> For Wesley, Christians are called to spread the gospel to all people, and to also recognize that God is already at work in drawing people to himself even before they speak. Outler explains, “[Christians] never speak to men who are actually ignorant of God or totally bereft of His grace. The Spirit is always there before us – and this means that our job is less that of imparting truth that would otherwise remain unknown than *stirring up the human spirit*, of awakening faith – inviting and persuading men to attend

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<sup>9</sup> Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley’s Theology: For Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 25.

<sup>10</sup> John Wesley, “Journal entry dated June 11, 1739,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vol. 7-8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 200-201.

<sup>11</sup> “Prevenient grace” is described by Wesley as God’s grace that is already present and active in the natural person, moving and inviting towards saving grace, and commonly identified as conscience. M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 142-143.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden, eds., *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 135.

to the Word within.”<sup>13</sup> It is only when Faith Community Church understands this reality that it will be able to effectively reach out to others in participation with God’s holy love in this Wesleyan spirit.

***Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West***  
**by Ross Hastings**

Ross Hastings provides a helpful understanding of God’s mission in the world as being rooted in the essence of God’s character and nature. Furthermore, he advocates that the missional call of God to the Church is the natural extension of the Trinity’s communal nature. However, it should be noted that the term “missional” is used in many contexts today, and there is often great ambiguity as to what it really means and how it should be applied to the Christian life. Hastings states, “Whereas the term ‘missional’ runs the risk of creating all kinds of misconceptions until explained, its core derivation is the God of the gospel, the self-revelation of God in Christ by the Spirit. That major creedal understanding, then, in proper order, leads to ecclesiological practices that are both deep and wide.”<sup>14</sup> Hastings states that what is sometimes called *missional* today is “nothing more than a pursuit of social justice, often justified within an incarnational rubric, which at times de-emphasizes evangelism and a false equating of political liberation with the kingdom of God.”<sup>15</sup> Hastings therefore calls the Church to follow the missional God, who is bidirectional in his nature. He both sends believers out and brings people to himself, and he calls the Church to do the same.

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<sup>13</sup> Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 46.

<sup>14</sup> Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

The thesis Hastings puts forward in his book is that John offers his version of the Great Commission through a word picture of the Church in union with the risen Christ by the Spirit's inbreathing, as the missionary God. Jesus states in John 20:19-23,

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld."<sup>16</sup>

Hastings uses Jesus' statements here to his disciples to put forward his argument that this passage forms the basis of the deepest and widest commission. He states,

It is wide in that it connects theologically with the fullness of God's mission in terms of creation and redemption. The presence of Jesus as the risen One imparting shalom to his people and through them to the world evokes the notion of the new creation and reconciliation of all things. It is the commission above all, however, because it connects the mission of the church deep into the eternal purposes of the Godhead. The sentness of the church is connected to the sentness of the Son by the Father, a sending planned in eternity past with covenanting counsels of God. Mission is expressed as flowing from within the very life of the Trinity.<sup>17</sup>

According to Hastings's thesis, the Church's mission is therefore a consequence of its union with the triune God and his mission, and that mission must stress participation of its members, in Christ, by the Spirit as witness to the world. The Church is sent because Jesus is sent. Hastings writes,

There is an actual correspondence between his sending from the Father and their sending from Christ. Each assumes a union. Just as Christ is sent as the Son in union with the Father, so now they were sent ones because of their union with Christ, by the Spirit he was about to breathe on them. The Spirit would mediate

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<sup>16</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society, 2001), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>17</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 28.

the presence of Christ in them so that they would be his body, his hands and feet on earth.<sup>18</sup>

Just as the triune God has become one with humanity in Christ by his incarnation, the Church is to recognize that having become one with Christ by the Spirit, it too is incarnational, in union with all humanity, and the means by which the Spirit is drawing all to find their place in the new humanity of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Because the sending of the Church by Christ in John 20:19-23 is linked to the sending of the Son by the Father, Hastings therefore advocates three actions that must be taken by the Church in order to fulfill the missional mandate. He contends that the Church must be “a Christocentric community,” “a Celebratory community,” “a Missional, open community (a community of hospitality).”<sup>20</sup> Christ and the Church are therefore together, not separate. Hastings states, “If they want Jesus but not the church, let’s give them Jesus in the church. It’s not that we have an option – we are in union with him.”<sup>21</sup> As the Church demonstrates each of these three characteristics, it will both be grounded in the nature of the missional triune God and incarnational in its witness to others. Hastings emphasizes these points as largely a reaction to what the emerging movement of today has done to discourage the importance of the gathered church. He states, “The idea now prevalent that church is two or three people who just happen to meet in Starbucks, or two or three people blogging or Facebook-ing in a disembodied way, for that matter, is not only poor theological anthropology and worse ecclesiology, it is isolationist defeatism

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 122-129.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 130.

about the gathered church.”<sup>22</sup> This is therefore something that only the Church can do as they are the ones truly united with Christ. Hastings therefore makes clear that the Church must be obedient to the missional call of God as being sent out as a community that is Christ centered, celebratory, and has a willingness to be open to others by showing hospitality, as a natural extension of the Trinity’s communal nature. This is both the Church’s identity and calling.

***The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church***  
**by Alan Hirsch**

Alan Hirsch’s book, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, explains the massive, long-trended decline of Christianity in the West, and advances the need for a more missional identity similar to that of the early Church. He reveals the incredible growth that happened in the early Church, which grew from 25,000 Christians in AD 100 to 20 million in AD 310, and he makes it the central task of the book to name to this phenomenal growth and try to identify the elements that constituted it.<sup>23</sup> One of the main qualities Hirsch discovered when looking at the early Church, along with other phenomenal Christian movements, is that they grew precisely because “they did not have centralized institutions to block growth through control.”<sup>24</sup> Only when the Church became more centralized and institutionalized did it lose its “Apostolic Genius.”<sup>25</sup> The thrust and call of the missional Church is therefore to return to a sending movement

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 18-20.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 18.

rather than an attractional model of ministry.<sup>26</sup> This is an important paradigm shift that must take place in the mindset of the people of Faith Community Church. Many people within the congregation have been largely exposed to more of the “attractional” model of ministry, and therefore most of the emphasis on ministry revolves around the Sunday morning service and activities by default. Hirsch is calling for the Church to move away from these inherited formulas for attracting people and recover more of a missional movement similar to that of the early Church.

For Faith Community Church to become genuinely missional, Hirsch encourages two important actions. First, he advocates that the Church become rich in “conversations around spirituality, life, Jesus, God, faith, discipleship, and mission – conversations that try to include those outside the faith.”<sup>27</sup> Second, he emphasizes that the Church keep its “spiritual ground zero with an encounter with the One True God . . . a God who in the very moment of redeeming us claims us as his own through Jesus our Savior.”<sup>28</sup> If Faith Community Church is to be effective in reaching people with the gospel, it must therefore engage in spiritual conversations and pray that people will have a life-changing encounter with the living God. Without either of these things, people will not come to faith in Christ and the Church will not recover its missional identity.

One of the greatest challenges for Faith Community Church is to think less about church growth and more about recovering the missional call of Jesus. If Faith Community Church is to fulfill its God-given purpose, it must see that disciple making is

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 84.

non-negotiable. As Hirsch states, “disciple making is essential of any genuine expression of Christianity.”<sup>29</sup> The congregation must therefore not be forced into the role of being little more than a vendor of religious goods and services, but it must be obedient to the message and ministry of Jesus Christ by making disciples. Unfortunately, as Hirsch says of the western Church, “the medium has so easily overwhelmed the message . . . as we simply cannot consume our way into discipleship.”<sup>30</sup> Faith Community Church must also avoid this pitfall.

One of the ways Hirsch suggests that Christians can be disciple-makers is to act incarnationally. He states, “To act incarnationally means that in our mission to those outside of the faith, we will need to exercise a genuine identification and affinity with those we are attempting to reach.”<sup>31</sup> This is a critical area of growth needed for Faith Community Church, as it must learn how to do this within the community. Hirsch offers four words that should define how Christians should do this: presence, proximity, powerlessness, and proclamation.<sup>32</sup> When Christians incarnate themselves within the community, at close proximity to others, and also take on the vulnerable role of alien or stranger, then will then be able to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ effectively. This, according to Hirsch, has been deeply effective when looking at the history of the phenomenal Christian movements within history. The challenge is not to think of this type of outreach as another church growth model, but rather a missional call from a holy

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<sup>29</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 105.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

and loving God to reach others with his grace. As Hirsch states, “We need to move away from institutional forms of organization and recover a movement ethos if we are going to become truly missional.”<sup>33</sup> To be missional means that evangelism is the call of the Church.

***Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey***  
**by Rick Richardson**

In the discussion about how evangelism is the call of church, Rick Richardson’s book offers significant insight into specifically how to do evangelism today. He reveals that the paradigm that dominated much of the twentieth-century evangelism might be called “evangelism as closing the deal on a sales call.”<sup>34</sup> At this point in history, however, these techniques and scripts are more a hindrance than a help. He states, “People today are spiritual but not dogmatic . . . they want to know God is real and not merely reasonable.”<sup>35</sup> Rather than adopting the “spiritual salesman” model for evangelism, Richardson advocates a way that “identifies clues of the presence of the Spirit in the lives of seekers and skeptics.”<sup>36</sup> When believers look for clues of God at work, and point those clues out to seekers and skeptics, he believes that this is more at the heart of the image of evangelism that God wants to happen. Rather than focusing on an agenda, whereby believers download their content and close the deal, this is a call for

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>34</sup> Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21.

Faith Community Church to adopt a model for evangelism that embraces conversations with friends, and delights in the relationships themselves, and rejoices over every spiritual conversation.

Richardson indicates that “the first task of anyone who longs to reach out to others is learning to listen to God and collaborate with the Holy Spirit . . . for the only witness that bears fruit is collaborative witness, directed by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the call of everyone engaging in spiritual conversation is to be what Richardson calls a spiritual detective.<sup>38</sup> When interacting with and listening to people’s stories, believers ought to listen and look for the ways in which God is already at work in their lives. Christians have been taught to focus on people’s beliefs when they ask questions; for example, “What do you believe about God?” or “What must we do to be saved?” But Richardson suggests that those questions often do not really engage them, nor do they help people discover where God might be at work. He explains, “These days people are very interested in the spiritual dimension of life. They are fascinated by experiences of the spiritual and the uncanny.”<sup>39</sup> As Faith Community Church seeks to reach out more effectively into the community, what this means practically for the congregational members is that they must be able to both recognize and articulate their own spiritual experiences effectively to draw out the spiritual interest in others. This will take both time and practice, but it is important to be able to tell these stories.

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<sup>37</sup> Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 34-36.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

Richardson also reveals that it is common for many people to have experienced some breach of trust with God or with Christians. He asserts, “We aren’t operating at ground zero, but rather at minus three or four. We have to pierce through their stereotypes and rebuild broken trust before they will ever listen to what we have to say.”<sup>40</sup> So rebuilding the bridge of broken trust is one of the greatest needs for seekers and skeptics today. Many unchurched people have fears that they will be judged, rejected, and marginalized by church types if they enter into spiritual conversations. Therefore Richardson explains, “In spiritual friendships with people who don’t know Jesus, assume mistrust.”<sup>41</sup> Part of the challenge for Faith Community Church will be learning how to break through this mistrust, to allow for safe conversation to take place. As Richardson reveals, however,

Stories are powerful. . . . Learning to tell our story is one of the most important steps we take as a Christian. . . . It is not only important for our witness, but it is also a crucial step in our self-understanding as a Christian. Stories convey not just the facts but also the feelings and the nuances of truth . . . and for people to find their way back to the Christian faith will not first be through logic and proposition and dogma. Their way back will be through the renewal of story.<sup>42</sup>

The way to recover trust with non-churched people will therefore be the ability of the people of Faith Community Church to share these stories.

Richardson describes most of the spirituality within western culture today as self-centered. He writes, “People today love spirituality, but they want to make up their own version. They want spirituality, but they don’t want to have to change. . . . But the crucial

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 84-86.

skill we need at this point in the conversational dance is to bring up Jesus and speak about him in ways that break the stereotypes and break through apathy.”<sup>43</sup> This is a process that often takes time. If Faith Community Church is to be effective at breaking through these stereotypes, it will need to see spiritual conversion like a marriage, where it is a relational process with milestone events along the way.<sup>44</sup> Spiritual conversion does not likely take place in one conversation, but through many conversations.

In summary, the three basic concepts that Richardson employs in his new way of reimagining evangelism are: “listen to story”; “look for clues”; and “learn to engage.”<sup>45</sup> These three concepts will form the heart of the practice of Faith Community Church in its ability to connect with neighbors through spiritual conversations. When the congregation is trained effectively in each of these areas, it will be able to develop a new model for evangelism and outreach that incarnates the gospel in a postmodern context. The emphasis will be a movement away from a “salesman’s pitch,” which too often has excessive dependence on theological interpretations that diminish the importance of people’s stories and resonance with others. Instead, the movement will be toward learning the skill of connecting one’s own story to the needs and stories of other people. People will listen if believers’ stories are genuine and not cliché- or agenda-driven.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 99-100.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 141.

***The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again***  
**by George Hunter, III**

If Faith Community Church is going to be effective in engaging in meaningful spiritual conversations, members will first need to learn how to find common ground with their unchurched neighbors. George Hunter, in his book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, offers helpful insights in how to do this through the example of Saint Patrick. Ireland, in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, was a deeply secular culture where people had little or no exposure to Christianity or its teaching. Hunter indicates that “Patrick came to understand Irish Celtic people. . . . He understood the people, their language, their issues and their ways.”<sup>46</sup> The effectiveness of Patrick’s Christian witness to these barbarian people was therefore based largely upon his ability to connect and find common ground with them. Hunter points out, “There is no shortcut to understanding the people. When you understand the people, you will often know what to say and do, and how. When the people know that Christians understand them, they infer that maybe the High God understands them too.”<sup>47</sup> This is an important insight for Faith Community Church to grasp. If the congregation is worried about what to say to their neighbors as they engage in spiritual conversations, perhaps first they will need to take the necessary steps to get to know them on a more personal level. They will need to find common ground, which makes conversation more natural and safe among people who are non-Christians.

Being that the gospel had never been preached in Ireland before Patrick, there are some differences between the fourth century Irish people and twenty-first century

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<sup>46</sup> George Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Americans. In America, there have been several indigenous Christian movements throughout its history. Because of this reality, there are both advantages and disadvantages to witnessing to others based on whether their previous exposure to the gospel message has been positive or negative. The point however remains the same: it is vitally important when witnessing the truth of Jesus Christ to others that Christians seek to understand people and not just seek to be understood. Because Patrick was effective at this, Christianity spread rapidly throughout Ireland, as essentially a “lay movement” rather than an institution.<sup>48</sup> New communities of faith were being formed as Patrick shared the gospel through his incarnational approach of living among the people. It was not a movement that was a controlling top-down approach, similar to the Roman form of Christianity, but rather a movement that started at the grass-roots level, or a bottom-up approach. Hunter reveals that “the Celtic Christians usually evangelized as a team, by relating to the people of a settlement; identifying with the people; engaging in friendship, conversation, ministry and witness.”<sup>49</sup> The application for Faith Community Church is clear: if members of the congregation are going to effectively evangelize people, they must be willing to live among them, know them, and relate to them. Furthermore, they must be willing to partner together as teams, in order to be effective in reaching lost people.

Hunter offers a genuine contrast between what he calls the “Roman model” for reaching people, versus the “Celtic model.” He explains that the Roman model for reaching people is: “1) present the Christian message; 2) invite them to decide to believe

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 47.

in Christ and become Christians; and 3) if they decide positively, welcome them into the church and its fellowship.”<sup>50</sup> The Celtic model for reaching people, however, is to: 1) establish community with people, or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith; 2) within fellowship, engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship; 3) in time, as they discover that they now believe, invite them to commit.”<sup>51</sup> The distinctions between these two models that Hunter provides represent the shift that Faith Community Church needs to make in its approach to evangelism and outreach from a Roman model to more of a Celtic model.

Faith Community Church must also adopt an understanding that “Christianity is more caught than taught,” and that people often “belong before they believe.”<sup>52</sup> Because this is true, there also comes the added responsibility of Christians to also live faithfully the message and practice of Christ. As Hunter asks, “Do [Christians] live by this religion they are asking people to buy, or are they just paid propagandists for the institutional church?”<sup>53</sup> To be an effective witness among people, as an incarnational way of doing ministry, presupposes that the gospel has taken root in the lives of Christians and that they are living in a way that is consistent with truth. To embody Christ effectively is to be Christ-centered in every area of life. The “holy places” of life are not just the physical church sanctuaries, but every place in which God sends his people to dwell. The Celtic people believed that the “veil between the natural and the supernatural, and between earth

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

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 60.

and heaven, was much thinner – especially at ‘holy places’ – than the Roman wing believed.”<sup>54</sup> To do incarnational ministry and outreach means that every place and space is an opportunity for people to encounter the holy loving God.

***Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition***  
**by Christine D. Pohl**

If every space is sacred, and God can break into any person’s life at any time and place, one of the most important places for divine encounter throughout Christian history has been in the home. Christine Pohl, one of the leading experts on the subject of Christian hospitality, offers helpful insights into this important Christian practice. Many of her insights form the basis for this doctoral project as a whole and provide solid footing for the roots of hospitality within the Christian tradition. She states, “Hospitality is a lens through which we can read and understand much of the gospel, and a practice by which we can welcome Jesus Himself.”<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, today many misconceptions about hospitality abound, as most people think not about welcoming strangers, but rather having friends and family over for a pleasant meal. In her book, Pohl offers a thoroughly Christian perspective on the practice of hospitality. She reveals that “God’s invitation into the Kingdom is tied to Christian hospitality in this life.”<sup>56</sup> To be a witness to the world is to show gracious hospitality to others, just as God has demonstrated hospitality by welcoming all to his table of fellowship through Christ.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>55</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 8.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 22.

Upon considering the tradition of Christian hospitality, beginning with the early Church in Acts, Pohl reveals that “the practice of hospitality almost always included *eating meals* together, having a *light hold on material possessions*, and a commitment to a *simplified lifestyle*.”<sup>57</sup> Those characteristics have largely been woven into the practice of hospitality throughout Christian history. Pohl adds, “The distinctive contribution to hospitality has also been the emphasis on including the poor and neediest, the ones who couldn’t return the favor.”<sup>58</sup> It is these traits that help define hospitality in purely Christian terms. The emphasis is upon universalizing the neighbor and personalizing the stranger as a way of both participating in and anticipating God’s own hospitality. She states, “Hospitality does not require many resources; but it does require a willingness to share what we have, whether food, time, space or money.”<sup>59</sup> Keeping hospitality rooted in the Christian tradition will therefore be vitally important for Faith Community Church.

