Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

GRACIOUS ASSERTIVENESS: LEARNING TO LEAD A STAFF TOWARD A NEW
MISSIONAL IMAGINATION

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GRACIOUS ASSERTIVENESS: LEARNING TO LEAD A STAFF TOWARD A NEW
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SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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BY
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ABSTRACT

Gracious Assertiveness: Learning to Lead a Staff Toward a New Missional Imagination
Austin Hill
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This study maintained two concurrent goals: First, it sought to strengthen the adaptive leadership capacities of a senior pastor by initiating a three-month action-learning experiment among the ministry staff. Second, it invited the ministry staff to begin a journey of discovering the leading of God's Spirit in the local context. The work was conducted in First Presbyterian Church of Fort Dodge, Iowa, and within the local community.

Beginning with a look at the myriad changes that have transpired in the church and community during the past ten years, this project describes various types of change, the leadership philosophies that address different types of change, and how missional theology informs leadership. Adaptive leadership is required to address the discontinuous changes within the ministry context when seen through the lens of missional theology rooted in Luke 2, the *missio Dei*, and doctrine of the incarnation. In order to develop adaptive leadership capacities, the senior pastor lead the ministry staff in a three-month action-learning experiment in the community. The six members of the ministry staff devoted 10 percent of their work time to building relationships with people in the community, modeled after Luke 10:1-12. For accountability and reflection, the ministry staff met six times to share stories about their learning through Appreciative Inquiry questions and qualitative interview questions.

The study demonstrated that default assumptions of mission and ecclesiology are challenged when a staff experiments with new behaviors that require interaction with community members. This learning requires space for intentional reflection about the experimental behavior. The community experiments challenged specific defaults concerning reciprocity and managing expectations, while the staff reflection times challenged leadership defaults concerning technical leadership proficiency, accountability, clergy-centric ecclesiology. The study revealed the need for ongoing practices of action and reflection within the ministry context.

Content Reader: Alan J. Roxburgh, PhD

Words: 293

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

First Presbyterian Church of Fort Dodge (FPC) has seen significant change in the

past decade. The church has been impacted by changes that have taken place within the

community of Fort Dodge, a multitude of changes in pastoral and ministry staff, and

myriad changes within the lives of the individuals of the congregation. These changes

have compounded with one another, creating a season of discontinuous change.[1]

For example, the church does not have the same level of engagement as it once

had. Fewer members attend services and programs, regular attenders attend less

frequently, fewer families contribute financially to the church, and the average age of the

membership has increased. Meanwhile, the community continues to face difficult issues

like regularly occurring teenage suicides, the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the state

of Iowa, economic struggles, high rates of drug use, and a lack of a positive town

identity. FPC must discover how the Spirit is leading the congregation in this ever-

changing context.

In conjunction with the changes that have taken place within the church and

community, I have become the senior pastor and experienced a kaleidoscope of change

within my own life and leadership. In the same span of a couple of years, I became a

father, I became the senior pastor of the church, and I started this Doctor of Ministry

program. To describe the impact of this turbulent time, I paraphrase Craig Van Gelder

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[1] For a definition of "discontinuous change," see David A. Nadler et al, *Discontinuous Change: Leading Organizational Transformation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 37-44.

from a coaching conversation on November 24, 2015: "In a time when you needed constructive experiences, you went through a process of deconstruction."[2]

As a result of these changes surrounding the church, the community, and myself, I do not know how to effectively lead the congregation toward a new missional imagination. The Spirit of God is already at work in the community of Fort Dodge, and I have not been able to lead people within our church on a journey of discovering God's movement in our midst. This doctoral project is about the development of my ability to lead a small group of persons within the church on a journey of discovering a new missional imagination. I will focus my work on the ministry staff of the church since I have direct, regular contact with them and a built-in form of accountability.

The ministry staff of FPC must go on a journey together of discovering how to join God in the local if they are to effectively understand their vocation in the congregation. I will lead the ministry staff on a three-month action-learning experiment where we each devote 10 percent of our weekly work time to partner with people and organizations outside the church. On the basis of this learning experiment, we will assess what we have learned as it pertains to our leadership and then design a new set of actions.

As a staff, we have already begun to share stories of experiments we have tried within our own contexts. The experiments of this project will arise from points of connection we each already have within the community, requiring 10 percent of our work time. In creating this ministry plan, I will draw upon ongoing experiences of dwelling in Scripture and the Missional Change Process. I will organize a planning meeting with the

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[2] Throughout this paper, I will quote coaching conversations with Craig Van Gelder. This coaching relationship began in early 2015 and continues through the time of this writing. In each quote, I will mention the date of the conversation in the body of text and will refrain from offering a footnote.

staff where we will discuss the parameters of our experiments. We will meet bi-weekly for Appreciative Inquiry and qualitative interview questions to reflect on our experiences. At the end of the three-month experiment, we will a) assess the work we have done, b) name the learning we are doing, c) co-design a new set of experiments based on that learning, and d) determine how to effectively communicate our experiences, learning, and new actions to key leadership in the congregation.

This paper consists of three parts and a conclusion. Part One creates a clearer sense of context for the overall project. It describes the adaptive challenges the church and I face together. Chapter 1 describes the discontinuous changes within the community, the church, and myself at length, and how they combine to form the adaptive challenges we face. Chapter 2 outlines the work that has transpired as a staff and within the church over the last four years since the beginning of the doctoral program.

Part Two describes the project in detail. The section begins with Chapter 3, offering a set of guiding theological frameworks and assumptions that support the work of the entire project. This discussion will highlight Missional Theology, the Missional Change Process, Adaptive Leadership, the Praxis Cycle, and Appreciative Inquiry. Chapter 4 provides a detailed process design for the project. This process design describes how the ministry plan is developed with the participating staff members, how the community experiments are to be carried out within the community, an evaluation of the experiments and my leadership abilities, and how next steps will be determined in response to the learning that has taken place.

Part Three consists of results and reflections. In Chapter 5, the results of the community experiments are discussed. This includes stories that staff members have

shared about their experiences in the community over the three-month time period, and what they have learned about God's activity outside the walls of FPC. Chapter 6 describes personal reflections from the ministry intervention. I will discuss what I have learned from my own time spent in the community, how this influences my understanding of ministry, and also what I have learned about adaptive leadership and how to lead people toward a new imagination.

The conclusion will offer recommendations for actions to be taken in the future. After the intervention has taken place, the appropriate response is to evaluate the practice of ministry in light of the experiments conducted and decide what new practices will be embraced. Thus, the paper will describe the current ministry context, the ministry intervention, what has been learned from the intervention, and possible next steps to consider.

PART ONE

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE IN THE CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

CHAPTER 1

DISCONTINUOUS CHANGE

In the first text assigned for the Missional Leadership program, *The Sky is Falling!?!*, Alan Roxburgh distinguishes between continuous and discontinuous change. "…if continuous change is comparable to a single acorn hitting us on the head, *discontinuous change* is an all-out acorn assault."[1] Although Roxburgh is using this term to describe many of the global changes happening within society as a whole, this metaphor has also described the last five years of life in Fort Dodge.

The first section of this paper creates a sketch of the context for the project. This project has been influenced by three major foci working in tandem. Each one can best be understood through the idea of discontinuous change. The community of Fort Dodge, the First Presbyterian Church, and my own life have all undergone significant changes in the past five years (and beyond). These changes have occurred concurrently, and the combined impact has been much greater than the sum of each individual course of change. This chapter will outline the changes that have taken place in each of these

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[1] Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling!?!: Leaders Lost in Transition* (Eagle, ID: ACI Publishing, 2005), 29.

locales and provide an analysis of how their interplay has created the adaptive challenges

facing First Presbyterian Church.

Changes within Fort Dodge

Famous radio broadcaster, Paul Harvey, said of Fort Dodge when the Hormel

meat packing plant closed in the early 1980s, "Last one out, get the lights." Although I

have never actually seen the quote in writing, it is embedded in the corporate

subconscious of the town. Just about anybody who has lived in Fort Dodge for any length

of time knows of the quote. It reveals a powerful social imaginary[2] that many possess.

Changes of Decline

There is a general feeling that Fort Dodge is on the decline, that the best days are

in the past. The downtown appears to be an aged shell of its former self. Multiple large

buildings sit abandoned, while others are used for low-income housing. Roughly 60

percent of students in the public senior high school receive reduced-price lunches.[3] With

farming equipment that harvests sixteen rows of crops at a time, fewer farmers can now

maintain larger areas of land. As a result, many within the farming community are

leaving their town when they grow up. The closure of the Hormel plant meant the loss of

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[2] I use the term "social imaginary" here in the way that Charles Taylor describes in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), Kindle: Chapter 2, where he describes "imaginary" as "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."

[3] This figure was given to me by the principal of the senior high school during a lunch meeting in August 2016 in Fort Dodge, Iowa.

700 jobs and $25 million in annual payroll. In more recent years, a local Electrolux plant closed, bringing about the loss of another 500 jobs.[4]

This feeling that Fort Dodge is on its way out is so pervasive that many of our teenagers struggle with significant issues at much higher rates than in other areas of the state. Webster County has the highest teenage pregnancy rate of any county in Iowa. Meanwhile, the town has averaged about one teenage suicide per year with a town population of roughly 24,500.[5] FPC has had two funerals for teenage suicides in the last four years alone. Methamphetamine labs cook chemicals in basements just blocks away from the church. People do not know what to do about it.

While I was meeting with the pastor nominating committee who called me here, one of the questions during the interview was "How do you think you would cope with living in rural Iowa?" The question was not a joke. The committee knew that there were unique challenges to living in Fort Dodge and wanted to make sure that we were fully aware of them, especially the bad winter weather that so many repeatedly mentioned. Four years later, while interviewing for the senior pastor position, that search committee made sure to ask me if I could see myself staying in Fort Dodge. Without fail, when people here discover that I am from San Diego, California, they ask me what I am doing in Fort Dodge, one hundred miles away from the closest international airport.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the previous head pastor was here for four years; all the while he worked on his doctorate, and left the church within sixty days

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[4] "Fort Dodge, Iowa," accessed September 23, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Dodge,_Iowa

[5] "Fort Dodge, Iowa," accessed September 23, 2016, http://www.city-data.com/city/Fort-Dodge-Iowa.html

of his commencement ceremony. Although he left the church for a variety of reasons, the feeling among some is that he used the church to pay for his degree and then left. Similarly, the associate pastor at the time left for his dream job just eighteen months after arriving in town. In 2011 and 2012, when both other pastors left, I was repeatedly asked when I would be leaving. When I began my doctoral work, the church personnel team was concerned because they did not want me to leave the moment I received the degree. At the time of this writing, my family and I are moving to a new home in town, and people have told us how excited they are now that they know we are still planning to stay here longer.

<div align="center">Changes for Hope</div>

Even though there seems to be a pervasive sense that nothing good can possibly come from Fort Dodge and that anybody successful will just leave, there is a collection of people who are seeking to change this image. Parents have formed an online group called "Taking Back our Community!" which is dedicated to changing the way community members talk about the town. Meanwhile, an African America man has created a program called "Athletes For Education and Success" (AFES) in hopes of providing stability and accountability for young adults and children in a way that was not present for him when he grew up in Fort Dodge.

Two other examples of people investing in the community involve a men's homeless shelter and a women's recovery house. Both of these organizations have been started by local residents in recent years. The Beacon of Hope (the Beacon) is a men's shelter that provides structure and an environment where numerous men have found

community, stability, refuge, and ultimately independence. FPC has seen multiple members of the church go from homelessness and unemployment to full-time work and financial independence through the program. Meanwhile, the Gateway to Discovery women's recovery home was founded and provides a refuge for recovery for women in the community as well. Both of these ministries have united the community and sought recourses from many service clubs, churches, and businesses from around the town. They have both created a lasting, tangible impact in Fort Dodge.

Additionally, the Fort Dodge Chamber of Commerce has rebranded itself as the Fort Dodge Growth Alliance and has made great efforts in recent years to help people see the growth that is happening in the town's economy. Some of this growth has been very creative and has encouraged local business owners to support one another. For example, the town has begun a bi-weekly farmer's market in the downtown throughout the summer. Local merchants sell handmade products, and there is often live music or food from local restaurants. Any time a new business opens that is part of the Growth Alliance, there is a ribbon cutting where other local business owners come to celebrate. Many new businesses have come to town, and the Growth Alliance has made great efforts to promote them along with improvements to roads in the downtown area. Not all growth is equal, however. Much of the new business comes in the form of more chain stores and restaurants. So while it appears that people are investing more in the community, the bulk of the wealth generated leaves the local economy.[6] Even more, the

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[6] Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann, and John McKnight, *An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture*. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 42.

entire narrative assumes that the only way to invest in the growth of a community is through economic investment.

Nonetheless, there are bright spots in the community of Fort Dodge. There are people who are committed to this place and to discovering the leading of God's Spirit for the community. The words of Paul Harvey from the 1990s have not yet proven true.

Changes within First Presbyterian Church

The trajectory of First Presbyterian Church has followed many of the same broad strokes of the town of Fort Dodge in the last thirty years. There is a perception among some of the more seasoned church members that the church was at its peak in the mid to late 1990s. Programs had their highest attendance, and there was a long-range planning committee which organized a $2 million capital campaign around the year 2000 for the church's Christian Life Center. To quote an elder from a time of Appreciative Inquiry questions[7] during a session meeting, "Ten years ago, there was stability. People had been in their positions awhile, and they knew the history of the people and the church." Another elder said, "During the 1990s, our church was servicing families and had a great youth ministry. Our church was organized by the staff, but led by the laity."[8] As recent as August of 2016, at the end of a Bible study, an inactive elder said to me that he felt like the church was stuck in neutral.

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[7] For a discussion about this practice, see pages 51 and 52.

[8] These comments happened during a session meeting in July 2014 at First Presbyterian Church, Fort Dodge.

Changes in Engagement

Statistics in the church match the comments of these members. For example, in 2006, the church had 440 giving units who contributed something to the church's operating expenses while in 2015, that number had diminished to 272. Even though membership has remained steady with 730 people (+/-5 percent), Sunday attendance has declined as well. In 2005, a typical Sunday in September saw roughly 400 in worship whereas the number was down to 275 in 2015. Many of the church's active members average one Sunday per month in attendance. The church members of today are not as engaged in the traditional elements of the church ministry as they were ten years ago.

This social imaginary, this feeling that the best days have already come, has deeply influenced the ethos of the church. Although many within the church want to reach out to others in the community, there is a concurrent feeling that if the church does not take care of itself, it will no longer be able to function. Men in the wheelchair ministry are concerned because no younger men want to work with them. The nominating ministry team faces larger challenges each year as they try to find people to serve on boards and ministry teams. Many outreach programs (like the church scholarship program) are just for church members, no matter how active. Meanwhile cleaning up the membership roll is avoided because people want to remain nominally connected.

Most significantly, this social imaginary influences the church's understanding of stewardship. FPC has been blessed with a sizable church foundation that contains multiple millions of dollars in unrestricted, undesignated funds. Currently the money is tied up in farmland, and the foundation board has no intention of liquidating that money. The perceived intention is to keep this money and let assets grow as farmland values

increase. Underneath all of this is an unspoken assumption that the church needs to hold on to what it has, because there is no guarantee it will get anything else.

To summarize this pervasive social imaginary, I quote another long-time member and elder attending the session meeting of July, 2014 "I remember a time in the history of this church, maybe ten or fifteen years ago, when there was always something great going on every day of the week. There was a feeling that you never wanted to miss anything because there was so much life and activity in our ministry. And, somehow, we've lost that."[9] Like the larger community, many within the church carry a feeling that life is not how it once was and that the best days have already passed.

However, also similar to the larger community of Fort Dodge, there are pockets of hope within the church, locales where people are excited to see what God is doing and what God has planned for the future. New members are regularly joining the church. Young families are finding a place of welcome and hospitality on Sunday mornings. Younger adults invite their friends at the local gym to visit the church. While attending, these visitors are welcomed by members both young and old. One new member joined the church in August of 2016, and his first day attending the church was the day he joined. He joined with his wife of less than one month. Upon his welcome, he said to the session, "I am confident I can join this place even though I've never come before because everybody I talk to tells me I'll be welcomed here."[10]

Interestingly, there is also hope and a willingness to experiment within some of the older members of the congregation. Many within the over-sixty demographic come

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[9] Ibid.

[10] This comment was made during a membership class on August 13, 2016 at First Presbyterian Church, Fort Dodge.

away from Sunday services filled with excitement, enthusiasm, and encouragement. In session meetings, the older elders are often more accepting of trying new experimental worship services or providing changes to staff job descriptions.

Two contributing factors come to mind for these shifts in member engagement. In the past ten years, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has adopted major changes in its polity, and the effects of those changes can be seen on the local level. Additionally, FPC has experienced a large turnover within its ministry and program staff during this time. These two factors, along with general shifts within the society at large, have created an altogether different context for ministry than just ten years earlier.

Changes within the Denomination

Since the 1970s, the PC(USA) has struggled to discern God's leading as it pertains to the ordination of people in the LGBT community. Finally in 2010, the 219th meeting of the General Assembly voted to amend section G-6.0106b of the Presbyterian *Book of Order*. The change, ratified by a majority of Presbyteries in 2011, removed the language requiring ordained church officers to remain chaste in singleness or faithful within the bounds of the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman.[11] This historic change led the way in a series of changes that has now provided for a more localized discretion of ordination standards and marriage standards in general.

These ongoing changes to the Presbyterian constitution have impacted churches nationwide, and FPC has been no different. In response to these changes, the session

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[11] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Part II: The Book of Order* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2009), G-6.0106b.

created a task force to draft an essential tenets document in 2011 and 2012, and representatives from the church attended national gatherings discerning ways forward in light of the changes to Presbyterian polity. Some members of FPC decided to transfer their membership to more conservative churches because they did not want any portion of their offering to support the PC(USA). Other church members encouraged departure from the PC(USA) or withholding the church's annual giving to the denomination. Meanwhile, others celebrated the changes coming from the denomination. However, this contingent was less vocal and smaller in number than the more conservative demographic.

