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This ministry focus paper entitled

COMMUNAL STUDY, SCRIPTURE REFLECTION, AND HOSPITALITY AS
PRACTICES TO ENCOURAGE GREATER NEIGHBORHOOD ENGAGEMENT

Written by

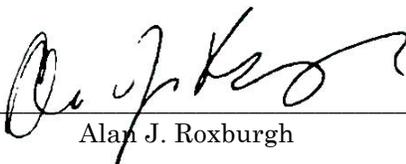
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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:


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Date Received: August 26, 2016

COMMUNAL STUDY, SCRIPTURE REFLECTION, AND HOSPITALITY AS
PRACTICES TO ENCOURAGE GREATER NEIGHBORHOOD ENGAGEMENT

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

JOSEPH CHRISTOPHER MONTOVINO
AUGUST 2016

ABSTRACT

Communal Study, Scripture Reflection, and Hospitality as Practices to Encourage Greater Neighborhood Engagement

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2016

The goal of this project is to facilitate members of a local church in action-reflection exercises incorporating missional practices, reflecting on Scripture, and sharing stories of hospitality with neighbors. It is believed that engaging in these practices would spark a fresh imagination within the members of what it means to be the people of God within today's postmodern American setting. The thesis was tested at Cascades Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, Washington.

Mainline Protestantism faces great decline as she no longer stands confidently at the center of American culture. Eric Jacobsen, in *Sidewalks of the Kingdom*, suggests that the Church might re-imagine a fresh future by turning members' attentions to the ordinary activities of neighborhoods in which they dwell (for example walking). This paper tests and documents a process by which CPC took initial steps toward engaging its immediate neighborhoods. This occurred through an action-learning process involving many exercises that took place at a variety of settings: leadership meetings, neighborhood prayer walks, Sunday school classes, and all-church retreats.

This study concludes that while the journeying toward a more missional future is long, initial steps were indeed taken. This was documented not only by the research and exercises conducted among the members in the previously mentioned settings, but also by the recorded stories of neighborhood engagement that were shared during worship by experimenters. Additional research and experimentation are needed to further instill this thinking throughout the entire congregation with the hope that a new missional future will be realized at CPC.

Content Reader: Alan J. Roxburgh

Words: 250

To the members of Cascades Presbyterian Church who loved me and provided space to
test together promptings that God's presence resides not in temples built by human hands
but rather in the ordinary places in which we have been planted

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of Cascades Presbyterian Church for their heartfelt participation in this project. You have trusted me as your pastor throughout this missional journey though the road was at times uncertain, long, and wearisome. Thank you to elder Phil Hickok for giving me space from preaching each month in order to focus on writing this final paper. Thank you to my colleagues Jon Brewer, the Rev. Doctor Josh Rowley, and the Rev. Doctor Geordie Ziegler who proofed my paper and challenged my inklings. And most especially, my gratitude is extended to my wife, Karen, and four children, Madisen, Rhyan, Jordan Ann, and Sofia who are the best partners one could have in life, ministry, and love.

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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONEXT

INTRODUCTION

Louise is a newly retired woman in her early sixties. Shortly after her husband of thirty years died, Louise was unexpectedly laid off from a job just shy of her ability to retire. Through the loss of her income and her husband's social security benefits, Louise found herself unable to remain financially in the home that she had lived in for seventeen years. Not only would this mean the loss of her physical home, it would mean relocating to a new neighborhood.

She applied for public housing and was told that it could be months if not years to secure an apartment in Vancouver, Washington. So she began the wait. Several months later she was contacted about an apartment that opened up in downtown Vancouver, less than five miles from her current home.

As I checked in with Louise periodically to see how she was adjusting, I became intrigued by the way she described her new home. The apartment complex is ethnically, religiously, and generationally diverse. She is making many new friendships. And she is enjoying the coffee shops, cafes, parks, and bike paths which are all within walking distance.

As Louise was moving in to her new place, she broke her wrist. No sooner had her new neighbors discovered it than one brought a sling to immobilize her arm in route to the hospital. By that evening another neighbor showed up at her door with dinner and plans to provide meals for the following two days. Louise talks about experiencing a sense of community in a way that she had not had in her previous surroundings.

Every Tuesday evening, Louise's new community shares a potluck meal that brings together good food, intriguing conversation (even when English is not the common language), billiard playing, and great laughter. Indeed, whenever Louise talks about her new home and her new friends, she has a sparkle in her eye. This is something new and fresh that she had not experienced previously.

I asked Louise if she would be willing to read Alan Roxburgh's book, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*. She agreed. A few months later, she also agreed to share with the broader church during our Sunday morning worship services some of these generative experiences as a way to spark others to engage their own neighborhoods.

This experiment with Louise left me wondering if others in our congregation were having similar encounters with the neighbors where they lived. Indeed, as I began to listen to the ordinary people in our congregation, what surfaced were more stories. Throughout this doctoral project we will hear from Ted, Carol, Stacey, Pam, Mike, and Karen, each of whom were having similar experiences in their own neighborhoods. As I talked with each of them independently, they noted that something special was taking place in their midst but that they lacked a theological framework to describe how God might be at work around them through this.

Eric Jacobsen, in *Sidewalks of the Kingdom*, suggests that the Church might re-imagine a fresh missional future by turning members' attentions to the ordinary activities of neighborhoods in which they dwell (for example, walking). Therefore this doctoral project proposes to test and document a missional change process by which Cascades

Presbyterian Church (hereafter, CPC), a mainline denominational church in Vancouver, Washington, will take as initial steps toward engaging the neighborhoods in which her members dwell. This includes an action-learning process involving exercises in entering, listening with, and attending to people in places where members dwell, reflecting on Scripture through text dwelling, and sharing stories of CPC's members who have experienced hospitality with neighbors.

Part One of this doctoral project describes CPC's current ecclesiocentric ministry context and imagination as a professional solo pastorate. This discussion also details the missional change journey that CPC has been on thus far as well as explore her primary adaptive challenge: how to engage people in our immediate neighborhoods who are different from us. This project demonstrates that attending to this challenge requires new learning and fresh practices should CPC desire to shift to a more missional imagination and one that focuses on the neighborhoods in which we dwell.

Part Two researches how the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (hereafter, PCUSA) within the Reformed Christian tradition arrived at its ecclesiocentricity for communal religious life. This section looks at *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) Part II* or *Book of Order* which describes both the Church's form of governing and historic principles upon which the Church was founded. It also explores how overvaluation of professionally trained pastorates, encouraged by John Calvin in *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, might actually short-circuit a congregation's ability to listen to and reflect upon the activity of God in their midst.

Part Three presents a three-phase project involving eight CPC members, all of whom live near the church and meet Saturday mornings at a local café within walking distance from the church. Phase One conversations set the ground work for entering, listening with, and attending to people in our neighborhoods using Roxburgh's *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* and *lectio divina* on Jeremiah 29:4-7. Phase Two involves walking particular neighborhoods where incidental contact, in Jacobsen's terms, best facilitates ongoing engagements with neighbors.¹ In Phase Three the process turns toward Roxburgh's workbook study on *Practicing Hospitality* and brainstorming particular opportunities to engage with neighbors. Finally in Phase Four, participants share stories of particular interactions that they had experienced with neighbors as a way of encouraging other missional encounters with members of the group.

Part Four of this project evaluates the group's recorded conversations and shared stories of actual engagements with neighbors. This hopes to document whether indeed an imagination shift is occurring from an ecclesiocentric focus to one that encourages greater member engagement in the neighborhoods in which people dwell. It is hoped that through this time of communal study, Scripture reflection, and sharing hospitality stories, CPC would be infused with a fresh way of living in our neighborhoods and not simply a program aimed toward church growth.

¹ Eric O. Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 89.

Part Five concludes the study. A summary of the results will be provided. Here, I aim to provide specific recommendations that CPC could take to further diffuse these practices within the broader congregation as it journeys toward a more missional future.

CHAPTER 1

CURRENT SOCIAL IMAGINATION AS AN ECCLESIOCENTRIC AND SOLO PASTORATE CHURCH

CPC is a small church of approximately 125 members that was founded in 1979 by two other Presbyterian churches that wanted to plant a Reformed presence of Christ in the north Clark County area. When the church building was constructed in 1983, the community in which it was planted was largely agricultural. The church looked out onto fields of grazing llama and sheep with Mt. Hood and Mt. St. Helens towering in plain view. Some thirty-one years later, the farm fields have been replaced with suburban, lower-to mid-income housing developments, the animals have been displaced by many first generation multiethnic neighbors, the mountain views have been hidden by houses and mature groves of trees, and three several thousand member mega-churches have popped up within a five-mile radius of the church.

Much has changed in CPC's neighborhood over the years, and yet much inside the church has not. These changes have led to some frustration, particularly with regards to CPC's lack of growth. Steeped in church growth thought processes, the leadership

wonders why CPC's ministries no longer attract people like they did back when it was first chartered. In truth these and other cultural changes in America have led to CPC's struggle to connect with the people who live right next door.

CPC has many gifts to offer, including a tremendous heart for God and a love for people who do not typically fit into other mainstream Christian settings. She also has a desire to help the poor and marginalized in our society. CPC is very grace-giving, hospitable, and willing to try new approaches to ministry. These gifts have helped cultivate a spirit of willingness to try new things such as enter into the missional change model in conjunction with my Doctor of Ministry program.

What is less helpful however is CPC's current social imagination as an ecclesiocentric, solo pastorate church. Ecclesiocentric means simply putting the Church at the center of activity, in the same way European cathedrals were once centrally located within the social, commercial, and religious life of a community. In other words, the local church once had interchange with each of these spheres and was believed to be the place where and through whom God worked. If people needed connection with God, they came to the church. If they needed spiritual counsel, they spoke with the pastor.

Reflecting on my first year DMin paper, I noticed how much this ecclesiocentric framework is deeply embedded in my own thoughts about the Church. CPC had just begun the process of designing new worship spaces, a dream that the church had from its beginning. It was self-focused and energy consuming. In the paper, I summarized what I thought was the aim of our construction project: "we hope to regain the church's position

as a center point of life in our community.”¹ This one comment unmask my own misguided belief of the importance of the church building, at least. I was not at all prepared for how the missional change model and this presumed goal of our construction would become two warring ecclesiologies. The current social imagination places the church clearly in the center of what God is doing in the neighborhood. The more missional one that CPC needed to shift towards was one that disperses the church to the places where its members dwelled.

Previously I mentioned that one of CPC’s gifts is hospitality, or helping people assimilate into the church. Again, in my Year One DMin paper, this centrality of the church showed up. I said, “We love sharing meals together, whether at all church potlucks, in each other’s homes, or gathering in local pubs following our young adults Sunday evening worship called The Orchard.”² Even still within our strengths is a deeply embedded framework of ecclesiocentricity and church growth. CPC’s hospitality is a gift, but at present, it is only internally focused, aimed at how to make us grow.

This leads to the other piece of our social imagination that has debilitated CPC’s missional imagination over the years: the solo pastorate. This is the pastor who works alone as the primary dispenser of religious goods and services to the church community. In our Reformed tradition the pastor, whom we now refer to as the “teaching elder,” is required to have a three-year Master of Divinity degree from an approved Reformed

¹ Chris Montovino, “Developing Missional Leadership Competencies at Cascades Presbyterian Church: A Mission-Shaped 360 Leadership Evaluation and Plan for Chris Montovino,” (Missional Cohort D, Year One, School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, March 1, 2011), 8.

² Ibid, 10.

seminary, pass through a gauntlet of ordination exams, undergo a thorough psychological review, and complete a rigorous communal process to confirm his or her fit for the calling. In the end, one is “ordained” to a particular calling with a stamp of approval by the ordaining authority or presbytery that this person has been properly equipped to fill all the ministerial roles in the church. These roles include but are not limited to serving as God’s spokesperson (i.e. preacher), dispenser of grace through the sacraments (i.e. baptism and the Lord’s Supper), primary fundraiser, head of staff, pastoral care provider, and chief custodian. Apparently within the solo pastorate social imagination, no one else is deemed equipped to do these jobs.

I recall when I was a prospective pastoral candidate with CPC and I was asked to provide the opening grace before a communal meal. I gladly obliged, not realizing that what I was being asked to do was to fill a role that they had had to do themselves over the years of this pastoral vacancy. Once I accepted the position, I have noticed that I am continually asked to fill that role. Apparently no one else knows how or has the confidence when the professional is there to pray over the meal. It is the pastor’s job as the prayer professional among them.

Another way that I may be unintentionally fueling this solo pastorate imagination is through the missional example that I provide to others in my own life. Another quote from my first-year paper states, “Many of those surveyed [in the course of the Missional Leader 360 evaluation] did mention that I serve as a missional role model and share those

experiences from the pulpit.”³ While I do this in my own life, I have yet to know how to get people to do it in their own neighborhoods. I do know that some of the richest moments in worship have been where ordinary lay people shared from missional testimonies during worship services about how they were experiencing God in their worlds. These stories seem to give people a sense that “if they could do it, so could I” and were more empowering than if I had stood up at the pulpit and told them what I was doing.

In *The Tangible Kingdom*, Hugh Halter and Matt Smay argue that little has changed in the seventeen hundred years since the early Christian Church’s formation. What was created then and continues in many congregations today was a place where people could come weekly, receive what was needed for their spiritual journey, and then expect to return again the following week for yet another spiritual feeding. All members had to do was show up and the paid professions would deliver it to them. And sadly, if the spiritual meal is not to a person’s liking, there would certainly be another congregation just down the road that would better meet their needs.⁴

Indeed, before CPC would be able to imagine a new missional future, these social imaginations would need to be transformed into something new and different. The Church would need to be seen as a church in diaspora as God’s people were in times long ago. Likewise the pastor would need to be seen as one of many gifted members

³ Montovino, “Developing Missional Leadership Competencies,” 15.

⁴ Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 56.

exercising their gifts within and beyond the body of Christ. The process by which this journey into diaspora would occur is described below and is known as Roxburgh's "Missional Church 360 Change Model."⁵

⁵ Alan J. Roxburgh and Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 133.

CHAPTER 2

OUR MISSIONAL JOURNEY THUS FAR

In 2010, CPC began this journey in conjunction with my doctoral studies in the Missional Church Cohort through Fuller Theological Seminary. This would entail engaging the entire congregation in Roxburgh's Missional 360 Change Model. The process would require missional assessments, the development of listening groups and action learnings teams, and brainstorming experiments that would encourage greater engagement with neighbors.

The first step was to have friends, colleagues, and members of the church evaluate my own readiness to lead missional change at CPC. This was accomplished through the help of the Missional Leader 360 Online Assessment developed by The Missional Network. This tool noted my strengths and weaknesses as a leader, which began to identify my own adaptive leadership challenges that I would need to address in leading this congregation through the change model. Two areas that needed further development became clear: first, developing and working with coalitions, and second, creating opportunities for missional practices to take place within the congregation.

In 2011, CPC took a similar assessment but this time of its own readiness to engage missional change. At first people were skeptical of the tool and wondered how it might help them solve problems within the church and help it grow. Many people realized that the tool was more about their own discipleship practices and less about what the church was or was not doing.

To evaluate the survey's results, we created a Saturday workshop where members of the church could begin interpreting the data for themselves. In the past, this evaluative work was done by the leadership of the church and handed down to the people. Sadly those reports typically sat on shelves and collected dust with little to no change incorporated at the grassroots. At this event, the fifteen participants from among the congregation realized that their honest assessment was valued, they felt free to share ideas even if it meant surfacing negative feelings or issues with the church, its pastor, or ministry.¹ One person who was quite critical going into the process said, "I really didn't want to come today, but I am sure glad I did." This work set the stage for what would come next in Listening Groups, when more and more members would be invited to interpret data together in community.

In all, forty-five people participated in CPC's Listening Groups. The groups were led by members of our Missional 360 Guiding Team who were specifically selected for their love of the church, their Christian maturity, and their willingness to learn. These members were responsible for guiding their teams through interpreting the data's results

¹ Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 153-154. Ward discusses the importance of these open thinking and free sharing spaces.

with the hope of identifying one or two adaptive challenges that the church set. This was quite a challenge in and of itself, because the participants were largely unfamiliar with the terminology or concept of adaptive change. Still they felt their way through it and honed in on an aspect of the way we share life together and how that impacts the way we do that with people outside the church.

What was also discovered through the Missional 360 Work is that CPC sees itself as somewhere between the developmental and transitional stages of missional change. According to Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren, a developmental church is aware of certain cultural changes and responds by constantly improving and developing its inner practices, habits, and culture. A transitioning church, however, is not just aware but understands those cultural changes and alters its practices and culture toward a new reality by developing new systems to support new ways of functioning.² CPC was clearly aware that things had changed and had begun to address those changes, but could not quite explain why CPC was taking these new steps.