Pohl indicates that “the intermingling of guest and host roles in the person of Jesus is part of what makes the story of hospitality so compelling for Christians. Jesus welcomes and needs welcome; Jesus requires that followers depend on and provide hospitality.”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, Faith Community Church will not just need to think about hospitality in terms of welcoming the stranger, but also in terms of becoming the stranger, as Christ did often among people. This will require not only opening one’s

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 12. Italics added.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 17.

home to neighbors, but also being willing to be a guest in the homes of others. Humility is therefore a crucial virtue for hospitality.

A shared meal is the activity most closely tied to the reality of God's Kingdom, just as it is the most basic expression of hospitality.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, if members of Faith Community Church are to both find and create threshold place for contemporary expressions of hospitality, they will need to make the sharing of meals a central focus. Sharing meals as a form of hospitality is common in all secular expressions, but what makes Christian hospitality unique is the ability to incorporate both worship and spiritual conversation as an integral practice. Homes and meals are not used as a "tool," or "means to an end," lest the welcome is distorted and people feel like they are being used. Homes and meals are used rather for the purpose of demonstrating the love and grace of God.

Pohl makes clear that to "offer hospitality, we will need to rethink and reshape our priorities."<sup>62</sup> To make one's home available for the stranger, and to become the stranger oneself, requires that believers do not embrace this new way of life begrudgingly. It means that members of Faith Community Church will need to reexamine the purposes for which God has loaned property and resources, and consider how these can be used for the Kingdom of God. Whatever changes are needed, there must first be changes in the heart. As the Danish proverb states, "If there is room in the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 171.

heart, there is room in the house.”<sup>63</sup> The aim therefore is to turn the home into a sanctuary where people feel welcomed and loved for who they are.

One particular challenge that Faith Community Church will have when considering the essential characteristics of Christian hospitality that Pohl provides in her book is the focus on the poor and needy within the community. Because the congregation is located largely within an affluent suburban context, it will need to consider how it can express hospitality in a way that is consistent with the Christian tradition, lest it turn into a modern form of entertainment among the middle class. Since there are not many who would be considered poor immediately within Elko New Market and the surrounding communities, Faith Community Church will need to reframe hospitality in terms of the concept of welcoming aliens and strangers. As stated in the previous chapter, suburbia does have a significant percentage of people who would easily fall into this category of aliens and strangers; therefore, this will be the call of the church that fits within both the biblical concept and Christian tradition of hospitality which Pohl advocates. To become a church that incarnates the gospel effectively means that members of the congregation open both their hearts and their homes to welcome strangers. It means that there is a return to table fellowship as the central locus for worship and conversation. This not only demonstrates faithfulness to the Christian tradition but also faithfulness to the character of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

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

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGY OF NEW MINISTRY INITIATIVE

In order to develop a ministry of hospitality in the suburban context of Faith Community Church, it is imperative that a solid theological foundation is set. This third chapter will present a theological justification for the ministry of hospitality as a legitimate expression of evangelism, which flows from the missional character of God. To understand the call to hospitality, there must be significant understanding of God's mission within the world. Furthermore, in order to understand God's mission in the world, there must be insight into the character and nature of God. This chapter will therefore examine who God is, what God does, and how God intends his mission to be extended throughout creation. This understanding will undergird the entire project and provide theological basis for an incarnational approach to witness and evangelism.

#### **The Character and Mission of God**

Before the universe or anything was created, God existed. The Bible begins with the statement in Genesis 1:1 that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." This means that before anything existed, there was One who predated everything, and this Creator's life was contingent upon nothing else. God was and is self-sufficient,

in that he is the uncaused cause of the entire universe. As Thomas Oden states, “God does not need a world to be God.”<sup>1</sup> Because of this reality, God is entirely self-sufficient and does not necessarily need the universe to be complete. But because the universe does exist, it is therefore important to understand why God created the world in the first place. To address this issue, significant insight will be needed into the character and nature of the God who created everything.

Orthodox Christian teaching asserts that God is “One” yet exists in three distinct “Persons.” Deuteronomy 6:4 states, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” This first verse of the Jewish *Shema* clearly reveals a monotheistic understanding of God. Contrary to the polytheistic view of many gods, the Scriptures reveal the existence of only one God, who alone is above all and Creator of all. Yet the Scriptures also reveal that this one God exists as three distinct Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There are many Scriptures that can verify this reality of a Trinity, but two verses in particular contain the Trinitarian formula. When Jesus sends the disciples out in what is known as the “Great Commission” in Matthew 28:19, he says to “baptize [new disciples] in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” It is evident that Jesus distinguishes between these three distinct Persons, yet represents them equally as God. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:14 also offers a benediction to the church in Corinth that also contains the Trinitarian formula. He states, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Again, this reveals that the Apostle Paul understood all three Persons to be equally

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology Vol. 1* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1987), 53.

God. Numerous other scriptural passages, including 1 Corinthians 8:6, Philippians 2:5-8, John 10:30-36, and John 1:1-14, all clearly indicate the existence of a triune God.

The significance of the one triune God, who is creator of the universe, is that this helps provide insight into the character of God. If God pre-existed the creation of the entire universe as a Triune Being, then the character of God must therefore be understood as “relational.” Before anything was made, God was in relationship with himself as three distinct Persons. This relationship was entirely perfect, loving, and whole. In other words, God did not need any other relationship in order to be complete. Yet God created the universe and every living thing, not out of a desire to be more complete, but rather as an extension of his love. It is out of that distinct goodness and love of God that human beings were created. The real story concerning creation therefore is about the creature/creator relationship. As Oden states, “The drama is all about relationship.”<sup>2</sup> The “communal” God desires communal relationship with his creation, not out of necessity, but out of choice. God must love his creation, because this communal nature flows from his character. Because “God is love” (1 John 4:8), that essential characteristic of God must overflow to all creation. As Hastings states, “To be Trinitarian means for us to understand the fundamental loving relationality of God and the power of that relationality. It is the power of love. No reality could be more relevant to Christian mission.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, to understand the mission of God in creation, it is important to see that this triune God desires a loving relationship with his creation.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>3</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 84-85.

The problem arose when humanity willingly rejected God's love and chose to enter sin as a violation of that communal life. When Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3, they no longer enjoyed the intimate fellowship of communion with God, but instead they "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God" (Genesis 3:8). Ever since this fall, humanity has been bent towards rejecting the communal love of God and has experienced devastating consequences. The inclinations of humanity have been tragically slanted toward sin, and as a result, evil and death have entered the world. David said in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Romans 3:23 states that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Not one part of creation has been unaffected by the taint of sin, and in a real sense it "groans" for that perfect communal life that it once enjoyed (Romans 8:22). All of creation longs for a restoration of that perfect relationship with God. But the deepest problem of the fall is that humanity cannot recover that relationship with God on its own; it needs to be rescued. It needs a savior to redeem creation and to restore God's perfect order of communion.

Because humanity needed to be rescued from sin and destruction, God therefore had to send his only Son Jesus Christ to redeem his creation (John 3:16). The love of God compelled him to do what was necessary to reconcile humanity back to that communal life. Through this act of self-sacrifice, God showed that he was willing to allow his Son to die on behalf of humanity. The activity of God in creation therefore is one of mission and redemption. The Latin term *missio Dei* has been used in recent years, particularly by notable theologians like Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch, as a key concept in Christian missiology to help describe the activity of the redeeming God in

creation. According to Bosch, “mission is not a primary activity of the Church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God.”<sup>4</sup> Bosch is advocating a view of mission as a descriptive quality of God’s nature. God does not simply have a mission, because he himself is missional. It is his character, and therefore mission is derived from the very nature of God as the One who sends in order to restore humanity back to himself.

Before proceeding with this discussion, it is important to clarify the meaning of the mission of God, or *missio Dei*. Guder states, “‘Mission’ means ‘sending,’ and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history. . . . We have begun to learn that the biblical message is more radical, more inclusive, more transforming than we have allowed it to be. In particular, we have begun to see that the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness.”<sup>5</sup> God is a missionary because God is one who sends. John 3:17 states, “For God did not *send* his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (emphasis added). The emphasis here is again on the character of God as being missional or sending, and the scope of that mission includes the entire world.

The mission of God is therefore much larger than perhaps what many evangelical Christians have considered. God’s mission is not only to save humanity from hell, but to redeem all of creation. In speaking of Christ and his mission, Paul states in Colossians 1:15-20,

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<sup>4</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-390.

<sup>5</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 4-5.

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

The last few verses of this passage reveal that it is God's intention to reconcile all things to himself through the cross of Jesus Christ. God's mission therefore becomes one of redemption through Jesus because God is one who is missional. In his discussion of Bosch's work, Wilbert Shenk writes, "*Missio Dei* is essential to the integrity of theology. The gospel . . . is the animating center of mission and theology; God as agape coming to the world for the world's salvation through the reign of righteousness."<sup>6</sup> God is a missionary, who sent Jesus Christ his son, in order that the world might be redeemed through him. This is not implying "universalism," or the belief that all people will one day be saved or redeemed, as humanity certainly has a response to God's reign. It is, however, implying that the scope of God's purpose in redemption is broader than perhaps most Christians have imagined.

The mission of God is God restoring his reign again on earth. Because God is the creator of the universe, he has the right to reign supreme over his creation. The work of God through Jesus Christ is to establish his kingdom, or his reign, on earth and in the lives of humanity. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray in what is known as the "Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6:10, he told them to ask of the Father: "Your kingdom

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<sup>6</sup> Wilbert Shenk, "The Mission Dynamic," in *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch's Work Considered*, edited by Willem Saayman and Klippiess Kritzingers (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 84-85.

come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus was revealing to his disciples that it is God’s will that his kingdom would be established on earth as well as in heaven. In other words, God’s sovereign intention is to establish his reign on earth, and Christ becomes the focal point of that reign. As William Abraham states in his book, *The Logic of Evangelism*, “God is active providentially in all history to establish his kingdom. . . . God established his reign on earth in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God’s kingdom has come in the past; it is here in the present; and it will come in the future.”<sup>7</sup> This means that although God has the right to rule, and is already establishing his kingdom on earth through Christ, there is a sense by which the kingdom still grows. Jesus compares the kingdom of God in Mark 4:30-32 to a mustard seed: “And he said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out larger branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’”

Jesus is emphasizing the fact that the kingdom of God grows and expands like that mustard seed. Such is the reign of God in the lives of humanity. As people open themselves up to the lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives and submit to God’s rule and reign through obedience, his kingdom comes to dwell within and among his people. In their book, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert

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<sup>7</sup> William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 32-34.

describe God's kingdom as "the redemptive reign of God over His people."<sup>8</sup> This redemptive reign of God for creation happens over time. The kingdom of God has already been inaugurated through Christ in the past, but it still is yet to come in the future. But in all cases, explain DeYoung and Gilbert, "it involves the age to come breaking into the present age."<sup>9</sup> The inclusion into the kingdom, or reign of God, is therefore wholly conditioned on one's response to the King.<sup>10</sup>

As people respond to God's kingdom reign, they too participate in the *missio Dei* in the redemption of creation through Jesus Christ. They too call others to respond to God's rule and ways. In *Introducing the Missional Church*, Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren describe this phenomenon: "God's dream [that is, mission] for the world is about the redemption of all creation, not just individuals getting into heaven; it is about the restoration of life as God intended it to be; it is about realigning life around God and God's ways."<sup>11</sup> When people realign their lives in obedience to God, they become participants of God's mission in the world so that others too may be a part of that same kingdom. Thus, the nature of the kingdom of God according to Jesus is one of growth and expansion, as people participate in that same mission of God. It begins small and grows into something large.

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2011), 119.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>11</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 102.

It is imperative to understand that the mission of God is something that God initiates. Because humanity is incapable of redeeming itself from the consequences of sin, it must have Someone outside of creation who acts on its behalf in order to restore it to its right place. If the Church is going to learn how to participate in God's mission, it must know this truth. In his book, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, Craig Van Gelder states, "The missional church reorients our thinking about the church in regard to God's activity in the world. The Triune God becomes the primary acting subject rather than the Church."<sup>12</sup>

God initiates, and humanity responds. God sends, and the Church goes. As Parker Palmer contends in his book, *A Hidden Wholeness*, "Withdrawal from the world is not the message of Jesus' life."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the purpose of God for those who are part of his kingdom is to become participants of his reign by engaging the world, rather than hiding from it. Because God is a missionary, all who follow must be the same and orient their lives around this characteristic of God. Thus, the grand narrative of all of creation is for people to know who God is and what he has done to bring redemption. It is for people to know that, according to Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It is to know this God of holy love who saves. As J. H. Christopher states in his book, *The Mission of God*, "The biblical mission is

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<sup>12</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 117.

driven by God's will to be known as God."<sup>14</sup> This is the grand narrative, or God's story of redemption. God is a missionary, and he lovingly initiates his kingdom on earth through Jesus Christ.

The mission of God must also be understood as a mission that calls people back to restoration of the communal life. When Adam and Eve sinned, the perfect communal life with God was lost. Through Jesus Christ that communal life can now be restored through repentance, faith, and obedience. The apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 5:22, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ, shall all be made alive." The mission of God, which is an extension of God's Triune nature, is a mission of love. This love is most vividly expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Hastings writes, "The love within [God's] communion spilled over in creation and the covenant to reconcile it and draw it into intimate relationship with Himself, but in a manner that preserves the agency of humans and the creation's ontological distinctness."<sup>15</sup> God does not force his way upon humanity, but lovingly engages people with his prevenient grace and calls them to respond in obedience to his rule and reign. Jesus invites humanity to this new communal life in Matthew 11:28-29 when he says, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." The invitation is to respond to this new way of living, this submission to the rule of God in Christ Jesus. This way is not a burden, but a way of blessing, abundance, and rest.

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<sup>14</sup> J. H. Christopher, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 126.

<sup>15</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 261.

The mission of God is therefore an invitation to submit to God's reign. This is a call for people not to follow their former sinful passions, but a call rather for these new participants to walk in holiness and obedience to God's ways. Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Hebrews 12:14 states that "without holiness no one will see the Lord." The Christian life is about submission to the will of God and walking in his grace. It is also an invitation to call others to that same response. Abraham writes, "Evangelism therefore is the process of initiation into God's rule . . . where the primary agent in all evangelism is God, and the ultimate objective of evangelism is to see people introduced to and grounded in the kingdom of God as it is manifested in history."<sup>16</sup> As Christians participate in the *missio Dei*, they invite others to submit to God's reign. They invite others to respond in obedience and abandon their former sinful life which alienates them from the communal life of God.

The call of the Church therefore has a single purpose which consists of two aspects. According to Shenk, "The calling of the church is to glorify God by: 1) faithfully witnessing to the reign of God; and 2) living as a sign of that reign."<sup>17</sup> Christians must therefore be a witness to the world through their lives, by being submitted to the reign of God and walking in obedience. Jesus says to his followers that they are like "salt" and "light" to the world, and their lives must be witnessed by others (John 5:14-15). The evidence that one has really submitted his or her life to the reign of God, and is a member of his kingdom, is ultimately in how one lives in obedience to Christ. Those who wish to be a part of God's kingdom can only do so if they take on his

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<sup>16</sup> Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 168.

<sup>17</sup> Shenk, "The Mission Dynamic," 90.

missional character as a faithful witness and living sign to others of Christ's reign in their lives.

### **The Reign of God as Feast**

One of the most descriptive images in the Scripture concerning the kingdom of God is that of a "feast." The image of a feast is frequently used in the Scripture to describe God's kingdom reign. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah offers a significant description of what God will do through the sending of coming messiah. He states:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God: we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isaiah 25:6-8)

This word given by the Lord through the prophet Isaiah offers a description of what will happen when the messiah comes. The image of this coming kingdom is used of the Lord as one of a feast for all people. This is a feast of abundance where there is the richest food and the best of wine available. Furthermore, it is the Lord alone who is "host" of this sumptuous meal.

The image of feast expressed in Isaiah 25:6-8 also has a New Testament parallel in the parable of the "Great Banquet" in Luke 14:15-24.

[Jesus said,] "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please

have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ And the servant said, ‘Sir what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’”

There are several significant insights to be gleaned from Jesus’ description of God’s great feast. First, the invitation begins with “many” and then is extended to compel everyone from everywhere to come in to this great banquet. Given the context of this passage, Jesus was referring to the Jews as being the initial recipients of the invitation, and based on their negative response, the invitation was extended to all who would come. The host would not show favoritism, but rather he extended a welcome to all people everywhere no matter the condition of their social, racial, political, or physical status. The invitation was ultimately wider than initially anticipated. Another insight in this parable is that the participants at this feast were there by their own choice. The call was widely extended, but the recipients of the invitation had to respond positively in order to participate at this banquet. This parable also demonstrates that there is “abundance” at this feast. There is both an abundance of food and an abundance of space, as there is still room at the table as the invitation goes out.

In discussing of this idea of God’s abundance, Parker Palmer states in his book, *The Company of Strangers*, “The Gospel sees abundance where the world sees scarcity,

and scarcity where the world sees abundance.”<sup>18</sup> It is interesting that the reason that many in the parable gave as to why they could not attend the feast was because of some area of “abundance” in their life. For example, one could not attend because he had bought a field, another because of oxen, and a third because one was recently married. Ironically, it was their earthly abundance that prohibited their reception of God’s abundance. Their own abundance essentially revealed a deeper scarcity. The invitation of the host therefore went out to those who were poor, or scarce in their earthly blessings, only to receive the abundance of his banquet. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 19:23, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.” Paradoxically, one needs a certain poverty or scarcity of spirit which enables openness to the abundance of God.

The image of feast, or feasting, is also prevalent in the gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry. Throughout his ministry, Jesus frequently sat at the table of people who were deemed “outsiders” by the Jewish religious community. Jesus’ meals all demonstrate the frequency by which he came to feast as an expression of God’s missional purpose (Matthew 11:19 and 15:32-38; Mark 2:13-17; and Luke 15:1-2 and 19:1-10). In fact, as John Koenig states in his book, *New Testament Hospitality*, “The collective presence of these companions, especially at meals, caused a number of good upstanding people to regard Jesus’ ministry as something immoral.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus continually challenged long established social barriers, and sought to be in the company of sinners. Koenig adds,

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<sup>18</sup> Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America’s Public Life* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 92.

<sup>19</sup> John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 26.

“The Synoptic Gospels show Jesus challenging exclusivism wherever it was officially sanctioned or accepted as normal.”<sup>20</sup> The greatest missionary, Jesus Christ, came to sit in the company of sinners to feast and commune with them. To some this was scandalous, but to others it meant salvation and initiation into God’s kingdom reign.

When examining the image of the reign of God as feast, it is significant that God was willing to be both “host” and “guest” at the same time. This is an interesting and important dynamic when understanding the reign of God at the feast. In both Isaiah 25 and Luke 14, the image of God is one who is host of a great banquet feast. Yet when examining the ministry of Jesus, it is clear that he was a guest in the homes of others. There is no Scriptural record of Jesus ever owning a home. In fact, he once stated in Matthew 8:20, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” This suggests that Jesus’ purpose was to come and place himself in the position of vulnerability. It is incredible to think that the God of the universe, or great host of the sumptuous banquet, would come humbly and place himself in the vulnerable role of guest. Jesus therefore came as a guest to give witness to the truth of the great banquet that God is hosting.