Changes in Staff

Concurrent with these denominational struggles, FPC underwent significant, ongoing change in its leadership. In 2006, the senior pastor, David Feltman, took a job at the local Presbytery after faithfully serving FPC for seventeen years. Since the year of David's departure, the position of senior pastor has seen five different people come and go. After David, the church had a generally positive interim experience with Jim Guyer. In 2008, Jeff Martin came to FPC as senior pastor, and he stayed four years until 2012. Nan DeVries served as interim for one year until I became the senior pastor in 2013.

In addition to these changes in the senior pastorate, the church saw five associate pastors come and go, as well as numerous other program directors. All tallied up, from 2006 to 2015, FPC has had twenty-one different people fill five positions. The church has seen senior pastors, associate pastors, business directors, youth directors, and music

directors all rotate multiple times in the last ten years. Since 2006, 2016 is set to be the first year that has maintained the same staff configuration as the year before.

High staff turnover has contributed to the feelings described above. The ministry was at its best when the staff was more stabilized, when people could rely on consistency, and they knew what to expect. During the last ten years, as soon as people started to trust a pastor, the pastor left. In addition, every senior pastor held different views about the changes happening at the denominational level, and there was not a constant voice helping the congregation grapple with the seismic changes coming their way. Thus it becomes easy to see how the ministry of the church legitimately felt more exciting, unified, and purposeful in the past.

Changes in my Own Life

As if there were not already enough discontinuous change occurring within the community and the church during recent years, my life has sustained significant, ongoing change. During these last five years, I have become a father of two, struggled through changes within the church staff and eventually become the senior pastor, and journeyed through the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller. Each of these major shifts has added another layer of complexity to my current circumstances.

Changes in Family

Perhaps the most obvious change has been my becoming a father. A ubiquitous experience, it changes every parent's life nonetheless. Learning to become a parent always involves a shift in priorities, schedules, expectations, and energy levels. This

challenge is frequently accentuated when the parents are in ministry. Unpredictable schedules at work begin to clash even more with newly unpredictable schedules at home. Although these changes are not unique, they are worth mentioning because they contribute to the matrix of discontinuous change that forms the heart of my adaptive challenge. Also of note, among all of the personal changes that have happened within the last five years, fatherhood has felt the least complex. That is likely to change in ten years.

Changes in Position

During this same span of years, my role within the church has changed dramatically. In 2009, I came to FPC as the associate pastor of youth and young adults. The church personnel structure called for three pastors at the time. Jeff was the senior pastor and had been in that position for one year. Scott Samuelson, the other associate, was not scheduled to begin in that new position until January of 2010.

The changes began just eighteen months later as Scott took a new position in the summer of 2011. Because of budgetary constraints, the church did not replace Scott, but divided his responsibilities between Jeff and myself. My position changed from being the youth pastor to simply being the associate pastor as I took on more worship leadership responsibilities, some adult education classes, and the new member classes. Just nine months after Scott's departure, Jeff left the ministry altogether.

For seven weeks, I was the only pastor serving the church until our interim, Nan, came. While Nan was serving, many of the changes from the PC(USA) general assembly were becoming a reality, and there were questions about Jeff's motives for leaving the ministry. This was a very difficult time within the church and for me, personally. Nan's

style of leadership was dramatically different from Jeff's, and I found myself frequently

being triangulated by people and groups within the church. The music director had also

just recently resigned, creating even more ambiguity.

During this time of interim, one of the changes from the PC(USA) was a complete

overhaul of the Presbyterian *Book of Order*'s "Form of Government" section. The

changes were passed in 2011. Among the substantial changes was a provision that

allowed associate pastors to apply for the senior pastor position within the same

congregation.

Ten months into the time of interim, a year after Jeff had left, through the

conversation with a ministry coach and the Presbytery's executive Presbyter, I decided to

apply for the senior pastor position. I had already met with two other candidates who had

been offered the position, but who had declined it.

A short while later, I was offered the position of senior pastor. I accepted it in

August of 2013. Having just finished the first year of this DMin program, I was confident

that I had the experience and knowledge to lead the church through the myriad changes

and into a time of renewal. Although the church was still short by three staff members, I

was confident that I could fill whatever gaps were present.

Changes in Theology

Parallel to the changes occurring at home and at church were the most significant

changes: changes in my theology as I progressed through the DMin program. To

highlight how these theological changes have impacted me, I will discuss only two

concepts here. For a more detailed discussion of the theological frameworks that guide this project, refer to Part Two, Chapter 3.

This discussion begins with Stephen Toulmin's book, *Cosmopolis*.[12] His book has reshaped my theological convictions in that it has provided a context for them. My upbringing within the church has been influenced mainly from an Evangelical background. To be clear, I am using "Evangelical" in the narrowest sense, describing Christians who are typically conservative in their theology, morality, and political views. I have managed to make it through a university education, theological training at a PC(USA) seminary, and ordination in the PC(USA) while maintaining my Evangelical commitments, all the while watching peers fall away as the years pass by. These Evangelical convictions have governed the way I have voted in our Presbytery meetings, and they have guided most of my practices as an ordained pastor.

Perhaps most significantly, my Evangelical convictions have influenced my view of biblical and theological orthodoxy and appropriate church practice. I have worked through essential tenets documents with the leadership of our church and maintained that much of an individual's relationship with God involves believing the correct doctrine – universally applicable, self-evident truths. Taking this further, I often believed that those who did not share these orthodox beliefs either had not carefully thought through all the facts, or they had let their emotions wrongfully influence their ideas.

Toulmin systematically deconstructed my Evangelical worldview as he first described the essence of modernity and then discussed its origins. Central to modernity is

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[12] Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

the emphasis on universally applicable truths and ways of thinking like the scientific method. Modernity signified a shift in priority away from the oral, particular, local, and timely to the written, universal, general, and timeless.[13] In short, worldviews were no longer based on a particular context, but became universally applicable. Ironically, these ideas came about because of their particular context. Rene Descartes' opinions had been influenced by all the turmoil of the Thirty Years War. He and others sought stability and order as they had witnessed the destruction of an entire generation because of particular religious beliefs.

When Toulmin described the major shifts in thought that Modernity brought about, it precisely described my Evangelical understanding of the faith. A conservative, Evangelical faith is one that prioritizes the written Word of God and espouses universal, general, and timeless truths that apply to the whole world. So when Toulmin demonstrated the contextual nature of this type of thinking, he, by extension, demonstrated the contextual nature of my Evangelical imaginary – an imaginary that deemphasizes the contextual nature of the Gospel. In essence, Toulmin dismantled my theological underpinnings and called into question some of my core convictions about our faith.

This set me on a journey in humility that allowed me to be open to many of the other ideas I would encounter throughout the DMin program. Having one book so thoroughly describe and deconstruct my theological and social imaginary loosened my grasp for certainty during a time of incredible change described in the preceding portions

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[13] Ibid., 30-35.

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of this chapter. Toulmin's ideas paved the way for me to grapple with even more ideas that would challenge many of my assumptions.

These assumptions were tested in the second year of the DMin program through more reading. *Colossians Remixed* challenged my core convictions about living as a Christian in Fort Dodge in the twenty-first century. For the first time in my life, I began to take seriously the idea that there are cultural forces within our nature that are not in line with the Gospel. The point in *Colossians Remixed* that began this shift was Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat's fictional retelling of the story of Nympha.[14] As this fictional Nympha spoke with her Christian friend, Lydia, a new convert to Christianity, she wondered why anybody would want to risk everything they had for this Jesus. For what Lydia was saying was "nothing less than treasonous, a threat to the empire."[15] Nympha later reflected that everything around her testified that Caesar was lord, not Jesus. So to follow Jesus would mean a total transformation of her way of life. It would mean "distancing myself from the communities and societies that had given my life meaning."[16]

At first, this seems like nothing new. The drug addict who converts to Christianity is called out from her/his way of life. The person who lives for their own desires begins to serve others and get involved in a church. However, Walsh and Keesmaat go further than this in describing the transformation that Paul calls Christians to embrace in

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[14] Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 41-57.

[15] Ibid., 54.

[16] Ibid., 56.

Colossians. They explain that Colossians is "fundamentally about shaping the imagination of the Christian community. Walter Brueggeman says that 'the key pathology for our time, which seduces us all, is the reduction of the imagination so that we are too numbed, satiated, and co-opted to do serious imaginative work.'"[17] This demonstration of how Christ calls us to follow him alone broke through all my defensive barriers. I was forced to take it seriously, even if it suggested that my typical American way of life could be called into question. I had to begin to ask myself, "What parts of my faith in Jesus have been colonized[18] by American or modern Western ideals?"

Perhaps the most significant legitimating narrative that I bought into was the idea that as the senior pastor, I was in control. This dangerous narrative has had multiple ramifications over the years. Firstly, it utterly exhausted me. I never felt like I had enough time to be with my family or to do anything productive in the house, neighborhood, or the community. I rarely felt like I had the energy to work on the DMin program. And the thought of leading the congregation through the ongoing changes it faced was a task too daunting to consider. My health declined; I was overweight and suffered from back pain and headaches. The idea that I was in control as senior pastor meant that I was ultimately responsible for the faithfulness of all those within the church. It was a burden too heavy to bear.

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[17] Ibid., 84.

[18] I use the term "colonized" in the same vein as Jürgen Habermas, explained by Gary M. Simpson in *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 113-114.

Further, this belief that I could control the church led me to draw from (then) current frameworks to address challenges that called me outside of what I knew.[19] I considered disruption to my plans as a problem to be solved instead of an invitation to a new missional imagination.[20] As I tried to command and control, I missed out on what God was potentially doing. I ceased to follow God on the pilgrim journey Barry Harvey describes,[21] and I became a functional atheist,[22] taking the place of the Spirit's leading.

How these Interact

All of these changes in the PC(USA), in Fort Dodge, within FPC, and within my own life, have a cumulative, nonlinear effect. This chapter concludes by showing how these changes have become interlinked and have compounded one another.

The parallel trajectories of Fort Dodge and the church have already been mentioned above. It is important to point out here that these parallel trajectories impact one another. Church members not only think about how the church used to be fifteen to twenty years ago, but they hear about the teenage suicides, the teen pregnancies, and the financial struggles because they are directly impacted by them. A great-grandchild of pillars of the church committed suicide. Countless children and grandchildren of longtime members are having babies as teens or in their early twenties before getting married.

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[19] Alan Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 153.

[20] Ibid., 156.

[21] Barry Harvey, *Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 134.

[22] Alan J. Roxburgh, "Ecclesiology, Context, and Missional Systems" Lecture during Doctor of Ministry class, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, January 12-17, 2014.

More and more church members are in need of financial assistance. The fate of the town impacts the fate of the church; and the more pressed people within the church feel, the less they feel empowered to impact the community.

Additionally, the substantial turnover in staff has contributed to the feeling of hopelessness, the feeling that the best days have already come. Not only are the children of the community ill-equipped to deal with life's challenges, but leaders of the church are not willing to stick around with them. Meanwhile, as the church faces the myriad denominational and cultural questions, there has not been a consistent leadership presence to help theologically sort through the questions which has contributed further to the feeling that the church is on its own.

For the last seven years, I, too, have been a part of this process, becoming more embedded within it over time. As my responsibilities have shifted, people's expectations of me have shifted as well. In a June 2016 session meeting while discussing job description changes, an elder said, "We need a strong leader for our strong church." There are expectations that finally after all these years, the church has consistent leadership. As the church's leader, I need to lead the church through all these changes.

However, as stated above, I have experienced many personal changes in the past years, and I am still struggling to define what adaptive leadership looks like in this context. My defaults play into the expectations that many within the church have of me. It is up to me to fix the problems for the church and lead people back to the way it was in 1995. Through my learning over the past five years in the DMin program, I have discovered that this is not possible, but I still have not grasped what a proper model of leadership is.

Thus, these myriad changes within the community, the church, and my own life swirl together to create a matrix of discontinuous change. Though many of these changes contain technical challenges, the way they interact together forms an adaptive challenge for me.[23] In this context, I do not know how to lead with gracious assertiveness. I do not know how to help the people of FPC Fort Dodge embark on a journey of discovering God at work in our midst.

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[23] For a more complete discussion on the differences between technical and adaptive challenges, see page 46 of this paper.

CHAPTER 2

THE WORK SO FAR

In Chapter 1, I discussed the matrix of discontinuous change that has taken place

in Fort Dodge, FPC, and my own life. In Chapter 2, I outline the work that has taken

place so far in an effort to address the ongoing change and challenges. This description is

provided to provide a partial rationale for the ministry intervention described in Part Two.

Beginning in a New Role

During the first year of the DMin program, the interim pastor was still at FPC,

and the bulk of my work consisted of simply doing what was required. I did what I could

to survive the drama at church while completing the reading and writing assignments for

the DMin. Details pertinent to this project began in the fall of 2013 with the start of the

second year in the DMin.

Starting out as the senior pastor, I spent the majority of my first year dealing with

various staff issues – looking for an associate pastor, filling in for the youth director

vacancy, and overseeing the resignation of the worship director. Throughout this time, I

avoided doing any work in my neighborhood or with the guiding team. Too

overwhelmed, I functioned in my defaults, seeking to manage my way into a new future.

I claimed that I was too busy for walking in the neighborhood or spending time in daily prayer or contemplation.

However, I did begin to lead our session meetings with a sustained look at Luke 10:1-12.[1] We began our monthly meetings dwelling in Luke 10 for our first twenty minutes together. Elders were gracious to try this new practice. We also began an annual tradition of an overnight session retreat consisting of sharing faith stories, times of worship and dwelling in the Word, and what we called an "in-service" where we studied a topic in-depth for two hours. In addition, for a period of two months, we met bi-weekly for prayer and Scripture study for an hour in the morning. This was during what felt like a low-point for me because our music director had resigned, and we were currently searching for three program staff positions.

I was not sure why I was initiating these new practices, but I was simply doing what was part of the DMin course requirements. I led the session in dwelling in the Word, for example, but I did not do so out of an understanding of its purpose.[2] During this time, I began to feel as though I did not know what I was doing as a leader. This was also apparent to the rest of the DMin cohort and the professors. It was as if I were waiting to see which ideas stuck and which did not. I was not reflecting upon my context, trying an intervention, and evaluating it, as prescribed in the praxis cycle.[3] This lack of

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[1] Throughout this paper, all references to Bible passages are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise specified.

[2] For a description of its function, see Alan J. Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, and Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time* (New York, NY: Morehouse, 2015), Kindle: Chapter 6.

[3] Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), Kindle: Chapter 1.

knowledge grew increasingly frustrating. The DMin prescribed a process for adaptive leadership, the Missional Change Process.[4] As the program continued on, I was lagging further behind.

Connecting Actions with Reflections

From my very first exposure to the Missional Change Process, I had learned that it is a nonlinear process. For example, Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk explain, "Change rarely happens in a straight line….First, the target is not always where we think it is…Second, we will make a lot of mistakes along the way… Third, the target keeps moving."[5] I interpreted this to mean that one is never truly finished developing awareness and understanding, even though he or she might be engaging in some experiments. Roxburgh and Romanuk corroborate this by saying, "The leader moves back and forth across these stages as people raise their questions, make new discoveries, and shift their Biblical imagination."[6]

However, I had been interpreting the entire Missional Change Process as a whole to be an isolated event, or set of events, as if it were simply a process in which we engage for a season. This understanding was based largely on the language in *The Missional Leader*, where a timeline for each step is listed in months.[7] Reflecting upon this, I

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[4] Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 79-81.

[5] Ibid., 79-81.

[6] Ibid., 104.

[7] Ibid., 105.

struggled because on the one hand, I was learning that my context is key. I was learning

what Roxburgh succinctly says, "We begin where people are at this moment."[8] Indeed,

the idea of beginning where people are has been a key emphasis throughout the reading

and conversations throughout the entire program.[9] In my context, with the matrix of

discontinuous change and technical challenges listed in Chapter 1, I did not feel as

though the elders, church staff, or I were ready to formally engage the Missional Change

Process.

So in the fall of 2014, I felt I was at an impasse. I wondered how I would continue

with the work of this class while also being attentive to the situation of my church, staff,

and myself. Thus, the guiding team work was put on the back burner, session meetings

were long and full of business, and staff meetings rarely left space for conversations

about what God was up to in the community and in our lives.

This feeling of stagnancy, almost despair, came to a head at the beginning of my

third year in this program. I felt tempted to take a break and focus on addressing what I

thought were more pressing issues within the church. Aware that there was no Cohort F

following behind, I was determined to press on with the program.

During the year three seminar, I learned a crucial clarification about the Missional

Change Process. Its nonlinearity meant that it could happen at multiple levels

simultaneously. In fact, it is an ongoing process. Sure, it can happen over a period of

eighteen months, like much of Roxburgh's literature describes. In fact, when hoping to

see real congregational change, eighteen months is often the timeframe in which it

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[8] Ibid., 84.

[9] See Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2013), 139.

works.[10] However, it can also happen on a day-to-day, weekly, or monthly basis. In essence, the Missional Change Process is more a posture than a program. Everything I do as a leader in my church can be done through the posture of the Missional Change Process.

It was helpful for me to realize that the Missional Change Process is a more specific form of what Mark Lau Branson and Juan Martinez describe as the "praxis cycle" in *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership*. They explain, "The approach to practical theology, a continual movement from experience to reflection and study, and then on to new actions and experiences, is what we call *praxis*…. So in church, praxis is the constant rhythm that includes study and reflection (including working with theology and other theoretical material in continual interaction with engagement and action."[11] Although Branson and Martinez later go on to more specifically name their own steps in which the praxis cycle occurs, the concept parallels the Missional Change Process. Both the praxis cycle and the Missional Change Process are more specific iterations of the action/reflection cycle. In essence, our reflections about our context guide our actions, which give us more opportunity to reflect, which guides a new set of actions. This is a continual, ongoing process, transpiring at a variety of levels. So for the purposes of the doctoral program, I needed to be working through the Missional Change Process in my context. And that process could take eighteen months, while also happening in smaller levels all the time.

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[10] Alan J. Roxburgh, "Missional Contexts and Local Churches" lecture during Doctor of Ministry class, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, January 16, 2014.

[11] Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership*, Kindle: Chapter 1.