The results from the Listening Groups were presented by the Missional 360 Guiding Team at a Spring Leadership Retreat in 2012 held with CPC's elders and deacons. Though some of these people had participated in the Listening Groups, this was the first time that they had heard its synthesized findings. We listened, processed, wrestled with the notion of adaptive challenges, and tried to come up with experiments that we could use to address the need for missional change. We also brainstormed names

² Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 126-131.

of people who might participate on Action Learning Teams which would be the next phase of giving the work away to the people. Our time together closed with a sense that God was working in and through this process but we still were not clear how. This was when one leader mentioned that “Cascades will rediscover its life where bread is broken and stories are shared.” CPC’s adaptive challenge was identified as follows: “how to share life with those inside and outside the church who are very different from us.” This challenge is definitely adaptive. It is one probably that most churches today have. The one experiment that was mentioned for all people to try was to consider prayerfully one neighbor with whom God might be inviting them to develop a closer relationship. While the adaptive challenge was still ecclesiocentric, it was also missional in that it was beginning to open up an imagination for including those outside the walls of our church. The experiment was clearly missional. Perhaps a shift seemed to be occurring. Further work with this adaptive challenge would be completed by an Action Learning Team which is described next.

The Action Learning Team process is an action-reflection model facilitated by the members of the Missional 360 Guiding Team. Here a group takes the adaptive challenge presented by the leadership team and enters into a cycle to brainstorm missional experiments to address the challenge, acts on the experiments, reflects on how the experiment worked in addressing the challenge, and then diagnoses further questions and adaptive challenges that could be met by future experiments. Then the cycle begins all

over again.³ All seemed in place and ready to take off until the missional change ship went aground and the entire process came to a screeching halt. We wondered what had gone wrong and how we could get the ship back on course.

Reflecting upon our process and experimentation, we had good momentum going forward following the work of the Missional 360 Guiding Team and the Listening Groups in Year Two. However, it seems like it all fell apart in Year Three when it came time to implementing the Action Learning Teams. There are several factors that could have played into this derailment. First, the Action Learning Team and its leaders struggled to name or own their adaptive challenges. Second, the Missional 360 Change process was too slow and its guiding leaders simply lost steam. Third, the primary person leading the Action Learning Team had to abandon the project due to the health of a family member. And fourth, it was the beginning season of our permitting and construction project to create new worship spaces, which were characteristically time and energy exhaustive. When the construction project struggled to move forward at a crucial moment, I found that I needed to redirect my attentions from the missional change process to shepherd our church's lay construction manager through it. Once the project was completed, I was freer to redirect my attentions to the Missional 360 Work and started over by having groups name their own adaptive challenges.

While these are all good and valid, probably the most significant reason why the process stalled was connected to my own limitations identified by the Missional 360

³ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Action Learning Teams* (Vancouver, BC: The Missional Network, 2012), 10.

Leader evaluation. This was related to my inability to create an environment where missional practices are put into place. Apparently, as noted in my Year Two paper, I had become an expert at diagnosing and solving the church's adaptive challenge. However, I had failed to wrestle truly with my own, which was learning how to facilitate a process that would get the church to identify and solve these challenges themselves.⁴

Allowing the process to fail and resisting the need to rescue it from failing was an important part of my own learning. Jesus himself said that "unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24).⁵ The Apostle Paul carried on this analogy about the resurrection of the body and being raised to new life (1 Corinthians 15:37). I had to let it die, perhaps in order for something new to be resurrected. So it was with our Missional 360 change process. Then and only then could it be something owned by the congregation, not simply a favor for me to complete my doctoral work.

Jesus' parables are notorious for describing times of life when things do not turn out as one had hoped. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, in *The Missional Leader*, state that "nothing in shaping a missional culture is simple."⁶ This was certainly true of my experience at CPC. But Roxburgh also encourages us to stay the course and not "escape

⁴ Montovino, "Developing Missional Leadership Competencies," 15. Here I identified several of my personal adaptive challenges. These are: to provide learning experiences for church members to discuss and develop missional practices where they work and live, to balance the inner life of the church with the outer life of developing relationships with unchurched people, and encourage members to practice hospitality with their neighbors and work colleagues."

⁵ All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 168.

from [the struggle because it is here] where God does something outrageously imaginative and transformative.”⁷ This lull, through this past year, has provided one of those challenging waiting spaces. The truth is that God’s work is slow and has many unexpected twists in the road. Paulo Freire in *Education for Critical Consciousness* supports Roxburgh and Romance’s inclinations; “In spite of the results it may [or may not] produce, its slowness is at odds with the urgent need of the community to stimulate production.”⁸ This also touched upon another of my personal leadership adaptive challenges identified in my Year One paper: how to work with slow moving, organically driven processes.⁹ Though the Missional Change Process had stalled, it clearly had not gone away. So I began asking, “Ok God, what next?”

⁷ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 165.

⁸ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Company, 1974), 105-106.

⁹ Chris Montovino, “The Development of a Contextual Theology: Continuing to Cultivate a Missional Imagination at Cascades Presbyterian Church,” (Missional Cohort D, Year Three, School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, March 1, 2013), 19.

CHAPTER 3

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES: PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL

As mentioned in the previous section, wrestling with how to become a better listener and reflective pastor who intentionally shares the work typically assigned to a solo pastor with the ordinary people of God in my congregation topped the list of what was next. I struggled in Year Two to know how to get the elders and congregation to name their own adaptive challenges as I fell back into my own default mode of doing the work for them. This short circuited the learning and transformation process among the people of CPC. Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, in *The Practices of Adaptive Leadership*, state succinctly, “because the problem lies in the people, the solution lies in them, too. So the work of addressing an adaptive challenge must be done by the people connected to the problem. And those in authority must mobilize people to do this hard work rather than try to solve the problem for them.”¹ The question I returned to was how to mobilize the people once again to get them to name their own adaptive

¹ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practices of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 74.

challenges as well as create some experiments where this kind of critical and reflective thinking could occur.

Part of the answer to this question occurred on its own during the summer of 2013 when I took a three month sabbatical. This was the first time that CPC had to wrestle with how to carry on the functions of their pastor (other than a season when their pastor left permanently). So it was a positive experience of filling in the gap, not out of dire crisis, but of desire. Many lay people filled the pulpit while I was gone. People were not asked to preach but to share primarily what God was teaching them in their current season of life. It was a rich time of hearing what God was doing at the grassroots among ordinary, not seminary educated, people. Still God's Word was rightly preached. Perhaps this has been a start of tearing down that framework in our tradition that overly emphasizes the role of the professional pastor as preacher or teaching elder.

Also, our deacons and Stephen Ministers provided all of the pastoral care while I was away. Elders wrote newsletter articles and coordinated elements of worship each Sunday. It was an empowering season for the church. One elder remarked quite glibly after my return about the lessons learned during my sabbatical. He confessed, "we discovered that while we like you, we don't need you!"

Writing about CPC's primary adaptive challenge is tricky; it is difficult not to fall into the same trap I did previously of diagnosing and solving the problem for them. I can only report the work that they have done so far. At the session elder retreat, the Missional 360 Guiding Team reported what they thought was our primary adaptive challenge: "How

can we engage people both in our congregation and in our neighborhoods who are very different from ourselves?” In other words, as Roxburgh describes it, [the challenge of] “how we create a sense of community whereby boundaries are broken, categorization is overcome, and a willingness to enter into dialogue with one another without any sense of needing to prove or make the other like oneself.”²

The first piece of this challenge is definitely ecclesiocentric: dealing with how to do this among an intergenerational body that lack areas of connectivity. Apparently some members feel as noted during the Missional 360 process that “the members of CPC have lost touch with one another’s stories and how God is at work in one another’s worlds.”³

The second piece however is more missionally minded dealing with the activity of God in the places where they have been planted. The Prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter from God to exiles who had been carried away into Babylonian captivity. God said “Folks, it’s going to be a while. I am the one who brought you into captivity. So make yourselves at home. Build houses. Marry. Multiply. Put down roots. And pray for the city where I have planted you. If the city prospers, you too will prosper (Jeremiah 29:4-7, my paraphrasing). In other words, these cultural shifts of decentralizing the church or God’s people by moving them to the margins of society are the act of God. Alan Roxburgh claims that this “exile is a symbol of God’s gracious preparation, not

² Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Sky Is Falling: Leaders Lost in Transition* (Eagle, ID: ACI Publishing, 2005), 144.

³ Chris Montovino, “For the Sake of the World: Cultivating a Missional Imagination at Cascades Presbyterian Church,” (Missional Cohort D, Year Two, School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, March 1, 2012), 8.

God's abandonment."⁴ For "God's future almost always emerges in the most God forsaken places."⁵

Through this we are learning many new things. Most importantly is that God might be the one behind this shift so that we might be more missionally grounded in what God is doing in our own neighborhoods and world. This will be explored in greater depth much later in this paper as we address our primary adaptive challenge and brainstorm experiments to engage our neighborhood.

One answer seemed to evolve around sharing stories with others during shared meal experiences. Hence a concluding comment that was made during the listening phase was that "CPC will rediscover its life where bread is broken and stories are shared."⁶ This led to an experiment of hosting a pancake breakfast once a month in between the earlier contemporary service attended by younger generations and the later traditional service attended by seniors. This in between space provides a place for people to gather, eat food, and share life stories with one another. People are finding that there is more in common with other generations than there are differences. We are welcoming the stranger within our own congregation and making them one of us. And in this God is

⁴ Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling*, 75.

⁵ Ibid, 120.

⁶ This is quite an interesting observation as it echoes the writings of missiologist Lesslie Newbigin who wrote "There is no way by which we come to know a person except by dwelling in his or her story and, in the measure that may be possible, becoming part of it." Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence, Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 52. Creating spaces to share, listening to and thus interweaving our stories with people inside and outside the church became one of the experimental paths we took toward a more missional future.

overturning the status quo and establishing a fresh way of being the people of God where “none can claim privilege over others and all gladly surrender privilege for the good of others.”⁷ While this may seem internally focused and not missional in the least, it is creating space for us to practice hospitality so that we can then extend that to others in the places where we dwell.⁸

Members of the listening teams also brainstormed ways to have members of the congregation share stories during worship about how they are involved with what God is doing in their communities.⁹ More and more, as people listen to these stories, it appears that they are seeing that missional activity is occurring though they have not coined it as such in the past. Yes, some of the work is simply naming what is already missional. Indeed this points to the possibility that the missional change terminology itself can be a barrier for people understanding what they are already doing to be part of what God is orchestrating in their worlds.

While we have described CPC’s missional change journey thus far and what we have done through this also needs to probe deeper into the Reformed Christian tradition and how it may be fostering our tendency toward ecclesiocentricity and an over valuation of professionally educated clergy. We will do this in two ways. The first will be to explore the Reformed principles as noted in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church

⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission, Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Books, 2003), 51.

⁸ Montovino, “The Development of a Contextual Theology,” 20.

⁹ Montovino, “Developing Missional Leadership Competencies,” 15.

(U.S.A.). The second will be to look at John Calvin's view of the church and its pastors as noted in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In order to further develop a case of the need to shift our missional imagination at CPC, it is to this that we turn our attention to next.

PART TWO

THE NEED TO SHIFT IMAGINATIONS

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE REFORMED ECCLESIOCENTRIC AND SOLO PASTORATE CHURCH MODEL

The Reformed Christian tradition was birthed during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. It espoused a strong emphasis on God's providence and grace in Jesus Christ as revealed by the Scriptures. Key concepts like grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone marked the principles that set it apart from Roman Catholic doctrine.

Other "Reformed" principles identified in the PCUSA's *Book of Order* include:

- a. The election of the people of God for service as well as salvation;
- b. Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God;
- c. A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation;
- d. The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God.¹

Each of the above mentioned ideas are good in theory. However, they do pose some challenges with regards to how they are implemented within the Church. This is

¹ *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II, Book of Order*, F-2.05, "The Confessions as Statements of the Faith of the Reformed Tradition" (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2013), 10.

particularly true of the second principle noted above of valuing “a disciplined concern for order in the church.” This ideal originates from the Apostle Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth. Apparently there were problems inherent in that particular church with multiple people speaking in tongues and prophesying over one another in such a way that no one could understand what was being said. It was causing distractions during corporate worship. Paul does not say that they should not exercise these gifts, he merely encourages them to do it in such a way that builds up all people in the church. He says, “God is not a God of disorder, but of peace.” He goes on to summarize his argument later saying, “Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:39-40).

This call for decency and order has taken on a life of its own within the Presbyterian Church. Some churches are so orderly and decent that there is little space for the Holy Spirit to operate. If order has become so highly esteemed and a marker of the Reformed Church, then there must be a gatekeeper who will maintain this order. As we shall see below, that gatekeeper defined by John Calvin as well as the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is to be none other than the pastor of a local congregation.

Probing deeper into this Reformed Christian heritage, it would be good to see what John Calvin has to say about the importance of those called to pastoral ministry and the role of the church in society. Our attentions turn to Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian*

Religion. This work was written in response to grave persecutions of Protestant Christians in France by King Francis in 1536. Calvin aimed to exposit his understanding of the Christian faith for the king in contrast to what was being taught by the Roman Catholic Church at the time. This work has become a foundational Reformed exposition of the Scriptures as to who God is and what God requires of us and the Church.

The Church, according to Calvin, has been given to humanity as a help or necessity to “beget and increase our faith, helping us to advance to our goal.”² God instituted the positions of pastors and teachers with authority to help God’s children understand the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But not all churches are true Churches. To distinguish, Calvin established what has become known as the “marks of the church.” He states, “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”³

These two marks of the Church indeed point to an ecclesiocentric mindset for Calvin. For a church to exist, preaching and sacraments must be present. Without them, there is no church. For most people, preaching is an event which one attends. In order for this not to be the case, it would require people to rethink what is meant by preaching and how the sacraments are administered and by whom, which leads to Calvin’s next point with regard to the importance of a “right” agency who can administer God’s grace.

² John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol.2*, Ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1011, sect 4.1.1.

³ *Ibid.*, 1023, sect 4.1.9.

Calvin obviously had a very high regard for the pastoral and teaching offices of the Church. He describes this human ministry as the “chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body.”⁴ Later he says that of the offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, the last two “the church can never go without.”⁵ This is most especially true of pastors who are to “instruct the people to true godliness [preach the gospel], to administer the sacred mysteries [sacraments] and to keep and exercise upright discipline.”⁶

That being said, Calvin also lifts up the roles of elder and deacon as important functions of the church. The latter serves to administer the caring ministry of the church while the former serves as chief administrator. Each is to work in conjunction with the pastor to ensure that Body of Christ serves the purpose for which it was created.

However, Calvin’s emphasis on the pure preaching of the Word of God might pose challenges for some. The word “pure” in and of itself sets a high bar and potential barrier for laity to take hold of, especially if they have not been formally schooled in Biblical exegesis or preaching. If there is a “pure” way of preaching the gospel, then one must be taught it. If one must be taught it, then it implies a form of education, which Calvin notes is a function of the church through its pastors.⁷

⁴ Ibid., 1055, sect 4.3.2.

⁵ Ibid., 1056, sect 4.3.4.

⁶ Ibid., 1058, sect 4.3.6.

⁷ Ibid., 1017, sect 4.1.5.

According to Calvin, the laity are neither up to the task of purely preaching the Word of God nor administering the sacraments. Other than participating in Bible study and offering themselves unreservedly to God, Calvin's ecclesiology seems to relegate the laity to the role of passive participants or consumers of the religious goods dispensed by the experts (i.e. pure preaching and rightly administered sacraments). Sadly and most interestingly, Calvin is notably silent on the aspect of the priesthood of all believers.⁸ It would be good to explore what others like Martin Luther had to say about this concept, though it will not be contained within the scope of this paper.

It is helpful to consider the immigrant nature of the church in Geneva that Calvin pastored along with some observations I have had as CPC has shared space for the past ten years with two such immigrant congregations. One was a Korean American congregation, the other a Slavic American congregation. Both are highly ecclesiocentric and specifically geared to reach people with similar cultural roots. They aim to preserve their cultural identity as foreigners, living in a foreign land. They are not the least concerned with connecting with people in their own neighborhoods who are different from themselves. Instead they have become more insular. This immigrant nature is also part of our theological and social heritage, that CPC likewise struggles to break free of these roots today. It would be interesting to explore this notion further for another time though it is clearly beyond the research tested and documented within the scope of this paper.

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 1476, 4.19.28n70.

Within the scope, however, is how the Confessions and Form of Government within the PCUSA follow Calvin's lead of seeing the Church at the center and overemphasizing the role of the pastor. The Directory for Worship, which is a component of the Constitution of the PCUSA, describes the role of pastor as a "special ministry of the Word and Sacrament."⁹ The word "special" in and of itself seems to imply a very different function from the ordinary which, again, sets the pastor apart from the laity. One look at the job description for pastor overwhelmingly calls for someone who has been professionally trained to wear many different hats.¹⁰ Like Calvin's silence, nowhere does the Book of Order address the concept of the priesthood of all believers or laity directly, though it does describe in detail the offices of elder and deacon, which are both roles served by lay persons.

This elevation of the pastoral position is reflected in both the Form of Government and Directory for Worship. Their wording states, the pastor "dispenses the manifold grace of God and the ordinances instituted by Christ, he or she is termed

⁹ *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II, Book of Order*, G-2.0501, "Teaching Elders: The Ministry of Word and Sacrament", 29.