What is also significant in the coming of the Messiah, according to Jesus’ parable in Luke 14, is that the feast has already begun. As verse 17 states, “The feast is now ready.” This means that the kingdom has already been established in the reign and rule of Christ. The table is set and the drinks and the meal have already been provided for. The mission of God is therefore one of welcoming others to come to the banquet table. When Jesus came to eat and drink with sinners, Coleman explains that he “wasn’t trying

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

to impress the crowd, but to usher in a kingdom.”<sup>21</sup> He came to both usher in God’s kingdom on earth and to send others to advance that same kingdom by his grace. The call to follow Jesus is therefore the call to feasting. The invitation to discipleship is the same invitation to dining with God. The feast God has prepared is now ready, through Christ, and now the God’s invitation extends to his creation to come to the table and commune with him.

Just as the triune God, who is One yet three distinct Persons, exists in relationship, so God calls his creation to be in relationship with him once again. The missional God came into this world by sending his only Son Jesus Christ to redeem humankind to restore relationship and invite communion once again at the table of feasting. As Koenig asserts, “The kingdom of God is a persistent invitation to Being which seeks us out in the fortress of our alienation.”<sup>22</sup>

This is therefore a story of redemption. It is a story about God coming to invite people to his great banquet table to be in fellowship with him. The foundation of a healthy understanding of a witness and outreach must therefore be firmly established on a theology which understands God as the great “host” of a banquet. God’s kingdom reign is one of abundance, and he invites humankind to feast at his table through Jesus Christ. It is the character of this host which makes this all possible. Rather than condemning creation, God is in the process of redeeming creation because of his love.

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<sup>21</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 35.

<sup>22</sup> Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 145.

Mission is therefore an invitation to Christ. Because God is a missionary, he sent himself, and makes himself known to the world through his Son. The author of Hebrews 1:1-3 declares,

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

God, therefore, is his own missionary.<sup>23</sup> God sent his Son to make known to the world the nature of his redemptive love. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that God desires to be known through Jesus. As Jesus walked in perfect communion with his heavenly Father at all times, God was making known to the world what he was like. As Christopher reveals, “God’s mission to be known to the world dominates the thinking of the Son even as he engages in prayer with his Father.”<sup>24</sup> Whether it was through prayer, teaching, miracles, or ultimately his death and resurrection, Jesus makes known to the world the mission and character of God. When people see Jesus, they see God.

When Jesus began his earthly ministry, he cited Isaiah 61:1-2 as a way of revealing how he is the complete embodiment of all that the Scriptures revealed about God’s perfect missionary, the messiah. He said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus made

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<sup>23</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 94.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher, *The Mission of God*, 126.

it clear to his audience in the Jewish synagogue that Scripture was being fulfilled in their midst. In other words, he was the complete embodiment of God's mission in the flesh. He was the true missionary that the Old Testament Scriptures had spoken of centuries before. God was now making himself visible, and the kingdom was rushing into creation.

God prepared a feast for humanity, but the feast was very costly. There was a price that had to be paid for the sins of humanity. There was a cost for communion. When God sent his Son into the world, he sent his Son to die so that humanity might have life (1 John 4:9). Hastings writes, "The Christian gospel of the mission of God is the story not only of forgiveness of sins, but of human persons becoming sons and daughters of God, and therefore of the redemption and recovery of the fullness of our human life in union with the risen Christ and as modeled in the richness of his personhood."<sup>25</sup> This recovery and restoration of communion with God, and the fullness of his life, was all made possible through the cross. Christopher states, "The cross was the unavoidable cost of God's mission. But it is equally true and biblical to say that the cross was the unavoidable center of our mission. . . . Ultimately all that will be there in the new, redeemed creation will be there because of the cross."<sup>26</sup> Jesus had to pay the price of redemption through his own death. The feast of God would not be possible without the price Jesus paid on the cross.

The invitation to feast is therefore the mission of God, and subsequently the call of the Church to invite others to come to the table. In their book, *Mission in Bold*

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<sup>25</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 171-172.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher, *The Mission of God*, 314-315.

*Humility*, Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger discuss the hope that “God, who has already intervened in Jesus Christ . . . is now conducting history to its conclusion.”<sup>27</sup>

There is a sense by which the kingdom is still not yet complete. Throughout history, God has called his people, the Church, to fulfill his mission and purpose in the world through witness and evangelism. He has called his people to make known his purposes of redemption through the cross of his Son Jesus Christ. He has called Christians to be missionaries who welcome others to the table. Just as the triune God spills love over to creation, so also God’s people must spill over God’s love to others, as a witness to the work of God’s redemptive reign in their lives.

### **A God Who Welcomes Aliens and Strangers**

God is the host of a great banquet, and his invitation goes out to all of humanity to come and feast at his table. God does not want even one person to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Because of sin, however, humanity is estranged from the communal life of God. The cross of Jesus Christ, however, makes reconciliation between humanity and God possible. God is a God of welcome to all who will repent of sin, trust in Christ, and obey his commands. To understand the concept of God’s hospitality to humankind, it is important to consider the nature of the people who are separated from God’s kingdom reign. In the Old Testament, the images of “alien” and “stranger” are used to describe people of vulnerability. David and Ruth Rupprecht, in their book, *Radical Hospitality*, state, “The alien, as defined in the Old Testament, was one who was passing through another’s land. The stranger, or sojourner, was a resident alien living in the foreign land as supposed to

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<sup>27</sup> Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger, eds., *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch’s Work Considered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 6.

travelling through.”<sup>28</sup> This idea of strangers and aliens is therefore an important concept to understand when considering the ministry of welcome and hospitality in God’s mission.

There are a number of Old Testament passages that provide insight into how Israel was to treat the alien and stranger. In Deuteronomy 10:19, God commanded the Israelites to love the stranger, or sojourner, as they too once were strangers in the land of Egypt. The Israelites were therefore called to remember their former way of life as a way of showing love and sympathy to aliens and strangers. Memory therefore significantly factored into their behavior towards outsiders who were not part of the community of Israel. In the Mosaic Law, God commanded the Israelites, “You shall not wrong a sojourner [stranger] or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:21). Again, the ability to show love to the stranger was based upon their own memory of being a stranger. They needed to remember that a foreigner’s life was not easy. They had material challenges, as they likely worked hard for little pay, and they often had poor housing. They also had emotional challenges, as they were displaced from their homes and families, and lived in the company of strangers. They lived among people who did not speak their own native language. The way of life for the alien and stranger was therefore difficult, and the people of Israel had to remember this reality if they were to treat the stranger in their midst appropriately.

Because the Israelites had the collective memory of being strangers and aliens in Egypt, they were therefore called to show hospitality to strangers. According to 2

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<sup>28</sup> David and Ruth Rupprecht, *Radical Hospitality* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), 18.

Chronicles 2:11, at the time of the dedication of the temple under Solomon, there were in fact 153,600 resident aliens living among the people of Israel. This likely would have been a significant percentage of the population of Israel as a whole. The nation of Israel had to learn how to practice of welcoming aliens and strangers as an expression of hospitality. This was not an option, for they were commanded by God's righteous law to do it. They knew what it once felt like to be the lonely, vulnerable stranger in a distant land, and now they were called to reach out and make the lonely feel welcomed and at home in their land. Furthermore, they were called to love their neighbors. In Leviticus 19:33-34 the Lord commands: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." According to the Mosaic Law, the concept of loving the outsider, or the stranger, is therefore ingrained within God's very definition of righteousness.

In the New Testament this same concept of welcoming alien and stranger continues. One of the most recognizable of all of Jesus' parables is that of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. When the lawyer asked Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded by asking in return, "What is written in the Law?" The man replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said, "You have answered correctly." Then, when the man asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus shared the story of the Samaritan who was the only man, among a priest and Levite, who took care of a man badly beaten by robbers. Ironically, the

“outsider,” or the Samaritan, was the man who acted rightly toward his neighbor by showing love and hospitality, as opposed to the religious men who should have shown that same hospitality to their neighbor. Jesus, therefore, calls people to radically love their neighbor, even if loving the stranger involves overcoming prejudice. God’s people must welcome strangers because God does so himself.

Just as memory played a significant role in the Israelites’ welcome of strangers and aliens, so memory also is significant in the life of New Testament believers. In Ephesians 2:19, the apostle Paul tells Christians, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the household and saints and members of the household of God.” Here Paul was revealing to these believers that through Christ they now have a changed status. No longer are they alienated from the life of God, but now they are part of the new household of faith. They are now participants in the feast of God’s kingdom. Like the crippled Mephibosheth who was invited to eat at King David’s table because of David’s kindness in 2 Samuel 9, so God has invited humanity to join him at the table as well. Christians are no longer strangers, but they inherit all the blessings as God’s children because of what Christ has done. Yet it is the memory of living as strangers that compels Christians to love all strangers.

The mission of God is therefore one of hospitality. He calls aliens and strangers back to the communal life found only at his banquet table of fellowship through Jesus Christ. The feast has already begun, and God is inviting people to saving grace. His prevenient grace is working to draw people to himself. As Outler states, “It makes a great deal of difference how you preach to the unconverted, whether you assume or reject the premise of God’s grace as prevenient, preparatory, and morally active in human

existence, always and everywhere.”<sup>29</sup> According to John 6:44, no person can come to God unless Jesus draws them to come by his grace. Wesley claimed that God’s grace is already present and active in the natural person, moving and inviting towards saving grace.<sup>30</sup> God therefore invites people to come and also enables them to come to his feast by this grace. It is to come to what Koenig refers to as the “supper of joyful repentance.”<sup>31</sup> God’s hospitality is what makes this possible.

### **A Biblical Call to Hospitality**

The Scriptures show that expressing love to neighbor fulfills the righteousness of God. Because God initiated his redemptive activity through Christ and invites humanity to feast at his banquet table, he therefore calls the Church to be a people who welcome others to the table. God calls Christians to be hospitable to others, just as he has been hospitable towards them. As Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch state in their book, *Faith Leap*, “The church is a result of the missionary activity of God and not the producer of it.”<sup>32</sup> Because God is the initiator, the church must respond in obedience through participation in God’s redemptive mission. This is a mission of hospitality to the outsider, the alien, and the stranger. If hospitality flows from the heart of God, then it must also saturate the hearts and lives of God’s people.

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<sup>29</sup> Oden and Longden, eds., *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, 195.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Meeks, *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 142-143.

<sup>31</sup> Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 114.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Faith Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure, and Courage* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

In order to develop a biblical concept of the practice of hospitality, it will therefore be important to adequately define the term *hospitality*. Kathie Crismier, in her book, *The Power of Hospitality*, reveals that hospitality comes from the Greek word *philoxenos*, which functionally defined means “reaching strangers.”<sup>33</sup> Hospitality is therefore creating places of inclusive belonging where God’s kingdom can be experienced.<sup>34</sup> It is not a planned event, or a series of routine gestures, but rather it is the stance of heart that is abandoned to God’s love.<sup>35</sup> Hospitality involves not only opening one’s home to the stranger, but it also involves an openness of one’s heart, life, and resources as a way of expressing God’s love to others. The Latin translation of hospitality can be used as either a noun (*hospitium*) or as an adjective (*hospitalis*), which in turn derives from *hospes*, meaning both “host” and “guest.”<sup>36</sup> As Koenig states, “Hospitality is the catalyst for creating and sustaining partnerships in the Gospel.”<sup>37</sup> While hospitality is a dynamic word that can be used in different settings, it is important to distinguish what it is and what it is not in the specific context of Christian history and tradition. In other words, there are clear distinctive traits that define what makes hospitality uniquely Christian.

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<sup>33</sup> Kathie Crismier, *The Power of Hospitality: An Open Heart, Open Hand and Open Home Will Change Your World* (Richmond, VA: Elijah Books, 2005), 45.

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2008), xxi.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2002), 203.

<sup>36</sup> Michelle Herschberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 19.

<sup>37</sup> Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 10.

The practice of hospitality is an ancient tradition, which has been practiced in many places, spaces, and cultures. Michelle Herschberger, in her book, *A Christian View of Hospitality*, explains, “In ancient near Eastern cultural concepts, hospitality was of paramount value or importance. It was more than oriental custom or simple good manners; it was a sacred duty that everyone was expected to observe. Only the deprived would violate this obligation.”<sup>38</sup> Hospitality in many ancient cultures was so commonly practiced that the failure to observe this practice was actually a sign of great moral and social decay. In Greek and Roman cultures, the practice of hospitality was also prevalent, but what distinguished much of their forms of hospitality was their emphasis on the client-patron relationship. Luke Bretherton, in *Hospitality as Holiness*, states, “The Greek and Roman views of hospitality tended to emphasize reciprocity and the use of hospitality within a client-patron relationship form which both parties gained, social, political, and economic advantage.”<sup>39</sup>

This form of hospitality, which has been the predominant tradition throughout history, may have some altruistic and redeeming qualities, but it is largely undergirded by a value system that uses hospitality as a way to gain personal advantage. Jesus specifically confronted this secular view of hospitality in Luke 14:13-14 when he said, “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” Jesus confronts this view of hospitality that seeks to use it for social or

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<sup>38</sup> Herschberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality*, 17-18.

<sup>39</sup> Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness amid Moral Diversity* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 134.

economic gain, and instead calls his followers to not make this their inclination when showing hospitality.

Christ's followers must be different in how they practice hospitality. While many cultures have practiced hospitality throughout the ages, there ought to be something unique about the way in which Christians do so. In addition to Luke 14:13-14, there are a number of commands in Scripture which call God's people to live and practice hospitality. One command is found in 1 Peter 4:9, which says, "Show hospitality to another without grumbling." As God's people are stewards of God's grace, they must learn to show love to others through inclusive welcoming. Furthermore, they were not to view it as a burden which resulted in grumbling, but rather as a blessing which results in God's glory. This command was not for a select few, but rather for all Christians in the community to follow.

Another clear command is found in Romans 15:7 which states, "Therefore welcome one another as Christ as welcomed you, for the glory of God." This particular command is notable for a couple of reasons. First, the grace and ability to show Christian hospitality is established upon the understanding that Christ has first welcomed believers into his family. Christ's hospitality enables Christian hospitality to take place. Second, hospitality is a way of showing God's glory. Christians honor God every time they obediently show hospitality towards others. Another command related to hospitality is found in Hebrews 13:2, which states, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware." This command appears to attach a blessing with it.

In the Scriptures, God provides many examples regarding the importance of showing love to neighbor through hospitality, linking it with certain blessings. One of the most prominent examples in the Old Testament is that of Abraham welcoming the three strangers in Genesis 18. Through his welcoming of these three men, he was to receive the news of his long awaited son through Sarah. In another example in Kings 4:8-17, the Shunammite woman not only urged the prophet Elisha to stay and eat in her home, but she and her husband built a small room to host the prophet when he passed through. It was through this hospitality that she also received news that she was to bear a son. In the New Testament, the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 demonstrates another example of hospitality, in which Mary in particular received the blessing of sitting at Jesus' feet and learning from him. Martha too learned from Jesus the importance of right priorities. Cornelius welcomed Peter in Acts 10, and as a result the Gentiles hear the good news. The men on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35 also welcome the "stranger" among them and welcome him into their home for a meal. It was through the feasting at the table that this stranger made himself known as the living Christ. In each of these examples of hospitality in the Scripture, one can therefore see that there was an associated blessing that came as a result. The command to show hospitality paved the way for unique blessings to those who practiced it.

The early Church was particularly engaged in the practice of hospitality. Acts 2:42-48 provides a beautiful picture of the early Church in fellowship by living together and sharing their possessions. It mentions specifically that they "broke bread in their homes" (verse 46). The early Church used their homes as ministry centers, as a place for fellowship and hospitality. Koenig states, "The major thrust of Luke-Acts is the outward

mission of the church to the world. . . . Residential believers in particular have a responsibility to preach the gospel through generous disposition of their material goods.”<sup>40</sup> He continues, “The house church [became] the creative hub for God’s redemptive work.”<sup>41</sup> Through opening their homes to others, the Church was able to present the gospel to others and greatly increase in number. Robert Banks, in his book, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, explains, “[Their thinking] did not begin with differences that divide people from one another, but with the differences that divide all people from God.”<sup>42</sup>

Christian hospitality was unique because it was not used for political, social, or economic advantage. Rather, it crossed bridges and broke barriers to make people feel welcome. Rather than focusing on welcoming the rich, which would allow for reciprocal blessing, Jesus made it clear to pay attention to the poor. No longer were Christians to be divided over racial barriers, but as the Apostle Paul said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). All the barriers and distinctions which previously divided them have been done away with in the new kingdom through the inclusive welcome of Jesus Christ. In her book, *Open Heart, Open Home*, Karin Mains states, “When we are servants, our hospitality takes on different dimensions. Our homes are used to build one

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<sup>40</sup> Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 111.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 110.

another, to bind ourselves together – not to create barriers of needless competition or comparisons.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, Christian hospitality was to be separate from secular hospitality.

A significant characteristic about the hospitality of the early Church was the value placed upon the home as the epicenter of evangelism. Michael Green reveals in his book, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, “One of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was by the use of homes. It had positive advantages: first, the comparatively small numbers involved made real interchange of views and informed discussion among participants possible. Second, there was no artificial isolation of a preacher from his hearers. Third, it was enhanced by the sheer informality and relaxed atmosphere of the home.”<sup>44</sup> It is evident that the use of the home by the early Church contributed to the phenomenal success of the advancement of the gospel. A number of specific houses used by New Testament believers—including Jason’s house at Thessalonica; Titus Justus’s home (provocatively opposite the synagogue) in Corinth; Philip’s house at Caesarea; Lydia’s house; and the jailer’s home in Philippi—were all used as evangelistic centers. Green states, “Christian missionaries made a deliberate point of gaining whatever households they could as lighthouses, so to speak, from which the Gospel could illuminate the surrounding darkness.”<sup>45</sup> It appeared that “witness” cultivated “witness.” As the early Church welcomed non-believers into their homes, being with them provided opportunities for evangelism. It is no wonder why in 1

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<sup>43</sup> Karen Mains, *Open Heart, Open Home: The Hospitable Way to Make Others Feel Welcomed and Wanted* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 78-79.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 318.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

Timothy 3:2 the apostle Paul instructed overseers in the church to be “given to hospitality.”

The homes of the early Church members became ministry centers where fellowship and evangelism took place, and they also became mission outposts where the holistic needs of people were met. However, one of the primary activities that took place in the homes of the early Christians was feasting. This act of feasting became one of the expressions of the kingdom of God in the midst of the Church. Bretherton states, “The framework of feasting and fasting provides a lens through which to assess whether particular forms of life together by Christians bear faithful witness to Jesus Christ.”<sup>46</sup> It was this one act of feasting, centered upon the table, which became one of the visible signs that God’s kingdom was at hand. In her book, *Untamed Hospitality*, Elizabeth Newman argues that hospitality and invitation depend upon the Eucharist; she suggests, “The Eucharist *is* the hospitality we receive and extend to others. . . . The Eucharist and hospitality as disciplines signals that these are communal acts that call for bodies willing to give and receive the abundance of God.”<sup>47</sup> As the early believers met in their homes, they feasted by receiving of the Eucharist as a tangible expression of God’s abundance through the grace of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, when the early Church celebrated the feast together in remembrance of Christ, this was an invitation for others to receive the abundance of God’s grace and mercy.

