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# The Journey of How Fourth Reformed Church is Becoming an Externally Focused Ministry

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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

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THE JOURNEY OF HOW FOURTH REFORMED CHURCH IS BECOMING AN AGENT OF  
CHANGE FOR THE COMMUNITY

Written by

JOSE ANTONIO MACIAS

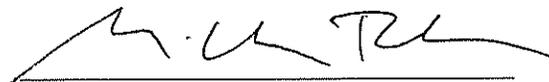
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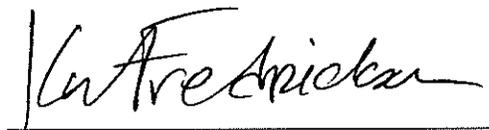
Doctor of Ministry

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upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



Soong-Chan Rah



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THE JOURNEY OF HOW FOURTH REFORMED CHURCH IS BECOMING AN  
AGENT OF CHANGE FOR THE COMMUNITY

A MINISTRY FOCUS PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JOSE ANTONIO MACIAS  
JANUARY 2018



## ABSTRACT

### **The Journey of How Fourth Reformed Church is Becoming an Externally Focused Ministry**

Jose Macias

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2018

In Paul's missionary trips to Corinth, his ability to connect with the multicultural community in Corinth, and his letters to the Corinthian church, we can understand the meaning of crossing cultures when working in a multicultural setting. Though Paul crossed cultural and religious barriers in other places, the multicultural background of Corinth gives us an example of what it means to cross cultures. Paul not only became a messenger of the good news, but also an agent of transformation. Similarly, Fourth Reformed Church has listened to God's call to cross cultural barriers to point the members of the community to the only one who can save them—Christ.

By understanding the Corinthian community and what Paul confronted there, we find the groundwork to work interculturally in a multicultural context. By becoming all things to all people, Paul created a path in which the cultures involved had the opportunity to understand and learn from each other. While God, through Paul's writings, is calling Fourth Reformed Church to become all things to all people, he is not calling it to do it all at once. Also, Paul outlines some limitations to guard against the danger of losing ourselves in the process.

Today, in the same way God called Paul, he is calling Fourth Reformed Church to become agents of change and transformation for its community. Through Paul's work, all those involved can gain a new identity in Christ. Fourth Reformed Church has understood the need of taking new steps in which we, like Paul, will learn how to live with those around us. Finally, through Paul, God is asking us to surrender our religious background, our expectations, our understanding of who he is, and the way we communicate to fully become intercultural human beings while living and working in a multicultural world.

Content Reader: Dr. Soong-Chan Rah

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I would like to extend my foremost gratitude to God almighty, the giver of life. He has made himself present during good and so good times in my life.

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In like manner, I want to thank my mother. She has always been a dedicated woman to her husband and family. Love you Mom.

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PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## INTRODUCTION

As a child, I always dreamt of becoming a civil engineer. After I graduated from high school, I enrolled in the university that I believed was going to give me the necessary tools to become one. Although building actual bridges did not turn out to be what I would do in life, I did become interested in building other types of bridges. The more sophisticated the bridge, the more interested I am in finding out how to build it. As a pastor, I see the value in building bridges between people.

During the year I spent at university, I learned the importance of studying the land before even making the plans for how a bridge should be built. As part of one class, we took field trips to study the land, its surroundings, and how to build a bridge that would benefit the community. We took our transit levels, walked the land, made graphs, and then decided what kind of materials to use. While technology has replaced those tools, engineers still need to study the land before building a bridge.

Webster's dictionary defines a bridge as a structure carrying a pathway or roadway over a depression or obstacle. In other words, a bridge eliminates the need to deal with the obstacles between two ends. While a bridge is a physical concept, it can also serve as a spiritual metaphor—where the cleft or obstacle separating two desired ends are not physical impurities of the geography, but a separation or disconnect in culture or lifestyle.