This was a hugely beneficial mental shift for me. It helped me coalesce multiple concepts of the DMin program in a way that made sense. For example, it explained the role of getting on the balcony[12] and why it is an imperative for missional leadership. This mental shift also helped come up with tangible practices and behaviors to try myself and with others, and why they would be helpful to do.[13] Additionally, it clarified why it is so important to start where people are.[14]

Beginning to Experiment

January of 2015 was a turning point for the work of this project. Equipped with a more adequate understanding of the Missional Change Process, I also began a coaching relationship with Craig Van Gelder at the behest of Alan Roxburgh. During the coming months, I began a variety of small-scale, action-learning experiments, slowing developing my adaptive leadership skills.

During the spring of 2015, I led another session retreat where we identified critical action steps for the coming eighteen months. The session arrived at these action steps through an experience using Appreciative Inquiry questions, helping people to identify where they saw God at work around them and what gave them passion.

Following through with the plan delineated during the session retreat, I spent the spring of 2015 working with the session to develop a new vision for the church, as this

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[12] Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 51-55.

[13] Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, Kindle: Chapter 10.

[14] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership* Can *Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 6-8.

had been one of the three vital action steps they sought to accomplish within the next eighteen months. However, as the months ensued, it became apparent that our session was having difficulty embracing a new set of behaviors. For example, in March, the session voted to dedicate their May stated meeting for the purpose of Scripture study, reflection, and discernment of a new vision. However, by the time the scheduled day for the meeting arrived, more than half of the elders had said they would not be able to make the meeting. We cancelled it as there was not a quorum. Ironically, during the June meeting, when seeking to decide on some big-ticket business items, some of the elders did not feel ready to make decisions because the session did not have a sense of vision. Other elders pointed out that people had been too busy the month before to begin working on that very issue. Thus, I continued to struggle with providing adaptive leadership during these meetings.

Finally, during a program staff retreat in the fall of 2015, Craig led our team in drafting a preliminary mission and vision document that we could take back to the session. Throughout the remainder of the fall, I led our staff through a time of discerning and revising this document for the purpose of presenting it to the session in the spring of 2016. Craig encouraged the idea of offering a draft for revision by the session as a way of helping to lead the elders in this process.

In March of 2016, I led our annual session retreat, and we spent the time dwelling in Luke 4, examining the socio-cultural context of FPC and reviewing the mission and

vision document our program staff had drafted.[15] The retreat was a significant move forward in that it gave the session an opportunity for continued discernment and reflection, but it also provided leadership and empowered the session to take action. After taking a month to pray about the new mission and vision, the session adopted the document in April.

The following step involved revising the job descriptions based on this new mission and vision statement. Once again, the program staff led the way. I led the staff through a series of meetings throughout the spring where we discussed and reworked our job descriptions to keep them more aligned with the language in the mission and vision, to envision a more distributive model of leadership, and to create more room for the leadership of the Spirit of God. After the program staff worked through the job descriptions, I worked with the personnel ministry team over a period of two meetings until they approved them for session review.

In June of 2016, the session took a first pass at the newly-revised job descriptions, and I learned a few important lessons. Firstly, I learned the importance of creating a process design. In simply distributing the job descriptions without giving any context to the elders and without having any plan of how I would provide context, people created their own. There was significant misunderstanding about the purpose and implications of the changes presented.

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[15] I used Craig Van Gelder's "Historical Development of Denominations" as the basis for examining the church's socio-cultural context. See Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 17.

I also learned why Dwight Zscheile says in his book, *Agile Church*, that it is in the ordinary people of the church that God is at work.[16] Instead of creating a space for simple experiments with a group of ordinary people in the church, I tried changing structures with the leadership of the church. I worked in a top-down approach. One of the biggest issues a few elders had with the proposed changes in the job descriptions was in a provision that allowed program staff to use work time for being involved in the community. Instead of seeking an official change in the church's control documents without any common experience as a session, I would have been better off simply inviting the program staff to engage in some experiments in the community on an unofficial basis.

A look at the changes taking place in the community, the church, and in my life provides the necessary contextual background to begin evaluating the work I have done to date and its impact. Together, this information elucidates the adaptive challenge that will be addressed through this project: I still do not know, however, how to fully and effectively lead the congregation of First Presbyterian Church on a journey of discovering a new missional imagination. In order to gain a deeper understanding of this process, I will lead the staff of FPC through a three-month action-learning experiment of joining with God in our local context.

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[16] Dwight J. Zscheile, *Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York, NY: Morehouse, 2014), 78.

PART TWO

THE PROJECT

CHAPTER 3

GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

Before describing the particular elements of the project and why they are

important, it is necessary to describe the theological and philosophical frameworks that

guide it. This chapter will outline the concept of liminality and how it relates to the

context of this project. A Biblical understanding of liminality will lead into a discussion

of missional theology and how it guides the work of this project. With some background

in missional theology, a discussion about adaptive leadership becomes more appropriate.

This discussion of adaptive leadership highlights the elements of adaptive challenges, the

praxis cycle, the Missional Change Process, and Appreciative Inquiry. Each of these

frameworks will be utilized in the work of the project.

Discontinuous Change, Liminality, and Biblical Narrative

Chapter 1 demonstrated that this project's context includes the "all-out acorn

assault" described in Roxburgh's *The Sky is Falling!?!*.[1] He goes on to describe this

change by saying it "literally feels like the sky *is* falling. It exhausts our physical, mental,

and spiritual resources by its sheer magnitude. While we may find some success adapting

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[1] Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling!?!*, 29.

to changes in one or two areas of our lives, pervasive, discontinuous change forces us to deal with changes on every front simultaneously. What's more, these changes build on each other, making it even more difficult to know which to pay attention to and what to do next."[2] The disorienting effect of this discontinuous change creates a state called "liminality." In the liminal spaces of life, one experiences a separation from their known world. They cannot return to how it once was. "This is about being placed on the edge of chaos where there is loss and hope, pain and potential."[3]

Especially poignant is Roxburgh's discussion of the response to liminality. It often creates a sense of "outsiderhood."[4] The temptation in the early stages of liminality is to recover what has been lost. This is largely because when people have been unwillingly brought into a liminal space, they are likely to exhibit confusion, discomfort and anger, and an instinctive desire to recapture the old world. Summarizing these ideas, Roxburgh explains six points about the liminal phase: people always experience liminality as loss; people should not be rushed through transition; the majority of people have no idea what they are experiencing; liminality is an emotional state; leaders too often make the mistake of assuming that strategic plans or more information will move people out of liminality; it is a time of either regression or opportunity depending on how it is addressed.[5]

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[2] Ibid., 29.

[3] Ibid., 94-95.

[4] Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 26.

[5] Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling!?!*, 97.

Roxburgh describes this concept with other metaphors as well. In *Missional Map-Making*, he says, "The maps we have inherited no longer adequately describe the realities we face."[6] But "as we lose our sense of where these old maps came from, we cling to them more tightly…. Maps (traditions, habits) don't disappear; they remain in our minds, determining our actions and how we see the world. If we don't recognize this, we will be misdirected in trying to navigate our current context."[7]

This discussion is vital because it so aptly describes the context of FPC. Without acknowledging this reality, effective leadership is impossible. However, this discussion of discontinuous change and liminality goes well beyond the context of FPC in Fort Dodge. In fact, "The Spirit has continually disrupted the church throughout its history, taking it to places where once accurate maps no longer applied."[8] Roxburgh correctly points out that the imagination for living as God's people today comes from two places – the narratives of Scripture and the concrete realities of living in our culture today.[9]

Thus, the discussion of living in the liminal spaces goes to the narratives in Scripture. Throughout the story of God's activity in the world, it is apparent that God is at work in the liminal spaces. When God's people experience discontinuous change, when they are thrust into liminality, God is at work in significant ways. Examples in Scripture abound, but they are particularly evident in the stories of Israel's wilderness experience

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[6] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 16.

[7] Ibid., 24.

[8] Ibid., 20.

[9] Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling!?!*, 70.

after the Exodus and during the nation's Exile to Babylon, and in the formation of the early church described in Acts.

The Israelites' departure from Egypt was a decisive moment. It involved forty years of wandering in the wilderness, but it also involved more than that. The Israelites departed Egypt as a "mixed multitude;" but at Sinai, while in the wilderness, they were transformed into an "identifiable, intentional community, called to a historical destiny."[10] The wilderness in this story is lifeless. Its only virtue is that it is beyond Pharaoh's reach. The Israelites discover, though, that when they reach the desolate place, it is not lifeless. God is present and God provides for them.[11]

The Exile experience of Judah tells a similar story. Occupation and dislocation were unfathomable narratives for the Israelites. "Despite the warnings of prophets, the [Israelites] had no framework to understand, accept, or receive the catastrophic events of 587 B.C. This was not only a crisis of politics, but also of faith and identity. It was the loss and ending of a world…"[12] However, while they experienced this liminal space, they were freed from their ties to Jerusalem. They were free to discover anew what God had in store for them. For the prophets writing about the Exile, it was a hopeful time where God was calling God's people back into covenant relationship.[13]

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[10] Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 46.

[11] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight, *An Other Kingdom*, 15.

[12] Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling!?!*, 73.

[13] Ibid., 74-75.

The early church experienced liminal moments where God invited people toward a new imagination as well. Peter's world was turned upside-down by the events of Acts 10 and 11, while Paul's entire way of life changed in Acts 9. A central question for the early Christians was whether following Jesus meant ascribing to the culture of Jerusalem and how Gentiles would be matriculated into the church.[14] There were no preset answers to these questions, and early church leaders figured issues out as they went.

This Scriptural narrative of God at work in the liminal spaces is also corroborated by other course readings as well. Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja describe the benefit of discontinuous change this way: "Equilibrium is a precursor to *death*. When a living system is in a state of equilibrium, it is less responsive to changes occurring around it. This places it at maximum risk. In the face of threat, or when galvanized by a compelling opportunity, living things move toward the *edge of chaos*. …the components of living systems *self-organize* and new forms and repertoires *emerge* from the turmoil."[15]

In summary, God is often at work in what seems to be the most God-forsaken situations. The Spirit of God disrupts people in ways beyond control. This disruption cannot be rushed nor managed. There is no going back to the way life was. Rather, God's people look for the leading of God's Spirit in the midst of the discontinuous change, the moments of liminality.

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[14] Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 21.

[15] Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja. *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business*. (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2000), Kindle: Chapter 1.

Missional Theology

The missiologist, Lesslie Newbigin, found himself in a liminal space, a space where he had no map. After spending years in India as a missionary, Newbigin returned home to Britain in the 1970s to find that his home was not the same as when he had left it decades earlier. "What had once been a Christendom society [had become] clearly post-Christian, and in many ways, anti-Christian."[16] It was a time where he became an outsider in his own culture, and he had to ask new questions.

At the heart of this disruptive experience for Newbigin was the question, "What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call 'modern Western culture'?"[17] For too long, this question had been largely ignored as it pertained to Western culture because the question had been raised in reference to interaction between the gospel and foreign cultures. Theologians and missiologists had ignored Western culture because it was so widespread and pervasive.[18] But as the Western culture had become increasingly secularized, it became imperative to discern how the gospel might speak into the culture of the West. This has proven to be a difficult and complex task because the gospel is embedded in culture. "There can never be a culture-free gospel. Yet the gospel, which is from the beginning to the end embodied in culturally conditioned forms, calls into

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[16] Darrell L. Guder, Ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America.* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 2.

[17] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture.* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), Kindle: Chapter 1.

[18] Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 1.

question all cultures, including the one in which it was originally embodied."[19]

Complicating the matter further, for most of the history of Western mission, there has been an underlying assumption that the church's missionary mandate included "shaping the Christian communities that it birthed in the image of the church of western European culture."[20]

Considering this interplay between the gospel and Western culture, Newbigin offered significant insight about the nature of mission. He rooted his later work in the triune nature of God, claiming that mission is part of God's nature.[21] This paralleled the earlier work of Karl Barth on the *missio Dei* which proposes that God is a sending God. God the Father sent the Son. The Father and the Son sent the Spirit, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have sent the church into the world.[22]

This reorientation of mission to be within God's character had profound impact on ecclesiology because mission was no longer reduced to simply an aspect of ecclesiology. Darrell Guder describes significant shift by saying, "…we have begun to see that the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness."[23] This means that mission is not part of the myriad church programs or something for the spiritual elite. Rather, the church is invited to dwell in

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[19] Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 1.

[20] Guder, *Missional Church*, 4.

[21] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 65.

[22] For an explanation of Karl Bath's work on the *missio Dei*, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 380-384.

[23] Guder, *Missional Church*, 4.

Christ through its mission as Christ dwells with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The church is invited to participate with God in God's mission.[24]

As participants in God's mission, the church learns more about its work. The church becomes a living embodiment of God's identity and intention so the local context of the church shapes what that particular church does. Everything the church does is for the purpose of preparing and sending believers to participate in God's mission. As the believers are sent, they recognize that they are not bringing God to a secular locale. God is already at work in the world ahead of the church since mission is part of God's very nature. So the church does not know how God is already at work in the world until believers go out and listen. Roxburgh summarizes this by explaining, "The notion of participation shifts all this. What the church does is discern how and where it is called to participate *with* God in the world. Participation with God reframes agency from the church and back to God. The church comes to know its concrete identity through the act of discerning and participating…"[25]

The first twelve verses of Luke 10 are a paradigmatic passage in Scripture that exemplify the posture of the church in light of a missional theology. This passage describes how Jesus sends seventy of his followers to dwell in the local communities. This passage provides a posture the church can embrace in seeking to be more faithful in its theology of mission, of participating in God's mission. The posture described in Jesus'

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[24] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 110.

[25] Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, and Changing the World*, Kindle: Chapter 4.

sending can be highlighted with five ideas offered in Roxburgh's *Missional*.[26] An overview of these concepts will prove to be helpful for framing the work of the project.

The first instruction that Jesus gives to his followers after he tells them to go is that they are to take no bag or sandals. This sounds cruel and seems to defy logic. However, Jesus is inviting his followers to be dependent upon those they meet. As they receive the hospitality of strangers, these early followers of Jesus discover how God is already at work. Consider how different this is from common church practice today. When the church *does* leave its building, it is often with baggage. People believe they already know what the world needs and therefore it is up to the church to meet those needs. For example, each time FPC goes on a mission trip to Guatemala, the church literally brings vanloads of supplies to leave with the Guatemalans. Roxburgh describes the powerful impact of leaving baggage behind by saying, "[Jesus] is in part calling disciples to move from doing things *for* people to being *with* people in the neighborhood and receiving *from* them."[27] This is a crucial distinction that impacts the shape of this project to be described in the next chapter.

Jesus' sending also emphasizes the idea that God is at work through ordinary people. "The seventy who are sent out are nameless, but that doesn't mean they're unimportant, just used to make a point."[28] God is bringing about God's kingdom in the world not through the church heroes and mega-church pastors, but through ordinary

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[26] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2011), 123-146.

[27] Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, and Changing the World*, Kindle: Chapter 8.

[28] Roxburgh, *Missional*, 128.

people participating in God's mission locally. This runs counter to many of the legitimating narratives of the Western church today. Christians believe they need more training, seminary education, and special abilities to engage in mission, but Luke 10 demonstrates otherwise.

Further, Jesus instructs his followers to enter the homes of those who receive them instead of greeting people along the road. This implies that the seventy would have entered homes as strangers, surrendering any illusion of control, as opposed to going where they already knew people. As Jesus' followers entered the homes of strangers, Roxburgh points out that they would have likely entered the entire economic system of these households. The followers stayed and participated in the life of the community to which they were sent.[29]

Part of this dwelling in strangers' homes meant eating what was set before Jesus' followers. As the seventy entered into the economic system of the household, they would work alongside strangers, living with them and eating with them. Consider what could be at stake in sharing a meal together. Jews were called to separate themselves from Gentiles by refraining from eating certain foods. Meals also divided various socioeconomic classes as well. Through the sharing of the table with strangers, Jesus' followers were truly welcomed in and received hospitality. Roxburgh describes the table as "a symbol of the *eschaton* (God's healed creation in Christ), which has already started among us."[30] This sharing of the table provides a radical way for the church today to encounter God at work. Rather than continuing to create more programs and further promote a lifestyle of

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[29] Ibid., 139.

[30] Ibid., 143.

busyness, Luke 10 invites Christians to receive the hospitality of neighbors and to simply listen.

One final reflection about Luke 10 coalesces all the previous concepts. Jesus' sending of his followers implies that the activity of the church, of God's people, is primarily in the public sphere. Jesus' followers don't spend their times in synagogues or the temple. Rather, they are working alongside ordinary people, they are sharing meals together, and they are staying in people's homes.[31] If the church is to discover God's leading in its own context, the church must be willing to partner with people in their everyday lives.

Adaptive Leadership Rooted in Missional Theology

The Trinitarian understanding of the *missio Dei* offers a dramatic reinterpretation of ecclesiology and missiology. Seen through this lens, Luke 10 provides a social imaginary which is vastly different from what is present in most churches today. This proposed ecclesiology demands not a minor change in priorities, but a complete shift in focus, language, and activity. When adaptive leadership principles are combined with these developments in missional theology, we begin to empower churches and church leaders to discover the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Adaptive and Technical Challenges

A discussion of leadership through discontinuous change and liminal spaces will inevitably reference the work of Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky. In their seminal work,

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[31] Ibid., 146.

Leadership on the Line, they elucidate a framework that must be understood and internalized. In order to lead people through sustainable change, Heifetz and Linsky call for adaptive leadership. This model of leadership draws a distinction between two types of challenges – technical challenges and adaptive challenges.[32]

Technical challenges can best be described as the types of problems for which solutions already are known and within reach. One usually already possesses the skills required to solve a technical challenge or they have access to the required skills and tools. A technical challenge may be complex, important, and difficult. When goals, methods, and skills are understood and available, a leader is likely working through a technical challenge.[33] Trained professionals utilize what they know to solve technical challenges.[34] To be clear, it is vital that effective leaders have technical proficiency.

However, leadership requires more than technical proficiency. This is because "there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures."[35] These adaptive challenges "call for changes of heart and mind."[36] They call people to adapt their behavior, thinking, habits, or expectations. An adaptive challenge cannot be solved with a person's current skills or knowledge. The individual must acquire new, unidentified skills and proficiencies. There are no

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[32] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 13-20.

[33] Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, Kindle: Chapter 10.

[34] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 13-14.

[35] Ibid., 13.