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<sup>46</sup> Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 169.

The table meal that took place in the early church therefore cultivated an environment of welcome and invitation to the fellowship of Jesus Christ. As new believers participated in this fellowship and committed themselves to following Christ, they were assimilated into the “household of faith” (*oikos* in Greek).<sup>48</sup> They were brought into the dwelling place of God. The kingdom of God dwelt in the midst of the early Church as believers invited and welcomed aliens and strangers in their midst to receive the feast of God. They reached across social, political, and economic differences and did not think of hospitality in terms of reciprocity, but they invited the poor and needy who could not repay. In her book, *Just Hospitality*, Letty Russell reveals that “hospitality is the practice of God’s welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God’s actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis.”<sup>49</sup> Although there were still challenges the early Church faced, particularly related to Jewish and Gentile distinctions, the call to embrace others of difference became a central theme.

Another distinction that marked Christian hospitality from secular hospitality was its emphasis upon ministry to the whole person. In his book, *Picturing Christian Witness*, Stanley Skreslet writes, “If the purpose of mission and sharing Christ with friends is somehow to make Christ present for others, then the fullness of a Christian’s experience of Jesus needs to be expressed in a way that respects his obvious solicitude for the whole person.”<sup>50</sup> In Acts 2:42-47, it is clear that members of the early Church

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<sup>48</sup> Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> Letty Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley H. Skreslet, *Picturing Christian Witness: New Testament Images of Discipleship in Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 115.

distributed goods to anyone who had a need. The love of Christ overflowed from them to others in order to minister to the needs of people.

One of the most profound insights into the importance of hospitality and the meeting of needs for the whole person is found in Jesus' statements on the final judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. One of main distinctions between the "sheep" and the "goats" in this text is the ability of the faithful to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, visit the prisoner, and welcome the stranger. Furthermore, Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." What makes this a crucial text to consider is that it places Jesus as the stranger. Jesus is the one who comes naked, in prison, hungry, and thirsty. In other words, when believers welcome a stranger, they mysteriously welcome Jesus himself. This passage is sobering in that judgment comes to those who fail to minister to people's needs, because they are missing Christ who is before them. Therefore, the distinctive mark of Christian hospitality is that it is a call to meet the whole needs of strangers and welcome them, as they would welcome Christ. Without favoritism, Christians must love others (James 2:2-4).

Throughout Christian history, the major emphasis of the practice of hospitality has therefore been among the poor and needy. Saint Benedict, who lived in the sixth century, established various "rules," is perhaps one of the greatest examples of Christian hospitality. His Rule 53:1 states, "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ." Rule 53:3 states, "Once a guest has been announced, the superior and the community are to meet the guest with all courtesy and love." Rule 53:15 states, "Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving the poor people and pilgrims, because in

them more particularly Christ is received.”<sup>51</sup> In their book, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love*, Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt indicate, “When St. Benedict wrote of hospitality he stressed the importance of welcoming the outsider, the poor, and the pilgrim. Benedict understood that guests are crucial to the making of a monk.”<sup>52</sup> To Benedict, it was not about comfort and entertainment; it was about saving lives.

The practice of hospitality also took place in early Methodism, as John Wesley viewed mission as nothing more or less than offering Christ to others through concrete actions.<sup>53</sup> The servant ministry of the early Methodist people was a mission lived out in solidarity with those people who were shut out, neglected, and thrown away in society.<sup>54</sup> A. B. Simpson, the founder of C&MA, emphasized the need to rescue souls from the sinking ship of humanity. While his aim was not the reformation of society, he preached personal holiness made visible and tangible. Believers had to go where the people were, and also welcome them in their midst.<sup>55</sup> Christian history has a long and proven track record for offering hospitality to the poor, needy, and the strangers in their midst.

A final distinction between Christian and secular hospitality is the call for the believer to consider becoming the vulnerable “guest.” Often times when hospitality is considered, it is usually in reference to hosting people in one’s home. But the example of

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<sup>51</sup> Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2002), vii.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision*, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel J. Ewearitt, *Body and Soul: Evangelism and the Social Concern of A.B. Simpson* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1994), 136.

Jesus and the early disciples reveals that part of hospitality is going to others' homes and being welcomed by them. Jesus was consistently being welcomed into homes by sinners, tax collectors, strangers, and friends. Much of his earthly ministry was done in the context of being a guest in the homes of others. He was willing to place himself in the vulnerable position of being a "stranger" in need. Likewise, Christians too are called to follow this same pattern. When Jesus sent the disciples out in Luke 9:3-6 two by two, he placed them in the role of being in need of hospitality. Luke writes, "And he said unto them, 'Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.'" Clearly they were to be dependent upon the hospitality of others, even those who were not yet Christians. Just as Jesus set the pattern for the disciples of being a guest among sinners, so too were the disciples to follow his example. The call to Christian hospitality therefore must not be limited to taking on the role of hosting others, but also being willing to become the guest in the homes of others. It is this two-fold pattern of hospitality which sets an example for healthy incarnational evangelism and outreach.

### **Hospitality and the Incarnation of the Gospel**

The call of the Church is to be missional. In his book, *Bible and Mission*, Richard Bauckham writes, "Mission is not the imposing of predetermined patterns on to history,

but openness to the incalculable ways of God in history.”<sup>56</sup> The Church must therefore discern how and where God is already at work, and join him by engaging others through incarnational mission. The Church is sent by Christ to “go and make disciples” of all people (Matthew 28:18-19). Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, in their book, *The Tangible Kingdom*, explain, “Missional at its essence means ‘sent.’ The opposite of waiting for people to come to us. It’s the opposite of trying to ‘attract’ them to us, our programs, our buildings, or our gatherings.”<sup>57</sup> The Church must therefore go out into the world and reach people for the gospel of Jesus Christ, not by veiling their values, but by living them out in plain view of the culture around them. Their lives must expose and challenge the present system with new kingdom values.<sup>58</sup> Not only does being missional imply being sent, but it also assumes that the Church has been given a task. The task of the Church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit, and gathering these disciples that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father.<sup>59</sup> In order to do this, the Church must look to how God does mission.

In sending his only Son into the world, God came to “dwell among” humanity. The beauty of the incarnation is that God came to dwell among aliens and strangers as a way of showing his hospitality to the world. To be missional, therefore, is to show incarnational hospitality to others. It is to come and dwell among aliens and strangers as

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 92.

<sup>57</sup> Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 38.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

<sup>59</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 26.

a way of showing the light and love of Christ. In their book, *Right Here, Right Now*, Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford describe being incarnational as “*moving out* into missional engagement, *moving in* through burrowing down into culture, *moving alongside* by engaging in genuine friendships and relational networks, and *moving from* the dehumanizing and sinful aspects of our culture.”<sup>60</sup> It means to be with people as a way of being a witness to them, through demonstrating the abundance of God’s kingdom reign. Hirsch and Ford write, “The church must therefore move into the culture and take the idea of incarnational mission seriously. This in turn takes its cue from the fact that God took on human form and moved into our neighborhood, assumed the full reality of our humanity, identified with us, and spoke to us from within a common experience.”<sup>61</sup> If God came to move into the neighborhood and dwell among humanity, so the local church must move into its neighborhood and dwell among people as well. The focus of missional outreach must therefore be “incarnational” rather than “attractional.”

Showing incarnational hospitality to others must mean that the Church is willing to dwell among aliens and strangers. It is to move into the neighborhood and develop relationships with others for the purpose of being an authentic witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without showing favoritism, the Church must be inclusive in its hospitality and radically welcome everyone. Halter and Smay suggest this involves four basic practices. To demonstrate incarnational hospitality, the Church must: 1) leave; 2) live among; 3) listen to; and 4) love with no strings attached.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that Christians

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<sup>60</sup> Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 35.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>62</sup> Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 124.

must be willing to integrate their lives into the fabric of society and participate in the natural activities of the surrounding culture. Rather than judging people, Christians are called to love them. As Halter and Smay indicate, “You can’t save the ones you judge.”<sup>63</sup> Like Saint Patrick did among the Irish Celtic people in the fourth and fifth centuries, Christians must dwell among people and learn their ethos and way of life. Rather than fearing the stranger as someone dangerous, they must seek to understand their neighborhood. As Homan and Pratt state, “The real question is not how dangerous that stranger is. The real question is how dangerous will I become if I don’t learn to be more open.”<sup>64</sup>

The basic skill that Christians must therefore learn in order to adequately practice Christian hospitality is the ability to contextualize the gospel. Hastings defines this process of contextualization “as a matter of identifying the very worldview undergirding the culture and working to subvert this worldview by way of investing it with Christian content.”<sup>65</sup> In order to practice hospitality, Christians must listen to and examine the basic worldview of their neighbors. They are to discern their values and seek to understand how they might begin a conversation which will allow for the light of Christ to shine through. This means that incarnational hospitality will look different in each neighborhood and with each individual. Evangelism and outreach are not done in a vacuum, nor can they be reduced to a simple method. In order to contextualize the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>64</sup> Homan and Pratt, *Radical Hospitality*, 36-37.

<sup>65</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 168.

gospel, it is to be done with spiritual discernment, guided by the leading of the Holy Spirit according to each unique situation.

In this process of incarnating the gospel through intentional hospitality, it is also essential to understand the fact that God is already at work in the lives of others. God's prevenient grace is already working to draw people to himself even before hospitality ever happens. Alan Roxburgh, in his book, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, indicates that Christians should therefore "ask what God is already doing ahead of us in these ordinary places."<sup>66</sup> As Christians discern how God is already at work in the neighborhood, they will then participate in the work God is already doing and seek to be used as vessels for his glory. Welcoming the stranger does involve risk. In his book, *A Hidden Wholeness*, Parker Palmer states, "The religious quest, the spiritual pilgrimage, is always taking us into new lands where we are strange to others and they are strange to us. Faith is a venture into the unknown, into the realms of mystery, away from the safe and comfortable and secure."<sup>67</sup> Rather than seeing the stranger as someone to be feared, he or she is to be seen as a person of promise.<sup>68</sup> Strangers are to be welcomed because God is already at work in them, and God may also use them to return the blessing.

In the traditional practice of Christian hospitality, the meal has always played a central role in welcoming people. Just as the feast is a primary image in Scripture of God's kingdom reign, so sharing a meal with others is a central part of showing hospitality to others. One of the significant blessings of shared meals is that food helps

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<sup>66</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 71.

<sup>67</sup> Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 56.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

relieve tension, as it is tangible and gives people something to do when they are socially nervous.<sup>69</sup> As Crismier states, “breaking bread, breaks barriers.”<sup>70</sup> When Christians open their homes and receive others, or in turn are received by others, the sharing of a meal is often the most fruitful place where Christ is made tangible. Shared meals not only construct and sustain relationships, but they also create spaces of inclusive belonging.<sup>71</sup> Most importantly, the table can become the setting, or the place of discovery, for people to see the kingdom of God at work among them. It introduces others to the reign of God made visible through his people and provides the catalyst for them to be invited by God to feast in his kingdom.

The critical element of table fellowship is that it models the kingdom and provides a place of discovery for others. Just as the men on the road to Emmaus did not recognize the “stranger” among them until they broke bread and their “eyes were opened” (Luke 24:30-31), so in many ways is Christ often most made visible at the table by others. Table fellowship therefore is a powerful expression of God’s love made visible through Christ. In his book, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, Alan Roxburgh contends, “When we gather for a meal as Christians with others, we are in the presence of God’s future. In the midst of our conversations, God’s future begins to become materially present.”<sup>72</sup> What takes place during the sharing of a meal with others is therefore something mysterious. As Christians welcome strangers, God’s Spirit moves

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<sup>69</sup> Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 159.

<sup>70</sup> Crismier, *The Power of Hospitality*, 66.

<sup>71</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 164.

<sup>72</sup> Alan Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 14.

to create “grace-grace” situations which enable blessings which are “good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over” (Luke 6:38).

### **Hospitality and the Nature of Spiritual Conversion**

When Christians engage in the ministry of hospitality, the goal is to be a witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ. During times of table fellowship there is ample opportunity to get to know neighbors through conversation and dialogue. While not every conversation will focus on spiritual things, Christians should make an effort to allow their words and actions to count for eternal purposes. Colossians 4:5-6 states, “Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” In other words, when Christians engage in the ministry of hospitality, there needs to be a spiritually redeeming quality about their conversation and actions. The goal of these conversations is to point people to Jesus and to see that others hear and receive the gospel through repentance and faith. The aim of these conversations therefore is spiritual conversion.

One of the most important issues foundational to the entire subject of evangelism revolves around an adequate understanding of the nature of conversion. In order to participate in the missionary work of God, Christians cannot develop an evangelistic strategy unless they first address the nature of conversion itself. In his book, *Conversion in the New Testament*, Richard Peace states, “How we conceive of conversion determines how we do evangelism.”<sup>73</sup> The central idea of the word *conversion* means “change.” It

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<sup>73</sup> Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 286.

can mean a simple change from the absence of a faith system to a faith commitment. It can also mean a change of one's personal orientation towards life. While there are complex, multifaceted experiences culminating in conversion, it is in essence a turning of one's life over to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and being "initiated into the Kingdom of God."<sup>74</sup> It is the submission of one's life to the reign of God, expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Peace provides helpful analysis on this idea that conversion happens as a series of insights. He reveals that the majority of evangelistic efforts within recent history are based on the idea that conversion is a sudden event, often expressed through mass evangelism, personal evangelism, and media evangelism.<sup>75</sup> This model for evangelism is based largely on the conversion of the apostle Paul, whereby one can see a core pattern of insight, turning, and transformation happening suddenly.<sup>76</sup> Subsequently, many evangelistic efforts have sought to repeat the Pauline conversion experience by calling people to make a decision quickly. The emphasis is upon preaching or sharing the truth and then calling people for immediate response. While this method has been effective in certain cases, and should not be dismissed entirely, Peace discovered that for most people, conversion is much more of a process than an event. Other Christian researchers on evangelism have come to the same conclusion. After extensive research on how and why people convert to religion, Lewis Rambo, in his book, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, concludes that "conversion is very rarely an overnight, all-in-an-instant,

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<sup>74</sup> Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 95.

<sup>75</sup> Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 288.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

wholesale transformation that is now and forever.”<sup>77</sup> This suggests that conversion involves a series of elements that are interactive and cumulative over time.

One of the most powerful biblical cases for conversion as a process is advocated by Peace. He suggests the disciples’ conversions were much more of a process or series of insights concerning the nature and identity of Jesus Christ, and that Mark structures his gospel according to these series of revelations.<sup>78</sup> He suggests the six sections of Mark each illuminate one key title about who Jesus is: Jesus as “teacher” (1:40-45); Jesus as “prophet” (5:1-20); Jesus as “Messiah” (8:27-33); Jesus as “Son of Man” (10:32-45); Jesus as “Son of David” (11:15-19); and Jesus as the “Son of God” (15:33-39).<sup>79</sup> Mark highlights to his readers the ongoing revelation of the disciples about the role and identity of Jesus. Based on Mark’s gospel, Peace therefore concludes that the conversion of the disciples was a process, rather than an instant or event that solidified their salvation. This provides a biblical foundation for an understanding of evangelism as a series of insights revealed by God to each individual regarding the true identity of Jesus, as well as his or her own identity in relationship to God.

If Christians see conversion as more of a process rather than a punctiliar event, this will have significant implications in how they do outreach and evangelism. First, the nature of spiritual conversations will change. Rather than trying to develop a contractual approach to getting people to say the “sinner’s prayer,” they will see conversion as a series of insights as to the true nature of Jesus Christ. Evangelism cannot be reduced to a

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<sup>77</sup> Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>78</sup> Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 288.

<sup>79</sup> Peace, *Holy Conversation*, 54.

certain method of spiritual conversation, but it will require more discernment as to the ways God is already at work in the life of each person. Like the men on the road to Emmaus, Christians must allow people to encounter Christ and explore, question, listen, and take their time.<sup>80</sup> This will mean that different people experience God in different ways, and the purpose of these spiritual conversations is to enable people to discover the nature and identity of Christ. It may not be a one-time decision, but rather a series of spiritual insights which are followed by decisions.

Another significant implication for seeing evangelism as more of a process is that it will enable Christians to act as a certain midwife to the soul.<sup>81</sup> When Christians listen to others share their stories, they will seek to discern where God's common grace is already at work. Listening is therefore at the core of hospitality. As Christians ask good questions of others, they will be able to discern the ways in which God is already at work. The emphasis is not so much on winning an argument, but starting a conversation.<sup>82</sup> As Palmer asserts, "The soul wants truth not trivia."<sup>83</sup> Teaching Christians how to listen to the stories of others will therefore be vital to the practice of hospitality. As they learn to how to be receptive listeners, they will be able to act in the role of midwife to the soul, where the Spirit of God can work.

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<sup>80</sup> John Finney, *Emerging Evangelism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), 20.

<sup>81</sup> Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1992), 82.

<sup>82</sup> James Choung, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 55.

<sup>83</sup> Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 126.

In the end, evangelism is about hospitality and invitation. Christians must first welcome others into fellowship, but they must also invite others to respond to the gospel. God is an inviter, and he is willing to break barriers to make hospitality happen. In the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus says that the king invited people to come to the feast, but they would not come. After this the king invited others to come, but they also rejected the invitation. The king finally asked his servants to go to the main roads and invite as many people as possible to the wedding feast. It is here where the reader sees the character of God as the One who welcomes. This invitation is not simply for a select few, but for all who would come to the table. The invitation is clear: everyone is welcome. If God is an inviter, so he also calls his disciples to be people who invite others as well. Hospitality is simply a way of extending God's welcome to others and inviting them to participate in God's redemptive reign.

Hospitality without invitation has its temporal benefits, but ultimately it will not serve God's eternal purposes. The call to Christian hospitality and disciple-making is clearly established in Scripture, and the purpose of being hospitable is to invite others to become committed disciples of Jesus Christ. This may not happen quickly, however there is great joy in joining the spiritual journey of others and ultimately being a part of the process of bringing others to Christ. As Bill Hybels states in his book, *Just Walk Across the Room*, "There is nothing better than pouring your life into the goal of welcoming home a wandering soul."<sup>84</sup> Christians welcome others as an overflow of God's generous welcome to the world through the cross of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>84</sup> Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room: Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2006), 179.

The theology of hospitality is therefore firmly rooted in the hospitality of God. The missional God sought out humanity as a way of reconciling others to himself. This was made possible because God incarnated himself as a man and came to dwell among strangers and aliens. God's purpose was to redeem, not only humankind, but all of creation. When people respond to God's hospitality through repentance, faith, and obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ, they participate in God's redemptive reign. Christians are therefore called to show hospitality and make disciples through inviting others to respond to God's grace. Conversion most likely does not take place immediately, like Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, but instead it is often a process similar to the one experienced by the men on the road to Emmaus.<sup>85</sup> The process is different for each person, and it will likely take time for people to discover who Jesus really is. Yet as Christians open both their hearts and their homes, they join the *missio Dei* and invite others to experience the blessings of God's abundant kingdom. Evangelism is therefore about hospitality and invitation. It is the generous welcome of others and the invitation to the feast of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All are welcome to the table.