In the context of navigating different cultures, the Apostle Paul has been called a bridge builder.<sup>1</sup> Using Paul's model, this project examines how what Paul experienced in Corinth has given the Church today a path to follow in order to build a bridge between Fourth Reformed Church and its surrounding community. Note that Paul has given an example of a path, and not the only possible path, for how to build these intercultural bridges. In the same way that Roman engineers studied the land for Corinth to be built, years later Paul also took time to understand the Corinthian community to build the Corinthian church. Paul used his knowledge, background, education, and language skills to present Christ to the Corinthians in a way they were able to understand.

In Paul's missionary trips to Corinth, his ability to connect with the multicultural community, and his letters to the Corinthian church, basis can be found for understanding the importance of identifying and engaging with different communities when working in a multicultural setting. Paul crossed cultural and religious differences to most effectively preach the gospel in Corinth.<sup>2</sup>

By becoming all things to all people (1 Cor 9:19-23), Paul created opportunities for many cultures to understand and to learn from each other. Furthermore, by understanding what Paul confronted in Corinth, Fourth Reformed Church has been able to establish a ground work to work interculturally in the multicultural context that surrounds it. Today, in the same way God called Paul, he is calling Fourth Reformed

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 432; and *Christian College, Christian Calling: Higher Education in the Service of the Church*, eds. Steve Wilkens, Paul Shrier, and Ralph P. Martin (Landham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005), 70.

<sup>2</sup> I believe that while Paul crossed cultural boundaries in other places, due to the multicultural background of Corinth, this is the best example by which to learn from Paul the meaning of crossing cultures.

Church to be a bridge for people of all backgrounds to gain a new identity in Christ. In order for churches to survive in the United States and its ever-changing communities, they must take steps to learn how to live with those who are different from their own congregational makeup.

The main goal of this project is to use Paul's experience in Corinth, to create new venues, or adjust the present ones, for Fourth Reformed Church to become a church through which its neighbors' lives are transformed. To do this, Fourth Reformed Church needs to gain basic knowledge of the Corinthian community, what Paul confronted there, and some of the similarities between the community that surrounds the church and Corinth. It is also vital for the church to gain a deeper knowledge of the community that surrounds it. In the same manner Paul crossed different cultural and religious barriers to preach the gospel in Corinth, the members of Fourth Reformed Church need to engage in a different type of ministry to the community with the end goal of introducing others to Jesus Christ. Just as a civil engineer studies the landscape to build a bridge on which traffic can pass in both directions, Fourth Reformed Church has taken time to study its surroundings. Even when some ground work has already been done, the church plans to officially begin this journey on the fall of 2008. The church will engage in a yearlong journey to find the groundwork to bridge the gap between the surrounding cultures.

Another aim of this project is to help Fourth Reformed Church gain tools to be more prepared when engaging in a multicultural community. Paul has left us an inheritance regarding how to become whatever we need to become in order for some to be saved. Overall this project will examine the historical perspective of Paul's context and the practical application of his work in today's ministry.

Part one focuses on the historical and cultural context of the community that surrounds Fourth Reformed Church. It also explains its founding, and some of the cultural changes that the church and city have undergone. Additionally, this section examines some of the challenges Fourth Reformed Church has confronted in order to follow God's call to serve its community.

Part two looks at the importance for Fourth Reformed Church to follow Paul's path of being able to communicate with the Corinthian community. Additionally, the section examines the importance of Paul being a transformative presence in Corinth. Finally, it concludes with what Paul's life and writings mean for Fourth Reformed Church in its current ministry context.

Part three concludes the project by discussing the goals and plans for Fourth Reformed Church to become a live presence in the ministry to the community. This section includes a twelve-month plan, as well as an assessment of the implications for doing life changing ministry. It addresses the implementation process the church plans to follow and ends with the presentation of the project's result to the congregation.