[36] Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught*, 9.

roadmaps.[37] Adaptive challenges cannot be managed or controlled, and leaders get into

trouble when they seek to manage adaptive challenges. In fact, it is the leader's inability

to distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges that makes leadership so

dangerous.[38]

Especially problematic for leaders navigating adaptive challenges are the

pressures from others to provide technical leadership. Adaptive work usually involves an

element of loss, risk, and change. People tend to resist this change and look to leaders to

provide simple, easy answers. But there is no fast, easy way through adaptive challenges.

Adaptive work takes people through liminal spaces as they wrestle with an onslaught of

discontinuous change. Leadership through adaptive challenges calls for a particular set of

practices.

The Action/Reflection Cycle

So adaptive challenges call people to discovery of new actions, but the question of

how to prescribe these actions emerges. Mark Lau Branson and Juan Martínez suggest a

vision of practical theology that invites leaders and churches to develop their skills in

theological reflection. The development of theological reflection occurs in what they call

the praxis cycle. "Praxis is the constant rhythm that includes study and reflection… in

continual interaction with engagement and action."[39] Learning happens through

thoughtful reflection on current experience. New learning then influences new behaviors

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[37] Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, Kindle: Chapter 10.

[38] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 14.

[39] Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, Kindle: Chapter 1.

which provide more experience for future reflection. The reflection repeats continually and can happen concurrently in multiple layers.

Branson and Martínez explain the praxis cycle with more depth and break it down into five distinct steps.[40] Meanwhile, Heifetz and Linsky describe a similar idea by using the phrase "getting on the balcony."[41] Branson and Martínez focus their discussion on reflection within the church, so they discuss the importance of drawing from Scripture and doing this reflection in community. Heifetz and Linsky emphasize the importance of seeing how the individual leader is functioning within the system. In both perspectives, reflection and action are linked together for effective adaptive leadership. As individuals discern the leading of God's Spirit through liminal spaces, they reflect on what they experience, test those beliefs in experiments, and continue to discern what God might be doing.

<div align="center">The Missional Change Process</div>

Similar to the praxis cycle, Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk propose their own process for working through adaptive challenges in *The Missional Leader*.[42] The Missional Change Process[43] also operates with the conviction that leaders start where

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[40] Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 1.

[41] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 51-74.

[42] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 79-108.

[43] In *The Missional Leader* Roxburgh and Romanuk actually describe what they call the "Missional Change Model." However, in subsequent works, Roxburgh refers to these steps as the "Missional Change Process." This project uses the phrase "Missional Change Process" because a key element of adaptive work is its nonlinearity. The conversation is framed in a technical perspective rather than adaptive when referring to a model rather than a process. Still, the description of the five components

people are. Broadly speaking, the individual reflects on their context, discerns an experiment, reflects on their findings, and then begins the process again. More specifically, the Missional Change Process includes five elements. These elements include: awareness, understanding, evaluation, experimentation, and commitment.[44]

Due to the nonlinear fashion of discontinuous change and adaptive challenges, the Missional Change Process does not occur as a straight line, although, each element builds on the element preceding it. Framed in the context of the praxis cycle, building awareness and understanding and evaluating current practices all would be part of the reflection side of the praxis cycle. Experimentation and commitment form the action side of the praxis cycle. All five of these components are repeated as a way of discovering the leading of the Holy Spirit in a particular context.

The reason this process is central for adaptive leadership is that it outlines a process for discovery of new behaviors. Adaptive challenges call people to embrace new ways of life. These changes do not happen easily. And generally speaking, people do not think their way into change; they act their way into a new reality.[45] When people encounter situations for which they have no map, the new maps are made on the journey, not before the journey starts.[46] Similar to the experience of the seventy from Luke 10, the Missional Change Process starts where ordinary people are, reflects on what God might

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of the Missional Change Model described in *The Missional Leader* is a helpful resource for understanding the process.

[44] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 84.

[45] Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*, Kindle: Chapter 1.

[46] Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 36.

be doing, and tests new practices. Though it includes the same five elements, the process

looks different in every context and takes the doctrines of the Incarnation of the *missio*

Dei seriously.

Appreciative Inquiry

One powerful set of practices designed to help build awareness and understanding

and empower people to experiment is known as Appreciative Inquiry (AI). There has

been a wide variety of research about this practice in recent years, and Tim Sensing

highlights some of the main ideas behind it and different models for how it is practiced.[47]

At the core of AI is the belief that change follows the type of questions people ask. Mark

Lau Branson provides background to the practice by offering ten assumptions behind AI.

Without elaborating on each assumption here, a general summary will be provided. Mark

explains that what people focus on will become their reality, and every organization has

things they do well. If a group can focus on what has worked well in the past, it will

empower them to think more creatively about the future. Ordinary people within the

community do the work of remembering bright spots in the past. AI is collaborative work

where people value different stories and perspectives. The outcome of these

conversations is new, tangible practices to try.[48]

Although there are different specific iterations, AI includes five basic movements.

The group chooses the positive as its basis for its inquiry. The group tells stories of life-

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[47] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 168-179.

[48] Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 24-28.

giving forces. People locate themes that appear in the stories and decide to inquire further into those themes. The group creates shared images for their desired future. Empowered by these positive stories, the group seeks new innovations to test.[49]

Thus the process of AI parallels the praxis cycle and the Missional Change Process. Like these other frameworks, AI begins with ordinary people reflecting on their shared experiences so that they can test innovative ways to discover God's movement among them. Appreciative Inquiry, like the Missional Change Process, includes a cycle of reflection that leads to action, which then provides more opportunity for reflection.

For the purposes of this study, the Missional Change Process is the specific framework being used. As a means of gaining awareness and understanding, AI questions will be utilized, and time on the balcony will be built into the project. These processes will be described in the following chapter.

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[49] Ibid., 28-29.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT PROCESS DESIGN

This ministry intervention consisted of five components: creation of community

experiments, implementation of community experiments, regularly scheduled reflection

meetings, final evaluation of the experiments and discerning next steps, self-evaluation of

my adaptive leadership skills. Some of these components happened sequentially while

others happened throughout the process. As a whole, the intervention lasted roughly six

months. In what follows, I will describe the process design for the entirety of the project.

Creation of Community Experiments

Since our staff had already embraced the idea of experimenting within their job

descriptions by carving out 10 percent of a typical workweek for experiments within the

community, the place to begin the ministry intervention was the creation of experiments.

Therefore, the first step involved a series of three meetings to design our community

experiments. These meetings would occur every two weeks. This space would give

enough time that individuals will be able to meaningfully engage the work between

meetings, ensure the meetings won't be overly time consuming, and would allow for each

meeting to last long enough for honest conversation to transpire. This bi-weekly pace

would also get us in the habit of meeting regularly as a ministry staff, a practice that will continue throughout the project. The length of this project required a substantial commitment to these meetings, even during the summer months, where travel was more likely. It was helpful to plan out when each of these meetings would transpire at the start of the project so people could adjust their schedules accordingly.

For our first meeting, we would meet in our church conference room for two hours, likely on a Tuesday afternoon or Thursday morning. During this meeting, we would spend the first twenty minutes dwelling in Luke 10. Afterward, I would explain to the group the process we would take to discern our community experiments. This explanation would demonstrate that Luke 10 was central for our discerning process, and it would serve as a guiding text. I would explain that the process of discerning our experiments would likely take us the next month to complete, outlining what we would accomplish in each meeting. I would explain the bi-weekly schedule and establish that by the end of this first meeting, we would have mapped out our schedule for the coming months. By the end of this first section of the meeting, my goal was that each staff member would have a clear map of what our overall process would look like through the coming months of the experiment.

In order to offer this level of explanation, it was vital that before the first meeting even happens, I have a clear understanding of the scope and schedule of the entire project. I will need to spend time before this meeting in order to prepare a detailed handout to give to the group. The more detail I can provide, the more it will ease any potential anxiety about these new practices we will try.

After the preliminary discussion in the first hour, I would explain that our remaining task for the first meeting was to identify key dynamics in the work of the seventy described in Luke 10. These key dynamics were to serve as parameters for our own experiments within the community. By the end of the first meeting, we would need to identify distinctive marks of the Luke 10 interactions and how they would delineate the types of experiments we were going to try. Additionally, we would have decided upon a meeting schedule, and I would have outlined what I expected to be completed by the next time we were going to meet.

In the time between the first and second meeting, each of the six staff (myself included) were to draft a proposal for their experiment based on the parameters mutually agreed upon from our first meeting. Before the next meeting, I would consult with colleagues from my cohort or Craig, depending on schedules, in order to garner feedback about my own proposed experiment. I aimed to have a good example of the type of community experiment I had envisioned in order to provide more clarity for the rest of the staff.

During our second meeting, we would once again start with twenty minutes dwelling in Luke 10 in order to center ourselves on the narrative that would guide our following discussion. In the remaining 100 minutes, I would allow fifteen minutes for each of us to present our idea and to receive feedback from the rest of the group. In an effort to "give the work to the people,"[1] I would offer my project last, inviting the group to more fully engage in the critique process for one another. By the end of the meeting, I would explain that the group will have another two weeks to revise their proposals based

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[1] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 123-138.

on the feedback they had received. In addition, I would invite each staff member to consider which part of their current job description they would need to diminish in order to create space for these new experiments.

During the third meeting, we would again start with dwelling in Luke 10, and similar to the previous meeting, each person would have fifteen minutes to present and receive feedback. However, during this time, the proposal would also include their plan of what they would diminish from their current job description. This part of the discussion would be important so we all would be aware of how our responsibilities would change during this time so we could plan accordingly. If we were to arrive at the end of the meeting and with a clear understanding of our proposed experiments and job description changes, we would decide on a date to formally begin our experiments, thus concluding the first section of the experiment.

Conducting Community Experiments

The second component of the project consisted of the experiments we would be trying within the community. These experiments would last for a minimum of twelve weeks in order to provide ample time for establishing and deepening relationships with others. This followed the example of Luke 10 where the disciples were called to stay where they were. Additional insights from Luke 10 demonstrate that these experiments would invite us to partner with people in the community rather than work for them. We would seek experiences where we were not seen as the expert, but where we could listen and learn. Rather than choosing multiple ways to get involved, we would select one

opportunity or one set of related opportunities. Further, these experiments would invite us to receive the hospitality of others.

It was possible that these experiments could grow out of ongoing work that had already been taking place within the community. However, during our designing phase, we would need to make sure that our experiments follow the example set before us in Luke 10. Therefore, current practices within the community, if pursued further for this project, might have needed to be adapted or considered in new ways in order to comply with the mutually established criteria. Ultimately, emphasis would be placed on going where God already had placed us, meeting God where we already were.

We would use 10 percent of our weekly work time as a guideline for these projects. Technically, that would translate to four hours per week. However, this timing could be flexible. For example, the experiment might include meeting in a community group that meets every other week for two hours. On the weeks when the group meets, more time would be devoted than the other weeks. In general, the intention was to spend roughly one afternoon each week, a day every other week, or a few hours multiple times a week. The time could be organized as needed to fit each community experiment and the needs of each person's schedule.

Sharing Stories and Assessment

The third component of the ministry intervention would be the bi-weekly reflection meetings. During the twelve weeks of carrying out experiments within the community, we would have six meetings to evaluate the work we are doing, to

hypothesize how we are seeing God at work in our contexts, and to hold one another accountable to our established plans for the experiments.

Each of these meetings would last two hours, once again, likely meeting on Tuesday afternoons or Thursday mornings. At the beginning of each meeting, we would spend thirty minutes dwelling in Luke 4:1-5:11. This is a substantial amount of Scripture, and it would continue to give us insights through all six meetings. The reason for the length of the Scripture would was that it commences with Jesus' beginning of ministry, it includes his clash with religious expectations, and it ends with Jesus' invitation to a journey of discovery. Each of these elements would help to continue challenging our assumptions about our own ministry and where God is primarily at work around us.

After spending thirty minutes in Luke, I would ask a series of appreciative questions each week. In the first meeting, we would mainly hear about the beginning impressions each person has about their experiment. Questions for the first meeting would include: Describe what actions you have taken to begin your experiment within the community since our last meeting. How did you initiate the experiment? Did it require you to approach anybody you didn't already know well? What did you learn about the people you met? What was your initial experience like? Did anything surprise you? What has been the most exciting part of the interaction you've had so far? What has challenged you so far in the work you've been doing?

With only ninety minutes to share stories with one another, there would be a good chance that we would not get through all of these questions during our first meeting. If that were the case, in the second meeting, after dwelling in Luke, we would start again

with asking what people have done to engage in their experiments since we last met, and then continue where we left off in the prior meeting.

Throughout each week, we would start the questions by asking what each of us has done to engage with our community experiments since the last time we met. As our meetings would progress, the questions would progress to deeper levels of reflection. For example, the next set of questions would include: Who have you gotten to know on a deeper level as these weeks have gone by? What have you learned about that person? What are their hopes, their dreams, or their fears? What have they taught you about our community, yourself, and God? When has your experience given you the most fulfillment or joy? What was happening that made you feel that way? What might God be saying to you in this? When has somebody you've worked with challenged your expectations of who God is or how God works? What has been the most difficult experience you have had during your experiments? Why was it difficult? What might God be doing in these challenges? These would be questions for the third and fourth meetings.

In the last two meetings, the questions would direct our staff toward tentative conclusions about our experiments and what possible next steps we should take. Questions for these meetings would include: As you've been listening to one another share stories for the last two months, what themes are you noticing? Do others' stories share similarities with your own experiences? Why or why not? What might God be saying to us as a staff through these stories? How do we know? What could God be telling us is a next step after these twelve weeks are finished? Do you think you will continue with your ministry experiment after we are finished with the twelve weeks? Why or why not? If not, what will you try instead? Reflecting on the work you've been

doing with people in our community, what would you do differently if you were to design this experiment again? How will the work we have done impact your understanding of your ministry position within the church? Do we need to revise our job descriptions based on what we've learned? Why or why not? How can you invite others within the church on a similar journey of discovery that you have experienced during these months? How do we share our stories with others including the session, our ministry teams, and the church in general?

The fourth component of the ministry intervention would involve reflection on my own adaptive leadership. During recent years, I have noted that I find it difficult to initiate and sustain experiments within the community myself, and I also have difficulty providing clear leadership toward a missional imagination. The questions that would be discussed throughout the bi-weekly meetings would be as much for me as they would be for the rest of the staff. I would be learning how my own experiments within the community impact my experience of God and my understanding of my role as a pastor. Additionally, the structure of bi-weekly meetings and the schedule of the overall project would help me to hold our staff accountable to actually follow through with their experiment plans.

After each meeting with the staff, I would schedule thirty minutes for journaling about the meeting. I would answer the following questions in these journal exercises: When did I exercise leadership during this meeting? How do I know this? What was the impact of that leadership action(s)? What opportunities for leadership did I miss during the meeting? What did I learn about each of the ministry staff from what they shared

today? Based on what happened today, what do I need to change for my plan for the next meeting?

Concurrent with this journaling exercise, I would schedule another thirty minutes each week to journal about my community experiment. In that time, I would reflect on the following questions: Who did I meet this week? What did I learn today about other people? What did I learn about myself? What did I learn about our community? How have I seen God at work? What has my time in the community taught me about ministry? Where am I being challenged? Where am I finding joy? In addition to these journaling exercises, I would set up a tri-weekly meeting schedule with Craig to discuss my reflections from the journaling and what I can do differently in the future.

At the end of the twelve weeks, after I would conduct the final evaluation with the ministry staff, I would conduct a final self-evaluation. During this final self-evaluation, I would consider the following questions: What was the effect of the journaling exercises and regular coaching conversations on my ongoing leadership skills? How was the language in our ministry staff meetings different at the end of the experiment as compared to the beginning? When was it necessary to "give the work" to the staff as opposed to taking a more assertive role? How can I discern the difference going forward? How did my own experiment within the community impact my leadership? What challenges did I encounter as I conducted the meetings with the ministry staff? When were staff members most receptive to my leadership actions? What next steps do I need to take with the ministry staff to continue fostering a spirit of experimentation and discovery of God's activity? Who else can I invite on a similar journey of discovery as I have done with ministry staff? How would that invitation be different, knowing others

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would not be directly accountable to me in an employee relationship? How can I continue to create space in my schedule for evaluation and reflection?

Discerning Next Steps

The fifth component of the ministry intervention would be a final evaluation with each of the ministry staff. This final evaluation would include four components: a) assessing the work we have done, b) naming the learning we are doing, c) co-designing a new set of experiments based on that learning, and d) determining how to effectively communicate our experiences, learning, and new actions to key leadership in the congregation. This final evaluation would consist of one to three meetings, depending on how much we can cover in each meeting.

In the first evaluation meeting, we would ask the following questions: Did we really spend 10 percent of our time in the community? Did we actually give up 10 percent of our other work to do the experiments in the community? Were the responsibilities we gave up for the experiment missed? Do you think we need to resume doing them? What made it difficult to try your experiment? What feedback did we hear from people in the congregation while we tried this experiment? Based on previous meetings and your experiences in the community, what is the most important thing you've learned?

In the second evaluation meeting, we would ask the following questions: Do we need to continue with the community experiments we've begun? Why or why not? If not, what new experiments should we test? Why? To what experiments are we willing to commit? Let's outline a specific process design for these experiments.

In the third evaluation meeting, we would ask the following questions: Who needs to be included in this journey next? Why them? In what order do we tell people about our story? Why? How do we include others in this journey? How do we communicate with others about this journey? Does the way we communicate change based on to whom we are talking? How do we invite people along this journey so they learn for themselves? What is our timeline for inviting others to come along with us?

These questions would be asked in the whole group of ministry staff so that each person could offer input as we each answered the questions. This would help to provide more authentic reflection as we shared our experience of one another's actions. For example, one staff member might reflect that the work they had to give up in order to create time for their community experiment was essential work that they need to resume. Meanwhile, other staff could share that maybe that particular responsibility was not missed as much as the individual thought it was. Similarly, if one staff member were to claim to have spent a particular amount of time on their experiment in the community, other staff can either corroborate the claims or deny them. The goal of this final evaluation would be to help provide a space for staff to reflect on their experiment and how effectively they engaged with it.