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<sup>85</sup> Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 20.

**PART THREE**  
**MINISTRY STRATEGY**

## CHAPTER 4

### MINISTRY GOALS AND PLAN

This chapter will provide a strategic ministry plan for Faith Community Church to establish a ministry of Christian hospitality based on the theology expressed in Chapter 3. This strategy will begin first with significant teaching on Sundays, which coincides with weekly hospitality groups within the congregation. After the sharing of meals and stories within these groups, a host facilitator will guide the conversation through the training manual for the purpose of healthy dialogue and creative expression. Significant emphasis will be placed on the power of story and the art of asking good questions. The senior pastor will oversee these facilitators. When the groups are completed, each person will be encouraged to organically express hospitality as a lifelong practice. The emphasis is therefore not on simply developing a new program, but rather calling people to a new way of life.

#### **Theological Implications for Faith Community Church**

Faith Community Church is both called and sent by Christ to be a witness to the world of God's redeeming love and mercy. Hastings states, "The greatest wonder of the Christian gospel is that the Trinity is open for human relations. Mission is God's mission

first, and we participate by grace in who He is and what He is doing.”<sup>1</sup> The call of the Church is therefore a missional call to evangelism. Faith Community Church must allow evangelism and outreach to be woven into the culture of the congregation. Rather than making the local church a “shrine” where everything is focused on centripetal ingathering, the congregation must be engaged in centrifugal outreach to others within the community.<sup>2</sup> It must participate in the extension of the reign of God into its own context of Elko New Market and the surrounding communities. It must announce both what God has done, and also invite others to accept Christ and to become part of his new earthly community, calling them to mission.<sup>3</sup>

Evangelism, therefore, is not optional for the church. Throughout the Great Commission passages in Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 13:10; 14:9; Luke 24:44-49; and Acts 1:8, Jesus makes it clear that his followers are sent into the world to make disciples. In his book, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, Darrell L. Guder writes, “Evangelism is, at its core, communication. It is making the story known. . . . It is embodying God’s love as revealed in Christ and taught by Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Faith Community Church is therefore called to share this story with their neighbors and friends in a way that incarnates the gospel clearly and visibly. This will look different from past evangelistic efforts the congregation has attempted, as it will be less formulaic and much

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<sup>1</sup> Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church*, 81.

<sup>2</sup> John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger, eds., *Mission in Creative Tension: A Dialogue with David Bosch* (Pretoria, South Africa: S. S. Missiological Society, 1990), 152.

<sup>4</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 32, 39.

more organic. In his book, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age*, Brad Kallenberg states, “Evangelism is more like medicine than parallel parking.”<sup>5</sup> The congregation will therefore need to be discerning in regards to where God is already at work and participate in his redemptive reign.

God’s call for Faith Community Church is to creatively incarnate the gospel into the community and to call for people to go outside of their comfort zones and take risks by welcoming others. This means generously including people into friendship circles and incarnating Christ in the given time and place, allowing him to be reborn in the given context.<sup>6</sup> Rather than rejecting the stranger in the neighborhood, it means making the choice for radical inclusion. This will mean the each member of the congregation should do what Alan Hirsh and Lance Ford call “[learning] the art of the small.”<sup>7</sup>

The strategy of Faith Community Church in its evangelistic efforts will therefore help people to recognize five important realities. First, it will help people see that each person can make an impact. Second, it will concentrate its efforts on smaller and smaller areas. Third, it will try to find areas in the community that will cause a tipping point for the biggest impact. Forth, it will focus on small changes that can spread. Finally, it will call people to use what is in their hands.<sup>8</sup> Each of these will provide a healthy framework by which the congregation can incarnate the gospel in their own neighborhoods. The aim

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<sup>5</sup> Brad Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), 125.

<sup>6</sup> Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, xii.

<sup>7</sup> Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

of this strategy is simply for people to, as Hirsch and Ford explain, “redeem their hangouts.”<sup>9</sup>

As expressed in the previous chapter, evangelism is hospitality plus invitation. Hospitality therefore is a theological principle that should direct how Faith Community Church should govern its relationship to others. Based on the insights gleaned from the previous chapter, the call to hospitality is theologically faithful, exegetically careful, and personally sustainable. This proposed strategy will therefore focus Faith Community Church to become more effective in the ministry of evangelism and outreach through the strategic practice of Christian hospitality with sensitivity to its suburban context. It will invite all members to participate in God’s Kingdom by opening their homes to strangers and aliens within their neighborhoods. Being missional is showing hospitality. Therefore, if Faith Community Church is going to participate in God’s mission to the world, it will need to engage in hospitality in a way that is sensitive to the needs of the residents of Elko New Market and the surrounding area.

Every Christian is called to practice hospitality. Believers must follow the biblical mandate to welcome others just as God has radically welcomed them. The proposed strategy for this project will therefore begin with the home. It will seek to do what Frank Damazio, in his book, *Crossing Rivers, Taking Cities*, calls, “turning homes into ministry centers ministering the life of Christ.”<sup>10</sup> Just as the members of the early Church used their homes as ministry centers, so the congregation of Faith Community Church will do the same in their own neighborhoods. Because there is currently no

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Damazio, *Crossing Rivers, Taking Cities* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999), 221-224.

church building, this strategy will fit perfectly with more of a centrifugal approach to mission. It will allow people to minister to the needs of others and build relationships with people in their own neighborhoods. The fact that many people come from a number of different communities other than Elko New Market makes this model for using the home as the starting point for hospitality and invitation an excellent fit. It will not require anyone to adopt another community to reach, but rather help people to look immediately at their own neighborhoods as a mission field. This allows for greater participation.

Hospitality will also look different in each neighborhood. As member think and pray over ways in which they can reach their own local neighborhoods, it will likely be different from one community to another. In their book, *Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross state, “There is no fixed format or tried and tested formula that must be prescribed for all contexts. We all proclaim Christ: but our methods and the application of the good news will vary.”<sup>11</sup> Hospitality may involve any number of ideas and practices. It may begin by starting a game night, book club, or monthly recipe party. It may involve creating a neighborhood asset and skills inventory that neighbors would be willing to share. It may be starting a neighborhood blog or Facebook page that people can join, or it may be adopting a grandparent, student, or single-parent family.<sup>12</sup> There are really an endless number of possibilities by which people can express hospitality to others in their own neighborhoods, but the point is that each expression of hospitality will look different in each context. Modern suburban life does not foster this mindset of hospitality. In fact, it does quite the opposite. For most people it reinforces the desire for

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross, *Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Most of these ideas are taken from Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 175-176.

privacy.<sup>13</sup> The call upon the local church, however, is to learn the rhythms of the neighborhood and listen to the community to find ways to build bridges and make connections.

In order to do biblical hospitality correctly, the people of Faith Community Church will need to be better listeners in their neighborhoods. Hirsch and Ford suggest, “Don’t start things until you understand the ethos of the neighborhood. Let the spirit of the place make its impression. Fall in love with little things. Get to know the people. Ministry should fit with how God is already working in a place. If you start pushing your agenda before you start making friends with the neighbors and finding out about their lives, then you’re a salesman, not a minister of reconciliation.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, a plan for hospitality and outreach should never happen until the people of Faith Community Church first learn to listen to their neighborhoods and look for clues to what God is doing among the people. They must intentionally look for God’s prevenient grace at work.

There are many neighbors who are lonely strangers in the community. Due to the fact that most people do not have roots in suburbia, they often struggle with some elements of loneliness. Elko New Market and the surrounding region are no exception. As John Cacioppo and William Patrick suggest in their book, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, “The solution to loneliness is not the quantity but the quality of relationships.”<sup>15</sup> Their advice is to “do what you can to make the lonely person

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>15</sup> John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008), 240.

feel safe.”<sup>16</sup> People need to feel as if they are safe before they can open up and share their thoughts. In order for members of Faith Community Church to effectively listen to people, they will need to first need to create a safe climate where there is trust. This will not likely happen overnight, but will most likely take time. The only way this safety and trust can happen is if Christians continue to maintain a “presence” among the people. As they incarnate themselves in their neighborhoods and go where people congregate, opportunities for meaningful dialogue and conversation will begin to happen.

Hospitality, however, must have boundaries. Hershberger states, “There is a tension in hospitality between being open to our guest and preserving our own values and identity. . . . True welcome space has to have its boundaries, for everyone’s sake. Welcoming our guest while hiding who we really are and what our values are is like welcoming our guests to an empty house.”<sup>17</sup> This insight is significant. In order for Christians to show biblical hospitality, there still will need to be healthy boundaries, or distinctions that make the Christian identity unique. Miroslav Volf provides insight into this issue of boundaries in his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, in which he states, “Boundaries are part of the creative process of differentiation. For without boundaries there would be no discrete identities.”<sup>18</sup> Volf makes it clear that boundaries make Christian identity possible. The challenge for Christians in showing generous hospitality is learning how to maintain a distinct identity as “salt” and “light” to others. Although

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>17</sup> Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality*, 166-168.

<sup>18</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 67.

the lines between faith and unfaith are difficult to draw, there does need to be a boundary that distinguishes Christian hospitality as something separate from secular entertainment.

Homan and Pratt, in speaking from a Benedictine perspective, weigh in on this subject of boundaries in hospitality: “Boundaries allow us to give more to others, not less. Boundaries do not exclude the other; in fact, if you become a person with actual boundaries, you are better able to give to other people because you do not feel diminished by it . . . to be fully present to the guest, monks must continue, first of all, to be monks.”<sup>19</sup> What this means for Faith Community Church is that in the process of welcoming strangers through radical hospitality, there must still be a boundary of character, conduct, and conversation which makes it distinct. In fact this distinction, if it is shown correctly, will likely be part of the appeal of Christian hospitality. It will set it apart as something with a unique flavor. In her book, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, Caroline Westerhoff states, “Without boundary, we have nothing to which we can invite or welcome anyone else.”<sup>20</sup>

The members of the congregation will therefore will need to have a deep commitment to the “essentials” of Christian faith and teaching before they can properly choose to work things out or even create or improvise within the boundaries. Although a significant amount of time could be spent on what the “essentials” means as far as right teaching and practice, it is sufficient enough to say that their words and actions ought to line up with the scriptural commandments of Jesus Christ. When this is clearly demonstrated before others, there should be an appeal to this kind of hospitality.

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<sup>19</sup> Homan and Pratt, *Radical Hospitality*, 179-184.

<sup>20</sup> Caroline A. Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 7.

The goal of this project is not simply to create a program which gets Faith Community Church involved in hospitality with others for a limited period of time. The aim rather is for the members of the congregation to develop a lifelong pattern and practice of Christian hospitality. The theological and missional insights gleaned from the project ought to inspire a holy desire to engage people with the love of God in Christ for the purpose of being a light to others. When neighbors see the difference in terms of how Christians love and accept them, this should leave a positive impression on them. It must also be clearly stated that the emphasis of this strategy is not to grow Faith Community Church. Although it would be wonderful to assimilate these neighbors into the life of the congregation as new disciples in Christ, the most important thing is for God to be glorified and the Kingdom of God expanded. Hospitality must be seen as something greater than a program of Faith Community Church, but rather a life practice that must be exemplified in the daily expression of each Christian. In other words, if a member of the congregation moved away to another place, he or she would still practice hospitality to strangers because it is a characteristic of being a Christian, not just part of his or her membership in the local church.

In essence, hospitality is a new way of life. In her book, *Sharing Food*, Shannon Jung states, “Hospitality is a way of being in the world, an orientation to others and to life itself. It is a means of grace, a way both of receiving God’s grace and being in tune with the gracious life of the world. It is a way of passing on God’s grace and being graced in return. It is a welcoming and sustaining way of life.”<sup>21</sup> When people have truly

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<sup>21</sup> L. Shannon Jung, *Sharing Food: Christian Practices for Enjoyment* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 51.

committed their lives to the gospel of Jesus Christ, they will have a desire to reach others. In the end, for the members of Faith Community Church to open their homes and be willing to be welcomed into the homes of others, they must be first people who truly have faith in Christ. In *Unbinding the Gospel*, Martha Grace Reese writes, “Hospitality is an important part of evangelism, but without a core of deep relationship with God, hospitality is just niceness.”<sup>22</sup> Crismier states, “Most American Christians want to prepare their homes for hospitality before they prepare their hearts. We want the practical steps of action to do hospitality. But we cannot truly do hospitality unless we are first hospitable. Everything must flow from the heart.”<sup>23</sup>

There is one final dimension to Christian hospitality that must be applied to the strategy of Faith Community Church. Not only does hospitality involve welcoming strangers into homes, but it also means being welcomed by others into their homes. In all reality, this may even be more critical to the success of this strategic practice of hospitality. As stated in the last chapter, Jesus often became the vulnerable guest in need in order to begin conversations with tax collectors and sinners. Furthermore, Jesus commanded his disciples to go and enter homes to be received as guests (Luke 10:5). When talking about hospitality today, this dimension is often overlooked. In some ways, conversations are less threatening to others if they remain in a more advantageous position as being hosts rather than guests. It leaves them in a place of less vulnerability, which often decreases their fears and makes them feel safer to open up in conversations. Considering the biblical model, Christian hospitality must therefore include the twofold

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<sup>22</sup> Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 108.

<sup>23</sup> Crismier, *The Power of Hospitality*, 132.

dimension of calling believers to both take on the role of “host” and “guest,” depending on the situation and context. To limit hospitality to opening one’s home is a critical mistake, as it must also include a willingness to become a guest in the homes of others. The members of Faith Community Church must be willing to open their hearts to this dimension as well, if they are going to reach their neighborhoods with God’s love.

### **Strategy Plan and Goals**

The first primary goal of this strategy for Faith Community Church is to help the congregation facilitate an understanding of God’s missional call to hospitality. There are several ways in which this goal will be accomplished. First, the congregation will be exposed to significant teaching on Sunday mornings with regard to the theology and missiology that has been already expressed in this project. Ten Sundays will be dedicated to surveying the biblical foundations for Christian hospitality and offering practical implications for today’s context. The congregation will delve into the roots of Christian hospitality and be challenged to explore new ways to participate in God’s redemptive reign in their neighborhoods.

The aim of these Sunday teachings will be to offer the congregation a new lens by which they can see the people around them. The members of the congregation will learn how to be good hosts, as they radically welcome others into their homes, and they will also learn how to be good guests in the homes of others. They will learn how to incarnate the gospel through meaningful interactions with others and discover that mission begins right in their neighborhoods. In essence, Faith Community Church will learn through

these Sunday teachings how to welcome strangers and be welcomed by strangers as a way of expressing God's mission in their community.

Another way in which Faith Community Church will accomplish the goal of understanding God's missional call to hospitality is through participation in hospitality groups (HGs). These HGs will in many ways be the most critical portion of this entire project as they will allow for healthy dialogue and interaction between congregational members to talk about Christian hospitality. These HGs will consist of between six and eight people who meet for ten weeks to journey together in new ways to explore God's kingdom reign in their lives. Each group will be led by a trained "host facilitator" who will provide direction for the group as the participants navigate through material prepared in a manual.

These HGs will meet in conjunction with the Sunday teachings to allow for healthy discussion based on the sermon information, and participants will be challenged with weekly assignments as they learn to incarnate themselves in their own neighborhoods. The host facilitators will be trained in advance of these groups so that they are well prepared for the groups. These HGs will rotate homes by each of the members of the group throughout the ten weeks, and they will each include shared meals together. The idea is to set a healthy pattern for what Christian hospitality looks like in a home setting. These groups will also allow people to learn healthy patterns of conversation with others and how to ask good questions that allow for deeper interaction with people. They will also be taught how to listen to their neighborhoods and develop healthy organic ways to connect with others. When these groups are completed, the participants will be sent out to their neighborhoods on a Sunday morning commissioning

service so they can begin the process of implementing what they have learned over the ten-week training period. Through both the Sunday sermons, as well as the HGs, Faith Community Church will begin to discover God’s missional call to hospitality as a lifelong practice.

The second primary goal of this project will be to encourage Christian hospitality as a lifestyle pattern and practice. During the ten-week training period of the HGs, the participants will be invited to reorient their lives toward three important principles: prayer, care, and share.<sup>24</sup> They will be called to pray for their neighbors and to find ways to care for their needs. Without both prayer and care for others, it is impossible to share the reign of God effectively. As the participants learn to orient their mission around these three concepts, they will learn how to do hospitality more effectively in their lifelong practices. These HG groups will therefore be a process in which people will be educated, equipped, and engaged in the lifelong journey of participating in God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ. As Simpson wrote, “Christians must begin at home, and then go into their neighborhoods, and eventually into every widening circle of influence.”<sup>25</sup> As the members of Faith Community Church join God in the neighborhood, they will learn to pray, care, and share effectively in their daily routines and rhythms of life.

There are going to be challenges to hospitality in any given context. As the members of the congregation are sent out into their neighborhoods, people may be hesitant to receive hospitality. Neighbors may, as *The Church Comes Home* authors,

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<sup>24</sup> These words are derived from John Fuder and Noel Castellanos’s book, *A Heart for the Community: New Models for Urban and Suburban Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 344.

<sup>25</sup> A. B. Simpson, *The Spirit Filled Church in Action: The Dynamics of Evangelism from the Book of Acts* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1996), 63.

Robert and Julia Banks, say, “have their guards up and the best foot forward.”<sup>26</sup> The congregation must therefore learn to expect elements of resistance and prayerfully consider how to build bridges of hospitality. Roxburgh and Boren state, “Often when people are invited to a meal, they wonder what the host wants from them. They become suspicious that the host has an agenda or that there is something he or she wants to sell us; so the guests go cautiously, with reservation. It’s nice to be invited, but they wonder what it’s really about.”<sup>27</sup> When Christians practice hospitality without any hidden agenda, other than to show genuine love and welcome others, this practice will be better received. When people begin to recognize that this invitation is not agenda laden but an authentic welcome, their guards will begin to come down. While Christians certainly want to see their neighbors come into the Kingdom of God, the first focus must be simply to love and welcome the stranger. When this is done correctly, no longer will they see Christians as, as Kimball writes, “scary, angry, judgmental, right-wing-finger pointers with political agendas.”<sup>28</sup> Faith Community Church will learn to do hospitality organically with genuine love.

Hirsh and Ford assert that “there is a lot of mixture in suburban culture that works against growing missional followers of Jesus.”<sup>29</sup> Much of the suburban life is oriented toward privacy, and therefore members of Faith Community Church will have to learn how to make their lives more visible and tangible to others. The Sunday sermons and the

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<sup>26</sup> Robert and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 116.

<sup>27</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 166.

<sup>28</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 159.

manual presented in the HGs are designed to challenge listeners and participants to consider making changes in their lifestyles. They will be asked to rethink their priorities and consider how their lives can be more “Kingdom” oriented.