## CHAPTER 1

### COMMUNITY AND MINISTRY CONTEXT

When Paul encountered the Corinthian community for the first time, he found a multicultural city in which people from different backgrounds, beliefs, and languages lived. Similarly, the present Church in the United States is slowly and gradually becoming more multicultural. Many churches, including Fourth Reformed Church, have been listening to God's call to cross cultural barriers in order to point others to Christ.

One of the aims of this chapter is to understand some similitudes between what Paul encountered at Corinth and what Fourth Reformed Church is being confronted with. To do this, this chapter discusses part of the history of Holland, Michigan. In like manner, it examines the birth of the Mexican people and how Mexicans see Paul and Jesus as one of their own. Another objective is to understand part of the history of Fourth Reformed Church, its beginnings, its neighborhood, and some of the challenges the congregation is facing. Later, the chapter explains some of the steps the congregation is making in order to embrace people from a Mexican background, to make them feel welcomed and loved. Lastly, this project addresses the difference between being and doing and how this has influenced the way the church interacts now with its neighbors.

## Historical Context and Social Analysis

In their book *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, Joe Holland and Peter Henriot address the importance of taking time to look at our surroundings before acting.<sup>3</sup> According to Holland and Henriot, social analysis “examines causes, probes consequences, delineates linkages, and identifies actors. It helps make sense of experiences by putting them into a broader picture and drawing connections between them.”<sup>4</sup> Once the first steps are made, Christians are called to a theological reflection of the things learned. These steps are necessary in order to make the best plan of action. In other words, the role of social analysis is not to provide a blueprint for action, but to help in the study of our communities for a blueprint to be made. In other words, “Social analysis is to social strategy what diagnosis is to treatment.”<sup>5</sup> In like manner, John Fuder underscores the importance of taking the time to know the communities Christians are trying to reach before being able to deliver the good news. He calls this practice “exegeting your community.”<sup>6</sup>

Being able to connect to people in ways they can understand plays an important role when trying to communicate the gospel. As John Fuder and Noel Castellanos advice, when trying to make a difference in the community, “invest in building relationships first

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<sup>3</sup> Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J., *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Washington, DC: Orbis, 1980).

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

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>6</sup> See John Fuder, “Exegeting your Community: Using Ethnography to Diagnose Needs,” in *A Heart for the Community: New Models for Urban and Suburban Ministry*, eds. John Fuder and Noel Castellanos (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009) for his explanation of Lingenfelters’ ethnography, his designation of Paul as somebody who exegete the communities he entered, and how this can be used to study communities before bringing the good news to them.

before asking anybody to do anything, especially when you suspect the request may be outside of their comfort zone.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, to become like others, Christians need to acquire knowledge about the other culture in order to make ourselves at home in it. Once this step has been accomplished, believers can be able to cross cultures in order to bring the good news.

In like manner, Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz also highlight the importance of talking to people in a language they are able to understand.<sup>8</sup> This very practice played an important role in spreading the gospel in the past. In like manner, Conn and Ortiz write how during the first two centuries of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world the language spoken was Greek. Furthermore, they explain how Greek “was not the language of the classical world but the language of the urban marketplace.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, from the beginning of Christianity, to use common people’s language was important for the gospel to be understood. However, it may take some time to be able to understand the culture to which people is called to bring the good news before being able to function in it. Social analysis does not happen overnight, but rather it takes time to know our surroundings.

### **Beginnings**

In 146 BCE, Corinth was invaded by the Roman General Mummius. Mummius killed the male population and sold the women, children, and freepersons into slavery.

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<sup>7</sup> Fuder, "Exegeting Your Community," 62.