¹⁰ *The Book of Order*, G-2-0504, "Pastoral Relationships" states "When teaching elders are called as pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor of a congregation, they are to be responsible for a quality of life and relationships that commends the gospel to all persons and that communicates its joy and justice. They are responsible for studying, teaching, and preaching the Word, for celebrating Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for prayer with and for the congregation. With the ruling elders, they are to encourage the people in the worship and service of God; to equip and enable them for their tasks within the church and their mission in the world; to exercise pastoral care, devoting special attention to the poor, the sick, the troubled, and the dying; to participate in the governing responsibilities, including leadership of the congregation in implementing the principles of participation and inclusiveness in the decision making of the church, and its task of reaching out in concern and service to the life of the human community as a whole. With the deacons the pastor is to share in the ministries of compassion, witness, and service. In addition to these pastoral duties, he or she is responsible for sharing in the ministry of the church in councils higher than the session and in ecumenical relationships."

steward of the mysteries of God.”¹¹ A dispenser is something that delivers a product to a consumer. This, in fact, implies that pastors are the primary dispenser of religious goods and services to ordinary people sitting in our pews whereas the ordinary people (i.e. laity) are not.

To further solidify this divide, the Directory of Worship states that the pastor alone is responsible for selecting Scripture and worship songs, for preaching the Word of God, and for administering the sacraments.¹² Accordingly, “preaching requires diligence and discernment in the study of Scripture, the discipline of daily prayer, cultivated sensitivity to events and issues affecting the lives of the people, and a consistent and personal obedience to Jesus Christ.”¹³ While these are all important elements in the act of preaching, nowhere in Scripture does it require that they must be done by seminary trained, presbytery approved individuals. And as Roxburgh and Boren state in their book, *Introducing the Missional Church*, this over emphasis on professionalism may be creating a culture within the church that is particularly risk-averse and unwilling to take chances in order to embrace something new or fresh.¹⁴

¹¹ *The Book of Order*, Form of Government of The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II, G-6.0202, “Names Expressive of Duties.”

¹² *The Book of Order*, Directory for Worship of The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II, W-2.2002, “Selection of Scripture” states “The teaching elder is responsible for the selection of Scripture to be read in all services of public worship and should exercise care so that over a period of time the people will hear the full message of Scripture.” W-2.3011. “Responsibility for Baptism states “For reasons of order, Baptism shall be authorized by the session, administered by a minister of Word and Sacrament, or commissioned lay pastor when invited by the session and authorized by the presbytery.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, Part II, W-2.2007, “Preaching the Word.”

¹⁴ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 183.

However, being that our denomination values order, there is a process one must navigate in order to be ordained as a teaching elder or Minister of Word and Sacrament. The Book of Order states, “Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder shall include:

1. a candidate’s wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, honest repute, and sound judgment;
2. transcripts showing graduation, with satisfactory grades at a regionally accredited college or university;
3. a transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, showing a course of study including Hebrew and Greek, exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek, satisfactory grades in all areas of study, and graduation or proximity to graduation; and
4. Satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly.¹⁵

This is a grueling and academically rigorous training period that one must go through just to be approved as ready for ordination. I believe it sets the bar so high that an untrained lay person cannot even compare to the professionally trained pastor. Many simply are not encouraged to try. Interestingly enough, nowhere is it mentioned that being full of the Holy Spirit is required for ordination. This seems to be a major oversight of the role of the Holy Spirit as the equipper and teacher of all wisdom from the Lord.

At CPC, however, we have begun to debunk this barrier. Some of the richest preaching moments in the worship life our church have taken place when ordinary people were encouraged to preach on Sunday mornings. In the summer of 2013 and during my three month sabbatical, lay people were asked to preach three Sundays of four throughout

¹⁵ *The Book of Order*, G-2.0607, “Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service.”

the summer. Instead of asking people to preach, which was terminology describing a role only filled by the professionally educated pastor, these folks were asked to share testimonies of what God had been teaching them in their particular season of life. The testimonies included a recent empty nester whose children had grown up in the church, who shared what involvement in a church family has meant to him. Another talked about God's presence and peace during their fight with cancer. And yet another documented the strength and wisdom God had given to her as she walked alongside her aged father in his last days. People were blessed beyond belief. New visitors to the church could not believe that all this could take place with the absence of the pastor. God's Word was preached, the church was edified, and other laypeople were given the vision that they too could be part of interpreting what God was doing in their world.

In the same way, we have wandered outside the bounds of our tradition to permit deacons, elders, and lay persons to administer the Lord's Supper to those aged people who are housebound or no longer able to participate in the regular worship life of the church. Deacons take communion to people's homes and in the course of their visit use a script that guides them through a liturgy involving the Scripture story, offerings of prayers, songs of thanksgiving, and the distribution of the elements. Not only does this take the load off my shoulders as a pastor, but it equally shares the joy that comes from dispensing God's grace to all people. Like the seventy disciples who returned with joy to tell Jesus all that they did in his name, our deacons always return with a sense of being part of something special and holy in that act (Luke 10:17).

This has become true as well with regards to how our church offers pastoral care through our Stephen Ministry Program. This ministry trains lay people to walk with others through various seasons of life, transition, or loss. Stephen Ministers undertake fifty hours of training on topics such as listening, maintaining boundaries, grief counseling, and self-care. They also meet twice monthly to process together the issues raised in their meetings with their care receivers. This in turn helps them to care for each other as they care for those in need of care. One of the things that Stephen Ministers learn is that while they are the care givers, only God cures people. In our church we have eight such Stephen Ministers which greatly reduces the burden for being the only one trained to provide such pastoral care. In fact, our Stephen Ministers are more skilled and educated than I could have ever hoped for through the single pastoral care course I took in seminary.

These are just a few steps CPC has taken to debunk this myth that the pastor is the only one capable of administering God's grace to others. We esteem the value of shared ministry as part of our Presbyterian unity.¹⁶ We have much further distance to travel in order to arrive at a new place where the church can be seen as one of the many loci where those gifts can be experienced but this shift in imagination is a start.

The Book of Order describes what are known as our preliminary Presbyterian principles. These are nonnegotiable core values which have held up the Presbyterian Church since its beginning. These include that Jesus Christ is alone the head of the

¹⁶ *The Book of Order*, Part II, F-3.0208, "Shared Power." "Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is a shared power, to be exercised jointly by presbyters gathered in councils."

Church, what the great ends of the Church are, the historic principles of Church order and government, and the Constitution. It is to these great ends of the Church that our discussion turns toward next as perhaps some insight as to how embedded is our ecclesiocentric framework within our Reformed tradition.

The Book of Order describes the mission of the Church as: “the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.”¹⁷ In other words, the Church exists for preaching, pastoral care, conducting worship, maintaining truth, doing justice, and representing the new reality of what God is doing in our world through Jesus Christ. With the exception of last great ends regarding what God was doing in our world (which is clearly missional in nature), all of the other functions are centrally focused. They are functions that either occur at or originate from the Church and are not missional per se. Indeed proclamation of the gospel does occur as worship takes place on Sunday mornings as part of the main event. Fellowship occurs at Church functions like potlucks. Social justice is promoted through Church sponsored initiatives. Nowhere do they encourage individual members to remain attentive to the Holy Spirit and what God is doing in other places, such as their neighborhoods where they dwell. Sadly, a search for the word neighborhood or neighbor in the Book of Order for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) turns up empty.

¹⁷ *The Book of Order*, Part II, F-1.0304, “The Great Ends of the Church.”

Scripture, however, has a lot to say about the importance of sharing leadership as well as the role of the neighborhood as decentralized places where God is at work. The first example in the Old Testament of the importance of shared leadership that comes to mind occurs in Exodus 18. Moses has taken charge as judge over Israel's people who presented their legal cases to him from morning till evening. He would listen to their cases and then inform them of God's decrees and laws. But the burden of doing the work alone was overwhelming. When Moses' father-in-law Jethro visited Moses, he admonished him that what he was doing was not good. Jethro said to Moses:

Select capable men from all the people – men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain – and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied. (Exodus 18:21-23)

God spoke through Jethro and Moses obeyed. Moses trusted that God would work just as much through the faithful from among the people as he would through himself. In doing so, Moses set the stage for how the Holy Spirit would work through the disciples of Jesus in sharing leadership with the ordinary people of God and in forming the early Church.

Likewise in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul lifts up particular positions of leadership within the Church, pastor included. He does not, however, set them apart as "special" nor does he expect them to do all the work of the ministry alone (Ephesians 4:11-13). In fact he instructs the Church in Corinth that its pastors are simply part of a

whole body, with all of its members arranged with unique functions and gifts according to God's purposes. He says, "Now you (collectively) are the body of Christ and each one of you (individually) is part of it. And in the church, God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:27-28). These gifts are distributed as God sees fit just as he wanted them to be (1 Corinthians 12:18). This allows for the gifts of God to be distributed through these diverse members who share in concert "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, reaching unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

But God does not give these roles to just anyone. There is a process the church is to use in discerning who God is raising up as leaders. Paul's advice to Timothy provides some of that direction as he specifically spells out the requirements for elder and deacon (1 Timothy 3:1-13). Both positions require people whose characters reflect Jesus Christ. Only for the role of elder is it specifically stated that "they must be able to teach" which could reflect some expectation that they have been trained to do so. Otherwise, these positions are expected to be filled by uneducated yet capable lay persons who are equipped by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit.

When we look at Jesus' example, and to whom he entrusted his Church after ascending into heaven, we see that they were simple, ordinary men of faith. They had no

educational or professional merits on which to boast. They were people who, by faith, had left all that they knew to follow Jesus and obey his teaching. Once Jesus was gone, he promised the Holy Spirit would remain to counsel, instruct, and remind them of all that Jesus had taught them while he was with them (John 14:25-26). And he specifically said, “I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:19-20).

This aspect of Jesus’ ongoing presence through the Holy Spirit among his gathered disciples is vital to understanding and delegating the specific functions of Jesus’ pastoral ministry among ordinary people. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven at the close of Matthew’s Gospel we hear his final charge. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).” These were not the synagogue leaders, nor were they high priests. These were not the teachers of the law, nor were they the ones who showed the most promise. They were ordinary men and women through whom Jesus opens the door for all people to be part of what he is doing in the world.

Ecclesiologist Veil-Matti Karkkainen confirms the utter importance of empowering the ordinary people toward God’s mission. He states “When laity are seen as the medium through which the church is constituted by the Spirit of God, then spiritual

activity and receptiveness are no longer divided into two groups of person, but represent two basic activities of each individual: each acts in the person of Christ and each is a recipient of this action.”¹⁸ Indeed, when two or more are gathered in Jesus’ name, it is Christ himself who does that action. Thus the emphasis of God’s action is on the Holy Spirit, not the channel or person with particular credentials through which it occurs.

So it is with the sacraments. The emphasis is always on the Holy Spirit, not on the credentials of the one administering these ordinances. Whenever we celebrate the Lord’s Supper we are reminded that Jesus is with us as we break bread together and drink from a common cup. The Holy Spirit feeds and nourishes our souls. The Apostle Paul gives no words or advice as to who is qualified to do this. Jesus simply implies that his followers were free to do this with and for one another.

We see the same freedom of agency with the sacrament of baptism in the early church of Acts. There would have not been anything decent or orderly about baptizing three thousand people in one day as what happened after Pentecost (Acts 2:41). This had to have been an all hands on deck event and whoever was available was in the water baptizing people as Jesus had earlier commanded. Still, as promised and as his followers were faithful to their charge, Jesus was present among them through the Holy Spirit. With all of the sacraments, we believe that it is as if Jesus were administering these graces himself, but through us.

¹⁸ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 141.

Once, God's spirit dwelled in the temple in Jerusalem, but now, through Jesus Christ, the veil that once separated the role of the priest from the people was torn down. It is believed that God is no longer constrained to a physical location for he lives in human hearts. With this respect the words of the prophet Joel have come true: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people, your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29). The believer is hence the primary agent for God's activity in the world and the location where this activity occurs is the place in which they are planted. This stands in stark contrast to an ecclesiocentric perspective. Since Jesus' disciples are no longer tied to a physical location as they were to the temple in Jerusalem, the good news of Jesus' resurrection can be spread far and wide throughout the world.

This equipping of Jesus' disciples to do the work of the ministry and then dispersing them into the world mirrors the character and nature of God who shares knowledge, empowers them with the Holy Spirit, and then sends them out into the world as an act of love. As the gospel tells us, God the Father so loved the world that he sent his only Son to dwell among us (John 1:14; 3:16). God the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit after Jesus ascended into heaven (John 14:26). And the Holy Spirit then sends us to be witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8). What this points to is the truth that though we are centered in Christ, we can be decentralized in mission.

Perhaps this means it is time to take this charge back and give it to the people of God as God intended in the first place. Perhaps it means shifting our social imagination that the places where God is at work is in the places where have been planted. It may mean that some things in Christ's mission won't be done decently and in order. It will be messy. It will require grace, but it will be good.

By and large I would say that while our American culture is more spiritual, it is also becoming less organized religiously.¹⁹ This means that people are open to a wide variety of spiritual practices as long as they are not sponsored by a particular church or denomination. The Pacific Northwest in which CPC is situated is known as one of the least churching regions of America. In truth, participating regularly in a faith community is not on most people's radar scopes.

The reality is that even among church going families, many younger adults are choosing not to attend when given the choice. At CPC, many of our older adults who made particular efforts to raise their children in the church are saddened by the fact that their children have stopped attending even when they live just minutes down the road. Somehow the value of church life did not get passed down to these adult children. So they chose instead to stay at home on Sunday mornings.

¹⁹ David Masci and Michael Lipka, "Americans May be Getting Less Religious , but feelings of Spirituality are on the rise," Pew Research Center FactTank News in the Numbers Website (January 21, 2016), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/21/americans-spirituality/>. This article reports that between 2007 and 2014 there was a 7% increase in people who claimed to have a "deep sense of wonder about the universe," an 8% increase in people who claimed no religious affiliation (or nones), and a 17% increase in self described atheists.

When a church's social imagination is ecclesiocentric, they obsess about getting people to darken the doors of the church.²⁰ What ends up happening is that we try harder and harder to find whatever magic combination it takes to attract people back into the church so we can sell them our religious goods and services. But if more people are choosing to stay home, then this is all the more reason to support a shift in our ecclesiology to one that is decentralized and located in the places where these folks live. The next section of this paper will propose an experimental process that hopes to begin cultivating such a missional imagination among the ordinary people of God.

²⁰ Leslie Newbigin, in *Proper Confidence*, remarks on the ecclesiocentric nature of the church, "We are not honest and open-minded explorers of reality; we are alienated from reality because we have made ourselves the center of the universe." Leslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 104.

PART THREE

THE PROJECT:

SHIFTING FROM ECCLESIOCENTRICITY TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND
FROM A SOLO PASTORATE TO A REFLECTIVE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

CHAPTER 5

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ON SEVEN MISSIONAL EXPERIMENTS

Carol and Ted have lived in their neighborhood for three years after relocating to Vancouver, Washington from Denver, Colorado. Carol is a retired librarian. Ted is a retired insurance adjustor. Both are very quiet and private people. Yet both are also highly engaged in the new neighborhood in which they have been planted.

Shortly after they first came to our church, I noticed that Carol's conversation and request for communal prayers often centered on the neighbors with whom she had frequent contact. She is an avid walker and Ted a dedicated gardener, both are often outside where they spark spontaneous conversation with the people walking by or who are out working in their own yards. This models the kind of incidental contact that Erik Jacobsen describes in *Sidewalks of the Kingdom* as missional practices.

In asking them particulars about how they had come to be so involved in their neighborhood in such a short period of time, Carol implied that they were thrust into it by another neighbor. "No sooner had we moved in, than did we get invited to a neighborhood block party. On top of that, everything you seem to mention in your

sermons is about getting to know our neighbors as our place of mission. I guess we just thought that was what we were supposed to do.”

Indeed when Carol talks about their community, she speaks with connection and joy. This led me to wonder what was at the root of that joy and how we could encourage other members at CPC to have similar engagement with their neighborhoods. That is the subject that I will turn to next as I describe the project behind this paper and several missional experiments that resulted.

Roxburgh talks about the importance of developing a workable missional ecclesiology, one that is highly practical and do-able. This is the way most will learn how to be missional.¹ We began by reading a book, *Missional: Engaging God in the Neighborhood* by Roxburgh. This helped lay a necessary language foundation for further discussions. After reading, we would gather at selective members’ homes to participate in conversations, share a meal together, and then walk through the neighborhoods as a way to connect with each other’s context and hear to stories about particular neighborhood encounters.