All of these components would take a total of roughly eighteen weeks. The first component, discerning and creating experiments, would take four weeks – three bi-weekly meetings. The second component, conducting the community experiments, would last twelve weeks, with the third component, the six bi-weekly meetings, happening concurrently. The fourth component, the final group evaluation, would take place two weeks after the conclusion of the experiments. Meanwhile, the fifth component, my own

evaluation, would happen concurrently through the entire process with tri-weekly conversations with Craig, journaling exercises after every staff meeting and once a week during the community experiment phase, followed by a final self-evaluation.

After this entire process was to take place, there would be one final component. Our staff would share their experience with the session and appropriate venues within the entire church. Using the plan we developed from the sixth reflection meeting, we would designate one hour of a session meeting to offer a full report of our experience and what we seek to do in response to the experience. As we were to make this report to the session, I would invite the elders to consider how we can share the story with other individuals within the church.

Granted, throughout the entire process our ministry staff would write monthly reports to the session about their progress. This were to come as no surprise to the elders since I have just recently led a session retreat, outlining the preliminary work our ministry staff had done and the need to create experiments within our community. The session had already been aware of the work our staff has done in the retreat with Craig and in the follow-up conversations we've had in the following months. This recent retreat consisted of eighteen hours filled with sharing faith stories, dwelling in Luke 4 and 5, and talking about the changes happening within the church in North America, changes in our community, and changes in our own church. The elders were having similar conversations that our ministry staff had, and they were expecting the staff to try new practices where we partner with others.

PART THREE

REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS FROM THE COMMUNITY EXPERIMENTS

The chronology of this experiment runs together in such a way that it would be difficult to divide the events between two chapters. Similarly, the reflections based on the events of the project occur throughout the entire project and are difficult to separate from the events that inspired them. Therefore Chapter 5 will be diachronic in nature, describing the events of the project as they transpired with preliminary reflections, while Chapter 6 will be synchronic, arranging events, conversations and thoughts by theme.[1] Any reflection offered in this chapter will be given when necessary to connect actions and events. Deeper reflection about the project as a whole, particular events and conversations, and theological connections will be presented in Chapter 6. This chapter will detail the creation of the community experiments, the series of reflection meetings telling stories about the experiments, the meeting to discern next steps, and various events that transpired throughout the duration of the project.

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[1] Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1995), 42-45.

The staff members who participated in this project with me were Sara, the associate pastor; Laura, the Christian education director; Gabriel, the music director; Libby, the youth coordinator; and Chris, the business administrator. Throughout Part Three, I will refer to comments each of them made during the experiment I will recount stories they shared about their experiences in the community, and discuss interactions I had with them as they pertain to my reflections about my leadership. In what follows, I will refer to them by their first names.

The Creation of Community Experiments

The process of creating our community experiments began at a 12:30 p.m. meeting on Thursday, June 23, 2016. I chose this day because it was late enough in the week that I could plan ahead for the meeting and be as prepared as possible. Most of our big events for the week were to have already transpired so that we could all be fully present. I also chose to use half of this meeting time for evaluating an evening worship service we had tried out in January through May of 2016. Getting all six of us together could be difficult, so I decided to make the meeting dual purpose. I prepared questions ahead of time and included too much in our agenda for the time we had in the meeting. Because of this, I only had twenty minutes to explain the plan about the upcoming two meetings for the creation of our community experiments.

Our second meeting was on July 7, a Thursday at 12:30 p.m. Similar to the previous meeting, I hoped to give myself ample time for planning during the same week so that the meeting would be as productive as possible. I scheduled an hour for planning and preparation on Wednesday, the day before. However, the day filled up, and I pushed

the planning off until Thursday morning. Thursday was just as busy and I allowed the morning to go by without spending the proper time in planning. Additionally, I worked right up until the meeting time so I arrived in the conference room at 12:31 p.m. One other staff member was there. We did not end up starting the meeting until others arrived at about 12:40 p.m.

The meeting began with time in Luke 10, a text our staff has gotten to know well over the past two years. I explained to the group that we would be using this text as a guide for the discernment of our community experiments. In our discussion of Luke 10, we emphasized that Jesus sent his followers into communities without their baggage. They were people dependant upon the hospitality of strangers. They were not to greet anyone on the road so that they would be less likely to find friends or family. Jesus' followers were to enter into the ordinary life of the community and partner with the people they would meet to discover together the Kingdom of God.

After our general discussion of the text, I asked each person to discuss their preliminary thoughts about how they were considering spending their time in community. After they would share their thoughts, they were to give a rationale, and the rest of the team was to respond, offering feedback and asking questions. This process unfolded informally with each person sharing a list of ideas they were considering.

Chris mentioned that he wanted to do something that took him out of his comfort zone. Ideas included joining the Fort Dodge Leadership network, a monthly one-day gathering hosted by our chamber of commerce, or possibly hanging out at the Beacon of Hope (the Beacon), a local men's shelter. Laura mentioned working with the middle school to be a mentor for a student, coaching a kids' sports team, or spending time at the

local soup kitchen. Libby mentioned attending high school events, volunteering at the youth center (ICKY's), reading in her mom's first grade class, and participating in the water-walking program at the pool. Gabriel mentioned participating in a Sunday afternoon soccer club, working with the international students at the community college (since he went there eight years prior after moving from Brazil), tutoring college students in the music programs at the local schools, and offering his help with the English as Second Language (ESL) students in local schools. Sara mentioned getting more involved in her women's service group (Philanthropic Education Organization (PEO)), participating in a local women's recovery program called Hope Sweet Hope, spending time at a local coffee shop community called Cana, and being more intentional with participating in her Cross Fit gym. Interestingly, Chris has also been heavily involved in the Cross Fit community, but he did not consider his time there as part of this experiment.[2]

I shared my ideas last and suggested the following three possibilities: participating in a local writers' group hosted by the public library that I had already begun to attend, going to a local coffee shop for regular hours to read the material for the writers' group, and going to my gym on a consistent basis. After sharing all of the ideas, I could tell that the group felt underwhelmed. They all had sought to offer ideas that were structured, required commitment, and contributed to the community. I believe the reason for this reaction was twofold. First, we were still in the process of approving the changes to our job descriptions with the session. We all had heard some initial thoughts from elders who struggled with the idea of staff spending time outside of the church. I believe

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[2] I will comment more about Chris' Cross Fit involvement on pages 77 and 114.

we felt a sense that we needed to prove that our time was being spent productively. The

second reason for this trend was simply that our defaults were hard to change.[3] Even

though we had been talking about new ways to do ministry for the last nine months, we

were still inclined to assume that our time in the community must seek to help or invest

in others.

In response to this, I reminded the group of Luke 10, and invited them to consider

activities that give the opportunity to "partner with" rather than "work for."[4] If we really

wanted to learn from these experiments, we would need to put ourselves in positions

where we felt like equals, learners, or listeners. So I told the group that we needed to

make sure that at least one of the ideas we were considering would be something where

we were not the expert or benefactor. These comments brought up questions about what

kind of learning we would be doing and about our schedule. Gabriel pointed out that

three months is not a very long time to learn much of anything. I did not give a complete

answer to his question about what we hoped to learn in three months. We did talk as a

group about how most of the learning would likely be more about ourselves and the way

we did ministry. We planned when our next meeting would be and that we aimed to

begin our experiments in August of 2016.

On July 28, we held our third meeting and decided upon our community

experiments. This meeting was also scheduled for a Thursday afternoon at 12:30 p.m. We

followed the same format as our previous meeting – starting in Luke 10, and then taking

turns to present our plans for the ministry experiment, while receiving feedback from one

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[3] Roxburgh, *Missional*, 55.

[4] Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World*, Kindle: Chapter 8.

another. The conversation during this meeting took a different turn from the previous meeting because during the time since we had last met, our session had met and formally approved changing our job descriptions. So after we spent time in Luke 10, the staff shared their feelings about the recent session meeting. They vented some frustrations that certain elders just did not seem to understand what we were trying to do. Gabriel, who is not a member of our church, explained that he felt like the members of the church on session think that they own the church and that the church should do what they want since they are members. While Libby was frustrated that the sentiment of the elders seemed to be "what about me?" and "what about us," Chris further elaborated, "They should be concerned for the interests of God, not just for the interests of the individual." Recalling a comment Alan made about one of my final papers,[5] I reminded the group that as frustrated as we might feel, we need to understand the perspectives of these elders if we are to invite them on the same journey of discovery we are traversing. Trying to bring the conversation back to the topic at hand – selecting our experiments – I underscored the importance of our work. We were experimenting with new behaviors. They would feel foreign to us and to others.

We shared our further-developed plans for our ministry experiments. Chris said that he was going to spend an afternoon each week at the Beacon of Hope, a men's shelter. I asked the group if this felt like something where he would be working for others or partnering with others. They said that it depended on what he planned to do while spending his time there. Chris clarified that he intended to hang out with whomever was

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[5] Alan J. Roxburgh, comments on Austin D. Hill, "Missional Contexts and Local Churches" (unpublished manuscript for Fuller Theological Seminary, August 1, 2015), 17.

there, and maybe man the intake desk alongside residents. The group decided this experiment met the guidelines of Luke 10. Laura decided to be an afternoon middle school bus driver a few days a week, to mentor a middle school student, and to be more mindful during her Monday night bowling league. The group encouraged her to consider the bowling league as a great place where she would meet people on their terms, so they approved her plan. Gabriel decided to spend time each week at Iowa Central Community College and St. Edmonds Senior High. He would spend time with students in the music department, offering music tutoring and help with homework. Once again, I asked the group whether this was partnering with or working for. The group decided that although he was helping students, he would also have opportunities to meet students and spend time with them in a less formal, helping relationship. The group approved his plan. Sara decided to spend Thursday afternoons at Hope Sweet Hope studios, the meeting place for women in recovery. During this afternoon session, she would work with them in their paper-making business and participate in an open discussion group. In addition, Sara would continue to participate regularly at her Cross Fit gym. Again, I asked the question of whether Sara would be helping or partnering, and the group decided that she would be working alongside the women in the program, and that during her time in gym, she was certainly not coming as an expert with all the answers. The group approved. Libby said that she would read at Duncombe Elementary School for the first graders and volunteer time in her mom's first-grade class room. I asked the same question as I did the others, and the group decided that, certainly, Libby would be interacting with children as one who is coming to meet needs, but she could interact with the other teachers and adult volunteers in a partnering way. They approved her plan.

I was the last to present my idea and I once again offered the idea of participating

in the bi-weekly public library writers' group with the expectation that I would do some

of my reading and writing in a local coffee shop. I also offered a plan to spend time at

AFES, the local youth center that our church had financially supported in 2015. The

emphasis of the program is helping kids find academic success through sports. I am not

good at athletics, but I wanted to spend more time at an organization that our church had

financially supported but had not supported very well in any other way. Following the

example of the rest of the staff, I made a compromise in choosing one activity that was

already a part of my interests and truly allowed me to engage with others as an equal, and

another activity that was more structured, organized, and sought to meet needs in the

community. I felt that our general plan was headed in the right direction, but I still

thought we were trying to do community outreach instead of investing in relationships

with our neighbors.[6] I hoped that as we spent more time in the community and continued

to reflect on Luke 10 and our experiences, we would be able to parse this out.

Our community experiments we now selected. The only other issue to be sorted

out was the timing of these experiments. Libby, Gabriel, and Laura had chosen

experiments that depended upon the school year and we were meeting still in late July.

We decided that we would wait until the beginning of September to formally begin our

experiments. For those of us who were already engaging with people for our experiments,

we were able to continue those ongoing connections as well.

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[6] For the difference, see John McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), 36-42.

Telling Stories and Reflecting upon Community Experiments

This portion of the project lasted from early August through December. During these five months, our staff held five reflection meetings, and other important events transpired between them. I will outline the major events during this period – the reflection meetings and the other events as they relate to the meetings.

July 29 through October 4, 2016

Since our staff settled on specific community experiments, we spent August meeting with the people with whom we would be working. For example, Chris met with the director of the Beacon, and Gabriel met with local teachers and college professors. For those of us who did not have to wait until the school year started, we either continued or began spending time in the community. I kept going to my bi-weekly writers' group, Sara continued to go to the Cross Fit gym, and Chris began spending time at the Beacon.

During this time, I contacted Charles Clayton, the director of AFES, to see how I could spend time there. We met over coffee, and I told him I was trying to get out in the community more. The challenge, I told him, was that since one of the main focuses of AFES was athletics, I did not know if I would be able to relate to very many of the kids. He needed to know that I was terrible at sports, but I still wanted to get to know the kids. Charles was not fazed; he said to me, "Actually, what we really need is somebody who is musical. We just received a bunch of acoustic guitars and none of us know what to do with them. We'd like to start some guitar lessons. Do you know anybody who can teach guitar?" This was perfect, I explained, because I had played the guitar for the last twenty years, and I loved teaching it to people and jamming with friends. Charles was excited

and told me that he was talking with another man in town, named Ernie, who was also planning to come and give guitar lesson. So Charles and I made a plan for me to work alongside Ernie in playing guitar with seven kids twice a week. We both left the meeting, amazed at how logistics had fallen into place.

One afternoon in August, Laura came to my office and asked me if she could do something else for her community experiment. "Why?" I asked. She explained that the school did not need any bus drivers after school, and that she could not find the right student to mentor. Instead, she wanted to spend her time at the local coffee shop community, Cana. I thought to myself, "Here's a chance to emphasize the assertive side of my project." I told her that she could ask the group in our next meeting, and we would decide on it together because that is the same process the rest of us went through. She thought that would be ok. After she left, I realized that what I had just allowed meant that while the rest of us would have already begun spending time in the community, she would still need approval to start her time. However, that still seemed like a better alternative than letting Laura bypass the process that the rest of the team went through.

Our first reflection meeting was not until October 4, a Tuesday afternoon at 1:15 p.m. There were a few interesting dynamics at play even before the meeting began. We had to reschedule the meeting from Monday morning because of a calendar conflict I had overlooked. The time of the meeting was not ideal. It was right after a full morning of meetings for the whole group and Bible studies that I had to lead as well. I knew it would be tough for me to get to the meeting on time, coming from a lunchtime Bible study.

I got to the 1:15 p.m. meeting at 1:16 p.m., and only Libby was in the room. I had to run to the restroom since I had come straight from two Bible studies and staff

meetings. I did not have an agenda made out in advance, but I did have a general sense of what I wanted the meeting to be about. We ended up waiting until 1:24 p.m. to start the meeting, when Laura, the last staff member arrived. The entire meeting felt rushed because of the late start and my desire to be faithful to the pre-established end time.

We spent less time beginning with Luke 10 than usual because I wanted to make sure that we would have time for all six of us to share about our experiences in the last month. In an effort to gauge the room, I began with a two-fold question: "Describe how the last month has felt to you and what actions you have taken to begin your experiment since we last met." This one question occupied the rest of the meeting. I had a list of seven questions, that I was to use in our first meeting, but each group member shared so much and interacted with one another so well that they at least partially answered the remaining questions and we ran out of time. As each person told the story of their experiences so far, there was a natural dialogue from within the group, and people asked follow-up questions of each other. Also of note, three of the people shared other ways they had gotten more involved in the community since our last meeting.

Libby began going to Duncombe every Thursday morning once the school year had started. So far, she had mainly been spending time in her mom's class, helping with whatever needed to be done and spending time reading to the first grade students. In addition, Libby had started taking professional quality portraits of high school students and their families and friends. It started with doing an extemporaneous photo shoot with some youth group girls, and she realized that she could meet people from all over the community if she offered free or affordable portraits for families.

Chris was spending time at the Beacon, getting to know the men who were there. One of the first things he observed was that the community was much less transient than he had envisioned. Just by showing up each Monday and sitting at the front desk with other guys, he was learning many of the stories of the men who were staying there. He also had the opportunity to offer some temporary employment to one man for some custodial services at our church. Chris also was excited to tell us about some conversations he was having at the Cross Fit gym. The owner of the gym is an elder at our church, and they had lately been talking about wanting to create a men's small group at a local restaurant for anyone in the community. Chris and the elder were making plans to start this group within that next month and were talking to other friends at the gym about it.

Gabriel had begun spending time each week at one of the two local high schools and at the community college. He was using his music background to help teach music theory in the high school, and he was tutoring college students with their homework. He expressed some frustration that some of the college students would show up without their notes or without having finished their homework. This would become an ongoing theme in our meetings that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 6. As we talked about his frustration, our group discussed the idea of meeting people where they are. On that same note, Gabriel mentioned that he had been invited to play piano at a local bar for their monthly open mic jam night. He had never done anything like that and was looking forward to the opportunity.

Sara was spending time with women in recovery at the Hope Sweet Hope studio every Thursday afternoon. During this time, they would talk about what was going on in

their lives while working together to create specialty paper. Sara described her feeling of not being an expert because of her lack of art skills, so she had to learn from the women at the studio.

I described my time at the writers' group and how one of the members began meeting with me on an individual basis because he wanted to collaborate on a science fiction piece based on Genesis 6, where God was sorry he created humanity. He knew I was a pastor and that I have been writing science fiction, myself. So as a result of the writers' group, I began meeting twice a month with Greg to collaborate on a novel. I also met with Charles Clayton of AFES and started giving guitar lessons twice a week with eight elementary and middle school students.

Laura said that she was still waiting to hear from the school district about afterschool bus driving, but in the meantime, she had been meeting with Barb, the director of Cana. This was my opportunity to let the group help Laura decide whether Cana could be her main community experiment (since she was not doing anything else). I invited the group to ask her questions, but I was not explicit to the group that we needed to evaluate this in the same way we had evaluated our past ideas since this was going to be her main experiment. I simply invited the rest of the staff to ask her questions. No one in the group challenged her by asking why she had nothing to report from the middle school mentoring or why she didn't know more about the after school bus driving. I followed the cue of everyone else and did not press her any further. This was a missed leadership opportunity for me to help the group hold Laura accountable to the same standards we had. I will discuss this more in-depth in the next chapter as this has become

a major theme in our staff meetings together and is a critical issue for my leadership moving forward.