For example, the HG manual will challenge participants to greater levels of simplicity. They will be asked to consider a statement made by Randy Frazee in his book, *The Connecting Church*: “The mission is to simplify our lifestyles in such a way that we concentrate more energy into a circle of relationship that produces a sense of genuine belonging.”<sup>30</sup> It will mean that Christians find a sense of common place with their neighbors through greater spontaneity, availability, and frequency of interaction.<sup>31</sup> When the members of the congregation simplify their lifestyles and reprioritize their activities, they will discover the joy of moving away from imbalanced independence to inter-dependence with those around them.<sup>32</sup>

The Sunday messages and the HG manual will also call Christians to simplify their activities around things that are of eternal value. Again, this is contrary to the suburban narrative. In his book, *Relentless Spirituality*, Gary Keisling describes the significance of simplicity for the believer: “Simplicity is effective in furthering the spread of the gospel to the unreached people of the world. It maximizes the use of our resources and multiplies the benefits that can be achieved for the glory of Christ. Embracing the discipline of simplicity has the potential to free us from the power of things that

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<sup>30</sup> Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2001), 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

complicate and consume our lives.”<sup>33</sup> When Christians begin to embrace a lifestyle of simplicity and openness, it will allow for greater effectiveness for the Kingdom of God because there will be less distractions. This lifestyle of simplicity may not happen immediately, but the congregation will be challenged to take small steps towards this undivided life that is oriented on missional hospitality.

In addition to this lifestyle of simplicity, there will also be an emphasis upon the need for stability. While this may be challenging for some because of career and family commitments, the call to stability in one’s housing location will be important in this practice of hospitality. Suburban culture does not lend itself to patience and stability, which is one of the most significant reasons why people feel like strangers in suburbia the first place. Members of Faith Community Church will therefore be challenged through these HGs to consider making a commitment to stability in their neighborhood. To do as Roxburgh prescribes, “To plant yourself into the local . . . and make a commitment to the long haul.”<sup>34</sup> As best as possible, each participant will learn to patiently stay put in his or her neighborhood and wait for God to bring in the harvest. This call to stability and to staying in one place is countercultural, yet it is vitally important to the effectiveness of Kingdom growth through hospitality. The goal, therefore, is not to simply practice hospitality and be nice to people for a ten-week program, but to invite Faith Community Church to make it a practice that bears fruit for the rest of their lives. There will always be challenges to the practice of hospitality, yet God has called all Christians to welcome others as a reflection of his radical welcome toward humanity.

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<sup>33</sup> Gary Keisling, *Relentless Spirituality: Embracing the Spiritual Disciplines of A. B. Simpson* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 2004), 98-99.

<sup>34</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 140.

The third primary goal of this project is to invite creative expressions of hospitality in the suburban context. As discussed earlier, Faith Community Church will need to discern where God is already working in the neighborhood and participate in that same work. Guenther suggests that when listening to others, “always assume that God is at work.”<sup>35</sup> If God is already at work in the neighborhood, then each Christian must be in prayer to discern what God is doing. Finney states, “Prayer must precede proclamation.”<sup>36</sup> The first week of homework in the HGs will therefore be focused on praying for the neighborhood. When Christians learn the names of people who live on their streets and pray for them, God will begin to open doors for ministry and connection. A failure to pray effectively will undermine the entire ministry of hospitality before it ever begins. In order to join God in his redemptive reign for the neighborhood, prayer will be foundational for every creative effort.

As a means of inviting creative expressions of hospitality in each suburban context, questions will be asked each week in the HGs to allow for dialogue about ideas regarding how to connect with others in each of their neighborhoods. Once participants have first “listened” to their neighborhoods and considered where God is already at work, they will then cater their efforts accordingly. The strategy for each person or family to reach their neighborhood is therefore open-ended. There is no set agenda for reaching each community, but the aim of these HGs is to provide practical tools for each individual to discern how God would have them connect with others. It may not be a big event, but it may simply be an accumulation of small acts of kindness that allows for that

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<sup>35</sup> Guenther, *Holy Listening*, xiii.

<sup>36</sup> Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 56.

connection to take place.<sup>37</sup> Connection does not happen automatically, but each participant must recognize that it requires sacrifice and action. The members of Faith Community Church must overcome fear and be willing to take risks to make connections with people. Pappano indicates that “we are losing our ability to do such basic things as converse and make ourselves comfortable around others. We must learn not merely to overcome this nervousness with interaction but to find solace and pleasure in the act. We must learn, too, to look more deeply at those around us in an effort to find common ground.”<sup>38</sup> When the members of Faith Community Church learn to do this, they will be able to find creative expressions for hospitality in their neighborhoods.

The fourth primary goal of this project is to enable organic spiritual conversations around the table. A great deal of attention in the HGs will be dedicated to this particular issue. The congregation will need to learn just how to interact with people in a meaningful way. It cannot be assumed that they already know how to enter into organic spiritual conversations, therefore significant teaching and modeling will need to be exhibited in these HGs so that people can learn how to develop their interpersonal communication skills. This idea of “organic” spiritual conversations means that these table interactions with neighbors will not be scripted, rehearsed, or memorized. They instead will be conversations that flow naturally in each setting. The purpose of these conversations is to give people the space to be themselves. Guenther states, “The person

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<sup>37</sup> Ted Haggard and Jack Hayford, *Loving Your City into the Kingdom* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997), 131.

<sup>38</sup> Pappano, *The Connection Gap*, 196.

sitting opposite is always a mystery. . . . When we label, we limit.”<sup>39</sup> Within the HGs, people will be taught how to build trust with their guests without labeling them, and they will learn the fine art of small talk. Parker Palmer describes this type of hospitality as receiving people “openly, warmly, freely, without the need for them to earn their keep or prove themselves, rather than making them feel invisible . . . or worse yet, visible but on trial.”<sup>40</sup> The HGs will therefore train each person in how to create a safe place for guests to feel welcomed and received.

One of the main reasons why the HG format will be centered on a table meal each of the ten weeks is to model to each participant how to facilitate an environment of trust and welcoming. It will show each participant that every meal, like every encounter with a human being, has the potential to reveal God present in creation. Holman and Pratt explain, “The table represents the unknown yearning of every human heart for communion with ‘something more’ that infuses all that exists.”<sup>41</sup> Intimacy is therefore the goal of hospitality.<sup>42</sup> When people feel safe to share their true thoughts and feelings, deeper and more personal conversation follows. Again, this may not happen immediately, but it may take a number of weeks, months, or even years. By opening the home and preparing the table, however, God’s invitation to feast will be consistently expressed in a tangible way so that others may know that they are received with love and respect.

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<sup>39</sup> Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Palmer, *The Company of Strangers*, 67.

<sup>41</sup> Homan and Pratt, *Radical Hospitality*, 110.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

Another significant portion of the training in these HGs will be helping to elicit people's stories.<sup>43</sup> It will help the congregation to be able to ask good non-threatening questions of their guests for the purpose of hearing their life stories. It will teach hosts to be good listeners of their guests. Guenther calls this type of skill "holy listening." She states, "[Holy listening] means putting yourself aside so that your total attention can be focused on the person sitting in the other chair."<sup>44</sup> By asking appropriate, well-timed questions that are open-ended and non-invasive, the guests will begin to share their stories. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in *Life Together*, "Listening can be a greater service than speaking."<sup>45</sup> When Christians are trained in how to ask good questions that elicit stories, the conversation will begin to open and expand into new horizons. People will begin to feel safe and comfortable, and richer conversation beyond small talk can begin to take place. As Homan and Pratt state, "Being a person of hospitality involves getting out of myself for long enough periods that I can hear other people, really hear them, and pay attention to what they might need at this moment."<sup>46</sup> When Faith Community Church learns to ask good non-threatening questions of others, they will enable what Peace calls "history giving" through this process of sharing stories.<sup>47</sup>

Within these organic spiritual conversations with others, it is important that nothing is agenda driven or coercive. Guests will readily pick up on anything that is not

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<sup>43</sup> Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 18.

<sup>44</sup> Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper Row Publishers, 1954), 97.

<sup>46</sup> Homan and Pratt, *Radical Hospitality*, 131.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Peace, *Small Group Evangelism: A Training Program for Reaching Out with the Gospel* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 2004), 51.

genuine or authentic in the conversation. As Bauckham states, “Coercion contradicts the nature of truth. Witness is non-coercive. It has no power but the convincingness of the truth to which it witnesses.”<sup>48</sup> If Faith Community Church is to be an effective witness for the gospel, then all members must always be authentic. They must not try to preach to people and tell them what to believe, but rather develop relationship with them in order to have meaningful conversations and spiritual dialogue. As Kimball confirms, “We’re not in a ‘Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it’ world anymore.”<sup>49</sup> The aim is not to get others to come to church, listen to a sermon, or even to say a prayer, but rather the aim is to be an example of Christ’s love and God’s kingdom reign.

An important part of the HG training will be focused on discerning where God’s prevenient grace is already at work within others, and allowing the conversations to be a place of spiritual discovery. Roxburgh describes these conversations as “involving the skill of creating spaces where people can give voices to their anxieties, hopes, and fears, as well as the music that lies beneath. . . . When people feel it is safe to give voice to their unspoken hopes and stories and these are brought into conversations with biblical narratives, we start to hear the life of the Spirit among us.”<sup>50</sup> By creating these safe places of discovery, the HGs will teach participants how to become effective midwives to the souls of others which allows for breakthrough and spiritual progress to happen. Halter and Smay explain, “[This] will help people to make a personal ‘preference’ for Christ and his life rather than bashing their values. This doesn’t mean we don’t get to

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<sup>48</sup> Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 99.

<sup>49</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 201.

<sup>50</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 176.

speaking and teaching the truth. It just means we're better missionaries if we let them experience it before we start debating it."<sup>51</sup>

When the opportunity arises, the congregation will be taught how to talk about spiritual matters with others. The key in these types of conversations will be to keep Jesus as the focus. The HGs will teach people to focus on what people already know about Jesus and work within that framework. Because evangelism is a process for most people, Christians need to be careful how they define a "successful" conversation with non-Christians. Success may mean that a person has a better understanding of the true nature and identity of Jesus rather than how they had understood him previously. It may be something big or it may be something small, but every step on the journey of faith should be celebrated. As Hershberger states, "Not every meal needs to be an intimate, life-changing event. We can't live in that kind of intensity all the time. But we can choose to take small steps toward intimacy, especially with the strangers we welcome."<sup>52</sup> While there are many directions that a conversation can go with regard to spiritual matters, the crucial skill that each Christian will need to be able to demonstrate is the ability to keep the conversation centered on Jesus Christ. The gospel is about God's love demonstrated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, therefore the focus of these spiritual conversations must stay focused on him. The congregation must be able to talk about Jesus comfortably and clearly.

The fifth primary goal of this project will be to help people articulate their own story of conversion. If members of Faith Community Church are to learn how to talk

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<sup>51</sup> Halter and Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 67.

<sup>52</sup> Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality*, 115-116.

about Jesus, they must also learn how the story of Jesus touches their own life story. James Choung calls this “connecting your own story with the Big story.”<sup>53</sup> Because God’s purpose is to redeem creation, then each Christian will need to articulate his or her own story of conversion and reveal how God has called him or her to participate in his redemptive reign through Jesus Christ. Peace explains, “To be a Christian is to be a pilgrim; it is to be on a journey. Our story becomes the story of our pilgrimage.”<sup>54</sup> Each Christian, therefore, will need to learn how to share his or her story of spiritual pilgrimage.

During the ten-week HGs, all participants will have an opportunity to share their own stories of conversion within their groups. Each story will be different, yet they will all be linked to the story of God’s redemption in their own lives. There will be Christians who have never officially thought through their own stories of conversion, so this will allow them to develop a concrete story of how God has worked in their own lives. It will be an important discipline of helping them to notice God. By helping people to discover their own stories and how they relate to the “Big story,” they will then be able to authentically be able to share their stories with others. Hybels offers four simple suggestions when sharing spiritual stories: “first, avoid long windedness (keep it short); second, do not be fuzzy (keep it simple); third, stay away from ‘religionese’ language; fourth, do not demonstrate superiority (stay humble).”<sup>55</sup> In the HGs, with sensitivity to

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<sup>53</sup> Choung, *True Story*, 204.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Peace, *Spiritual Storytelling: Discovering and Sharing Your Spiritual Autobiography* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1996), 79.

<sup>55</sup> Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room*, 120-121.

each of these considerations, the participants will learn how to articulate their own stories of conversion and authentically share them with others.

The strategy for witnessing in today's postmodern culture is much different than it was a generation or two ago in America. Yet Finney states, "We are finding that the modernity which stems from the Enlightenment has not completely vanished in a puff of smoke: it is still around and people still look for proof and argument and logic. But postmodernism is also with us in all its fuzzy splendor."<sup>56</sup> What this means is that each individual is different in how he or she sees and approaches the world. Christians, therefore, will need to be sensitive and discerning as to the particular worldview of their guests. They may be thoroughly postmodern in their approach to the world, or they may subscribe to a hybrid of both postmodern and modern worldviews. Whatever the case may be, the important concept to consider is that Christianity must be on display before people. Robert Webber, in his book, *Ancient Future Evangelism*, states, "In today's world when everything is relative, the only truth that anyone has is the truth he has for himself."<sup>57</sup> As a result, concludes Webber, "Postmodern evangelism is not so much an argument but rather a display."<sup>58</sup> The message of redemption and hope will likely resonate with many postmoderns when it is displayed correctly. If Faith Community Church is going to be effective in its outreach efforts to Elko New Market and the surrounding suburban communities, it will need to be sensitive to the worldviews of

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<sup>56</sup> Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 37.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Webber, *Ancient Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith Forming Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 124.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

others who constantly put personal experience over church doctrines. It will need to “show” the Kingdom of God and not just “tell” about it.

In summary, the five primary goals of this project are to: first, facilitate and understanding of God’s missional call to hospitality; second, encourage Christian hospitality as a lifestyle pattern and practice; third, invite creative expressions of hospitality in the suburban context; fourth, enable organic spiritual conversations around table fellowship; and fifth, help people to articulate their own stories of conversion. When the members of Faith Community Church engage in these five primary activities, they will fulfill the essence of this doctoral project. The congregation will be mobilized to become more effective in the ministry of evangelism and outreach through the strategic practice of Christian hospitality with sensitivity to its suburban context.

### **Content for Strategy**

As it was articulated earlier in this chapter, this project will be focused on a ten-week strategic training period at Faith Community Church for the ministry practice of Christian hospitality. The project will be oriented around two primary ways of transformational engagement which coincide with each other. It will have a Sunday sermon series, which conveys much of the information contained in Chapter 3, and it will also provide practical teaching on “how to” do the practice of hospitality through the HGs.

The goal for this project is to begin a minimum of five HGs, with between six to eight people per group. While it is the ultimate goal for everyone at Faith Community Church to participate in an HG, it is also unlikely that everyone will participate. Yet

significant emphasis will be placed on promoting this project and sermon series which will be called, “Welcome Home: Hospitality 1.0.” At the very minimum, people who come on Sundays but do not participate in an HG will at least hear the teachings and be challenged to open their hearts and their homes to the possibility of taking steps toward a lifestyle of welcome. While these HGs will last for ten weeks, there will be possibilities for the initiation of new HGs in the future. The aim of this project, therefore, is to work Christian hospitality into the DNA of the congregational life so that this does not simply become another sermon series but rather a sustained practice in the life of the congregation.

The content for both the “Welcome Home: Hospitality 1.0” sermon series, as well as the HG training manual, will be divided into ten weekly themes that will emphasize various aspects articulated in this project. Week One will be entitled, “God is a Missionary.” During this week, a solid theological footing will be established as to the character of God as being “holy love.” The Triune God intends for relationship with humankind, yet because of the fall, humanity needs to be rescued from sin and redeemed. The missionary God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, as the true redeemer. Because God is a missionary, he sets the pattern for the Church to be sent into the world to invite others to his holy love. Within the HGs, the emphasis will be placed on the idea that the missional call to hospitality is derived from the missional God. Christians are “sent” to participate in God’s redemptive reign. This will provide the theological footing for the practice of hospitality, and it will also emphasize the Christian call to witness. The first HG weekly assignment will be the initial step of meeting and learning the name of one new person in the neighborhood.

The title for Week Two will be, “An Invitation to Feast.” During this week the congregation will learn about the priority of God’s Kingdom. Hospitality is not simply about growing church numbers, but rather extending God’s Kingdom reign to others. Significant emphasis this week will be placed on Jesus’ example of God’s kingdom as being likened to a great banquet table. God is the host of this abundant feast and he welcomes humanity to come and join him at the table. The congregation will be challenged to think beyond their own agenda, and think from the perspective of God’s desire to redeem creation itself. Because God has welcomed people to the banquet table, he calls the Church to be people who welcome others as well. Hospitality is a call to welcome all people no matter what their lifestyle or background. Within the HGs, the Week Two assignment will be to create a personal prayer list of the name of every person on one’s street and to begin praying for each individual. Each participant will again be asked to meet and get to know the name of one additional person in their neighborhood.

The theme for Week Three will be “A Biblical Call to Hospitality.” This week will be a survey of both Old Testament and New Testament passages that relate to the theme of hospitality. Significant emphasis will be on the idea that hospitality is a valid expression of the gospel and Christian witness. Hospitality is not optional for Christians, but rather it is a biblical mandate by God as a way of extending his kingdom reign. However, before hospitality can take place effectively, each person will need to listen to the rhythm of his or her neighborhood. The Week Three assignment in the HGs will be to call each participant to find ways to “listen to the neighborhood.” Emphasis will be placed on getting to know people. Participants will be asked to journal their findings and

report the following week. The idea is not to create any specific strategy for hospitality without first learning what is already going on in the neighborhood.

Week Four will be entitled, “The Strangers among Us.” This week will introduce the biblical concept of the alien and stranger and highlight God’s command to welcome them. Because many in suburbia feel like strangers and aliens in their own communities, parallels will be established as to how Faith Community Church can welcome these strangers. Exploration will be given as to the importance of welcoming the stranger, and often how that can result in great blessing in the life of the believer. In the Bible the stranger was the person of promise; therefore by welcoming other strangers, Christians are mysteriously welcoming Christ. The Week Four assignment in the HGs will be to try to find a “stranger” in one’s neighborhood and connect with that person in conversation.

The Week Five theme will be called “Redeeming Your Hangout.” The emphasis this week will be on the example of Jesus as being an incarnational witness. Just as Christ became incarnate and dwelt among humanity, so Christians are called to move into the community and become visible before others. The call for all believers is to let their light shine right where they are, and to think about turning their homes into mission outposts and ministry centers. The call is to let God work in the normal places and spaces of life so that his life can happen. The Week Five assignment in the HGs will therefore call people to creatively become visible in the neighborhood. They will learn to incarnate themselves with the people around them, for the purpose of letting their light shine for Jesus Christ. Practical teaching will be done as to how this could happen in different contexts.