As previously mentioned in his *Action Learning Teams Workbook*, Roxburgh describes an action-reflection model in order to help foster missional change within a congregation. Indeed, changing the ecclesiocentric culture of a church is impossible in one fell swoop and requires a series of experiments designed as small steps in order to progressively get people in tune with God’s activity in their particular places. While

¹ Alan J. Roxburgh, “The Missional Church” in *Theology Matters, A Publication for Presbyterians for Faith, Family, and Ministry* Vol. 10, No. 4 (Sept/Oct 2004), 1-5.

most activities at CPC would stay the same, as experiments unfolded, were reflected upon, new experiments attempted, and the results shared with others the hope was that the momentum would shift at CPC from the church proper being the center of missional activity to the places where we work, dwell, or go to school. Little did I know that the project in my initial proposal would be one such experiment that would fall into the action-reflection cycle. What began as one experiment actually morphed into four separate opportunities to infuse missional thinking within the life of the congregation.

My initial project concept proposed three phases involving eight CPC members each of whom lived near the church. We were to meet on Saturday mornings at a local café within walking distance from the church. Phase One conversations were to begin during the Lenten Season of 2014 which would set the ground work for entering, listening and attending to people in our neighborhoods using Roxburgh's *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, and focusing our *lectio divina* on Jeremiah 29:4-7. Phase Two was to involve walking particular neighborhoods where incidental contact in Johnson's terms best facilitates ongoing engagements with our neighbors. Phase Three would have concluded the process in late spring or early summer 2014 as the focus turned toward Roxburgh's workbook study on *Practicing Hospitality*.

What actually took place was a series of seven experiments (see Appendix A-G) that started in April of 2014 and finished one year later in April of 2015. The chart located at the end of this chapter summarizes all of the data collected from these seven

experiments. These experiments will be described briefly below and then their data interpreted later on in this paper.

Neighborhood Prayer Walking Exercise

On a beautiful Saturday morning, April 19, 2014, the day before Easter, three of us gathered at CPC where I had introduced the concept of Neighborhood Prayer Walking. We spent approximately fifteen minutes prior to the walk discussing the importance of prayer and how to go about it in an unobtrusive way in the places we dwell. We also took a short neighborhood exegesis survey (see Appendix A) that asked participants to draw their community and describe the frequency of meaningful conversations they had had with members of their community in the past week, month, or year. It also asked about the gifts, struggles, and what they sensed God was doing in their neighborhood. The results of this exercise will be described later.

Stacey, one of the participants in the prayer walk, was an avid walker in her own neighborhood and also a previous member of the Missional 360 Guiding Team. She had read several of Roxburgh's books on the Missional 360 Change process and was up to speed with the missional conversation. Cheryle, however, was new to this missional language house, but was one who was likewise deeply invested in relationships within her own community.

We began our walk in a way that seemed nothing more than three friends taking a walk on a beautiful day in their neighborhood. We asked the Holy Spirit for wisdom and

guidance to know how and what to pray for this community. Amidst conversation about life, observations as we walked, and the occasional greeting to neighbors out in their yards, brief prayers would be offered up either in silence or out loud for whatever it was that cross our minds. All in all, our prayer walk was brief, lasting no more than an hour in length. Then we returned to the church to debrief our experiences. Each of us remarked how extremely rich the experience was.

From this experiment, I began to wonder if other people in the church had as much contact with their neighbors as Stacey and Cheryle had with theirs. I had not recalled much conversation with people except for the occasional prayer offered up in the context of Sunday morning worship at church. It was then that I decided to broaden my reach by asking the nine members of our session elder board to complete the same Neighborhood Exegesis exercise that Stacey and Cheryle had done the day of the prayer walk.

Session Neighborhood Exegesis Exercise

Our session elders meeting on Tuesday May 13, 2014 began with a short devotional that was connected to the neighborhood exegesis survey (see Appendix A). This time we had eight participants, five women and three men. Answers were shorter and less descriptive than what had been completed during the morning of the prayer walk perhaps due to the time constraints before our work session. I also noted that the men had more difficulty than the women in answering the relational questions of the survey.

Session Deacons Retreat And Missional Network Video Discussion

The next experiment took place on Saturday July 8, 2014 at our annual session/ deacon's retreat (see Appendix B). This was a day that we set aside to meet as church leadership to listen to one another, to reflect on the past year's ministry, and to consider how God might be calling us to minister together in the coming year. We met in a member's home, a restful and beautiful location not far from CPC. Eighteen people participated in all, thirteen women and five men.

One of the main objectives of this retreat was to put the work of identifying a primary adaptive challenge of the church back into the hands of the people. As mentioned previously, I had fallen into the trap of discerning this myself without allowing the leaders to figure it out for themselves. We began by watching a video by Roxburgh from the Missional Network where he describes three shifts taking place within American Christendom.²

First, Roxburgh mentioned was that there is a great unraveling going on in American institutions, the Church included. Second, he noted that there is a bubbling or deep sense among people that God is up to something and the main question is how can we join God in what He is doing. And third, he had sensed that the location in which this was taking place is in the ordinary, local, and every day experiences of life. Each of these three shifts led to the question of "How can we be God's people in those places?"

² The Missional Network, "Joining with God in the Local: What We Do," <https://vimeo.com/79454163> (accessed August 25, 2016).

Participants formed four groups of four or five and were asked to discuss if they agreed or disagreed with those main points. If so, why or why not? They were also challenged in light of this great unraveling to describe what was the primary challenge before CPC today. They were also asked to summarize their group's discussions on a simple survey form that contained the aforementioned questions. While the specific results of these responses will be discussed later, over all the eighteen elders and deacons found the conversation both disturbing and enlightening because it forced them to think beyond the status quo.

All Church Family Retreat Dwelling In The Word And Practicing Hospitality Workshops

In September of 2014, I had yet another opportunity at the Fall All Church Family Retreat in Sandy, Oregon to further infuse this missional thinking throughout an even broader subset of the church population. This time we had twenty seven participants engaged in the missional conversation. These were people of all ages, youth to adult, with seventeen women and ten men attending.

The teaching during four large group sessions focused on Roxburgh's Study Guide, *Practicing Hospitality* (see Appendix C). Large group teaching topics included: creating space for others; the nature of hospitality; the spiritual rhythms of hospitality; and stepping toward hospitality. After each session, the larger group was divided into four smaller intergenerational groups who set their attentions on reflecting on the following Scriptures: Luke 10:1-12 (Jesus sends out the seventy two); Acts 10:23b-48

(Peter at Cornelius's house); Luke 24:13-44 (The road to Emmaus); Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus and Jesus) (see Appendix D). By the end of the weekend, each group had dwelled in the word, captured their reflections as a group on the reporting form, and shared insights with the larger group (see Appendix E). The weekend was very rich and further instilled missional thinking within the retreat participants. Again the results will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

On account of the many conversations that I had been having with people and their engagements in their particular neighborhoods, several stories emerged that were clearly missional in nature. These were each people who had recently relocated to the area or had moved to new sections of the city after years of dwelling in other locations of Vancouver. I was intrigued by how each of these people had embraced the places where they had been planted as opportunities to be part of what God was doing in these locations. The stories reminded me of God's word to the Israelite exiles in Babylon through the Prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:4-7). Here God tells them to make themselves at home, to grow roots, and to pray for the city in which they had been planted - or, in other words, be attentive to what God was doing in their community and join in that work.

Fall Sermon Series "Bloom Where You Are Planted" Testimonies

This sparked an idea to preach a sermon series during the fall of 2014 that I titled "Bloom Where You Are Planted." It was based on this text in Jeremiah. I also asked

several people to share their stories during worship prior to my sermon. Several questions prompted our sermon interviews including: How had they come to live in the community in which they now lived? What were some of their greatest joys that they discovered in their neighborhood? How had they encountered their neighbors? What did they sense that God was up to in these ordinary places? How have they joined God in that work?

We had five missional testimonies shared over the course of the ten week sermon series. These moments during worship were incredible and helped further paint a picture of what it meant to be the people of God in the places where we dwell. All of this took place as a lead up to the main work that was to comprise my initial doctoral proposal.

Lenten Scripture Reflection Group And Practicing Hospitality Study

Following the sermon series, I finally felt like it was time to begin the project proposed earlier in this paper. So I invited a select group of people to prayerfully consider taking part in a small group based on Roxburgh's *Practicing Hospitality Workbook* that I would lead for eight weeks during Lent of 2015 on either Saturday mornings or Sunday afternoons. As the cafe that had been originally proposed as our meeting space had closed and there was not another decent centralized public meeting space, I suggested instead that we would rotate meeting in each other's homes for about an hour and a half. This solution would give us opportunity to experience the places

where we each dwelled as we talked about our neighborhoods. I was very clear that there would not be any expectation of the host home other than providing a meeting space.

The only preparation expectation was that people would read Roxburgh's book, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*. We would simply listen to Scripture together, share our encounters with neighbors, consider simple hospitality experiments that might help us to connect better with our neighbors, and then reflect on those experiments. I also mentioned that this study was not about evangelism or trying to get these neighbors into our church. It would simply be to listen to what the Spirit of God might be doing in the places that we live.

Invitation letters were sent out and books were given to each of five couples: Bob and Stacey, Carl and Melissa, David and Chloe, Mike and Karen, and Carol and Ted (see Appendix F). Four of the five couples read the book while one returned it saying the content was too academic. Unfortunately, every couple declined the invitation to participate in the small group either on Saturday mornings or Sunday afternoon. People were either too busy, disinterested, or just burned out on the missional conversations since we had been talking about it so much over the past several years. I sensed that this group of participants needed a break so in keeping with Roxburgh's action reflection model, I went back to the drawing board and figured out another way to engage a fresh set of people in listening to Scripture together and talking about their engagement in their neighborhoods.

What I settled on was hosting the small group during our Adult Sunday School hour at the church during a time and place that did not require an additional burden on people's busy schedules. We started in January of 2015 and went through the Lenten season into April of 2015 (see Appendix G for results). Thirteen people participated. Of those initially invited to join, Ted, Carol, David, Chloe, and Mike came. Two other participants, Deborah and Christina, had been at the All Church Fall Retreat noted earlier. Teddy, Arty, Thelma, Amber, and Erasmus were each new to the missional conversation.

Missional Book Reviews

From these discussions, Carol, the retired librarian, whose story was shared at the beginning of this chapter, wondered how we might be able to infuse this missional thinking more into the members of the congregation. She asked for additional books to read on the missional topic and offered to write book reviews as part of our monthly newsletter, the Bell. In these articles, she highlights the main points of the book, encourages people to put them into practice in their daily living, and then makes the book available for people to borrow from a bookshelf in the fellowship hall. Since the start Carol has reviewed twelve books and has received extremely positive feedback on her monthly column from the members.

A Summary of the Data Results

Table 1, on the following page, summarizes the quantitative research that took place over the course of an entire year among CPC members, from April 2014 to April 2015. Ted and Carol's testimony referenced above is but one of the fruits that resulted from the experimentation. In total there were seven experiments with seventy four people who participated over twenty one hours of missional conversations. They reflected communally on six Scripture passages and were asked a total of a hundred and fifteen questions. There were three hundred and eleven responses given. For more in-depth reading of each experiment's results and what actually took place, please see to the Appendix.

Table 1: Quantitative Data Collected from Seven Missional Experiments
 Source: Data from CPC taken April 2014 to April 2015.

Experiment Held	Participants (#)	Length of Experiment (hours)	Scriptures reflected upon (#)	Questions asked (#)	Responses given (#)
Neighborhood Prayer Walks	3	1	0	7	21
Session Neighborhood Exegesis Exercise	8	1	0	9	104
Session/ Deacons Retreat Missional Network Video Discussion	18	2	1	5	65
All Church Family Retreat Practicing Hospitality	27	6	4	29	37
Fall Sermon Series Bloom Testimonies	5	1	0	0	0
Lenten Scripture Reflection Group Practicing Hospitality	13	10	1	65	84
Total	74	21	6	115	311

PART FOUR

REFLECTIONS ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS OF SEVEN MISSIONAL EXPERIMENTS

Mike and Karen are a young couple in their early thirties. They are also new parents to two year old Lily. A few years ago they relocated to Vancouver, Washington from California feeling called by the Lord. Until recently they had no family in the area and had loosely connected to a large mega church in our community. They longed for greater connection with the people who lived around them.

Mike had met a retired man living across the street from their new home and developed a friendship with him. Whether out in his yard or hanging out in his garage, this retiree would often invite Mike over for casual conversations. This friendliness spilled over to the other neighbors and Mike and Karen were quickly included in a web of communal friendships that have existed for several years.

Following Karen's recent pregnancy, she had experienced an illness that led to her being hospitalized for several days which left Mike alone to care for their newborn. The network of friends that they had developed quickly surrounded them with meals, childcare, and support when their immediate family were not able to help. In this

situation, they experienced what happens when a community becomes one's extended family. They felt cherished, loved, and cared for. The kingdom of God had arrived at their household.

Mike and Karen shared their story one Sunday morning during worship as part of a sermon series that I preached based on Jeremiah 29:4-7 about the blessings of blooming in the community in which we are planted. They had no idea at the time that they were purchasing their home that their neighborhood would become such a crucial component of them experiencing God at work in their lives. Their story was vital for other members of the congregation to hear in order for them to likewise know what God was doing in their own neighborhoods.

This young couple had graduated from a Christian college in California where they had met. While their theological schooling had given them the essentials of a missional mindset, they lacked the formal language house needed to express their desires for greater connection in the places they inhabited. Upon my invitation, both read Roxburgh's book, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, and participated in the All Church Family Retreat where we dwelled in the Word and conducted workshops on Practicing Hospitality. Their experiences during that one experiment and the experiences of other participants in other experiments form the qualitative research which is reflected upon below.

Neighborhood Prayer Walking Exercise

The first experiment was a neighborhood prayer walking exercise as previously described (Appendix A). Each of the three participants were able to draw their neighborhood and label particular people on their street. They were also very aware what was going on in the lives of their neighbors. Each mentioned a strong sense of fellowship as the particular gift of their neighborhood and yet also confessed the challenge of finding time to get together because of busyness. In terms of what God was doing in their neighborhood, a common thread was the idea that God was knitting together an extended family with whom they shared life, both ups and downs. Each also had particular people that they were praying for in their neighborhoods.

This knitting together of neighbor's lives and deep knowing of each other's business reminds me of Jesus' last words that the Gospel writer John recalled on the night that Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot. After sharing with his disciples how he would be arrested, put on trial, and killed by the Jews, Jesus also comforted them and imparted his wisdom to be left behind. Jesus said, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I have called you friends, for everything I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:12-15). These actions were imprinted upon the hearts of Christ followers throughout the ages. When Jesus' followers live by these principles of knowing and loving each other

sacrificially, we reflect the kind of love that God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ, had for each other.

While I think this first exercise and its results greatly reflect the deep faith of those who participated, I also know that not everyone might be comfortable with the idea of going on prayer walks through their community or asking the Spirit to reveal what it was up to in those places. Still, most would be open to walking next door and engaging their neighbors. What I focused on, however, were the stories that were shared among the prayer walk participants of how they were experiencing the presence of God in their own neighborhoods. This exercise moved people out of the church and into the places where they dwell as the locus of God's primary activity. I also became curious with how I might get others to do the same and begin to share their own stories of what they were experiencing in their own neighborhoods. That led me to conduct the Neighborhood Exegesis Exercise with the Session of CPC as my next test subset.

Session Neighborhood Exegesis Exercise

The Session of CPC consists of nine ordained elders each of whom have been elected by the members of the congregation to oversee the church, for three year terms. This group provides the leadership and direction for the church. In 2014 at the beginning of our May Session meeting, I had them fill out the same Neighborhood Exegesis questionnaire that I administered during our Prayer Walking Exercise four weeks previously (see Appendix A).

Most people could draw a picture of their neighborhood and identify their immediate neighbors on their street. Most also had meaningful conversations with these neighbors in the past week, month, or even year. Though friendliness and a willingness to watch after each other's homes while away existed, there seemed to be a lack of intimate knowledge of what was going on in each other's lives. This was very different from the stories and conversations that were shared among the prayer walking participants. Session members noted their personal degree of busyness and a lack of common ground with families in their neighborhoods who were in different stages of child development. Once again this pointed to CPC's primary adaptive challenge noted earlier, "how to share life with people who are different from ourselves."

It was interesting when the questions came up about what they sensed God was doing in their neighborhoods. Responses were either quite short or nonexistent. Only two of the eight elders present even attempted to answer this question. Of those who responded, one mentioned God was melding different backgrounds and bringing these people to their door. Another steered the response in the direction of church attendance and that only three families went to church.

The final question asked participants to identify one person or family in their neighborhood that God might be calling them to engage in deeper relationship and what steps they could do to make that happen. Three responders provided names while only one suggested an actual goal of being more intentional to invite their neighbor over for a shared meal soon.

What this experiment has shown is that even CPC's elders are struggling with having meaningful interactions with the people in their neighborhoods. While they are friendly and cordial, there seems to be little to no life sharing with one another. At this point I am not sure that people are really understanding what it means to be missional. They certainly did not understand what it meant to attend to what God was doing in their neighborhoods and joining in that work. As with Mike and Karen's story earlier, they lacked the necessary missional language house. What this indicated was that we needed more time learning about and reflection upon what it meant to be missional in order to build the necessary language house to have deeper conversations about where God was at work among them.