When we were wrapping up our meeting, I wanted to make sure that we had our next meeting times scheduled on all of our calendars so that we would not have to deal with schedule conflicts and changes like we did for this meeting. I wanted to get all of the remaining meetings on our calendar. As we went through this process, Laura looked visibly upset. She sighed when I began this topic of conversation and held her head in her hands through the entire conversation. We concluded the meeting on time, and people were generally excited about the experiences they were having in the community, but Laura seemed frustrated at all the time this was taking.

<center>October 5 through October 20, 2016</center>

Our next meeting was scheduled for Thursday morning, October 20 at 9:30 a.m. It was scheduled at a good time of the week for everybody. I would have time to prepare for in advance. We all had it on our calendars. It was set up to be a smooth, effective meeting. Then at 5:49 p.m. on October 19, I received an email from Laura, telling me that she had to rearrange her schedule for a doctor's appointment and she could arrive at 10:45 a.m. (fifteen minutes before the end of the meeting) "to report on my volunteer stuff."[7] I did not respond to the email as I received it later that evening, past work hours.

The meeting began on time with five of the six of us, spending time in Luke 10. This time we had more comments and connections with our Scripture passage than in

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[7] Laura Stover, "meeting tomorrow," email to Austin Hill, October 19, 2016 (5:49 p.m. CDT), accessed March 15, 2017.

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previous times. Staff members identified elements of their experiences in the text. Libby, for example, resonated with Jesus' phrase from verse 2, "The harvest is plentiful," as she related to how many students there are at the school who deal with significant issues at home and how few teachers there are to work with them. Sara identified with verse 4 where Jesus instructs his followers to not take a purse or bag or sandals; she felt out of her element, doing art with women. She did not have the skills these women had, yet they welcomed her anyway. Chris mentioned getting to know John from the Beacon and how he'd been able to walk with John through his alcoholism. For Chris, this has been how he has been able to say "Peace to this house," and "heal the sick" from verses 7 and 9 in the passage. Gabriel quoted verse 8, where Jesus commands, "…eat what is offered to you," as a directive for him to be more satisfied with the skills and proficiencies of the students with whom he was working.

Our discussion of Luke 10 flowed naturally into a discussion of the questions I had given the group in a handout. Once again, I did not need to formally ask each question because in the telling of stories, we all were addressing the questions listed. People spoke of challenges they have experienced in getting to know people, what had been surprising to them, what they had been learning from people, and what had been most exciting.

Answers to these questions engaged us in lively discussion. For example, Libby shared that in doing a photo shoot with a woman who sang in our praise team, she learned more about the challenges and difficulties this woman experienced than Libby ever had learned from Sunday interactions or even discussion when this woman was serving on session. I asked a follow up question to the group, based on her story. I asked, "Why do

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people feel like they can't be real at our church?" Gabriel offered that people think the church is supposed to be pure, that people feel judged. This led Sara to tell a story of an interaction she had with a woman at Hope Sweet Hope studios one day when Sara was wearing jeans with a hole in them. The woman was amazed that Sara was a pastor and would dress so casually. Sara noted how judged she felt by this woman, how much it made her feel like an outsider, and it gave her insight to how one might feel coming to church.

Gabriel related this story to his experience of playing piano at a local bar recently. While there, he thought to himself, "I'm going somewhere I'd never go visit in any other circumstance," but while there, he felt welcomed by everybody, even when they learned that he worked at a church. Another person noted, "Building relationships is what breaks down barriers." While another observed, "A professional status creates a barrier." Chris responded to this with "You need to adapt to reach others," while Sara quoted Debra Fine's *The Fine Art of Small Talk* by saying, we need to 'assume the burden'[8] and meet people where they are." I tried naming this as "incarnational ministry"[9] for the group. I further explained that meeting people where they are is what Jesus did.

About that time, Laura came to the meeting. We had about fifteen minutes remaining, and the energy in the conversation vanished. I tried to briefly reiterate where our discussion had been going. I repeated Chris' last statement, that we need to adapt to reach others, and posed a related question, to hopefully reinvigorate the conversation. I

[8] Debra Fine, *The Fine Art of Small Talk: How to Start a Conversation, Keep It Going, Build Networking Skills, and Leave a Positive Impression!* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2005), 6-7.

[9] See Tetsunao Yamamori and C. René Padilla, eds., *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Kariós Ediciones, 2004), 100-103.

asked, "How do we meet people where they are without compromising what we believe? In essence, how do we meet people where they are, while still being salt and light? People did not seem to understand the question, so I briefly told a story of an experience I had with friends who regularly smoked marijuana. "In that context," I asked, "How would I meet these friends where they are, while also being salt and light?" I was creatively trying to get people talking with the engagement they had had earlier, but it was not happening. The conversation did not really get off the ground before it was time for us to conclude our meeting.

October 21 through November 7, 2016

Our next meeting was going to be smaller in number because it was scheduled for November 7 and Sara was going to be gone for a conference during that time. When we began at 9:30 a.m. that Monday morning, it was only Gabriel, Chris, Libby, and me. We began at the starting time anyway, and I sent Laura a text, asking where she was. She responded that she had forgotten about the meeting; she would be there soon. She came thirty-eight minutes late to the ninety-minute meeting.

Even with a smaller group at the beginning, we still had engaging conversation about Luke 10 and our experiences in the community. Again, staff were making connections between the text and their experiences. We discussed feeling welcomed like what Jesus mentioned in verse 8. Libby said that she sometimes felt like she had to force her way into relationships at the school. Chris said that people were suspicious of him at the Beacon at first. I echoed those sentiments in telling stories of my experience in the writers' group. When it began, we had to tell the whole group what our occupation was,

so the know group knew that I was a pastor. I frequently heard comments from people like, "I don't know how this will sound to your ears," or "I don't want to sound too preachy with this," or "just so you know, I'm an atheist." I experienced a definitive mistrust at the beginning of my experience in the writers' group.

We also talked about Jesus' phrase, "the kingdom of God," from verses 9 and 11. One person asked, "What is the kingdom of God? How can we tell if it has come near?" I refrained from giving my answer and let the other staff members discuss it. Chris said that the kingdom of God is made up of the people of God, and it has come near when we are looking for it. Gabriel asked, "Are sinners a part of the kingdom of God?"

We then transitioned to the discussion questions I had provided for the day. I asked whom people had gotten to know on a deeper level as a result of our time in the community so far. I followed up by asking what these people had been teaching us. Gabriel said that he was getting to know four college students better than others because they met with him every week. He was learning to be more patient and tolerant because the students he worked with had a variety of things happening in their lives so their passion for music was not always the same as his. He explained that he had been learning this same lesson at church, too. Before coming to Fort Dodge, he had worked as a professional musician with other singers and musicians at the peak of their abilities. He was learning to have different standards than when he used to tour.

Chris was getting to know Eric, one of the workers at the Beacon, and John, a resident. Chris was able to share his own recovery stories with John and had invited John to work as a full-time, contract employee for our church. John was thrilled for the work and loved the new opportunities this church was giving him. Not only was John working

at the church throughout the week, but he was beginning to participate in twelve-step groups each week and coming to worship services, bringing some friends from the Beacon. To be clear, there were definitely issues that came with this. Chris had set up stipulations that if John ever showed up to work intoxicated, he'd be done. Meanwhile, as Chris' friendship with Eric was growing, Eric began to come to our church with his wife and daughter.

Laura had arrived by this time, and she answered the question, telling a story about a woman she had met at Cana named Sharon who was difficult to talk to. She explained that when talking to Sharon, she had to reminder herself that she was just there to listen. Laura told our group that it had been hard for her. She had been developing skills to listen and be patient. She also admitted that she was jealous of the stories the rest of the group was sharing; they seemed more exciting than her experiences.

Libby shared about her interactions with two children. One boy was having difficulties in the classroom, and the more she was there, the more she learned about his background. There was one day when she and another adult had to pick him up from home, and the parents were not there. Libby recalled wondering, "How is this boy still making it without any meaningful parent support?" She also told the story of meeting a girl who had just moved with her family to Fort Dodge from Guatemala. Libby instantly felt a connection because of the trips our church had taken to Guatemala. This girl did not know any English nor did she know anybody in the school. Libby, with her limited Spanish abilities, was able to communicate with the girl and establish a connection between their Guatemalan experiences.

I also shared stories of how I had been getting to know Greg from the writers'
group. He was a screenwriter who grew up in Fort Dodge, had moved to Los Angeles,
but had recently moved back home to live with his ailing mother and provide care for her.
While in Fort Dodge, he wanted to continue writing and sought accountability so he
approached me to meet with him every other week at a local coffee shop and discuss
screenplay and story ideas. He told me that in Los Angeles, he had gone to Bel Air
Presbyterian Church. He had not visited our Presbyterian church, however, since he had
returned to Fort Dodge. Interestingly, each time we met, he felt compelled to remind me,
"Now, I don't want to write anything blatantly Christian. I don't want to preach. I want to
write something that will entertain." While we would meet at the coffee shop, he would
also tell me things about other native Fort Dodgers whom we would see. I was learning
more about my town while meeting with him over coffee than I had in years.

After sharing these stories of people we were getting to know, we discussed our
plans for the upcoming meeting. It was going to be at a different venue. Each year in
November, our ministry staff takes thirty-six to forty-eight hours for a retreat. This year,
we were going to include another of our reflection meetings during this retreat. After
discussing logistics, we concluded the meeting at 11 a.m.

November 8 through December 8, 2016

The main goal I wanted to accomplish during the November 21 and 22 program
staff retreat was technical in nature. I wanted us to developed plans for our ministry over
the next one, three, and five years, taking our newly-adopted mission and vision
statements and job descriptions in mind. I knew that in the midst of our adaptive

leadership and our experimenting with new behaviors, we still needed to tend well to the

organizational and programmatic needs of the church.[10]

The details of the retreat that were most relevant for this project included three

things. First, our morning discussion about our goals for the coming years was so

productive that I did not want to cut it short in order to fit in another reflection meeting.

Because of this, I made the decision to postpone our scheduled reflection meeting to a

later time and let our current conversation continue. I made a mistake in that I did not

verbalize this decision until the meeting time was over. Second, part of the conversation

about our goals for the coming year included finding more ways to invite other people

along this journey of discovery that we had been traversing through the fall. Out of those

ideas, I decided to do a seven-week preaching series about our recently-adopted mission

and vision statements. I will outline the results and implications of this preaching series

in Chapter 6. The third pertinent result of this staff retreat was that we decided that we

needed more time together as a program staff on a recurring basis. So beginning in

January of 2017, we decided to change our weekly staff meeting schedule to include a

forty-minute session just with the ministry staff so that we could continue coordinating

and planning ongoing ideas and conversations.

We rescheduled our fourth reflection meeting to Thursday morning, December 8,

at 9:30 a.m. As the meeting date grew closer, I mentioned it to Sara and she said that she

had forgotten about it. She recommended that I send out a text reminder to the group the

day before. I sent a group text, reminding everyone of the meeting the next morning.

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[10] Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 50-59.

Laura responded to the group text, saying that she would be late the next morning and was not sure when she would be able to come. Chris responded to the group text saying that Laura had been late to every meeting thus far, and there was important work that we all needed to do together. Nothing else was said via group texts that night.

The next morning, Gabriel sent me a text about how uncomfortable Chris' text made him feel the night before. I did not want to undermine how Chris was holding Laura accountable, so all I said to Gabriel in response was, "Thanks for letting me know. Also, what kind of donuts do you want me to bring to our meeting this morning?" He gave a short reply that left me feeling as though he wanted me to talk to him more about Chris and the text conversation from the night before. I gave in. I texted him a few of my thoughts: "I did not respond last night because I did not think a group text was a good way to get involved, especially because it was late at night, I had to go. I did not want to be late to the meeting after what happened the night before!" As I reflected on this exchange with Craig in a coaching call, I concluded that I would have been better served with offering only my first comment, but I could not sit with tension that was created by the group members holding each other accountable. This has been another issue I will address at length in Chapter 6.

After the drama of the night before, this was the first meeting where everybody was present on time. Our beginning time was different from normal because Libby asked about the health of a seventeen-year-old church member who was dying of cancer. Being sensitive to the difficult issue, I did not stop the conversation for another ten minutes. I led us in a time of prayer for the young lady and her family. This served as a good mental transition for us to begin our time in Luke 10. After fifteen minutes dwelling in the text,

we were already making more connections to our community experiences and the questions I had provided for the group in a handout.

Being the fourth reflection meeting, I started asking questions that caused the group to test theories about their overall experience or offer some preliminary themes they had begun to notice. Relating back to the command in the text to stay in one place, multiple group members observed that people do not trust us until we spend significant time with them and are willing to be open about ourselves. When they learn that we work at a church, they assume we have an agenda.

These assumptions often were correct about us, too. We surprised ourselves to learn that we often did have expectations or a set agenda with the people we met. Gabriel continued to work on setting his agendas aside when he spent time with college students, while Laura mentioned that it continued to be a challenge to be with people rather than do something for people. She said she was working to change her expectations because her inclination was to do more talking than listening. I shared the story about how I learned that my friend, Greg, had been attending the church where his mother is a member. I was disappointed when I discovered this and I had to process why this was the case. The more I thought about it, I eventually realized that I had secretly been hoping that maybe through the time I was spending with him, he would start coming to our church and would make the perfect example of why we changed our job descriptions. It was a hard realization about myself, and I had to reframe why I was spending time with him. I mentioned the doctrine of the Incarnation again, elaborating that God meets us where we are, and part of our experience of being sent into the world is to meet people on their terms.

December 9 through December 22, 2016

After the December 8 meeting, I was in a quandary. We had one more meeting

planned for December 22, but we needed to make up the meeting that we skipped from

the program staff retreat. Complicating matters, Christmas was approaching, and many of

us were taking significant vacation time after Christmas. With all the major events and

time away, it seemed prudent to finish this project by the end of the year. I did not want

to draw this out any longer than necessary. After all, we had begun meeting at the end of

June. So I decided that the December 22 meeting would be our last meeting. I would

bring all of my concluding questions and try to guide to staff to draft some conclusions

and discern some next steps.

As was the pattern, our meeting was scheduled for a Thursday morning at 9:30

a.m. We all were present and on time, without any issues. The confrontation from the

previous meeting had still maintained its effect. I told the group ahead of time that I was

hoping that this meeting would be our last and that we should be thinking about big-

picture themes and conclusions. Being a busy time of year, we came to the meeting ready

to get down to business. We began in Luke 10 but moved into the reflection questions

after a short time. The first three questions in my handout generated significant

discussion. All three of these questions invited the group to reflect on emerging themes

they might have heard throughout the time in the community and in the previous

meetings.

Sara explained that through her experiences at Hope Sweet Hope and Cross Fit,

she was developing less of an "us verses them" mentality about the community, and that

she was noticing connections between all of the places where she was spending her time. Others of us noticed similar experiences. For example, I had started coming to the men's community small group that Chris had started with the elder from our church. While going one Thursday morning, I met Meredith, one of the other writers in my writers' group. She told me that every Thursday morning she comes to that restaurant to write, and I now see her when meeting with the small group. Similarly, while meeting with Greg for coffee, we met one of Greg's former classmates from high school. While the two reminisced, they mentioned one of their friends, Ernie, who I had worked with at AFES, giving guitar lessons. Meanwhile, Sara had gotten to know Amy, Ernie's sister, through Hope Sweet Hope.

Gabriel mentioned that requiring time spent in the community as part of his job description forced him to get out of his comfort zone. He had to sacrifice some of his time spent playing the piano and organ each day in order to meet other people. He explained that on his own, he never would have taken that step. Chris agreed, noting that his experiences in the men's group and at the Beacon had encouraged him to step out more. Libby agreed, saying that she was challenged as she spent so much time with young elementary-aged children, and she found it challenging that she was unable to talk about her faith at the school. Laura described the experience by saying, "We're going out, whether or not we feel equipped." She thought a bit more and then added, "Maybe this is modeling to the congregation to go try something new."

Steering the conversation toward next steps, I asked the group to reflect how effective they though our efforts were. "Did we actually spend 10 percent of our time in the community? If not, what made it difficult to do this? How should we continue with

these experiments in the future?" Laura was the first to answer, and she said that striving

for 10 percent of her time was her biggest struggle. She said that she did not give up any

of her other job responsibilities to compensate for the time. This would have been a

perfect time for the group to point out how low of a priority this project seemed to her

throughout the experience. But nobody in the group, myself included, mentioned

anything of this sort. Instead of specifically stating "10 percent" in our job descriptions,

Laura suggesting saying something less specific, like "offering a tithe of our time." Libby

said that in the future, she would like to try getting more involved in something else, but

the amount of time was not an issue. Other staff members mentioned that it was a

challenge for them to always maintain 10 percent of their time in the community, but

having the specific number helped them strive for more. I did not decide during the

meeting that we would seek to make any changes to the number in the job description.

Our meeting time was drawing to a close, and although we were naming concrete

ideas we had been learning, there were still many questions I had not been able to bring

to the group. We had done very little work about determining how to report our

experiences with others. I knew that we would have to plan another meeting to discern

next steps, but with Christmas Eve just two days away, the meeting would have to wait

until early 2017. I would need to do some more planning about how to spend time

discerning concrete, actionable next steps.

Discerning Next Steps

With the start of a new year, our staff was going to try some new practices.

Resulting from our staff retreat in November of 2016, we were going to dedicate forty

minutes each Tuesday for time together to work on projects and plan our ministry. This would be a good place to continue the conversation about our community experiments and how we could invite others on the same journey.

One thing I was learning from having lead all of these meetings with the ministry staff is that not only did I need to plan ahead for these meetings, but the more information I could send to staff members ahead of the meeting, the more prepared they would be and the better they could engage the content. Some weeks have been better than others as I have had varying amounts of time leading up to the Tuesday morning staff meetings. Generally, any amount of information I could pass along to the staff ahead of the meeting was helpful, even if it were as simple as, "This coming week, we will talk about creating small groups. Consider the following two questions…"

I went back to the remaining questions from my thesis proposal that we had not addressed and I prioritized the top five questions that would help us draft some concrete steps for our future. I emailed the group a week before the meeting and told them that we would be spending our next meeting time continuing the conversation from the fall of 2016, looking to draft concrete steps. A few days later, I emailed the specific questions that we would consider in our upcoming meeting.