The theme for Week Six will be “‘Witness’ Cultivates Witness.” Building off the previous week, the members of the congregation will learn to think creatively about hospitality in their neighborhoods. Once they have learned how to listen to the neighborhood and redeem their hangouts, they will then begin to think of welcoming others into their homes. During this week, emphasis will be placed on the dynamics of “guests” and “hosts” and how Christian hospitality involves being willing to take on each role. The Week Six assignment will be to do a new activity with a neighbor and to find a way to connect with him or her. Emphasis will again be on taking things slowly and looking for what God is already doing in the neighborhood.

The Week Seven theme will be “Hospitality versus Entertainment.” There will be teaching on what hospitality is, as well as teaching on what hospitality is not. In suburbia, the emphasis upon welcoming other people is often different from hospitality in the Christian sense. During this week, the teaching will explore the differences between Christian hospitality and secular entertainment. The emphasis will be on the motive of hospitality and issues of the heart, as well as a reminder to keep the gospel central. In many ways, this week will call people to rethink their priorities in life and do a spiritual evaluation as to what motivates them to reach out to others in the first place. The Week Seven assignment will be to have individuals and families sit down together and rethink their priorities and set their households, lives, and hearts in order. The goal will be for participants to clear away the clutter of their lives and become more kingdom oriented.

The Week Eight title will be “Spiritual Conversation 101.” This week will explore the nature of spiritual conversion and how in most cases people come to Christ through a process of change. Because spiritual conversion is often more process than

punctiliar in nature, the members of the congregation will be taught how to discern where and how God is already at work in the lives of others. They will begin to listen to the spiritual journeys of others and learn how to talk about spiritual matters with people. Much of this will involve the skill of asking good questions. For the Week Eight homework, participants will begin to develop concrete plans of hospitality for their neighborhoods. They will let this plan happen organically for the express purpose of welcoming these persons/families into hospitality.

The Week Nine theme will be “Loving with No Strings Attached.” This week will remind people that the most effective witness is both authentic and honest. Rather than having a hidden agenda, the congregation will be encouraged to think simply about loving people into the kingdom of God. The agenda is not to create a sales pitch or a specific formula for salvation, but simply to love people and let God do the work in people in his own timing. Emphasis will be on encouraging Christians to be patient with God’s gracious process in the lives of others. The homework this week will be for each person or family to formulate a prayer list for everyone on the street by name. Furthermore, participants will begin to develop unique hospitality plans for their neighborhoods as the Spirit of God leads them. They will also be encouraged to step out and show acts of love and kindness to neighbors.

The Tenth and final week will be on the theme, “Joining God in the Neighborhood.” This last week will focus upon looking for God’s prevenient grace in the lives of others and moving out into missional hospitality. It will call the members of the congregation to join what God is already doing and welcome others organically in their community. A final commissioning service will happen on a Sunday morning with

all of the HG participants for the purpose of establishing a time in which they can be “sent” to go do mission work in their neighborhoods. Rather than making this an end to the training program, it will be the beginning of a new life that is dedicated to the practice of Christian hospitality. This will be a time of celebration, but more importantly it will be a time of commitment to God through the lifelong practice of hospitality.

### **Target Population and Leadership**

Throughout the implementation of this project, a significant emphasis will be placed on the success of HGs. It will therefore be a high priority to make sure that the right host facilitators are selected and adequately trained. Because Faith Community Church is largely a church of families, the host facilitators will generally be married couples. In some cases, however, there may be exceptions. These host facilitators will be selected in advance of this project based on character qualities, spiritual maturity, and overall intrapersonal skills relating to others. They will be selected and directed by the senior pastor in advance of this project and given overall theological, ecclesiological, and practical insights as to the nature of how this project will be implemented. They will also have time to review the prepared training manual and ask questions as it pertains to the project with the senior pastor.

The training guides will be provided to the host facilitators in advance so they will have a chance to familiarize themselves with it. These training guides will have three basic sections for each of the ten weeks. The first section will be called, “Think Biblically.” In this section, there will be a weekly reading that is focused on a biblical passage of Scripture that was emphasized during the Sunday sermon. The host facilitator

will be given a few questions to ask the HG that will allow for rich theological dialogue about the subject matter, which will lead to the second section called, “Dialogue Organically.” The success of the HGs will depend upon the conversation that happens around table fellowship. Questions in this section will be provided in order to facilitate discourse between individuals. Through these engaging questions, participants will discern how and where mission is unfolding in their own neighborhoods.<sup>59</sup> The final section in the manual will be called, “Act Practically.” In this section the participants will be invited to do weekly homework assignments that will challenge them to take steps toward hospitality. Each week they will be invited to create simple, limited experiments that allow them to venture into the neighborhood.<sup>60</sup> The training manual will therefore be focused on theological reading, engaging questions, and weekly assignments which facilitate healthy dialogue and creative organic expression in each group. Hybels calls this “Living in 3-D” by developing friendships, discovering stories, and discerning next steps.”<sup>61</sup>

Participants in the HGs will not be hand selected, but rather the entire congregation will be given an open invitation by the senior pastor to sign up for a group. One month prior to the beginning of this ten-week training period, this program will be promoted through formal invitation by word, print, and screen. This program will be highly visible in the life of Faith Community Church so that they will be aware of what this is in advance of the ten-week period. Sign-up sheets will be available in the church

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<sup>59</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 59.

<sup>60</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 144.

<sup>61</sup> Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room*, 60.

lobby, and people will also be able to sign up on their “Communicator Card,” which is located in the weekly bulletin. Following the month-long promotion, the senior pastor will dialogue with the host facilitators and assign them the people for their groups accordingly. Sensitivity will be given to personality types and group dynamics, and most importantly, much prayer will go into this process. It should be noted that although the goal of this doctoral project is to initiate at least five pilot HGs, there will be additional host facilitators trained in the event that there is overwhelming participation among the congregation.

At the conclusion of the ten-week HGs, each participant will be invited to the commissioning service on the final Sunday. During this time each participant will come to the front of the sanctuary and be asked three basic questions as a group. These are: Will you commit your life to the sharing of the gospel with others and the advancement of God’s Kingdom? Having learned that we are biblically called to welcome strangers, will you commit your life to the practice of Christian hospitality? Will you commit to joining God in your neighborhood and being a participant in His Kingdom reign? When the participants have answered affirmatively, the senior pastor and the elders will then say a commissioning prayer so that each participant at Faith Community Church will be released to go into their communities and be a light for the gospel of Jesus Christ. They will be commissioned to live as Simpson contends, “Not by long intervals, but by the breath and by the moment.”<sup>62</sup> This will effectively conclude the formal training portion of these pilot HGs for this doctoral project.

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<sup>62</sup> A. B. Simpson, *Wholly Sanctified: Living a Life Empowered by the Holy Spirit* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1991), 90-91.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

In order for this ministry of hospitality to be established into the life of Faith Community Church, there will need to be thorough preparation in advance of this project. This chapter will describe the steps that will be taken to implement the strategy for the congregation to engage in the lifelong ministry of Christian hospitality. It will detail the timing, process, materials, and personal resources necessary to train host facilitators and launch at least five pilot HGs. This chapter will also provide an assessment plan that will allow for healthy evaluation of how the participants have actively worked Christian hospitality into their lifestyles once the HGs are completed.

#### **Pilot Project Timeline**

A vital aspect in guiding a planned change process toward Christian hospitality at Faith Community Church will involve creating a manageable timeline for this project. In order to implement a strategic change in the life of the congregation, it must be recognized that change does not happen immediately. It will take time for people to adopt a new way of being. Van Gelder suggests that there are four types of change that

can happen in the life of a congregation. First, there is improvement, where a certain aspect of a ministry is upgraded. Second, there is adjustment, where a planned change adds another dimension to the process. Third, there is revision, where the basic vision of the church is re-oriented. Finally, there is re-creation, where the congregation actually reinvents itself.<sup>1</sup> The intention of this project is neither to improve an existing ministry nor to call the church to reinvent itself. The purpose of this project is rather to add another dimension in how the congregation understands and engages in God's missional call to outreach and evangelism. By calling people to practice Christian hospitality in their own context, this project will invite others to reorient their lifestyles towards a new missional way of being in their community.

The timeline of this project will begin in the spring of 2014, when the theological research will be completed. This will be the period of time during which both the research and the writing for this project paper will be finalized. During this time, specific feedback will be given by the content reader in order to provide a high quality project that will be theologically sound, ecclesiastically faithful, and practically functional. This project will be a work in progress at this point in time, as dialogue with the content reader will help guide this project into the best quality project possible for Faith Community Church.

During the early summer of 2014, the resources will be developed for this project. The main resource that will need to be developed will be the training manual for the HGs. The content for the training manual entitled, "Welcome Home: Hospitality 1.0," will be based on the information in the previous chapter. The beginning of the manual will have

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<sup>1</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 169-172.

a brief introduction to the project, followed by the content from each of the ten weeks. Each week will be organized in three sections entitled, “Think Biblically” (reading), “Dialogue Organically” (questions), and “Act Practically” (homework). Each participant in the HGs will be given the training manual during the first week and the homework is expected to be completed by the following week. The manual will be written by the senior pastor by mid-summer 2014 so as to give the host facilitators time to thoroughly discuss and read through them before they launch the pilot HGs. The manual will also contain graphics and color produced by a professional agency, and also printed and bound by that same company. The manual will likely be copy-written for the sole purpose of legally preserving the content of this project.

After the training manual is completed and printed, there will be a training period in August and September of 2014 for the host facilitators who have been selected. The trainings will be held at the home of the senior pastor, so as to be consistent with the overall theme of making the home a center for ministry. The training times will consist of two gatherings that will be centered on meals and giving the host facilitators an overview of this project. Just as discipleship training in the New Testament involved both living in community and interactive teaching, so these training times will involve each of these dynamics.<sup>2</sup> Adequate time will be given for the host facilitators to ask questions as well as provide time to simply be together. This will both model and set the course for what the practice of Christian hospitality is all about. The training manual will be given to each of the facilitators and thoroughly explained as to how and what the HGs will look like from week to week. A significant time at the conclusion of each of these

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<sup>2</sup> Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, 148-149.

training times will also be devoted to prayer, so as to be reminded for the need of God's grace.

The senior pastor will promote "Welcome Home: Hospitality 1.0" significantly at the beginning of September 2014 in order to invite and challenge the members of the congregation to participate in the HGs. Sign-up times will be available in both the church lobby as well as the bulletin communicator cards. Based on the experience of Faith Community Church in recent years, it is hard to begin any new program or project at the beginning of September as people are still trying to adjust to their new schedules and get in that one last vacation before the fall. The project launch will therefore be postponed until at least a couple of weeks into the new school year, so as to give the congregation time to get reoriented to life after summer.

Beginning in mid-September of 2014, at least five pilot HGs will be officially launched at the homes of each of the host facilitators. If each of these groups consists of between six and eight people, including the host facilitator, there would potentially be a total of around forty adult participants.<sup>3</sup> Childcare in these groups will be determined by each host facilitator as to what they as a group want to do. Although finding some type of childcare may be helpful for some groups, they may also decide to have the children remain in the house during the HGs. This will model to each participant that children are not a nuisance, but they also have a role in the hospitality practice itself. In any given situation hospitality will have its challenges, and allowing kids to be present may actually

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Faith Community Church has approximately 150 people who call the church their home. This also includes children.

help initiate this process of understanding the dynamics of hospitality with all of its challenges. Yet, each HG will make its own decisions regarding childcare.

As these HGs are promoted and implemented at Faith Community Church, it must be understood that people may vary in their attitudes and responses to this project. Not everyone will fully embrace this concept of living in radical hospitality so as to fulfill God's missional call to love and welcome the stranger. Bolman and Deal reveal, "As changes emerge, camps form: *supporters*, *opponents*, and *fence sitters*."<sup>4</sup> There will most certainly be a varied response to this missional call to Christian hospitality, but as these HGs are launched, hopefully the congregation will be able to see the importance of this ministry as it is clearly rooted in scriptural teaching. These HGs will be considered pilot groups, as the goal of this project is to make these groups an ongoing ministry in the life of the congregation. People who are initially "fence sitters" or even "opponents" to this concept of hospitality may indeed choose to participate in a group at a later time. Getting people involved as soon as possible, however, will be ideal.

When implementing any new project, plan, or program in a congregation, it must be understood from the outset that there are going to be objecting forces that are barriers to its success. Implementing "Welcome Home: Hospitality 101" at Faith Community Church is no exception. A number of possible arguments could be made by members as to why they do not want to participate in the pilot HGs. Some may say, "I'm too busy," or "My unbelieving spouse will not be on board with this," or "I'm not that social," or "My nearest neighbor lives a mile away." Really, any number of objections and arguments could be made by people who are not fully in support of this missional call. In

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<sup>4</sup> Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 386.

fact some may not even like the term “missional,” perhaps because they are perceiving incorrectly that Faith Community Church is turning into an emerging church. The baggage of the term “missional” may cloud their judgment as to the reality of the scriptural mandate to advance God’s kingdom through a new way of living.

All in all, however, the force of this project will be derived from a solid exposition of texts that keeps hospitality rooted in Scripture. To make excuses is to reject the clear biblical teaching on God’s call for his people to show hospitality. Fence sitters will hopefully be convinced by the ten-week sermon series, if they do not readily participate in an HG. Another important activity that will be done in conjunction with this project is having strategic testimonies during the Sunday morning services. In many ways, revealing “success stories” will cultivate an environment of celebration for what God has done through this ministry of hospitality. One particular testimony will be shared in August by a HG facilitator who came to Christ as a result of a family welcoming him in as an exchange student years ago. These types of stories need to be shared, in order to quiet the forces that may attempt to derail this project. By having stories like this shared in advance of launch of this project, it will demonstrate to the congregation that Christian hospitality does make a difference in people’s lives, and that it can take on many unique forms. The key will be not to wait to address the objections until the ten-week HGs begin, but to begin to share success stories in advance of the project.

Once the ten-week HGs are completed, in early December 2014 there will be a commissioning service for everyone who participated. The idea of this commissioning service is to both to officially finalize the training period and also to release the

congregation to begin the lifelong practice of hospitality. In his book, *Shopping Malls and other Sacred Spaces*, Jon Pahl describes this kind of newness of life and practice that the Christian is commissioned to live. He writes, “We are baptized not to avoid, but to engage in new ways with the world. If the old ways of the world focus on worrying about and hoarding possessions – including our own self-righteousness – the new ways of a person clothed in Christ focus on practicing compassion, on living life risked in love.”<sup>5</sup> Faith Community Church will be commissioned to risk their lives in love and hospitality for the sole purpose of glorifying God and seeing his Kingdom expressed and advanced. The fact that the commissioning service will take place in December is also helpful, as the Christmas theme of God becoming incarnate through Christ will also blend well with the commission to let Christ become incarnate in the community.

The final component of this project timeline will involve evaluation, analysis, and future ministry projections. Once the commissioning service is completed in December 2014, throughout the winter and spring of 2015 the host facilitators will connect with each participant in their HGs and ask how things are going regarding practicing hospitality in their neighborhoods. This will be done on the first, third, and sixth month following the commissioning service. A specific list of questions will be given to each of the facilitators for the sole purpose of eliciting feedback from the participants. This information will in turn be given to the senior pastor in order to evaluate and analyze how this project has been implemented. Furthermore, it will allow for success stories to be shared and potentially conveyed to the larger congregation to promote further

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<sup>5</sup> Jon Pahl, *Shopping Malls and other Sacred Spaces: Putting God in Place* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 157.

engagement in this practice of hospitality. When people see that others are successfully engaging others in hospitality, they too will be inspired to do the same.

This evaluation component of the project will not be overlooked, as in many ways it will help direct future HGs. These groups will in many ways be a work in progress, and the feedback gained from the participants in the pilot HGs will help the senior pastor know what areas worked well and what areas did not. The idea will be to continue to modify the groups so as to gain the optimum level of success for the Kingdom of God. Although spiritual success can be difficult to measure in people, what will be measured is the specific kind of changes and behaviors that were modified through this project in the lifestyle of each person. Participants will also be asked to share what new discoveries they made as they learned God's missional call to hospitality. Evaluation will therefore be done at both a cognitive level concerning theological matters, and it will also be done at a behavioral level considering the changes to lifestyle. The specific questions the host facilitators will ask the participants for this evaluation process will be developed in the summer of 2014 by the senior pastor in advance of the project.

One additional way in which these pilot groups will be analyzed and evaluated will be for the senior pastor to meet with the host facilitators in a post-training debriefing meeting. At some point within a few weeks of the completion of the HGs in January 2015, the host facilitators will connect again with the senior pastor in a small group time to discuss what happened in each group and what suggestions and changes could be made for future HGs. The five strategy goals outlined in Chapter 4 will be discussed

thoroughly.<sup>6</sup> Each of these five goals will provide guidance for the evaluation, analysis, and conversation process. Questions and feedback will be oriented specifically as to whether or not those goals were accomplished.

### **Host Facilitator Leadership Development**

One of the key components of the launching of the HGs will be the selection of the host facilitators. When John Wesley began a movement, he enlisted gifted laypeople.<sup>7</sup> If Faith Community Church is to going to initiate a ministry of hospitality in its community, it will take gifted laypeople who will be able to lead each HG effectively. The identification of these host facilitators will be a consensus process with both staff and elders.

Beginning in the summer of 2014, the senior pastor will consider various people within the congregation who would be potential candidates for this important ministry leadership role. The senior pastor will then dialogue with both staff and elders to get their input on whether these people would make good candidates as host facilitators. The staff and elders will also be encouraged to recommend any additional people for this role. When between six and eight couples or individuals have been identified by the staff and elders, the senior pastor will then contact these persons and ask if they would be interested in exploring this role as a possibility. During the summer of 2014, prior to the initial training times for the host facilitators, the senior pastor will also meet with these

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<sup>6</sup> The goals are: 1) to facilitate an understanding of God's missional call to hospitality; 2) to encourage Christian hospitality as a lifelong pattern and practice; 3) to invite creative expressions of hospitality in each context; 4) to enable organic spiritual conversation around table fellowship; and 5) to help people articulate their own stories of conversion.

<sup>7</sup> Damazio, *Crossing Rivers, Taking Cities*, 203.

people on an individual basis to discuss the “Welcome Home: Hospitality 101” project. The candidates would then be given an opportunity to consider whether or not they would like to formally be host facilitators for the pilot HGs.

When considering the qualities necessary for host facilitators, there will be several important things to look for. First, these people must already have a gift for hospitality. While every Christian is commanded to show hospitality, there are people who have a unique spiritual gift of showing hospitality to others. It would be wise to begin with these people who have already demonstrated hospitality in the life and context of the congregation. These are people who have clearly set an example to others of what it means to welcome others. While their gift of hospitality may or may not be formally recognized, the candidates selected for the potential role of host facilitators must have this quality evidenced in their lives and practice. Second, these candidates must also have some elements of leadership skills necessary in order to make these HGs succeed. While their leadership may or may not be formal within the congregation, they must model a Christ-centered life and evidence the grace of God in their lifestyles and practices. Whether they have led large or small groups before, they will need at least a minimal level of leadership skill in order to cultivate healthy HGs.