To do so, I would cast an even broader net than before in order to bring even more people into the missional conversation. This would include not only the session elders of the church but the deacons as well. The nine deacons at CPC provide the caring and compassion ministry of the church. The session and deacons meet together once yearly at an annual retreat for ministry discussions and coordination.

Session Deacon Retreat Missional Network Video Discussion

At the Session Deacons retreat on July 8, 2015 we took time to watch a video discussion by Roxburgh of the Missional Network in which he describes three key points of the missional church conversation (see Appendix B). This would provide more of the framework for the missional language in order to have more pointed discussion. First,

Roxburgh mentions that there is a great unraveling going on in American institutions, the Church included. In other words, life within big institutions was changing at a speed faster than technical solutions were able to address and people's allegiances to those institutions were waning.¹ The result was that business would not be able to go on as usual because the support base was no longer there to keep the functions going. Hence, life was unraveling.

Second, Roxburgh said that there was also some hope among the people of God that this was something that God was doing in our culture and he raised the question of how can we join God in what he was doing in this unraveling. Just getting people to acknowledge this unraveling was uncomfortable for some. But as Linsky and Heifetz mention in their books, we needed to address the truth about the waning church which people would rather avoid. This would break the ice and get people to talk openly about the unraveling that we had all been experiencing in Christendom. Jesus said to his disciples, "You will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32).

Roxburgh's third point that we heard in the video lecture was that he believed the location in which God was working was the ordinary, the local, and the everyday experiences of our lives. This countered our deeply embedded ecclesiocentricity, that God worked in the church only. His challenge then was for us to discern how we can be God's people in those decentralized, ordinary places.

¹ Technical challenges are those for which we either have the specific knowledge or can acquire knowledge to solve. Adaptive challenges are less precise. These kinds of challenges require a fresh understanding of our situation and often require new learning in order to solve.

My hope was to get people to really hear that things were changing so that we would not try to simply put the same bandaid on an old wound and assume everything would be fine. Respondents agreed that God seemed to be doing something new and that it required a change. One even said “God was messing with us.”

Identifying the primary challenge before Cascades was not so easy. One group steered toward technical solutions that they knew how to address by improving church attendance. Another noted the busyness of young families in our culture. Two groups clued on that the challenge was relational. One group seemed to hit the bullseye: how to find a way to develop relationships with people outside the church who are different from us.

In hindsight, I feel the third question that groups answered about the video could have been asked in a different way that would have put more focus on God’s activity in our communities. Instead it was asked what we could do to help people engage God more. The emphasis should have been to get people to wrestle with where they were experiencing God themselves in their neighborhoods and then encouraging them to join God in those places.

Instead the responses leaned toward initiatives that we could program to connect with people outside the church. In other words, what programs could we do to get people to come to the church, like game nights, ice cream socials, health checks, entertainment nights, etc. Not one group mentioned engaging neighbors more in intentional conversations or life sharing. Clearly this ecclesiocentric narrative was deeply ingrained

in people's thinking which would require yet another experiment geared for a broader audience to engage. Obviously I had more work to do to prepare the soil and would need to go back to the drawing board in order to expand people's missional tool belt. A perfect opportunity came during the All Church Family Retreat that took place in October 2014. At that time, I would have nearly thirty people's attention over three days to implant this missional thinking in their hearts.

All Church Family Retreat Dwelling In The Word and Practicing Hospitality Workshops

For this experiment we had twenty seven people total and six hours of reflection time over four sessions on different Scripture verses centered on the concept of hospitality (see Appendix C). This seemed to be a missional practice that people either had experience as a guest or as host. The conversation was lively and people of all ages were involved. This was the first time, in fact, that children and youth were included in our missional discussions. We were actually practicing how to relate to people outside our social spheres who were different from ourselves.

Four table groups of mixed ages reflected on four Scriptures identified in Alan Roxburgh's Practicing Hospitality Workbook (see Appendix D). During session one, I talked about the importance of creating space for others following in Jesus' footsteps who goes ahead of us and creates a space where he is that we can be also (John 14:1-14). I also shared Paul's letter to the Romans which exhorts believers to be "given" to hospitality (Romans 12:13). The word "given" means to chase after something as if in hot

pursuit. Roxburgh writes, “Hospitality is about welcoming the stranger and loving the neighbor. It is central to the life of Israel because they remember that they were strangers, aliens, immigrants, refugees taken up by God (Deuteronomy) fed and loved. Being in the community of God’s people is to love the stranger as oneself.”² If that were indeed true, then we were to be in hot pursuit of hospitality with strangers and neighbors because that was our story as well.

During the time of Scripture reflection, participants noted how often there seemed to be a reversal between the guest and host. An example of this took place in the story on the Road to Emmaus when Jesus broke bread with his friends in their home (Luke 24:30-32). It was not until the disciples experienced this that they realized that the living Christ was present among them as they supped.

Some of the participants remarked at being surprised by who God uses and how. Others acknowledged that it was sometimes hard to get to know one’s neighbor due to their own or their neighbor’s personalities. Still most people felt Cornelius’ hospitality to Peter in Acts 10 was exemplary of how God opens his heart to us though we were first enemies of God (Romans 5:10). Hospitality, they noted, involves a great deal of trust. First, there is a trust of one’s neighbor who may be very different from us, but nonetheless receives us as guest and welcomes us to their table.³ Second, there is a trust

² Alan Roxburgh, *Practicing Hospitality: A Study Guide* (West Vancouver, BC: Roxburgh Missional Network, 2010), 5.

³ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 141.

in oneself that you have something to offer. Third, there is a trust that God will protect us as we extend ourselves vulnerably without agenda to our neighbor.⁴

In the second session, we discussed the nature of hospitality and how food is critical to practicing hospitality. According to Roxburgh, “Food and table represent the presence of God and sharing of things to come when all creation (Revelation) will sit at table with Christ and feast in the new creation. Practicing hospitality with the neighbor and stranger is practicing God’s future; it is a central witness to the new creation that the Spirit is calling into life through the church.”⁵ Participants remarked how important it was to get to know neighbors and to invite them over for meals. Equally important was the need to accept invitations to neighbors’ homes. One said “hospitality is the framework for sharing faith and in the process both groups are blessed.”

In the third session, we turned our attentions to the spiritual rhythms of hospitality. To begin I shared a story from some years ago when I worked with high school students and an organization called Young Life. My wife and I invited a group of senior high school boys over to our home that I had gotten to know from the community. Most of these boys were not from the church but people I had met through volunteering at the local high school. The table was set with our finest crystal and silver and we enjoyed a leisurely two hour dinner, not a typical meal one shares with high school boys. After dinner we went out in our back yard, sat under the stars and continued our dinner

⁴ “Luke writes the stories of the sending of the seventy and the Samaritan on the road to suggest that what God is doing in the world has more to do with being the stranger and receiving hospitality than being in control of the resources and the answers.” *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵ Roxburgh, *Practicing Hospitality*, 6.

conversations about life, life after school, and where God was in the midst of it all. As the boys left, one of them remarked, “I don’t know what happened tonight but whatever it was, it was incredible!” I think what we all experienced that night was what happens in hospitality where the Lord shows up in our midst, becomes the host, and we all get a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven.

One of the things that the retreat participants noted was that one of the rhythms of hospitality is that it cannot be rushed. Indeed, as the story above describes, it often takes time for the mutual blessings to unfold. Dorothy Bass, in her book, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*, writes, “In a fast food culture, a wise Benedictine monk observes, you have to remind yourself that some things cannot be done quickly. Hospitality takes time.”⁶

Another observation included the notion that there is a difference between thinking about hospitality and acting on it. That a community practices what it believes is important. We should look for opportunities for generosity and come to look for and expect Jesus in those moments when we receive others as we wish to be received.

During the last of four sessions, all participants were encouraged to take steps toward hospitality. I shared about how we host block parties several times a year for Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Halloween, and Christmastime. We are not so much the host, as it is in the cul de sac in front of our house. But we are the instigator of them. People come as they are able and if for some reason we are delinquent in getting

⁶ Dorothy Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2002), 117.

word out in advance, we are called by people inquiring “We are having the annual party, right?”

I also mentioned that hospitality does not happen on its own. In fact it takes being very intentional to create spaces for hospitality to occur. We must pray and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind someone in our neighborhood with whom God is calling us to connect. We are to reach out, schedule something on the calendar, and see who comes.

During the closing session, four questions were asked that were intended to move the retreat participants from passivity to actively engage their neighbors (see Appendix E). As in the previous experiment, I felt that asking people what God was up to in their neighborhoods and joining God there was confusing language for most. So this time, I chose simpler questions that steered clear of the missional language. I asked what stories stayed with you this weekend? What is something new that you have learned about hospitality? What one person or family in your neighborhood has God put on your heart this weekend? And what one thing are you planning to try when you get home?

From these questions, specific names surfaced where people thought the Spirit of God was inviting them to pursue. One student said “When I get back to school, I’ll try saying hello to my locker neighbor and ask her name.” Another said that they would make zucchini bread when they got home and take it to my neighbor.” And still another mentioned “I’m going to see if I can get my neighbors together for a neighborhood potluck.”

As I looked back over the responses throughout the retreat, I noticed a significant shift in focus from the previous experiment at the session deacons retreat. Not once did people approach hospitality as a program that the church needed to pursue. Instead, hospitality was something we were to practice in our personal lives. In this setting, I started each session with true stories of hospitality where either I was the host or the guest and how I experienced the Lord's presence. Author Christine Pohl says "We nurture hospitality as a habit and a disposition by telling stories about it."⁷ By taking the conversation out of the missional language house, I was able to encourage our retreat participants toward greater neighborhood engagement by sharing stories that awoke their own imaginations for their own actions.

Fall Sermon Series: Bloom Where You Are Planted Testimonies

During the same season, I had planned a fall sermon series called "Bloom Where You Are Planted." It was based on the Scriptures in Jeremiah 29:4-7 where God tells the exiles in Babylon to make themselves at home and engage their hosts. As I listened to several people in our congregation, they clearly had stories that needed to be shared with the broader congregation as to how they were engaging their neighborhood. And since testimonies are the best way to enliven a fresh missional imagination, having these folks share their stories as part of the sermon series during worship would further diffuse the

⁷ Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 173.

missional thinking among the broader congregation, whether they had participated in any of the previous experiments or not.

Each missional testimony was only about ten minutes in length. Some were interview style where I asked questions about their neighborhood, how they first got to know their neighbors, and one concrete example of how they have experience the kingdom of God in their community. In fact, the stories laced throughout this doctoral paper came from those missional testimonies. What I think these stories accomplished was to give ordinary lay people a down to earth view of what it truly means to be missional and to attend to what God is up to in the places where they have been planted. I also think that their stories were really inspiring.

Lenten Scripture Reflection Group And Practicing Hospitality Study

Later that fall, it became time to recruit participants for the Lenten Scripture Reflection Group and further discussions on how to engage our neighbors. Needless to say, I was eager to get started. I am not sure if my request was bad timing during the holidays or if people were simply getting tired of all these missional conversations, but my excitement turned to disappointment when only one of five couples agreed to participate regularly in the Scripture reflection group. What I did end up with, however, in addition to this one couple, were almost ten others who were relatively new to the missional conversation. It would be a whole new group of people to diffuse the thinking throughout the congregation.

Each week during the Adult Sunday school hour, we began with Scripture reflection upon Luke 10:1-12 and then used Roxburgh's *Practicing Hospitality Workbook* to lead them through guided discussions (see Appendix G). For the first several weeks, people seemed to tire of beginning with the same Scripture week after week. Then, we seemed to have a breakthrough when Teddy, an eighty-something year old woman, shared that she had been thinking about the text all that week and began to look at new versions of the passage on her own. She was asked to bring those other versions with her to class and we would reflect on what new insight we would glean from those. Teddy's inspiration launched us into a whole new way of encountering God in the text.

Conversations steered around the appointments that God has for us in our neighborhoods and being open when those appointments present themselves. That means that sometimes they are not at the most opportune times that fit our schedules. Regardless, God's invitation is to receive them and be open without agenda to what the Lord might do in and through them. By the second week each of the participants listed names of neighbors that they felt the Spirit of God was putting upon their hearts to engage. Some of them described incidental encounters and how they were beginnings to relationships. These encounters included: meeting a neighbor at the mailbox and saying more than simply, "Hello;" crossing paths with a neighbor as they walked their dog and stopping to ask how they were doing; and calling a woman one had recently met at neighborhood party. Following up on these promptings was to be their weekly

experiment and they were to return the following week to report back what they experienced.

It was mentioned that people are more open to conversation during certain seasons of life where they are ripe for the harvest. One participant described a casual acquaintance who had recently undergone a life threatening medical condition. When the person reached out and visited them in the hospital, the patient was deeply moved by their care and concern. They both sensed God's presence through the visit and the prayers that were offered for healing. All it took was stopping and taking the time to put another person's needs above their own.

By week four, people began reporting back the results of their experiments. Some engagements were successful and led to deepening of the relationship. Others were not. The Scripture encouraged participants to walk through doors that opened, leave behind doors that seemed shut, but be friendly and kind to everyone regardless. Those closed doors may open in the future in God's own time.

At about the same time, a Slavic church community that rents our space invited our members to be lunch guests following a Saturday work party. Some food we would know, most we would not. Regardless we felt like the Scripture in Luke 10 came alive as we experienced first hand when the roles between the host and the guest switch. We were now the guests and we were to eat what was put before us. At lunch, we experienced the kingdom of God break into our world as we feasted and shared meaningful conversations with our Russian friends even though their English was broken and at times poor. What I

think this did for some was encourage them in their own neighborhoods when they encounter people whose language and culture is different from their own.

By the fifth week, one participant had started walking her neighborhood regularly and praying as she went along. During one of those walks she met a young woman with a five year old daughter. She has had three encounters with this woman so far and is starting to strike up quite a friendship.

By the sixth week, I noticed that the topics of our missional conversations had shifted significantly. Not once during our conversations about the encounters with these neighbors did the concept of church come up. We had moved from a church-centered program aimed to get people into the church to developing real relationships with people who lived around us without agenda. It seemed as though we had finally moved from the church questions and strategies to that “in-between space that disrupts our settled assumptions and threatens our formulas and expectations.”⁸ In other words, the space where we could truly begin to think missionally.

During week seven, our conversation steered toward the middle school near one of the participant’s homes. Each day, they encountered students as they got out of school and walked through the neighborhood. It was interesting how that seemed to be what the Lord would have us consider, especially as we are invited to engage people in relationship who are different from us. And it does not get much different than a middle

⁸ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, 90.

schooler. What seemed to be developing was an opening to a group of people that we had not previously considered.

At the close of week ten, we only then began talking about our faith. We agreed that it was important for us to remain true to who we are as followers of Christ in these new relationships. As we talk about things of significance to us, our faith and our involvement within our church community will naturally come up. It was important not to be afraid of sharing that faith and to let go of the results. Our job is to cast seeds, but let the Lord cause those to grow which will grow.

All in all what started in discouragement ended with great encouragement that a group of people new to the missional conversation could grasp the concepts quickly. Everyone enjoyed attending to the same verses of Scripture and in fact looked forward week to week as to what nuance they might grasp. They also became curious as to how the Lord would steer our conversation to a particular topic we were being invited to consider as it related to our particular context.

Missional Book Reviews

Earlier I mentioned that one of our Lenten Scripture Reflection Group members was a retired librarian and currently serving as our church librarian. She approached me about wanting to get more of the things I had been learning into the hands of the ordinary lay people. Having read Roxburgh's *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, she wanted to read more and write book summaries to post in our monthly newsletter.

Members could read the review, grasp some of the main concepts, and borrow the books from me. This would further diffuse the missional principals to a wider audience. To date she has read and reviewed five books including *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* by Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Starting Missional Churches: Life With God in the Neighborhood* edited by Mark Lau Branson and Nicholas Warnes, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* by Alan J. Roxburgh, *God Next Door* by Simon Carey Holt, and *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay. She has received extremely positive feedback from her reviews from people who have appreciated her work in making these books more accessible to the broader congregation.

CHAPTER 7

THE MISSIONAL STORIES

Pam is a single woman in her mid-fifties and recently divorced with grown children. She also runs a successful tutoring business out of her home where she spends a lot of time. Through a string of life circumstances, she relocated to a new neighborhood within the same small town she had lived in for years after being in transition for some time. She was excited about finally being planted in a new community but upon moving in, she noticed little interaction among the neighbors.

About this same time, I was preaching a sermon series on Jeremiah 29:7-8 entitled *Bloom in the Places You are Planted*. In the Scriptures, the Lord tells the exiled Israelites in Babylon to settle down, marry, and pray to the Lord for their surroundings because they were going to be there for a while. My hope and purpose was to spark some encouragement within our members to have the same mind frame with their neighborhoods. During this time, I also had about six individuals and couples share their stories about how they had engaged their neighborhoods. Louise's story, which we heard earlier, was one of the first that Pam had heard.

Nearly a whole year later, I noticed one Sunday that Pam seemed to have a particular spark in her eye. She said, she had just had the most incredible time with the neighbors on her street. After she had met a few of her new neighbors, they confessed that though some of them had lived in the development for some years they did not know many of the people on the street. So Pam and another neighbor planned a block party potluck for a sunny Saturday afternoon toward the end of summer in front of Pam's house. Flyers were sent out inviting people to come and celebrate the start of school.