This meeting took place on Tuesday, March 14. I knew we had limited time, so I would need to manage our time closely. I wanted to accomplish three things during our time: I wanted to hear an update on what we had been doing in the beginning of 2017, I wanted to remind the group that we were still maintaining the 10 percent requirement in our job descriptions, and I wanted to come away with some clear steps of what we were going to do next.

Within the first few minutes, I knew that the meeting would be rushed. The group had more stories to share about their experiences in recent months and we easily could have taken the entire meeting time telling those stories. This was a good sign that the group was still engaged in the work, but it became difficult to fit everything in our time together. After cutting the sharing time short, I reminded the group that we still had not changed the 10 percent requirement in our job descriptions, even though our twelve-week experiment was officially over. This part of the discussion did not take long.

We had about fifteen to twenty minutes remaining to discuss possible next steps. Throughout the conversation, the prevailing theme was that we wanted to help church members see that God can use them where they already are. We also discussed that we wanted to find ways to show people how God is already at work around them, rather than write just another report. One person mentioned that the best way to show people is to invite them to come with us and share our experiences. This resonated with us. We had spoken about this back in June of 2016 when we first started using Luke 10 as a template for planning our experiments because Jesus' followers went two-by-two into the towns. We did not implement this at the time because what we were trying was already a big change for us. We did not quite have the planning and forethought to invite others with us.

I shared a story that related to this. In early February, my brother from Tennessee called one evening and asked what I was doing. I had just left teaching guitar lessons at AFES, and I lamented to my brother that I never seemed to have time to teach kids in our church how to play guitar so that they could play in our worship team. Meanwhile, I was teaching kids outside our church. My brother casually suggested, "Why don't you bring

some kids from your church to take the same guitar lessons with the kids you teach at the after school program?" It was such a simple suggestion, but a powerful, tangible way where I could invite people within the church to see what God is doing in our community.

The staff appreciated this story and suggested other tangible ideas. We decided that in our May session meeting, we would center the agenda for the night on showing people where we've been involved in the community and telling stories about what we have learned. Rather than writing another session report, we would take the elders to the places where we have been going. We have not yet worked out all the details of this, but we will continue to plan it out in upcoming Tuesday morning meetings.

In addition, Chris discussed utilizing the skills of our new technology director to film vignettes of church members telling stories about how they experience God in our community. These short videos could be used in the worship service, on our Facebook page, or in our weekly newsletter. In conjunction to this, we discussed using our monthly print newsletter to let each staff member write about their experiences and what they have learned. These all seemed like good, actionable steps to help spread the word about what we have learned.

I also shared my reflections from preaching our seven-week sermon series about our mission and vision[11] from January and February of 2017. The series had a profound impact on me personally. Through all of the study, prayer, and reflection on our vision, Scripture, and the context of our church, I gained a new confidence and passion for where

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[11] See Appendix A for a copy of the Mission and Vision Statements that were approved by session in April of 2016.

the Spirit of God has been leading us. Before the series, I had a loose idea of what our staff and session were trying to articulate through the mission and vision. However, I had not personally internalized the content or discovered the parallels between Scripture and the themes we had included in the document. As a result, I suggested to the staff that after our current sermon series, we could teach a follow-up series about our context in Fort Dodge. A key theme that came out of the mission and vision sermon series was that God is calling us to look at our own context in order to discern how the Holy Spirit is leading us forward as a church.[12] So a natural next step would be to lead the congregation in a journey to study our context. Through a series of maybe four sermons, we could start conversations about issues that our community is facing and create discovery groups based on the themes addressed in the sermons. For example, we could preach one Sunday about the ongoing issues of mental health in our county, and we could form a group of people who would commit to learning more about this issue in our town.

So we came out of the meeting with five follow-up concrete steps from our experiments. We were committing to continue spending 10 percent of our time in the community. We were going to plan our May session meeting around sharing our experiences in the community with our elders. We would help people name how they already see God at work in their everyday lives – video vignettes, newsletter articles, interviewing church members. We would invite church members to participate in our ongoing community experiments with us. We would start a sermon series after Easter naming specific issues in our context while forming exploratory groups to learn about those issues from people in our community.

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[12] Roxburgh, *Missional*, 31-38.

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS FROM THE MINISTRY INTERVENTION

While Chapter 5 described the major events of the ministry intervention as they

transpired, Chapter 6 will explore the project from two perspectives, offering more in-

depth theological reflection. The chapter will first explore three areas of learning from the

staff experiments within the community. Then I will evaluate my adaptive leadership

throughout the ministry intervention by offering three areas of personal learning. This

chapter will refer to events described in Chapter 5, but it will not follow a chronological

order.

Formal Learning from Staff Experiments

Throughout the course of the ministry intervention, the ministry staff engaged in

an ongoing cycle of action and reflection. As we spent time in the community, reflected

on Scripture and on our experiences together, we began to notice themes emerging. I will

highlight three of these themes below.

Theology of the Incarnation – Meeting People Where They Are

In our second reflection meeting held on October 4, 2016, Gabriel mentioned that our experiment was taking him to places where he would not ordinarily go. He was referring to his experience playing piano for a jam night in a local bar. During this conversation, I mentioned that we were doing "incarnational" ministry. In explaining my comment to the group, I emphasized that if we take the doctrine of the Incarnation seriously, we recognize that in Christ, we see God who meets us where we are. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.…" The Message paraphrase makes this imagery of Incarnation even more explicit: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood."[1] Jesus meets us where we are, he stoops to our level, he "condescends," to use the language of Karl Barth.[2] And then in John 20:22, Jesus explains, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." As Jesus moved into the neighborhood to meet us where we are, so we are to do the same.

This is a vital step for our church to understand. Historically, we have opened the doors to our church for various outreach events and wondered why people did not show up. In one instance, when the construction of our Christian Life Center had recently been completed, we distributed paper invitations for a breakfast in our new facility to all neighboring houses. To our dismay, our neighbors did not show up. We have also hosted block party events at our church, and organized games, competitions, entertainment, and meals. Most of the people who came were already church members, and while we did receive some local visitors, none of them have been integrated into the life of the church.

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[1] Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 1916.

[2] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* II/1. (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 354-355.

Through our experiences in the community, we were beginning to discover that an Incarnational understanding of mission requires more than opening the church doors. Only as we were dwelling with other people for extended amounts of time did they begin to trust us. A series of events in my writers' group demonstrate a tangible example of this. Earlier in the fall, the administrator of the public library was having some disputes with the board of directors. The library administrator was the person who had organized the writers' group. So as tension began to rise between him and the board, he shared with the group that his resignation might be forthcoming. Not long after, my friend with whom I had been regularly meeting, Greg, called me. He told me that the administrator had resigned, and Greg wondered if the church would be able to provide space for the writers' group if need be. I said that we would be happy to if that would help the group. That next Saturday, the library administrator informed our group of his upcoming departure and we discussed a way forward for the group. Greg offered the services of our church which the group appreciated. It turned out that we were able to stay at the library in the end. A few things strike me in this scenario. Almost the entire group consisted of atheists and agnostics. Nowhere else in my life during recent years have I been blessed to spend time with so many people who do not have the same assumptions about God and faith as I do. The majority of this group would never step foot in our church under normal circumstances, and during this time, Greg was inviting the group to utilize the resources of the church. Even more, I was in a position to hear the suffering of a friend (the administrator) losing his job, and other friends losing their friend when he would move. As he navigated the challenges of career change and moving out of state, and as the group navigated the challenges of losing a friend, colleague, and mentor, I was able to

walk with these people during these times, and they have come to trust me with real joys and struggles while we have shared our art together. I was only able to have these experiences because Jesus has sent me to dwell in the world just as the Father sent him.

<p style="text-align:center">Reciprocity – Managing our Expectations</p>

The doctrine of the Incarnation means more than we simply meet people where they are in a physical, spatial sense. Dwelling with people involves reciprocity, an engaging with people. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile describe the connection between the incarnation and reciprocity this way: "Nowhere is the theme of reciprocity in relationships more evident than in the incarnation. Incarnation is God's ultimate missional participation in human life. The Word was made flesh in Jesus, and the church as the body of Christ must continue to be enfleshed in every human culture and moment in mission."[3] Therefore, the church does not go and meet people where they are simply as a strategy to proselytize to them. Rather, it goes "bearing the burdens of its neighbors as it participates deeply in the life and struggle of the community into which it is sent and within which it lives."[4]

While we were meeting new people in new environments, we were also learning about our expectations and our willingness to learn from others. Gabriel shared multiple times to the group that he felt frustrated to meet college students who did not have the same passion for music that he had. In reflecting about this experience, he was able to identify this issue with his expectations and has mentioned that managing his

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[3] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 114.

[4] Ibid., 114.

expectations of others has been an ongoing issue for him. Responding to Gabriel's observations about his expectations, I told the group how I, too, was learning about my expectations. Over the course of the fall, I had been spending a significant amount of time with my friend, Greg, from the writers' group. Not only were we talking about story, writing, screenplays, and elements of the craft, but we were getting to know one another better. He shared with me more stories about his reasons for moving back to Fort Dodge and how challenging it was to care for his aging mother. He discussed his faith very openly with me as well, but I had never seen him come to church even though he used to attend a Presbyterian church in Los Angeles. Secretly I hoped that I could be a resource to Greg if his mother were to need care or even pass away. I fantasized that since I had been getting to know him, he would come to me at the event of his mother's death for funeral services and then I could help him connect to the church again. I would then always be able to tell his story as the perfect example to justify why church leadership should spend more time outside of the church walls.

As a result, I was disappointed when one day, he mentioned a sermon he had heard the Sunday before, while attending his mother's church. Explaining his story to me, he said that every week he went to church with his mom. In that humbling moment, I had to cease viewing Greg as a project for evangelism and meet him as a friend. I believe this is why Jesus commanded his followers to "not take a purse, or bag, or sandals" in Luke 10:4. Alan Roxburgh elaborates, "Most of us are trying to figure out all the best, seeker-friendly ways to get someone to *come* to something we are offering. Our plans and what we want to achieve are all-important – another huge piece of baggage, which prevents

our listening to and receiving from the other."[5] This quote exactly describes what I was doing in my friendship with Greg. And I was not the only one doing this. In some ways, we all were bringing our baggage with us into our experiments in the community. This was evident in comments like when Laura lamented that she did not have as many exciting stories from her experiences as compared to others. Even Chris' desire to go somewhere and do something that would make him uncomfortable positioned those he met as objects for his gain.

In contrast to this, Paul Wadell describes in *Becoming Friends* true friendships not as "relationships we control adventures we enter into; indeed friendship is more a surrender than a conquest, more a loss of control than a calculated plan. Friendship is a matter of mutual affection, of reciprocal love, care, and concern…. Every friendship is an adventure, a journey perhaps, that changes us over time, shaping our character, forming our habits…"[6] This level of adventure and risk is a scary thing. Our default way of thinking is that we go out into the world to bless others, to give them the light of Christ they need. The other person does all the changing, and we remain the same. Mission and evangelism should not truly be a dialogical[7] process, we assume, because we already have Christ while others do not.

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[5] Roxburgh, *Missional*, 127.

[6] Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 17.

[7] See Walter Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference: An Invitations to the Contemporary Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 73-94.

Our missional mandate, though, is the way of the cross. Van Gelder and Zscheile point to the kenosis of Philippians 2.[8] As Christ came into the world, he emptied himself on behalf of the world. Jesus, in his power, surrenders his freedom so that humanity might find it. They state further, "…the missional church discovers God's compassionate love for all humanity by participating in the life of the neighbor, not expecting the neighbor to participate in the church's life on the church's terms. The risk in this kind of 'embrace' of the neighbor (especially the neighbor who is a diverse other, or even an 'enemy') is the way of the cross."[9]

This project has elucidated the need for continued growth within the leadership of FPC. It has highlighted the deeply embedded belief of our own superiority and lacking of awareness of what God is already doing in neighborhoods and community around us. As a staff, we are only just beginning to see the incongruence of our expectations for mission and the reality of becoming friends with our neighbors. Furthermore, we have barely begun to understand how our defaults and language influence our behaviors, leadership choices, and abilities to invite others along with us.

<center>Learning New Habits and Behaviors</center>

The aim of the ministry intervention was to help the ministry staff develop the capacity for learning new habits and behaviors. To that end, the entire process was designed as a series of new behaviors. We were to spend our time each week differently, and we were to meet and evaluate what we were learning. Even the way that we decided

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[8] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 114.

[9] Ibid., 115.

on our experiments and the way we reflected upon them was a new set of behaviors.

More specifically, as we set out to spend 10 percent of our time in the community, we

were learning to prioritize our responsibilities and time differently. The way we decided

how we would be in the community involved an extended amount of time together in

prayer, reading and discussing Scripture, and dialoguing with one another. In addition,

our recurring reflection meetings invited us to dedicate significant time together for the

purposes of discovering the leading of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Lastly, we devoted

time to evaluating our work and discerning next steps based on what we had been

learning. Each of these practices was new for us, and they encouraged us to form

innovative habits.

In the midst of these emergent behaviors, old defaults still remained. Our

language houses[10] still existed. So even though we were trying new behaviors, we

continued to engage these new behaviors from our old mindsets. For example, we still

read the Luke 10 instruction largely as an invitation to meet people's needs. As Alan

Roxburgh quotes Samuel Wells and Marcia Owens, "Until we value someone

intrinsically for their own sake, any efforts to 'work for' or even 'work with' another only

reveal that we may be using someone in need as a means toward some further end."[11]

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[10] Roxburgh, *Missional*, 57-64.

[11] Samuel Wells and Marcia A Owens, *Living Without Enemies: Being Present in the Midst of Violence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 38 quoted in Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World*, Kindle: Chapter 8.

Thus, we need to continue as a staff in pursuing practices that challenge our defaults and in reflecting upon those practices[12] in such a way that we can test and experiment with new ideas. Roxburgh further notes that the characteristic of a good experiment "invites us to stretch some (risk) but not too much (security). When both elements are held together, the likelihood for new learning is high."[13] Meanwhile, Dwight Zscheile describes this process in *The Agile Church* by demonstrating that innovation happens through "iterative small experiments..." and "requires a high tolerance for failure."[14] These perspectives are helpful in determining the success of this ministry intervention. While evaluating our overall experience, some members of our group explained that spending 10 percent of their time in the community felt like an extra burden as they did not give up any of their other responsibilities. They found it difficult to step away from their work at the church and dedicate adequate time in the community. This demonstrates that our community experiments were, in fact, calling staff to new behaviors and out of their comfort zones. The challenge, moving forward will be maintaining enough accountability to encourage more experimentation, while also creating a sense of safety so that staff will feel free to risk and fail. The need for ongoing accountability to continue with experimenting in the community leads this paper to the next section: evaluating my adaptive leadership skills throughout the ministry intervention.

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[12] Walter Brueggemann describes how Scripture invites us into a "*counterimagination* of the world." This is helpful in cultivating ongoing practices for continued learning. See *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), Kindle: Chapter 2.

[13] Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World*, Kindle: Chapter 8.

[14] Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 67.

Evaluation of my Adaptive Leadership

Not only has the ministry staff been learning throughout this project, but I have

also learned new insights about myself and the way I lead a team. The insights I have

learned are closely related to the learning of the rest of the staff. This new learning will

be grouped in three sections. I will first describe the ongoing learning about my technical

proficiencies in need of additional development. Then I will discuss what I have been

learning about the importance of maintaining a holding environment. Last, I will explain

what I call "the hero mentality" and how it impacts my leadership.

Strengthening Technical Proficiencies to Develop Trust

In multiple coaching calls with Craig (June 10, 2015 and January 12, 2017), he

quoted Lyle Schaller who popularized the phrase "paying the rent." The point he was

making was that in order to develop trust within the congregation, I needed to pay the

rent – perform the technical aspects of ministry with proficiency. As I would preach well,

be attentive to the pastoral concerns of members, and effectively administrate the staff

and programs of the church, people would begin to trust me enough to lead them with

new initiatives. Another way of describing this image of paying the rent refers to the

language of technical challenges and adaptive challenges. Alan Roxburgh makes this

helpful point.

> What makes this process difficult for organizations and their leaders is that an
> organization continues to face ongoing technical challenges it must address day in
> and day out within existing expertise and structures at the same time as it must
> confront adaptive challenges that can't be addressed in this way….Technical
> challenges continue. Indeed, in organizations facing major adaptive challenges the

need for technical work increases as concerns and anxieties across the organization increase.[15]

As a young lead pastor, still learning about the core mechanics of leadership, I have not only needed to grow in my adaptive leadership skills, but also in my technical leadership capacities. While I suspected this was the case before beginning this ministry intervention, my work in recent months has substantiated this suspicion.

A major growth area in my technical leadership capacities centers around the need to manage myself. More specifically, this project has highlighted the need for me to manage my schedule, my responsibilities, and my energy. Ultimately, I am the only person responsible for my schedule. However, I let other people dictate my schedule too often during this project. Time after time, I would set out to give myself the necessary time for planning meetings or projects but allow other more urgent, but less important, tasks to take precedence. As a result, I would come to meetings unprepared, late, or simply feeling less confident. This often had a dramatic result when the meeting or activity required adaptive leadership skills. While leading a conversation that would have the potential to challenge people's defaults or invite them into a new set of behaviors, there was often a critical need for me to be attentive to the environment, able to take the heat of people's challenged expectations, and remain consistent in what I was creating. Coming to a meeting late, without notes, or feeling flustered often neutered my leadership capacity before I even tried. Further, one of the two central aims of this project was the development of gracious assertiveness. The moments that most often required my assertiveness related to issues of accountability with other staff members. When I felt

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[15] Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, Kindle: Chapter 10.

unprepared or unconfident, I was nearly inept at holding other staff accountable, and therefore, unable to develop gracious assertiveness.

To be clear, this deficiency is not necessarily a lack of planning and organizing my time. Rather, I need to exert gracious assertiveness in maintaining the plans and schedules I establish for myself. When someone wants to chat in my office for twenty minutes, that time is gone, and so was the opportunity I had given myself to put together an outline for an upcoming meeting. Granted, I could spend that much more time in the office to do that planning, but this is not always possible or advisable. In addition, I might still have the time needed to get the planning done, but it might be at a less ideal time where I would be less productive or mindful of the work that needs to happen.