A third important quality to be considered in the selection of the host facilitators is that they will need to be good conversationalists. These people must understand basic group dynamics and interpersonal skills in order to keep the conversation flowing naturally and organically. They will need to have the ability to do what Outler calls “stirring up the human spirit, awakening faith, and inviting and persuading others to

attend the Word within.”<sup>8</sup> They must know how to keep a conversation going and invite others into engaging dialogue. In addition to this, they must also have the ability to listen. Because listening is at the core of hospitality, these host facilitators will need to be able to model what it means to listen deeply to others.<sup>9</sup> If they cannot ask open questions and elicit stories from others, they will not be able to lead the HGs in a healthy manner. Careful consideration will therefore be given as to their conversation skills.

Finally, the selection of these host facilitators will be based upon the history of these individuals in their willingness to submit to vision and the humility by which they conduct themselves. The members of the congregation will not join groups in which the host facilitators are arrogant, rude, or condescending, but rather they will join groups when there is a clear demonstration of love, humility, and grace. These host facilitators must have a proven record of humility and have shown that they know how to work well with people. If these individuals have a competing agenda that is inconsistent with the overall vision of this project, they will not be asked to facilitate a group. If, however, they have demonstrated a consistent pattern of submitting to the leadership of Faith Community Church, they will be excellent candidates for this role.

As mentioned earlier in this project, although there will be a minimum of five pilot groups started in the fall of 2014, training will be given to a few extra couples or individuals for the host facilitator role, as it is uncertain what the initial response of the congregation will be for this project. The possibility of an overwhelming response should be planned for, but this must be coupled with a realistic understanding that not

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<sup>8</sup> Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> Homan and Pratt, *Radical Hospitality*, 213.

everyone will participate. If these extra couples do not lead pilot HGs in the fall, they can certainly participate in a group and be likely candidates to lead HGs in the future. There will most certainly be aspects that do not go according to plan in the implementation of these HGs; however, these host facilitators must be willing to adapt and be flexible to the situation with an overall understanding of the vision and purpose of the groups.

After the host facilitators have been selected and trained for the HGs throughout the summer of 2014, they will continue in dialogue with the senior pastor throughout the ten week training period during the fall. Leadership guidance and mentoring will happen through these conversations in order to offer proper guidance and continuity within each of the HGs through the training process. The mentoring relationship between the senior pastor and each of the host facilitators will mainly revolve around weekly e-mails to the facilitators, as well as occasional phone calls to hear what has been happening in the groups. These mentoring conversations will allow for adaptive changes to be made if various challenges arise. Throughout these mentoring conversations with the host facilitators, the senior pastor will maintain a posture of listening, so as to model an environment of creative and healthy dialogue and discovery. Furthermore, this will allow this training process to feel more personal rather than programmatic. In addition to leading a pilot HG, the senior pastor will therefore be actively involved with each group throughout the ten-week training process.

## Costs and Resources

The purpose of creating the manual for the HGs will be to educate, equip, expose, and engage each of the participants.<sup>10</sup> Throughout this training process, it will be important to provide excellent materials with regard to layout, content, editing, and graphics. Because a poorly presented manual will not advance the purpose of this project, the senior pastor will therefore do what is necessary to make sure that the resources provided are of the best quality. For the last six years, Faith Community Church has used a local printing and graphics company called *Cornerstone Copy* in nearby Lakeville, Minnesota. Using this existing business relationship, all materials and resources provided for this project will be developed in partnership with this business. Beginning in the summer of 2014, the senior pastor will contact Cornerstone Copy and begin the process of laying out the content of the training manual for the HGs. The senior pastor and Cornerstone Copy will be in constant dialogue so as to complete the training manual by the end of July in time for the meetings with the host facilitators.

At the annual congregational meeting for Faith Community Church in January of 2014, \$2,000 was officially budgeted for the year for “training and equipping.” Because this money is largely used at the discretion of the senior pastor, the funding for the training manual will be taken from this fund in the annual budget. If more funding is necessary in order to print fifty manuals, other funds are available from within the evangelism budget as well. While it will be important to provide quality materials for these pilot HGs, the senior pastor will seek to do this in a manner that is cost effective without jeopardizing the quality of the manual. While additional money is available for

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<sup>10</sup> Fuder and Castellanos, *A Heart for the Community*, 332-333.

this project in the evangelism fund, the senior pastor will seek to stay within the \$2,000 range. For the 2015 official budget, the senior pastor will propose that additional funds be given to training and equipping so future materials can be developed.

As of the spring of 2014, it is not yet certain as to whether these materials will be officially copyrighted. Upon initial examination, however, it appears quite likely. A current member of Faith Community Church works for a Christian book supply company in Minneapolis, and discussions will take place between the senior pastor and this member as to the pertinent issues and costs necessary to make these materials copyrighted. If this hospitality project is implemented well, and the congregation responds in an overwhelmingly positive way, it would be ideal to have these materials marketable for a broader use outside the immediate context of Faith Community Church. When the content is written for the training manual, sensitivity will be given to the information contained within it in order to make it user friendly in a number of different contexts. It is likely, after the initial pilot HGs are launched, that the manual may need to be revised or even re-edited in order to make the experience more positive for each future participant. When the senior pastor meets with the host facilitators at the debriefing meeting several weeks after the ten-week training period is over, suggestions will be solicited as to how the manual can be changed or modified for future editions. Costs for having the materials copyrighted will be examined throughout the fall of 2014, and an official decision will be made based on the feedback of the host facilitators and participants and their experience of this project.

In addition to the costs of developing the materials for this project, there will be the costs that participants will incur in practicing hospitality itself. Juliet Schor, in her

book, *The Overspent American*, says clearly that “for everyone socializing costs money.”<sup>11</sup> It costs money to welcome people into homes, particularly if a meal is involved. The reality for some in the congregation is that it may not be within their budget to be able to welcome people into their homes and have a lavish meal or provide some other type of service that involves expenses. While this may be true in a few cases, it often may come down to reprioritizing how and where money is invested. Emphasis throughout this training project will be placed around orienting one’s lifestyle around the priority of God’s Kingdom. When God’s Kingdom is put first, how one invests money will most certainly be altered. Sensitivity, however, will be given to this issue as some people are struggling in their finances and do not have much money to spare.

While the HGs will rotate homes throughout the ten-week training period, ideally each person or couple will host twice. Sensitivity will be placed in this project on the difference between “hospitality” and “entertainment” as already discussed. The emphasis will be placed not so much on the food, the furnishings, or even the house itself, but rather on the priority of love. Host facilitators will set the example to each of the participants by hosting the first two weeks. The senior pastor will encourage the host facilitators to consider providing a meal that is more formal in one weekly session, and also provide another more informal meal or simply dessert. HG participants will also have some discretion as to how they want to implement their groups with regard to food, and discuss any issues pertaining to food allergies. If a person is absolutely uncomfortable hosting an HG at least once or twice at his or her home, that individual

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<sup>11</sup> Juliet B. Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don’t Need* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 101.

may consider meeting at a local park or restaurant instead. Flexibility will be designed into the structure of the HGs so as to help people take small steps towards hospitality. As Alexander states, “Require only small steps which anyone can take now.”<sup>12</sup> If it is not conducive for some people to host in their homes, they will not have to. Creative alternatives, however, will be emphasized as every person will be challenged to take additional steps towards a life oriented around Christian hospitality.

In order to cut costs for the HGs, some people may simply decide to have dessert or a light snack when they host at their homes. The initial point will be just to get people together for the groups, so as to set a pattern for future hospitality within their own neighborhoods. Not all hospitality has to be formalized. In fact, teaching participants to be spontaneous may be a helpful skill to learn throughout the training process. Prior to the first week of the training process, the host facilitators will discuss food issues, childcare, and how they specifically want to implement their groups according to the needs of each of the individuals within that particular group. The goal is not to make people feel uncomfortable, but to challenge people with sensitivity to take those next steps toward having a missional life that is centered on reaching strangers and aliens. If this training process does not expose existing fears within individuals, growth cannot happen. The aim of this training process is to confront those fears and to allow the Holy Spirit to reshape individuals to be conformed to the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. When Faith Community Church is reshaped in this way, both hearts and homes will begin to open to others.

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<sup>12</sup> Alexander, *Being Church*, 133.

The issue of food, however, will be a significant part of these groups for the purpose of setting before the participants a visible example of God's reign as feast. There certainly will be costs involved. The main idea when discerning how the weekly HGs will look each week will be focused not so much on outdoing each other, but rather doing what is most natural in each home. Arthur Sutherland, in his book, *I Was a Stranger*, reveals that "hospitality ought to be ad hoc and personal . . . it ought to be natural and unforced."<sup>13</sup> In one home setting it may be dessert, in another setting it may be a BBQ at the local park, in another it might be a more formal dinner. In each case, each participant will consider what is natural for him or her in how to host the group. The idea is not geared toward competing with others, as this is often a sign of secular bondage, but rather toward simply being open to the rhythms of God's grace in each context. When participants begin to escape the chains of secular entertainment, they will begin to uncover a freedom that comes from Christian hospitality. This new mindset may be one of the most profound changes that will need to take place in the lives of many individuals.

### **Assessment Plan**

An important component to the success of this hospitality training will be the follow-up assessment plan. While the overall assessment plan has already been discussed in this project, the primary emphasis will be placed on the senior pastor connecting with the host facilitators. When the host facilitators get feedback from their participants on the first, third, and six months following the completion of the ten-week training program,

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<sup>13</sup> Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 79.

they will relay this information to the senior pastor so that specific results can be tabulated. A questionnaire will also be created by the senior pastor for each of the host facilitators to hand out to their participants so that they know what specific questions to ask and what to look for. The main purpose for this assessment plan will be to see how hospitality has been woven into the lifestyle of each participant. If after six months participants are more engaged in their behavior and lifestyle in Christian hospitality, then this project will have been a success. If, however, people resumed their former ways of life without any behavioral modifications, then it will not have succeeded. It will have simply been another church program. As Martha Grace Reece points out in her book, *Unbinding the Gospel*, “Hospitality must always be integrated into a well-developed congregational structure of teaching the practices of the faith and teaching faith sharing.”<sup>14</sup> The assessment plan will therefore seek to determine whether or not hospitality was successfully integrated into the life of the congregation.

Webber asserts that there are three major obstacles to community: individualism, isolationism, and consumerism.<sup>15</sup> If members of Faith Community Church are going to reorient their lives towards missional hospitality, these obstacles will need to be overcome. The questionnaire therefore will seek to uncover both cognitive and behavioral changes that strike at the heart of each of these barriers to real community and hospitality. If the five strategic goals outlined earlier in this project have not been met, then this project will need to be significantly altered. If this turns out to be the case, the senior pastor will reexamine the materials and the training format to see how things can

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<sup>14</sup> Martha Grace Reece, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 108-109.

<sup>15</sup> Webber, *Ancient Future Evangelism*, 59.

be modified to bring about the greatest results. Because the theological and practical implications of this project are vitally important to the life of each Christian, the call to hospitality must never be abandoned. What must be changed instead is the way in which the training portion happens. Hopefully these pilot HGs will have been such a significant success that if changes are necessary in the future, they will only be small.

It will take time to measure the true success of “Welcome Home: Hospitality 101.” Just as it takes time for people to develop connections with others, this practice of hospitality will take a significant amount of time to implement into Elko New Market and the surrounding communities. Even six months after the completion of the ten-week training period, it will be difficult to truly measure the success of this project. Because evangelism is a process, Faith Community Church will need to learn how to celebrate the small steps people are taking to reach out to others in hospitality. What must be measured first, however, is the change of heart in the lives of each participant in the congregation towards this new missional way of being. *To Transform a City* authors Eric Swanson and Sam Williams contend that “churches must be transformed first before transforming others.”<sup>16</sup> If members of Faith Community Church expect to allow the gospel to shine brightly through their lives into the community, they must first allow the gospel to penetrate every area of their own lives. Inward change will always precede outward change. The most valuable assessment for the success of this project will therefore be oriented toward changes in the heart.

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<sup>16</sup> Eric Swanson and Sam Williams, *To Transform a City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2010), 49.

The final, yet one of the most important, aspects of this project will involve prayer. To join God in the neighborhood and radically welcome others to God's feast means that the congregation needs to discern the will and ways of the Holy Spirit. This can only happen through intimate prayer and fellowship with God. In order for the congregation to overcome its various fears, it will need to have a deep faith in God's grace and power to live in this newness of life. Prayer will help overcome these fears. As Bradley Wright points out in his book, *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites . . . and Other Lies You've Been Told*, "In some cases these fears are more often affected by what we think others think of us than we are by what they actually think of us. That is, our perceptions of their attitudes often matter more than their actual attitudes."<sup>17</sup> Helping the congregation to be aware of the reality of these fears and also to commit everything to God in prayer will therefore be essential to the success of this hospitality movement. As the congregation seeks the Lord in prayer, the grace of God will be with all participants as they faithfully obey the command to be witnesses for the gospel of Jesus Christ. A key assessment in the analysis of this project will therefore be gauging the level of prayer in the life of the congregation to see whether or not this has grown in tangible ways. If people are praying for their neighbors more readily, this will most assuredly be a positive sign that God is working and moving within the church. Without God's grace, nothing significant will ever happen spiritually in the lives of church members or the people they seek to reach.

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<sup>17</sup> Bradley Wright, *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites . . . and Other Lies You've Been Told* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2010), 202.

## CONCLUSION

Putnam contends that “relationship building is a way of looking at the world, not just another strategy.”<sup>1</sup> If Faith Community Church is to become more effective in the ministry of evangelism and outreach through the strategic practice of Christian hospitality with sensitivity to its suburban context, it will need to reorient its priorities toward a more missional focus. God is active in Elko New Market and the surrounding communities, yet the members of the congregation must be willing to participate in what God is already doing in their neighborhoods. Roxburgh and Boren write, “Being missional isn’t about a new program or project inside a church but rather entering a community to sit alongside others and engage in gospel conversations.”<sup>2</sup> The aim of “Welcome Home: Hospitality 101” is to make hospitality a vital movement within the people of Faith Community Church. It is to get the members of the congregation to think through and share their experience of faith with their neighbors and friends, and welcome others into God’s Kingdom through faithful living, loving, and sharing. As Chilcote states, this vocation involves “proclaiming God’s salvation, living as part of God’s family, and witnessing God’s grace to the world.”<sup>3</sup> Amidst the busyness of suburban life, the call of Christians is to become salt and light to others. This is not optional, but an imperative.

In sending of his only Son to the world, God came to humanity to rescue and redeem it from the corruption of sin and death. Because God is a missionary, it follows that his people must be missionaries as well. The attempt of this doctoral project is to

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<sup>1</sup> Putnam and Feldstein, *Better Together*, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 65.

<sup>3</sup> Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision*, 17.

show that hospitality is a valid biblical expression of the missional character of God, who hosts a sumptuous banquet and welcomes aliens and strangers to his table. Not only does God welcome strangers, but he is also willing to become a stranger himself. In the sending of his Son Jesus Christ, God became incarnate and dwelt among humanity as a stranger. Likewise, if Faith Community Church is to grasp this biblical concept of incarnation, it must be willing to plant itself into the neighborhood. Church members must not only be willing to welcome strangers into their homes, but they must also be willing to become “strangers” and be welcomed into the homes of others. By taking on the nature of the stranger and dwelling among others, Christ will be made visible.

Christian hospitality is therefore welcoming others to the table of God’s abundant feast. It is inviting others to participate in God’s Kingdom by opening one’s life to the gospel of Jesus Christ. While this spiritual conversion will likely be a process that will take time in the lives of most people, the aim of this project is to call Faith Community Church to join this dance with others. As the members of the church both share their stories and listen to the stories of others, they will begin to uncover the work of God’s prevenient grace in the lives of the people around them. As the members of the congregation discern where God is already at work within the neighborhood, and begin these conversations with others, the power of the Holy Spirit will work both in and through his people to bring about his holy Kingdom purposes.

Palmer writes, “The church *must* incarnate its vision in public, for there and only there is the stranger to be found. If the integrity of the church’s vision depends on its

public expression, the quality of public life depends on the church acting out its vision.”<sup>4</sup> Because this is true, Faith Community Church must go public its mission to “love God, love others, and serve the world in the name of Jesus Christ.” One of the best ways this mission can be made tangible is through the ancient practice of Christian hospitality. Through the implementation of this project, Faith Community Church will be better equipped to fulfill its God-given mission to reach others with the gospel. When hospitality is worked into the life of the congregation in this way, it will help to establish a firm foundation by which hospitality can be developed as a lifelong practice. When the members of the church begin to orient their lives toward Kingdom priorities, Christian hospitality will be a natural expression of that missional life.

“Welcome Home: Hospitality 101” is designed to facilitate a place of discovery. It is created for the five-fold purpose of helping Faith Community Church: to facilitate an understanding of God’s missional call to hospitality; to encourage Christian hospitality as a lifelong pattern and practice; to invite creative expressions of hospitality in a suburban context; to enable organic spiritual conversations around table fellowship; and to help people to articulate their own stories of conversion. If these goals are met through this program, then this doctoral project will be a success. The larger priority, however, will be the impact that this has on the Kingdom of God. If the principles and concepts that have been derived from this project find their way into the life and practice of one individual who shares the gospel effectively with one other person, it will have served its purpose. It will have made a difference from the eternal perspective. This project is not

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<sup>4</sup> Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 23.

ultimately about growing Faith Community Church; it is about seeing that hell is plundered and heaven is populated.

There will certainly be unforeseen challenges and obstacles to overcome through this implementation of this project. Yet as the congregation learns to lean into Christ and trust him for the grace, wisdom, power, and discernment needed, nothing will be able to stand against the power of the gospel to accomplish its work in the lives of others. Jesus said in John 15:4-5 “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” Without Christ, nothing of eternal spiritual significance will ever happen. Only when Faith Community Church discovers the “source” of all grace needed to practice Christian hospitality will it effectively be able to see others welcomed to God’s banquet table.

This aim of this project is to develop a strategy for Faith Community Church to both understand God’s mission in the world and to accomplish that mission by incarnating the gospel to others through the practice of Christian hospitality. This doctoral project merely acts as a “trellis” for the vine to grow on. It merely provides the structure for how Christian hospitality will be implemented in the congregation. God, however, must grow the fruit on the vine. As the members of the congregation seek the Lord in prayer and faithfully live out God’s missional call to hospitality, they will begin to journey into greater levels of obedience and faithfulness to the call of Christ and his Kingdom. While there are many people to be reached with the gospel in Elko New Market, Minnesota and the surrounding area, God will use his people to reach others with

his holy love as members of Faith Community Church seek to live out the gospel in their daily lives. Abraham states, “God is active providentially in all history to establish His Kingdom.”<sup>5</sup> Amazingly, he invites his Church to join him in participating in that same mission. As the members of Faith Community Church learn to faithfully practice Christian hospitality in its suburban context, they join God in his mission.

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<sup>5</sup> Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 32.

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