The day and time of the party, it was just Pam and her neighbor parked in front of her house with lawn chairs and a few food items on a card table. They waited, and waited, and waited. Finally one family showed up and then another until there were about ten new families with people that Pam and her friend had never met before. They had such a great time that people stayed for several hours eating, visiting, and sharing stories. By the party's end, they had also exchanged addresses, email addresses, and phone contact information with a possible date for yet another neighborhood gathering in the near future.

What Pam's story shows us is that "when Christian communities are again transformed into true communities, wonders will begin again."¹ Indeed as Pam develops deeper and more meaningful connections with the people in her neighborhood, she feels as though she has a new lease on life following some terrible set backs.

¹ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 87.

Pam had participated in the All Church Retreat where we worked through Roxburgh's Workbook: *Practicing Hospitality*. She too had been prompted in her missional endeavors during life changing event. Pam had been moving around following a divorce and desired to seek deeper roots within her community. After praying, the Lord opened the way for her to purchase a new home that really matched her heart's desire. Though Pam did not share her story with the broader congregation, it was shared with me in passing after the sermon series I did on "Blooming Where You are Planted." Perhaps she was inspired by the previously mentioned stories and how others were seeking to do the same. Regardless, what her story shows is how missional fruit is budding as a result of the previous work.

What I hope to do in this space is to reflect upon each of the missional stories mentioned in this paper. These stories form the qualitative research that resulted from the seven projects that were undertaken. Though each is unique, there are common threads woven through each. These threads often include (but are not limited to) dislocation, having hearts that are open to God's leading, experiencing circumstances that were beyond their control, a willingness to receive gifts that the others had to offer, and being

centered in Scripture which helped develop the biblical lenses through which to view their worlds.²

Louise too, like Pam, was prompted by the crisis of losing her home following her husband's death and needing to live somewhere else. Uncertain as to where she might land following the dislocation, she demonstrated a willingness to listen to God who she believed had her best interests in mind. When she finally became settled in her new home, she began to explore her new community and see the many gifts that this new urban apartment building had to offer.

Louise is also recently retired which means that she is no longer as busy with a career or raising her two adult sons. Thus she has optimal time to enjoy her community and cultivate relationships in her surroundings. One of the things that she is finding is how present God seems to be with her and how often her fellow neighbors talk about God. Indeed this seems to echo what Roxburgh and Boren posit in their book, *Introducing the Missional Church*, which is the notion that “some of the most constructive input for doing local theology (i.e. among and with the people you live) can come from the unchurched.”³ While Louise is still very involved in church functions, she

² This lack of controlling the circumstances around missional encounters with neighbors and the gifts they have to offer us in return is something that Lesslie Newbigin describes in his book, *Proper Confidence*. Newbigin writes, “But there is another kind of knowing which, in languages, is designated by a different word. It is the kind of knowing that seeks relations with other people. In this kind of knowing we are not in full control. We may ask questions, but we must also answer the questions put by the other. We can only come to know others in the measure in which they are willing to share. The resulting knowledge is not simply our own achievement; it is also the gift of others. And even in the mutual relations of ordinary human beings, it is never complete. There are always further depths of knowledge that only long friendship and mutual trust can reach, if indeed they can be reached at all.” Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 10.

³ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 93.

seems to balance church life well with sharing life with those in her new apartment complex.

As I interviewed Louise prior to sharing her story with the CPC congregation, it was clear that she lacked the language house with which to discuss the missional concepts. I gave her a copy of Roxburgh's book, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, which helped her develop a framework to begin to express what she had been experiencing. Quickly she caught on.

Stacey was also one who, following retirement, had a desire to downsize from her home of thirty years. Previously living on a couple of acres, there were few opportunities to engage neighbors, other than her immediate next door neighbors who were also charter/founding members of CPC and with whom she and her husband spent a great amount of time.

When she moved, they built a smaller house in a new development with a much smaller yard. Because of the proximity and the fact that everyone else moving in was also new, there was more of a desire to get to know the people who lived around her. Moving from her old home gave Stacey the opportunity to start fresh and weave missional living into her new way of life.

Stacey had served as a member on the CPC Missional 360 Guiding Team. She had been part of the missional conversations from the very beginning. As she had read several of Roxburgh's books and was familiar with the Missional Change Model, she, unlike Louise or Pam, had developed the necessary missional language house to be able

to discuss what she was experiencing. Sharing her story was a great witness to the entire CPC congregation.

Carol and her husband Ted had relocated to the Pacific Northwest and joined CPC about the same time that I was preaching the series on blooming in the places where God has planted us. She told me sometime later that at the time she had merely assumed that these missional concepts were already ingrained in everyone at the church when in reality most were hearing some of it for the first time. Coming when she did really had a great impact as she and her husband began to put down and develop roots in their own community.

A former librarian, Carol is educated and was willing to read books that I gave her on the Missional Change process. She had also volunteered to write book reviews for CPC's monthly newsletter on any books I gave her in order to further disperse this missional thinking among the broader congregation. One of the criticisms that I had received from members of the Missional 360 Guiding Team was that occasionally some of the resources were too academic and out of touch with the general laity who they thought would never read them. Having Carol reword the book's concepts into lay terms gave yet another voice in the missional conversations. Not only that, but hearing it from a lay person also provided greater acceptance since it is coming from one of them and not simply ideas that were developed from the leadership and passed down.

Mike and Karen's story likewise involves a recent move to the Vancouver community a few years ago. In all senses, they too are just now establishing their root

system. Unlike the others, they had met and studied at a Christian college where they were previously influenced by professors who taught missional thinking. They are well accustomed to the missional practice of attending to what God was doing among them and following God there. Making new friendships is relatively easy for them as they are both very personable and easy going people. So when they moved into their neighborhood they were simply doing what was natural for them which was developing relationships with those who lived around them. I doubt, however, that they were necessarily thinking programmatically or deliberately acting in terms of the missional concepts. That language house was not developed until after the fact, when Mike agreed to read one of Roxburgh's books.

The same would be true with our last story about David. The concluding chapter of this project includes an email that I received from him about a year or two after the others shared their stories during worship and a whole year after he began the Scripture reflection discussions on hospitality during the Lenten season of 2015. I do not recall specifically challenging him with regards to getting to know his neighbors more or challenging him in finding ways to share a meal with them, but that is exactly what he did. The email points to the great blessings that he and his fiancé, Chloe, received when they finally began to pursue that time with their neighbors. Again, David's story, I believe, is budding fruit as a result of the previously shared stories, missional conversations, and articles written.

All in all, none of these stories were things that I could control or force to occur. They simply happened on their own, as the Spirit of God moved these participants to contextualize or weave this missional theology into their daily lives.⁴ This was not a huge program started by the church geared to institute huge change within. Instead, they were influenced by small experiments that allowed missional living to arise from the grassroots of ordinary people in the congregation. Yes, it has been a slow process, one that involves planting seeds, allowing enough time and space to germinate, and producing results over time.⁵ According to Roxburgh, that is what leads to long-term missional change within a congregation.⁶

Another thing that each of these stories have in common is both the deliberate and incidental contact that these people have had with their neighbors. By deliberate, I mean intentional. In other words, they were the ones who took the initiative to contact these neighbors, organize a block party, stop by their house, engage in conversation, or ask for assistance. Erik Jacobsen, in *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith*, states that this kind of deliberate contact with people is extremely valuable.⁷ But he also states that incidental contact, or the kind that is not planned but

⁴ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 93.

⁵ “Bloggers Chris Smith and John Pattison have developed an understanding of church inspired by the slow food movement. Their ‘slow church’ encourages Christians to protest against the drivenness of speed and efficiency and to reconnect locally where God plants us. It encourages attentiveness to sustainable ecology, economics, ethics and local community development, which starts with slowing down and being faithfully present and attentive to what God is doing locally.” This quote was taken from Kim Hammond and Daren Crenshaw, *Sentness, Six Posture of Missional Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 34.

⁶ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 182.

⁷ Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom*, 90.

happens happenstance, builds relationships in an entirely different way. This kind of contact such as running into them at the grocery store, seeing them at community functions or events, or while out on a walk in the neighborhood, “permits us to get to know people in their ordinariness and even in their pain. Jesus built much of his ministry around such incidental contact.”⁸ We cannot get to know them unless we spend time with them.

⁸ Ibid.

PART FIVE

MOVING TOWARD A MISSIONAL FUTURE
AND SHIFTING THE FOCUS TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

CHAPTER 8

NEXT STEPS TO CONTINUE OUR MISSIONAL JOURNEY AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR MYSELF, CPC, AND THE PCUSA

David is in his early sixties, just a few years away from retirement, and lives with his fiancé, Chloe, near CPC. He often joins us on our Saturday morning prayer walks through his neighborhood. I had asked David and Chloe to be part of the Lenten Scripture Reflection Group. After reading Roxburgh's book, he agreed, but after the first session he faded away and no longer participated in our conversations. Truthfully, I was not sure how many of these missional concepts he had grasped.

Nearly a year later, David sent me the following email,

Hi Chris! I just want to thank you. Awhile back you had encouraged us to invite our neighbors over. Finally, tonight it will happen. I'm not saying this to get an attaboy, I'm saying this so you know that we in the congregation DO pay attention to what you say, and sometimes we just have to wait for the right time to make things happen.

Anyway, Kip and Stacy on one side of us went to Paris late this summer and they are coming over to show us their photos. Rich on the other side of us was born in Bordeaux, France and he is also coming. So we are looking forward to a pizza party with them. Thank you for your encouragement.
David and Chloe

I was encouraged that missional roots were starting to sprout and bear some good fruit. This new growth would need to be cultivated, watered, and strengthened. How that could occur is where we turn our attentions to next as I suggest three simple suggestions that I could pursue as a missional leader, what our congregation could do as a missional church, and what our denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA) could do to encourage missional work in other congregations.

What I Could Do as a Missional Leader

This entire Missional Church Cohort has been a five-year journey into a whole new world of thinking: others and I have evaluated my missional readiness to lead a congregation through missional change. CPC has evaluated itself with regards to its own readiness to go through missional change. and, as previously mentioned, there have been a few experiments that we have tried that seem to be indicating that such missional change is indeed taking place. But the journey is far from over. In many ways it is just beginning. As many missional leaders have written, “indwelling a place and its people doesn’t happen instantaneously; it requires being there for years.”¹

There are skills I must develop and habits that I must do to in order to improve my ability to keep the missional conversation going forward. The first is to cultivate a deeper spiritual attentiveness to my own community and to CPC simply by listening. The second is to act as a facilitator leading CPC through the Missional Change model and

¹ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 90.

resisting the urge to do the ministry for them. The third is to keep the missional conversation moving forward.

We live in a day and age where there are many voices speaking to us at once.² Technological advances designed to make our lives easier in fact have made it worse. The Internet, social media, and cellphones all pull at our attention. This can be quite distracting and make it difficult to know where one should go and what one should do and how one should spend one's time. I confess that I often struggle to fight the tyranny of these voices and miss out on what is truly important because I was not truly listening.

But even in Jesus' day people struggled amidst the cacophony of voices that were offering competing ideologies, prophecies, and religious perspectives. To that, Jesus said, "He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15). I must listen more to others, listen to myself, and then also listen for God. Barry Jones encourages, "Perhaps the most fundamental posture of a parish-minded church is the posture of listening."³ If I am not

² Barry D. Jones, *Dwell: Life with God for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 106. "One of the most important spiritual capacities we can develop in a world like ours is the capacity to pay attention. In our contemporary culture environment we suffer from a kind of collective attention deficit disorder. The ability to give sustained attention to people, to ideas and to the state of our own souls is absolutely indispensable to the cultivation of intimacy in relationships, depth of understanding and wisdom for life. The erosion of our ability to pay attention is no small matter. We are increasingly becoming an easily distracted people living in an increasingly distracted world. The ubiquity of technology, the breakneck pace of life and the invasiveness of 'productivity' into every sphere of our existence have demolished our old conceptions of place, time and space and have dismantled our ability to achieve sustained focus, deep awareness, thoughtful reflection and vibrant memory. Yet these capacities are indispensable for anything more than a superficial spirituality (not to mention family life, friendship, political community and so on). In her book *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*, Maggie Jackson goes so far as to argue, "The waning of our powers of attention is occurring at such a rate and in so many areas of life, that the erosion is reaching critical mass. We are on the verge of losing our capacity as a society for deep, sustained focus. In short, we are slipping toward a new dark age. The cultural consequences of our collective loss of attentiveness could be significant indeed."

³ *Ibid.*, 203.

listening, then how can I expect the members in our congregation to listen in their own contexts as well?

Part of listening requires asking the right questions without agenda, demonstrating patience during the response, and then truly hearing people's responses.⁴ It also requires a sense of humility and a willingness to be changed by what the other person has to say to us.⁵ As we do that, Kim Hammond and Daren Crenshaw say that we are "cooperating with God in *Missio Dei*." The Spirit of God is active in drawing people to Jesus. Part of our role, as evangelist Rick Richardson suggest, is to be junior partners in the detective agency of the Holy Spirit, not preachers with agendas but travel guides joining people on their journey and story listeners and storytellers."⁶

Roxburgh also believes that the church should be asking better questions. The heart of his book *The Sky is Falling* is about how to ask and address the questions: "What is God up to in our neighborhoods and communities? What is the nature of an engagement between the biblical imagination and this place where we find ourselves, at this time, among these people? What will a local church look like as it responds to such questions?"⁷ But we cannot ask these questions if we already assume that we know the answer.⁸ Again as mentioned previously, this has been one of my shortcomings as a

⁴ "Patience, a lot of listening, and careful dialogue will be necessary in order to lay the groundwork for possible removal of those previous local theologies." Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 27.

⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁶ Hammond and Crenshaw, *Sentness*, 78.

⁷ Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling*, 44.

⁸ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, 127.

missional leader and an area in which I continue to grow. This leads into the next area that I could work at in my missional leadership.

Paulo Freire was leading the Brazilian people following political change after the fall of a dictatorship. They were used to having things done for them and to them without much say. He knew that the best solutions would be those that the people generated themselves and not those that would be imposed upon them. His job was to come along side these ordinary people with a process, educate them on how that process would work, and then lead them to reflect upon “themselves, their responsibilities, and their role in the new cultural climate;” this is what would empower the people that they indeed had the wherewithal to do the critical thinking that would engender true change.⁹ In other words, they were the experts for the way forward. Freire simply facilitated them in the conversations and offered them the instruments with which they could teach themselves.¹⁰

The same has been true throughout this whole Missional 360 experiment. I have brought a process of missional change that has required a lot of education and a need to reflect upon what missional change would look like within the church. Instead of being a director, I have tried to act as a facilitator, guiding them to discover the solutions for themselves and then stepping back to let them implement those solutions.

As a facilitator, I am still to be part of the equation but not the primary voice. Instead, my role is to create spaces, forums, and environments where the people of CPC

⁹ Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

discuss what God is doing in their neighborhoods and discern for themselves how to get involved or not. In his work with the metaphor of mapmaking, Roxburgh emphasizes, “the mapmakers are in our local churches; they are ordinary people in whom the Spirit is gestating all kinds of unanticipated futures for the kingdom. Mission shaped leaders create environments of permission-giving and experimenting in which these ordinary dreams might be birthed.”¹¹

The same could be said for the way we do theology. For too long theology has been something experts did after having received a professional seminary degree.¹² But now, part of my role in keeping the missional conversations moving forward is to get ordinary people to see that “doing theology is as natural as walking and talking. Indeed, we all do theology, both as individuals and as a community.”¹³ Clemens Sedmak in his book, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity*, describes a model that helps facilitate people to do this theological work themselves. This happens by breaking theology, or discernment of what God is doing in the places where they live,

¹¹ Branson and Warnes, *Starting Missional Churches*, 46.

¹² Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology, A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 3. “Theology has been on loan from the people of God to professional theologians for a long time. Theologians have become rich, and they have amassed intellectual property. The wealth is to be found in libraries and on our book shelves. It is about time to make explicit efforts to share and to live an intellectual life of solidarity - acknowledging the treasures and gifts of everyone and making the theological resources available to all. Professional theologians as well as non-academic theologians can wake up if they realize the riches of their questions and the wealth of their cultures and their church tradition...Waking up means learning how to listen, learning how to see, learning how to discover, learning how to speak. Waking up means seeing differences between times and places, cultures and peoples...Doing theology as a person who is not sleeping means being attentive to the particular circumstances. Doing theology in this sense means doing theology where you are - in other words, doing local theology.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

down into smaller more manageable bite size chunks. Sedmak calls this creating “little theologies.” In his own words, “Little theologies are called to three tasks: (1) To point to the positive richness and goodness of local contexts; (2) to challenge the local context by inviting people to see and go beyond its limits; and (3) to inspire and encourage by opening eyes to previously unseen visions and ears to unheard sounds. Little theologies invite people to do theology themselves. When little theologies function properly, they empower.”¹⁴

As I have tried to keep the missional conversation moving forward, we have begun to routinely ask a set of questions at our session elders meetings which allows us to do these “little theologies.” At the beginning we ask, “What items or issue is the Lord putting on your heart tonight that you want to discuss?” This puts the work of forming the meeting’s agenda into the elders hands. Then at the end of our meeting and after a moment of silence, we reflect individually over our words, decisions, and actions throughout the evening. We ask, “How is God inviting us to be involved with what He is doing in the places that we live?” It is always interesting to hear people’s responses. These questions have put the work of theology into our elders’ hands and empowers them as local theologians.