To illustrate this point further, pages fifty-three through fifty-six of this paper outline a specific process for guiding the ministry staff to evaluate and select experiments for the ministry intervention. The process provides ample details of how I planned to lead these meetings. However, when I actually planned and lead these meetings, I did give myself the time to thoroughly review this plan. As a result, I did not instruct the staff to decide which portions of their current job description they would have to deemphasize in order to create enough margin so that they would be able to utilize 10 percent of their work time for community experiments. Consequently, when evaluating our ability to implement experiments within the community, Laura, Libby, and Sara complained about the ongoing challenge they had in finding the time to be in the community.

Not only did my lack of self-management hinder my ability to plan ahead, but it also prevented me from spending adequate time reflecting on events after they transpired. This, too, was a vital component of the work of the project. Chapter 3 outlined the praxis

cycle, indicating the relationship between action and reflection. Without adequate reflection, I was not able to appropriately plan even when I did give myself the time to do so.

Throughout the ministry intervention, this growth area most impacted my adaptive leadership of the ministry staff and the elder board. In order to continue leading both of these groups of people on a journey of discovering a new missional imagination, I need to manage myself more strictly. If I fail to do this, those who are closest to me will not develop the trust needed to continue on this journey with me. Tod Bolsinger, in *Canoeing the Mountains*, describes this idea by saying, "Before people will follow you off the map, gain the credibility that comes from demonstrating competence on the map."[16]

In recent months, I have learned something about myself that can potentially help with this even though it does not address the core issue. Through preaching a seven-week sermon series about our newly revised mission and vision statements, I became more confident about the work that is before us as a congregation. The act of preaching requires me to spend multiple hours each week in conversation with others, in study of Scripture, and also in reflection about the words I use to describe a topic. This can be a helpful tool for me in the future. If I choose sermon topics or passages that will help me to reflect on the ongoing issues before our church, I will have a built-in time each week to reflect on some of the leadership issues before me. I plan to utilize this strategy in the late spring of 2017 as a way to keep me thinking about the leadership work in front of me.

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[16] Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 53.

Managing the Holding Environment

Also related to the goal developing gracious assertiveness is the idea of managing

the holding environment. Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky define this term in *Leadership*

on the Line. They define this term as "a space formed by a network of relationships

within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying

apart."[17] Managing this holding environment includes what Heifetz and Linsky call

"control[ling] the temperature."[18] This is done by either turning up the heat or cooling

down the temperature within a group. They discuss how to control the temperature in

depth by discussing two related leadership tasks: giving the work back to the group and

holding steady when the heat rises.[19]

Managing the holding environment proved to be an ongoing challenge for me. I

found this challenge for three reasons. First, I did not always know when and how to

effectively give the work to the rest of the group. Second, I did not consistently hold staff

members accountable throughout the process. And last, I did not always live with the heat

when the group was engaging adaptive work.

Elaborating on the subject of giving the work to the group, I struggled to

distinguish what my responsibilities were and as opposed to those of the rest of the staff.

For example, when working with the ministry staff to develop a plan for how we would

communicate what we have been learning to our session, I was unsure of how much work

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[17] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 102-107.

[18] Ibid., 107-116.

[19] Ibid., 123-160.

I should do before the meeting. Was my responsibility simply to draft a series of questions that would direct the group in a process of creating a plan during that meeting? Should I have brought a preliminary outline of possible ways to communicate our findings so that the staff would have something concrete to work with during the meeting? I went back and forth with this decision because I felt that offering an outline was doing too much work for the group, while coming with a list of questions and hoping that we could do the planning work during the meeting was not enough for us to actually produce something. Ultimately, I created a hybrid of the two approaches. I utilized the questions I had proposed in this project while also offering a sparse outline with some suggestions to get the group going. This approach is not what I would have done six months ago. Then I would have come only with questions and assumed the group could produce something in the meeting. During these last six months, however, I have begun to see that offering something to get the group started can help yield tangible results. I still doubt myself when making these types of decisions.

My doubting is due partly to the fact that I still frequently do not give myself adequate time to plan and reflect, as stated above. It is also due to a reality that Craig described in a coaching call on February 2, 2017. Speaking facetiously, Craig told me, "You second-guess yourself more than anybody else I know." I believe this could be because of what Craig described on November 15, 2015 in a meeting with me, when he said, "In a time when you needed constructive experiences, you went through a process of deconstruction." I am still processing this deconstruction and discerning what I believe.

The second way I struggle in managing the holding environment has to do with accountability. Throughout the ministry intervention, I struggled to hold staff accountable. For example, Laura was late to three meetings in a row, and I did basically nothing. It was not until she was going to be significantly late for the fourth meeting in a row that Chris finally was so frustrated that he spoke up. Additionally, when Laura changed her community experiment, the group did not hold her accountable, and I did not bring it up during the group meeting to even give the group a chance to offer accountability. Further, at the end of the community experiments, I did not state plainly that we would continue spending time in the community until the next meeting, two months later.

The reasons for this lack of accountability are multi-faceted. As stated above, when I fail to properly plan, I do not feel adequately prepared and confident, so I am less likely to provide accountability. Also, holding others accountable would mean that I would need to hold myself to those same standards, and sometimes I fail to hold others accountable so that I do not have to hold myself accountable. Third, I struggle with holding Laura accountable more than any of the other ministry staff. This is because she is the only other staff member who worked with me before I became the lead pastor. She still remembers working alongside me in a way that none of the other staff do. This is significant, and the dynamic is exacerbated because Laura is a generation older than me, and she is the oldest member of the ministry staff. She has struggled with my leadership for quite some time, and I have struggled to exercise my leadership with her. It is a dynamic that I have brought to the personnel ministry team, and it needs further,

immediate attention. Lastly, I struggle to hold staff accountable because I struggle to live with heat that comes with adaptive leadership.

Heifetz and Linsky explain, "Changing the status quo generates tension and produces heat by surfacing hidden conflicts and challenging organizational culture. It's a deep and natural human impulse to seek order and calm, and organizations and communities can tolerate only so much distress before recoiling…. Of course, you can't expect the group to tolerate more distress than you can stand yourself."[20] The text conversation I had with Gabriel on the morning after Chris held Laura accountable is an example of when I did not manage the thermostat of the holding environment effectively. I did not hold steady under heat. Gabriel felt uncomfortable when members of the group were holding each other accountable. He brought that anxiety to me. My first impulse was to thank Gabriel for his input and just absorb his anxiety. But then I did what Craig has called "a gut check" and applied ameliorative efforts to lesson the heat. Craig has suggested that I do a "gut check on my gut checks" (conversation on February 25, 2016) to make sure that I hold steady when tempted to ease the pressure in those leadership moments.

One way that I can make progress with managing the holding environment is with the practice of naming. Craig pointed this out to me in a phone conversation on December 19, 2016. He noted how I was beginning to do this in our staff reflection meetings. As Gabriel was reflecting on his expectations and how students were not meeting them, he was modeling the kind of reflection that can begin to challenge defaults. Laura offered similar comments when she reflected on the challenges she had

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[20] Ibid., 107-108.

with developing patience and doing more listening than talking. This, too, was a powerful

insight that had the potential to help her notice her defaults. Chris also offered a valuable

reflection to the group when he observed that the story of many of the men at the Beacon

mirrored his own story. He said he could see himself in the men he was meeting. Chris

was beginning to experience reciprocity with his relationships. All three of these

examples were good opportunities for me to name the learning that was happening. The

group members were doing the learning, and I could help the group as a whole identify

the learning that was taking place. This practice serves as an example of letting the group

do the work while also holding the group accountable to learn new insights.

Letting Go of the Hero Mentality

In his book, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World*, Alan

Roxburgh describes a "misdirecting narrative" within the church that he calls

"clericalism."[21] This narrative of clericalism maintains that the ordained clergy are the

primary operatives within the church. "Clergy has been trained, ordained, hired, and paid

by the church, so they naturally see themselves as responsible for addressing the

unraveling. They are driven by the belief – and the external expectation – that they need

to have the answers…. Even when they don't know how… most clergy feel this burden

to fix."[22] Roxburgh describes a default within myself that I have been working to

overcome for multiple years now. Deeply imbedded within my view of ministry is the

narrative that I am the one God has called to fix the issues within my church. Over the

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[21] Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World*, Kindle, Chapter 3.

[22] Ibid., Kindle, Chapter 3.

past two years of talking with Craig, I have come to identify that I need to put to death the idolatrous belief that God will use me to bring FPC back to the glory days.

Over the course of this ministry intervention, I recognized this narrative in multiple ways. The most pronounced way I noticed this clergy-centric narrative at work in me happened when Chris began a community men's small group with one of our elders, Josh. Both Josh and Chris work out at the same Cross Fit gym, and they have regular conversations about their faith, our church, and our community. The two of them connected one day about their mutual desire to have a place where they could meet with other men and talk about faith in an open atmosphere, where men of all walks of life would feel comfortable to share and support one another. They talked about this desire for weeks and came up with a plan to start meeting at a local restaurant and invite their friends. They invited friends from the gym, from the Beacon, and anywhere else they had connections. The group started in November and now has roughly twelve guys attending each week. Chris coordinated with Sara to use adult education resources for purchasing study materials for the group. So, in a way, the group is sponsored and supported by the church, but it was not a church initiative. Less than half of the participants are members of our church. The rest either do not associate with a particular church or had not been strongly connected to their church.

This experience brought to light two different occasions where I noticed my need to be the church fixer. As the group got started, I began to think to myself, "Why did I not start a group like this? I am the pastor, after all. Chris is our business administrator. Organizing men's groups is not part of his job description." Meanwhile, I had failed to acknowledge the dramatic shift that was taking place before my eyes. Just a year before

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the formation of this group, Josh had told me in a session meeting that leadership in the church and vision had to come from me, as the pastor. He did not feel that it was his job as an elder to come up with that.[23] And yet here he was, just one year later, working with a church staff member on his own initiative to discover God at work around him in the lives of other men. This work could only happen solely because it was an area of passion for Chris and Josh; it would not have flourished if I had created a church small group initiative.

I also encountered my need to be the hero of our church in this same men's group when I heard the story of a man named Mitch. He started coming to the small group right as it began because Josh invited him. He has come just about every week since, and we will likely never see him join FPC, show up on a Sunday morning, or contribute to the general fund. The cynical, ecclesiocentric side of me recognizes that whatever good may be happening in his life, it will not positively impact the ministry of our church. However, his story has challenged my clergy-centric hero mentality. One Thursday morning when I attended the group, he discussed the impact of his time meeting with the other men. He said that he knew he had been distant from God, and coming to the group helped give him the encouragement he needed to re-engage at his church. He is a Catholic and has attended mass with his wife every week since he began coming to the small group. He is more involved in his church than he ever has been, he is experiencing God's presence in his life, and the other men in the group see it. This movement of God's Spirit is happening whether I initiate it or not, and it has humbled me.

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[23] The *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II: Book of Order*, (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2015), G -3.0201 states otherwise. It says, "The session shall have the responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness."

More indirectly, I experienced this clergy-centric narrative throughout the ministry intervention. For example, while playing guitar with the kids that I thought I would never see at our church, I often wondered, "Is this the best use of my time?" When I would discover that the potential benefit to our church was low, I was tempted to move on from the people I was with, like when I learned that my friend, Greg, was going to his mother's church and I was disappointed. When some of the people whom Chris met at the Beacon started showing up at church, in cynicism, I would think, "It is great they are here, but they will not help pay our bills." All of these reflexive thoughts demonstrate that I still have saddled myself and let the church saddle me with the responsibility of maintaining the longevity of the church while it is under my watch.

In contrast to my ongoing narrative, Craig Van Gelder describes the ministry of the church as requiring "the transforming power of God working through the agency of the Spirit. The holiness of the church is a work of the Spirit. It is the Spirit's power that indwells the community and its members. It is the Spirit who draws, leads, guides, teaches, counsels, and provokes the church into living by a redeemed set of values."[24] There is still more learning that I need to do in this area, not only for myself, but also with other church leaders. In the future, the more I can do to highlight how God is using other people and initiatives, the more potential people will have to discover how the Spirit of God is at work in and around them.

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[24] Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 118.

CONCLUSION AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

This project began by describing the ministry context of First Presbyterian Church. The church has been experiencing a sustained onslaught of discontinuous change. As lead pastor, I too, have been inundated with myriad changes at all levels of my life. The result of the past decade of both personal and church-wide change has been significant. Despite previous efforts, I have been unable to effectively lead this church through the adaptive challenges before us. The central aim of this ministry intervention was to create a plan that would develop my capacity to lead people on a journey of discovering a new missional imagination.

The ministry intervention drew upon theories of change management, Biblical narratives of displacement and mission, the development of missional theology, and the dynamics of adaptive leadership. More specifically, the changes happening in the context of FPC Fort Dodge suggest that the Spirit of God may be inviting this church into a new reality. Scripture describes how God is often the most at work when people experience disruption and are forced to depend on the hospitality of others. Forsaking their baggage, the church is called to meet people where they are and participate in the mission of a God who sends. This sending requires the church to embrace new habits and practices and calls the church into a new reality that often involves loss and change. Leading the church into this process requires me, as the lead pastor, to also develop new habits and practices. This adaptive leadership invites the church and invites me to participate in an ongoing cycle of experimentation and reflection, continually discerning where God's Spirit is leading. The scope of this project included one full cycle of reflection, action, and reflection again.

Therefore, in order to develop a sense of gracious assertiveness, I sought to invite the ministry staff on a journey of discovering a new missional imagination through a three-month action-learning experiment. I led the ministry staff in process of discerning how we could spend 10 percent of our work time in the community, partnering with people so that we might learn from then. We used Luke 10:1-12 as a guiding framework for the creation of our experiments; and after three meetings together, we decided how we would spend our time in the community.

Over the next three months, our experiments took us to the local community college music program, a high school music classroom, a local coffee shop, a writers' group in the public library, a local men's shelter, a women's recovery art studio, an after-school youth center, an intentional coffee shop community, a local restaurant, a Cross Fit gym, and an elementary school. In these diverse settings, we hoped to see God at work, learn more about our community, and learn more about ourselves.

Throughout this three-month experiment, we regularly met as a staff to share stories about what we were learning and to reflect on our experiences. These meetings were also an opportunity for me to gain adaptive leadership skills as I aimed to provide a space for ongoing learning and accountability. During these meetings, our group explored several themes that became increasingly apparent. We began to learn that God's sending of the church requires that we meet people where they are. Although this is a physical meeting of people where they reside, it also means that we set aside our own expectations for people. As the Father sent Jesus into the world, the Triune God has sent the church. The way Jesus was sent required a kenosis, an emptying of self. We, too, are called to empty ourselves, leave our baggage behind, and engage our neighbors as equals. Over the

course of the three months, we began to see that incarnational ministry – meeting people where they are – as difficult and required changes in defaults, attitudes, and behaviors.

Thus, at the end of the three-month experiment, there is still more work to be done. The ministry staff continues to spend time in the community and still has more learning to do. Together, we are working to invite more people on the journey we have begun. We have created preliminary plans to show the board of elders what we have been learning, to create several learning teams that will focus on researching various issues within the town of Fort Dodge, and to help people discover how God is already at work in their everyday lives through sharing stories in various venues.

I also have more work to continue. This ministry intervention has demonstrated the ongoing need to ruthlessly defend my own time for effective planning and reflection. Without this planning, I will be unable to hold others accountable and to lead with gracious assertiveness. The mission and vision that our church has implemented creates a posture for learning and discovery. It is my responsibility to be the vigilant defender of this posture through ongoing community experiments and sustaining practices for group reflection and testing of new ideas. This will require me to hold steady under pressure, both internal and external, to be the primary fixer in the church. Instead of fixing, I will need to maintain the holding environment, enabling others to discover God's continued leading.

In addition to this learning, there are real stories of lives changed because of the leading of the Holy Spirit through this experiment. An elder has a renewed passion and sense of ownership of his faith. A father's faith has been rekindled and he participates in the life of his congregation with his family. A homeless alcoholic has found a community

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in our church, a job as our custodian, addiction support through twelve step groups, and has most recently secured an apartment. Another family has started coming to FPC on a weekly basis, participating in Bible studies. Most poignant, the wife in this family said of our church one day, "I used to think that First Presbyterian Church was just a rich country club, but when I saw how much you cared about the community, how the staff members were required to spend time outside of the church, I saw a different side of the church."

APPENDIX

FPC Mission ~ KNOWING CHRIST AND MAKING HIM KNOWN
God is calling First Presbyterian Church of Fort Dodge, Iowa to:
- **Encounter**
  - By living our lives within our community, partnering with our neighbors so that we might see God at work
  - By seeking out, building relationships with, and blessing those who have not yet experienced the saving grace of Jesus Christ
- **Empower**
  - By caring for the spiritual and physical needs of all our members and all the persons with whom God brings us into contact
  - By growing as disciples of Jesus Christ through the practices of prayer, Bible study, and devotional time
  - By engaging in fellowship as we encourage one another to grow spiritually so that each person identifies, develops, and uses their spiritual gifts in ministry
  - By proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and Bible study in order for lives to be transformed

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FPC Vision ~ The Spirit of God is leading First Presbyterian Church in its next chapter of ministry to respect important traditions while cultivating a culture that equips all of God's people to love others deeply, build relationships and participate more fully in God's mission in their daily lives within the ever changing circumstances of Fort Dodge and beyond.

Key Guidelines for Partnering with God to Pursue this Vision
- **Stewarding Our Core Ministries**: We will steward well our core ministries while we work to adapt them to respond to the changing needs within our church and our larger community.
- **Willingness to Risk and Experiment:** We will engage in God-ordained risks for the sake of the Kingdom through experimentation in trying new ways to address changes taking place.
- **Every Member in Ministry**: We will increase member involvement within our ministry at all levels, with staff working primarily to recruit, train, and empower these persons to lead.
- **Balancing Inward and Outward**: We will work at achieving more balance in the time and effort we invest in serving our members with that we use to engage our larger community.
- **Learning to Engage With Others**: We will actively engage persons in our larger community not presently served by the church in ways that listen to, walk with, and learn from them as we bear witness to the good news of the gospel. We seek to meet people where they are.

- **Discerning God's Continued Leading:** We will continually evaluate our ministry environment for places where God appears to be at work both in our church and within our larger community, and then act to align our ministry with these movements of the Spirit.

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