What CPC Could Do As A Missional Congregation

This sense of place in which God is at work is something that ordinary church folk are not accustomed to considering. Typically it is assumed that God is at work

¹⁴ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 125-126.

through the mission of the church in the local community. But Richard Bauckham reminds us that the church is a people, not a building or a facility: “God’s presence is among his people in the metaphorical temple they themselves compose (Ephesians 2:21). This new center is everywhere and nowhere, just as with the advent of modern geography and postmodern globalization the ends of the earth are now everywhere and nowhere.”¹⁵

This new decentralized notion of God’s presence frees us up to consider the many places where God could be at work outside the physical location of the church facility. We each dwell in particular bodies, in particular houses, and in particular communities. Where we live says a lot about what we believe.¹⁶ Our role as local theologians is “to speak the language, sing the songs, and recite the poems of the people [we] live with and the culture of which [we] are a part.”¹⁷

What we need to do is encourage people to see their particular neighborhood as their personal parish. The parishes have tremendous gifts to offer, hurts that need healing, and injustices that need fighting. God is indeed there and at work in all of these. By encouraging people to spend more time in these communities, they will begin to see just how God is at work among them.¹⁸ The hope is that the people in the church will

¹⁵ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 76.

¹⁶ Jones, *Dwell*, 195. Barry Jones summarizes Eugene Peterson when he states, “There is an essential, indissoluble connection between geography and spirituality. We dwell in a particular body at a particular time in a particular place. According to Peterson, “In the Christian imagination, where you live gets equal billing with what you believe. Geography and theology are biblical bedfellows. Everything that the creator God does, and therefore, everything that we do, since we are his creatures and can hardly do anything in any other way, is in place. All living is local - this land, this neighborhood, these trees and streets and houses, this work, these shops and markets.”

¹⁷ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 15.

¹⁸ Jones, *Dwell*, 205.

seek the peace and prosperity of the city's in which they have been planted. And as in the words of Jeremiah, if our cities prosper, so we too will prosper (Jeremiah 29:7).

The simple experiments and stories within this project have encouraged the people at CPC to do just that. Embracing their neighborhoods is as simple as getting to know the people who live right next door, cultivating a relationship of trust with them, and sharing with them.¹⁹ But in order to share life with them we must leave our places of comfort and engage them in the public square. For it is there that we will hear the songs of their hearts and perhaps come to know what God is doing among them. Sedmak calls this accessing the local theological resources and acquiring the local language. "Proverbs and songs, stories and jokes, riddles and exclamations are part of oral tradition. And oral tradition, which reveals the deepest layers of a culture, is only to be traced in ordinary life."²⁰

In his book, *God Next Door*, Simon Carey Holt mentions personal busyness as a barrier for some in making missional connections with others. He recounts a conversation that he had with a woman who struggled with spending time with people in her neighborhood. She said, "there is so much going on in our lives right now and, for the most part, people keep their distance."²¹ I can certainly relate to that as I too have had many days when I avoided a neighbor's wave because I had little to no time to stop over, engage in conversation, simply because I was hurriedly on my way to whatever was next.

¹⁹ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 102.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

²¹ Simon Carey Holt, *God Next Door: Spirituality and Mission in the Neighborhood* (Brunswick East Victoria, Australia: Acorn Press, 2007), 45.

One of the potential causes of this busyness for Christians today could be due to the over-programmed Church. We have evening programs for kids, youth, young adults, adults, older adults, mission meetings, work parties, elders/deacons meetings, etc. All of these are beneficial for the life of the Church and are well intended. “The danger,” however, “is that the programs of the larger congregation take these clusters [of Christians] away from their neighborhoods more often than they leave them to flourish there.”²² Yet it is true that too much of good thing can become bad. Perhaps what CPC needs to do is pare down their own midweek church programs. This would free people up to spend a majority of their time at home in their neighborhoods, building community with the people there, sharing meals with the people next door, coaching their kids’ soccer teams, and volunteering at their children’s schools.

What The PCUSA Could Do As A Denomination

In my opinion, our denomination, the PCUSA, has strayed far from our Reformed heritage. At one time, we had a clearer biblical world view of who God was and what God required of us. Nowadays, we are more likely swayed by cultural influences than what the Bible teaches. The same is true with the church’s mission which is always a work in progress. Roxburgh and Boren state that “instead of providing a specific map for us regarding what it means to be God’s missional people, the Bible invites us on a journey where we figure out what it means as we walk.”²³

²² Ibid., 151.

²³ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 105.

But we must start with the Biblical narrative, enter into it, develop good questions, and then consider how God is inviting us to live it out in our particular contexts. This is what we did for the twelve-week Lenten series where we had a group of people dwelling continually in the Word through *lectio divina*. Using the text of Luke 10:1-12, we centered ourselves on the Word of God, asked questions, and then processed together how we were hearing the Spirit of God call us through it. This study indeed found that when small groups of people center themselves around the word of God and simple conversations a fresh sense of calling occurs: one that asks what God might be doing in the places where we dwell and presuming that we know such activities.²⁴ This calling provides hope for the future.

Sedmak, in *Doing Local Theology*, fleshes out how this hope is demonstrated.

Theology is an expressing of the hope that a few people can make a difference. Theology cultivates the art of hoping. There are at least seven important features of hope: Hope rises in the darkness of a crisis; hope can give reasons to keep believing; hope paradoxically both requires and engenders patience and endurance; hope means wideness and openness and also risk and the willingness to change; hope is stubborn and endures long periods of delayed fulfillment; hope admits small beginnings; and the message of hope is the promise of life.²⁵

First, hope rises in the darkness of a crisis. Many of those who shared their missional stories with us had moments of crisis where they were uncertain as to how God would come through for them. In those moments God did indeed show up, not through a program or even a fellow church member, but through a neighbor who had come to be

²⁴ “Jesus did theology to build up community. He called everyone into community, a community that is constantly ‘on the move.’ Doing theology as Jesus did is a community-building enterprise.” Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 31.

²⁵ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 159-160.

light in their darkness. This was a tangible reminder that God had not forgotten them in their time of need.

Second, hope paradoxically both requires and engenders patience to change. Hope is stubborn and endures long periods of delayed fulfillment. This work itself has indeed been long, beginning in 2010 and culminating in 2016. We have studied, discussed, asked many questions, been open to fresh ideas, and yet the real work of imagining a more missional future among God's people is just beginning.

Third, hope admits small beginnings. Just as young seedlings spring up from small seeds and huge trees spring up from those young seedlings, so missional activity springs up from the small experiments that CPC tried that by and large on their own have not changed the culture of our church. However, over time as these small missional experiments grow, are reflected upon, and further experiments are launched, CPC will live into a new identity of being a missional church. It is at that point, I believe, the culture of the rest of the church will begin to change as well.

Finally, Sedmak encourages us that the message of hope is life. The stories contained within this paper are such messages of new life. They engender the young sprouts that indeed confirm that the people at CPC are grasping these missional concepts. They are also beginning to put them into practice through small but simple missional experiments which they developed on their own, for the sake of sharing life with those people in their neighborhoods.

As a denomination, we must begin to understand that being a “missional church” is not about developing programs that can easily implemented in churches across the nation. This is about doing local and grassroots theology: theology by the people and of the people. We are asking where God is at work in a particular context, location, people, and time and finding ways to join Him in that work.²⁶ This is not something that we can control as we have had the habit of trying to do.

One of the possible reasons why the leaders of the PCUSA are struggling with grasping this concept is that many of its pastors have not been adequately schooled in missional theology. There also could be more training in how to facilitate congregations through missional change. Instead, most of us have been raised up to be program directors of ministries that we inherited. We must create leaders who are “learning to be cultivators of environments out of which God’s people might innovate and imagine where God is at work.”²⁷

Sedmak writes, “Since doing theology is as natural as walking and talking, we all do theology, both as individuals and as a community. There is, however, a difference between explicit and implicit theologies, between trained and untrained theologians.”²⁸ This implies that cultivating ordinary people in the pews to see themselves as theologians is important. Receiving a seminary degree is not prerequisite for understanding God’s ways and where God might be calling them to join in God’s work in their neighborhoods.

²⁶ Hammond and Crenshaw, *Sentness*, 70.

²⁷ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, 145.

²⁸ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 13.

We also need to do a better job of translating into ordinary layperson's language what missional resources we do have. One of the main critiques of any book that I shared with others to read was that they were too academic and beyond the reach of the ordinary people. Part of the problem is that we have not adequately taught people that they are just as much theologians as is the pastor. Then we must get these resources into the hands of the people of God.

One final way that the PCUSA could encourage future missional activity within its congregations is by abandoning recent church growth models that merely perpetuate self-focus and encourage inward thinking. In summarizing Darrell Guder and his colleagues' work in *The Missional Church*, Barry Jones writes:

things get off track when the church begins to speak of 'building' or 'extending the kingdom of God.' Such language puts the emphasis on our efforts. This then betrays the notion that God is the primary acting agent for establishing His reign in the world and that we are merely invitees who are to join in that ongoing work. Our work then is simply to attend to our neighborhoods and ask what the Spirit might be up to in those places.²⁹

When our emphasis is "building", "growing," or "extending the kingdom of God" in our midst, we tend to become internally focused. Jesus said, "Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Luke 17:33). The whole notion of the missional church movement is about losing its life for Jesus' sake. In other words, we are called to the outward turn from self-preservation, to enter into stories of one's community, remain attentive to where God is at work there, and give oneself up for

²⁹ Jones, *Dwell*, 24.

the sake of the world. As we turn outwardly, we naturally fight against what Barry Jones describes as the “inward curvature of the soul.”³⁰

These missional efforts do not occur over night. Seeds must germinate in order for new flowers to grow. Sometimes that growth takes place beneath the surface where it appears as if nothing is actually happening. Likewise, we must allow time for God’s work to unfold among us. “Indwelling a place and its people doesn’t happen instantaneously; it requires being there for years.”³¹ But slowly as we take root in the neighborhoods where God has planted us, we will indeed see that “new forms of church start to emerge when they start by being missional.”³²

³⁰ Ibid., 65. “We must learn to make the outward turn by seeing, feeling, and responding in concrete ways to the brokenness in the world. One of the ways we become people of the outward turn is, not surprisingly, by turning outward. We become people whose lives are characterized by giving ourselves away for the glory of God and the good of other people. And slowly but persistently over time, we begin to overcome the inward curvature of the soul.”

³¹ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 90.

³² Hammond and Crenshaw, *Sentness*, 23.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

“For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun.
Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness.
I will create rivers in dry wasteland.” (Isaiah 43:19)

In conclusion, this doctoral project sought to achieve several goals. The first was to facilitate members of a local church in certain action-reflection exercises that would incorporate the missional practice of hospitality. The second was to create small groups that would simultaneously reflect on Scripture and thus learn how to attend to what God was doing in their particular neighborhoods. Finally the third goal was to get the members of CPC to share personal stories with one another as to how they spent time in their neighborhoods and engaged the people who lived in their local communities.

A small group of people met for ten weeks during the Lenten Season of 2015 for the action reflection exercises as planned. They completed Roxburgh’s *Workbook on Hospitality*, a guide to encourage their engage with others. During this time, conversations were had and experiments were brainstormed by the people to try themselves. Finally, as retold throughout this paper, missional stories were shared not only in the context of the small group but with the larger congregation as well during worship. If those were the benchmarks that needed to be covered to measure success, then this project achieved each of the goals per its intent.

Where and how CPC continues this missional conversation and runs with it or not is not within the scope of this paper. In his book, *Proper Confidence*, Lesslie Newbigin writes, “Christian discipleship is not a two-stage affair in which a concept of truth is first

formulated and is then translated into a program for action. It is a single action of faith and obedience to a living person, the response to a personal calling.”³³ Even though the project goals were achieved, there still is a response to a personal calling that needs to be answered. I do believe that the invitation remains open for us to continue to commit ourselves to it and to learn as we go forward what our role in the missional enterprise is to be. But we go forward in faith without any certainty that what we set out to achieve will be reached, and trusting that the Lord himself will set our footpaths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).³⁴

As for myself, I will continue to challenge CPC in the way they have been headed over the past couple of years. I will continue to encourage them to dwell truly in the neighborhoods where they have been planted. I will continue to exhort them to know their neighbors, and share life with them. And I will continue to ask them what God is up to in those places and encourage them to take courage and join God in that work.

If we do that, then the Church of Jesus Christ will remain alive and well with a fresh imagination of what it means to be the people of God within today’s postmodern American setting. “The Spirit [of God] is out there ahead of us, inviting us to listen to the creation groaning in our neighborhoods. Only in the willingness to risk this entering, dwelling, eating, and listening will we stand a chance as the church to be the embodiment of Jesus to the world.”³⁵

³³ Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 66.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, 150.

APPENDIX A

NEIGHBORHOOD EXEGESIS EXERCISE

Saturday April 19, 2014 (Prayer Walk) and Tuesday May 13, 2014 (Session Elders Meeting)

1. Draw a picture of your street or place that you live. Name as many people as you can. (First names only)
2. How many of these people have you had meaningful conversations with in the past week? Month? Year?
3. Can you share a particular story or event that occurred with your neighbor?
4. What are the gifts of your neighborhood?
5. What are the struggles of your neighborhood?
6. What do you sense God is doing in your neighborhood?
7. Is there one particular neighbor that God is bringing to mind now?

APPENDIX B

CPC SESSION DEACONS RETREAT

Alan Roxburgh of the Missional Network talks about three main points:

- There is a great unraveling going on in American Institutions, Church included.
- There is a bubbling or deep sense among the people that God is up to something. The main question is who can we join God in what He is doing?
- The location in which this is taking place is in the ordinary, local, and every day experiences of life. How can we be God's people in those places?

What did you hear? Do you agree or disagree with Roxburgh's points or not? Why?

In light of this great unraveling, what is the primary challenge before Cascades today?

How can we create spaces where people can engage God in their ordinary lives and places in which they dwell, work, go to school, etc?

What experiments could we try to begin joining in what God is doing in these local places?

APPENDIX C

ALL CHURCH FAMILY RETREAT

Friday Evening - Creating Space for Others

Mixer: Hot Potato Introductions Mixer

Upfront Game: Balloon Burst

Songs: Carol: As We Gather; Here I am to Worship; Great is Thy Faithfulness; Bind Us Together

Opening Story - Going to Australia while in the Navy and being welcomed into people's homes.

John 14:1-14 - Jesus reminds us that he goes ahead and prepares a place for us, so that where he is, we can be also. There is enough space for everyone.

Romans 12:13 - "Share with God's people who are in need. Be given to hospitality." Given - chasing after it.

"Hospitality is about welcoming the stranger and loving the neighbor. It is central to the life of Israel because they remember that they were strangers, aliens, immigrants, refugees taken up by God (Deuteronomy) fed and loved. Being in the community of God's people is to love the stranger as oneself.

As we reflect upon these texts, notice how often there is a role reversal where the host becomes the guest and the guests become the host. Hospitality is a reciprocal relationship, a two way street in which the host is changed and transformed in the relationship. Hospitality in the Biblical texts is always about the reality and possibility of meeting the presence of God in the stranger."¹

Group Discussions

Group One: Maddy, Lindsey, Lily, Makenna, Steve, Deborah, Pam - Jesus turned himself into the host from the guest. Surprising who God uses and how. Two way street. Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus into his heart.

¹ Roxburgh, *Practicing Hospitality*, 5.

Group Two: Carol, Karen, Ron, Rosan, Melissa, Christina - Sometimes hard to get to know your neighbors. Open to pursue them.

Group Three: Jordan, Bruce, Ben L, Noah, Rhyan, Nathan, Carl, Amy - God doesn't show favoritism. Having hospitality like Cornelius. Excepting everybody even with different religions. Trusting your neighbors.

Group Four: Gayle, Lon, Sofie, Christina, Gordon, Carolynn - Open your heart and home to your neighbor without agenda.

Saturday Morning - The Nature of Hospitality

Mixer: Puzzle Mixer

Upfront Game: Popsicle Eating Contest

Songs: Carol: The Heart of Worship; The Wonderful Cross; I Exalt Thee; We Are The Family of God

Opening Story - Getting stuck in the snow during road trip through Ohio as a child

Leviticus 19:34 - "When a stranger shows up in your land, do not mistreat him. Treat him as one of your native born. Love him as yourself, for you were once strangers in Egypt."

Matthew 25:35,40 - Jesus said "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in... whatever you have done for the least of these, you have done it for me."

The Book of Acts depicts how people are constantly breaking bread together in each other's homes with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people...and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

People want to be part of something like this.

Where is the church taking place? In people's homes and in the temple courts.

Food is a critical part of hospitality. Sacred moments happen over meals. "Food and table represent the presence of God and shaping things to come when all creation (Revelation) will sit at table with Christ and feast in the new creation. Practicing hospitality with the neighbor and stranger is practicing God's future; it is a central witness to the new creation the Spirit is calling into the life through the church. We may

have turned hospitality into church pot-lucks and dinners with safe people who are just like us; but the Biblical imagination calls us to a radically different way of life.”²

Group Discussions

Group One: Maddy, Lindsey, Lily, Makenna, Steve, Deborah, Pam - Jesus became the host with the two disciples when he broke bread. Jesus wants us to invite him in.

Group Two: Carol, Karen, Ron, Rosan, Kathy -Different people receive God differently. Why of hospitality? It is the framework for sharing faith and in the process both groups are blessed.

Group Three: Jordan, Christina, Bruce, Ben L, Carl, Amy - People in biblical times were very hospitable. We need to show hospitality to others.

Group Four: Gayle, Lon, Nathan, Rhyan, Christina, Erin - Getting to know our neighbors, especially new ones. Hospitality should be open to everyone. Expand our borders.

Saturday Evening - Spiritual Rhythms of Hospitality

Announcement: Turn in your Names of the Bible Game Sheet and we will say who won tomorrow morning.

Mixer: I Like Cascades Church because...

Upfront Game: Silly Kings

Songs: Erik: Blessed Be Your Name; How Great is Our God; Come Thou Fount

Opening Story - Senior Guys Dinner Night; having high school boys over for brownings, ice-cream and conversations about God. Not being hurried, but having some peace and calm. Meditating on the text ahead of time and asking what God would want from our time together.

“We nurture hospitality as a habit and a disposition by telling stories about it.” Christine Pohl.

“In a fast food culture, you have to remind yourself that some things cannot be done quickly. Hospitality takes time.” Benedictine Monk.

² Roxburgh, *Practicing Hospitality*, 6.

Value of small acts of hospitality creates huge spaces for God's ministry to occur...where Jesus literally shows up.

Group Discussions

Group One: Maddy, Lindsey, Lily, Erik, Deborah, Pam - It is important to break down walls in your neighborhood and not to show favoritism to whom you are showing hospitality towards.

Group Two: Mike, Karen, Ron, Rosan, Melissa -Jesus entrusts us with a lot (authority and power) such as the message, his peace/blessings. Negative consequences of not sharing hospitality.

Group Three: Jordan, Christina, Karen, Ben L, Carl, Amy - Good to be hospitable. Difference between acting and just thinking it. (A community practices what it believes is important.) Hospitality can be a blessing to both host and guest.

Group Four: Gayle, Lon, Nathan, Rhyan, Sarah, Christina - Overall God values hospitality. It shows love and devotion to others. We should look for opportunities for such generosity. We should also come to look for and expect Jesus.

Sunday Morning - Stepping Toward Hospitality

Announcement: Pay retreat fees; clean up; take offering for the retreat center; church announcements.

Upfront Game: Announce winner of the Names of the Bible Game

Call to Worship: Psalm 133

Songs: Erik: Shout to the North; Heart of Worship; Come Thou Fount

Prayers/Blessings: Open Sharing

Opening Story - Our Neighborhood Parties. Christmas Eve in 2008 Snow Storm.

Being intentional about creating spaces for hospitality.

We must ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind someone in our neighborhood that God is calling us to connect with. Call them and set something on the calendar. If we write it

down, chances are great that it will happen. Put out the invitation and see who comes. Whoever comes is who the Lord wants us to spend time with.

Food is very important to the spiritual practice of hospitality.

Give out survey again to have people fill out about hospitality.

Group Sharing: What have we learned?

Group One: Maddy, Lindsey, Lily, Deborah, Pam

Group Two: Karen, Ron, Rosan

Group Three: Jordan, Christina, Ben L, Carl, Amy

Group Four: Gayle, Lon, Nathan, Rhyan, Erin, Christina

Closing Song: How Great is Our God

Blessings/Prayer

APPENDIX D

ALL CHURCH FAMILY RETREAT - GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Group One - Luke 10:1-12 - Jesus sends out the seventy disciples

Opening Questions

- Describe a time when you were welcomed as a stranger and given hospitality?
- Who gave you the hospitality? How did they do it?
- What was the most significant part of the experience for you?

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10:1-12

- Have one person read the text once
- Then have a second person read it and listen for key words that jump out at you.

Discussion

Choose one person from your group to act as scribe and collect your thoughts as you discuss the following questions.

- What is the passage saying to us about hospitality?
- What is the location of the 'church' in this text?
- What is strange about this passage? Why?
- What new insights does it give you about how God works?

Wrap it up

Given your conversation today, what names of people might you invite and welcome to a meal as an act of Biblical hospitality?

As a group, how might you summarize your conversation?

Pray together around your conversation and learning.

Group Two - Acts 10:23b-48 - Peter at Cornelius' House

Opening Questions

- Describe a time when you showed hospitality to a stranger?
- What was the most significant part of the experience for you?

Dwelling in the Word - Acts 10:23b-48

- Have one person read the text once

- Then have a second person read it and listen for key words that jump out at you.

Discussion

Choose one person from your group to act as scribe and collect your thoughts as you discuss the following questions.

- What is the location of the ‘church’ in this text?
- How does God move in the hearts of these men as they extend and receive hospitality from one another?
- What is strange about this passage? Why?
- What new insights does it give you about how God works?

Wrap it up

Given your conversation today, what walls might God want to tear down that are separating you from your neighborhood? How might this occur through simple acts of hospitality?

As a group, how might you summarize your conversation?

Pray together around your conversation and learning.

Group Three - Luke 24:13-44 On the Road to Emmaus

Opening Questions

- Have you ever been to a new group of people that knew each other well?
- How did they receive you? Well? Or not so well?
- What was that experience like?

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 24:13-44

- Have one person read the text once
- Then have a second person read it and listen for key words that jump out at you.

Discussion

Choose one person from your group to act as scribe and collect your thoughts as you discuss the following questions.

- What is the passage saying to us about hospitality?
- What kept the two disciples from noticing Jesus on their journey?
- What is strange about this passage? Why?
- How do the roles between host and guest change?
- What new insights does it give you about how God works?

Wrap it up

Given your conversation today, how might God be calling you to be more open to the people who live around you?

As a group, how might you summarize your conversation?

Pray together around your conversation and learning.

Group Four - Luke 19:1-10 - Zacchaeus and Jesus**Opening Questions**

- Have you ever felt small, insignificant, or invisible?
- What was that like?
- How did things change once someone important learned your name?

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 19:1-10

- Have one person read the text once
- Then have a second person read it and listen for key words that jump out at you.

Discussion

Choose one person from your group to act as scribe and collect your thoughts as you discuss the following questions.

- What is the passage saying to us about hospitality?
- How is hospitality a two way street here?
- What happens to Zacchaeus as he invites Jesus to his home? What happens to Jesus?
- What is strange about this passage? Why?
- How do the roles between host and guest change?
- What new insights does it give you about how God works?

Wrap it up

Given your conversation today, how might God be calling you to change to be more open to the people who live around you?

As a group, how might you summarize your conversation?

APPENDIX E

CREATING SPACE FOR GOD'S MINISTRY FALL RETREAT

Closing Survey Responses

What story has stayed with you this weekend?

Zacchaeus, Road to Emmaus, Strangers who take in people who need help.

What is something new that you have learned about hospitality?

You should be intentional in your ways to learn to love your neighbor. That we need to extend ourselves first. Sometimes we need to show hospitality to people that we wouldn't usually want to. Giving and receiving are both important. It is long term and intentional. Role reversals of host and guests occur. If you do not accept this it could cause serious consequences. Do not be afraid to make the first move in hospitality.

What one person or family in your neighborhood has God put on your heart this weekend?

My very grumpy neighbor. Other students at Clark College. Connect with my neighbors who just moved in. New neighbors or new students at school. Laura K. Susan in our neighborhood. Reach out to new neighbors. My friend who is currently staying with my husband and I because he is homeless. A friend who had a dog for a long time but had to put him down. The new family who recently moved into the neighborhood. Upstairs neighbors (young family) who live across from me. Louis J.

What one thing are you planning to try when you get home?

When I get back to school, I'll try saying hi to my locker neighbor and ask for their name. I will make zucchini bread when I get back home and take it to my neighbors. Talk more to the students in my classes at Clark College. Make more conversation. Encourage parents to host more events at our house. Coffee date with Susan. Pray for her. Put a function together for our neighborhood, especially since we have new neighbors. Talk the wife into hosting a neighborhood get together. Accepting hospitality. Actually being more hospitable and not just thinking about it. Take the new neighbors a welcome basket. To be more outgoing with neighbors across the street who are hard to meet and talk to.

Would you be willing to meet with others over an eight week time frame to further explore how we can practice hospitality more in our neighborhoods? If so, please write your name below.

*Pam Lacombe, Deborah Shaner, Maddy Montovino, Christina Miley, Nathan Rementeria,
Rhyan Montovino*

APPENDIX F

INVITATION LETTER FOR SCRIPTURE REFLECTION GROUP

December 3, 2014

Dear Bob and Stacey, Carl and Melissa, David and Chloe, Mike and Karen, Ted and Carol

This past fall, I really enjoyed hearing people's stories about how God was at work in their neighborhoods. As I listened, I have become curious as to what might happen if we got a few more people together to talk about these experiences. So, here is what I am proposing.

I'm wondering if you might prayerfully consider taking part in a small group that I would lead for eight weeks on either Saturday mornings or Sunday afternoons in January or February. This group would rotate meeting in each other's homes for about an hour and a half. There wouldn't be any expectation of the host home other than provide a meeting space. Nor would there be any preparation or expectation for further study. We would simply listen to Scripture together, share our encounters with neighbors, consider simple hospitality experiments that we might try to better connect with our neighbors, and then reflect on those experiments.

Please note that this is not about evangelism or trying to get these neighbors into our church. It is simply to listen to what the Spirit of God might be doing in the places that we live. This is all very exciting. I believe the Lord is up to something. Let me know what you might think.

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Chris

APPENDIX G

DWELLING IN THE WORD AND HOSPITALITY DISCUSSIONS

Group Meeting: Week 1/January 11, 2015

Participants

1. Ted Oswalt
2. Carol Oswalt
3. Deborah Shrawner
4. Teddy Chapman
5. Arty Schaeffer
6. Christina Miley
7. Chris Montovino
8. Chloe Morrison
9. David Honey

Introductory Questions

- Describe a time when you were welcomed as a stranger and given hospitably?
- Who gave the hospitality?
- How did they do it?
- What was the most significant part of the experience for you?

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10:1-12

As you read the text together, here are some simple questions to share and discuss with one another:

- What is the passage saying to us about hospitality? It's talking about God's appointments for us. Appointments with others that we were being invited into.
- What is the location of the 'church' in this text? Out in other people's homes.
- What is strange to you about this passage? Why?
- What new insights does it give you about how God works? We would like to know more about the Jewish customs of hospitality in Jesus' day.

Pray together around your conversations and learning.

Question for the week.

Given your conversations this morning are there names of people you might invite and welcome to a meal as an act of Biblical hospitality?

Group Meeting: Week 2/February 8, 2015

Participants

1. Ted Oswalt
2. Carol Oswalt
3. Thelma Scovil
4. Teddy Chapman
5. Arty Schaeffer
6. Christina Miley
7. Chris Montovino

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10:1-12

This is what stood out to us. The harvest. Seasons of peoples lives. Time when it is ripe for God's work. Heal the sick. Thinking particularly of a friend Frank who had a brain aneurysm. Do not greet anyone on the road. Multitudes were sent out not just the disciples. He was about to go. Echo of John the Baptist. What does it mean to be a person of peace? Hospitality - going into the home. Receiving hospitality from people very different from themselves and those who had very little.

Comments from Discussion Questions

- One person did further study. Not for us to determine who get's God's grace.
- What names came to you this week? Mike, Arte's neighbor; Julie, Carol's neighbor; Sherry who Thelma met at a neighborhood party; A person Teddy met at the mailbox; Frank and Andrea, friends of Chris'
- Why these names? Frank had an aneurism this past week.

Group Meeting: Week 3/February 15, 2015

Participants

1. Arte Schaeffer
2. Carol Oswalt
3. Thelma Scovile
4. Christina Miley

Dwelling in the Word: Be hospitable in all ways. Offer to help in the kitchen. Don't force yourself on people. Adapt yourself to the home in which you are staying. How many of the seventy were women?

Comments from discussion: Incidental encounters. Important to stop - take the time. Some people are very nervous about approaching people they don't know. Information has been exchanged between families of young girls. How you understand God is where you start.

Group Meeting: Week 4/February 22, 2015

Participants

1. Ted Oswald
2. Carol Oswald
3. Arte Schaeffer
4. Teddy Chapman
5. Chris Montovino

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10:1-12

Twice it says eat and drink what is set before you. Thinking of the Love of God Russian Church. At the work party, we were the host and yet they were ones who brought the lunch for us. Host/guest reversal just like in Scripture. Russian feast. Harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Those who answered received the blessing of the harvest banquet.

Comments from discussion:

Be friendly. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Some people you meet are friendly, some are not. Keep eyes and ears open to the needs that are expressed while you are in the home. Carol ran into someone as she was walking her dog. Was invited to a neighborhood online forum group for people to connect that had become inactive. One person confessed that they had become tired of the text. Claimed that the English translation was bad. Not everything we try sticks.

Observations:

People are tiring of the same text each week but they are still getting something out of the time in the Word. We will bring in different translations next week and hear from them. Three of our participants are self proclaimed introverts.

Group Meeting: Week 5/March 8, 2015

Participants

1. Ted Oswald
2. Carol Oswald
3. Christina Miley
4. Teddy Chapman
5. Chris Montovino
6. Arte Schaeffer

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10:1-12

Read from the NIV, King James, and The Message today. Continued to raise more questions. We haven't talked about the wolves and the hazards in what they were doing.

What is the danger? Not a local police force. Bandits and unscrupulous people. Strangers weren't always treated well. People may not be open to receive the word. Danger of rejection.

Comments from Discussion Questions

We've been busy. Carol is getting to know a young woman with a five year old. She's had three encounters so far.

Group Meeting: Week 6/March 15, 2015

Participants

1. Ted Oswald
2. Carol Oswald
3. Teddy Chapman
4. Christina Miley
5. Chris Montovino

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10:1-12

Teddy brought an Amplified Version of the text today. Much ripe corn. Peace means something different today than it did back then. Culture around us is fast paced.

Conversations about the Discussion Questions

Saturday night game night might be a great leveler as we spend time with neighbors. I wonder what that might teach us in how to reach/connect with our neighbors? Ted talked to a neighbor. They are both busy, not time to get together. Meal times are important times to be intentional about connecting with people. One person threw out the idea of a progressive dinner. Nursing home and apartment buildings are also neighborhoods.

Observations:

I noticed this week a remarkable shift in people talking about their neighborhoods. Not once did "church" come up in our conversations. Interesting!

Group Meeting: Week 7/March 22, 2015

Participants

1. Ted Oswald
2. Carol Oswald
3. Teddy Chapman
4. Christina Miley
5. Chris Montovino
6. Arte Schaeffer

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10:1-12

Teddy brought an Da Jesus Book, a translated version of the Bible in Pigeon English from Hawaii. The king is here now. Good heart. Don't stop to tell stories.

Conversations about the Discussion Questions

A lot of middle school kids in the Oswalt's neighborhood because they live across the street from Geiser Middle School. People walk the neighborhood and their dogs in the afternoons. Good time for incidental conversations. God is at work in the neighborhood. Prayer when doors are not open.

Observations:

I found it interesting how our conversation steered toward the middle school kids and young people in our neighborhoods. We felt as though God was inviting us to engage them in conversations when we see them.

Group Meeting: Week 8/April 19, 2015

Participants

1. Ted Oswalt
2. Carol Oswalt
3. Teddy Chapman
4. Christina Miley
5. Chris Montovino
6. Arte Schaeffer
7. Amber Popkes

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10:1-12

Conversations about the Discussion Questions

None recorded

Group Meeting: Week 8/April 26, 2015

Participants

1. Ted Oswalt
2. Carol Oswalt
3. Teddy Chapman
4. Christina Miley
5. Chris Montovino
6. Arte Schaeffer

7. Erasmus

Dwelling in the Word - Luke 10:1-12

Coming back to not worrying about the results of our efforts. Be the best neighbor we can be without any expectations of the results. Being true to who we are in sharing our faith with others and trusting that the Lord will cause seeds to be planted.

Conversations about the Discussion Questions

Game nights. Progressive dinners. One person helped a neighbor reflect on some past actions. Find that they are watching people to visit within the neighborhood. Change is happening in the neighborhood. Transitions in people moving.

Observations:

It was interesting how we started talking about sharing our faith and how it turned to being true to who we are without agenda. We share our faith with our neighbors without concern of whether or not seeds grow.

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