<sup>8</sup> Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

G.D.R. Sanders notes that Corinth then became a ghost town occupied by a small non-Corinthian population who mainly farmed the land.<sup>10</sup> However, in 44 BCE, the city was re-founded by Julius Caesar as a colony for 12,000 to 16,000 colonists.<sup>11</sup> David Romano writes how the possibility existed that before the city was occupied, “Roman agrimensores had visited the site on one or more occasions in order to prepare the way for the arrival of the colonists.”<sup>12</sup> As part of their job, they had to set the limits of the city and divide it into urban and rural sections using the Flavian system.<sup>13</sup>

David Romano also mentions how allotments of land were distributed as part of the new Roman colony. In fact, “Roman colonies typically were well planned, and Corinth was not the exception in this regard.”<sup>14</sup> Romano adds that some of the new colonists could also have been “Sikyonians or relocated citizens of other neighboring cities.”<sup>15</sup> Bookidis agrees with Romano that perhaps some of the new colonists were Sikyonians since they were neighbors to the site of the new Corinthian city. It is also a possibility, Bookidis observes, that slaves that had worked in the construction of the canal at Corinth were given their freedom along with plots of land. However, Romano

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<sup>10</sup> G.D.R. Sanders, “Urban Corinth: An Introduction,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Daniel N. Showalter and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> David Gilman Romano, “Urban and Rural Planning in Roman Corinth,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Daniel N. Showalter and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>13</sup> “The Flavian system is characterized by a fan-shaped grid that is divided into ten different oriented units in the plain immediately to the south of the Corinthian Gulf.” See Romano, “Urban and Rural,” 48.

<sup>14</sup> Romano, “Urban and Rural Planning,” 26.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 53.

and Bookidis agree that besides this, there is not much information about who these new colonists really were except that it was a diverse mix of people.

Entertainment was also important for the Roman colonies. An amphitheater and a circus were included in planning the city. These would have been used in different ways during Roman festivities. In addition, many scholars have agreed that the Corinthian community was formed mainly of a mix of different cultures and backgrounds, which included freed slaves, free Roman citizens, and Roman veterans.<sup>16</sup> As a Roman colony, Corinth worshiped many gods and goddesses.

Location has always been important to commercial success and this held true for Corinth. Corinth's four harbors played an important role for the commerce of the city. Its location and ports helped facilitate the easy spread of Christianity. According to Richard Sennett, "The cities in which Christianity first took root were small, mostly centers of trade within the Empire."<sup>17</sup>

Corinth was re-founded as a Roman colony. As such, the city was a polytheistic place in which different gods and goddesses were worshipped. Corinth's location made it easy for travelers to visit the city and later for the Gospel to spread as well.

### ***Mestizos***

On October 12, 1492, Christopher Columbus stepped down for the first time in a land that later became known as the Americas. After the Spaniards conquered the land,

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<sup>16</sup> See also Nancy Bookidis, "Religion in Corinth: 146 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Daniel N. Showalter and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 151.

<sup>17</sup> Sennett, *Flesh and Stone*, XX.

they started integrating the Native Americans/Indians<sup>18</sup> as part of their settlements and daily life. In these communities, conquerors with more power and higher education would look down on the natives as if they were animals. Justo Gonzalez tells us how “The Spanish wanted little to do with the Indians as human beings. They even debated if the Indians had souls.”<sup>19</sup> However, some of the conquerors decided to mix with the natives, giving birth to a new people group called *mestizos*.

The *mestizo* culture developed its own characteristics, rules, and ways of life. Hispanics, a *mestizo* culture, have developed as a unique culture as well. As missionaries arrived in the new land, they saw an opportunity to introduce the native groups to God. However, they presented him in the figure of a person who did not look or speak like them. As the missionaries started the discipleship journey, they introduced many of the Indians to a God that was different than the indigenous people were in every aspect. Consequently, the indigenous people inferred that God was not one of them.

The *mestizo* community grew up realizing that they were seen as “a threat to both its parent cultures.”<sup>20</sup> For centuries, the *mestizo* culture had to struggle with acceptance inside and outside the parent communities and cultures. Furthermore, the *mestizos* who did not share the community’s beliefs were seen as outsiders in yet another aspect. Consequently, there was, and is, a sub-culture of *mestizos*. On the one hand, there are the

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<sup>18</sup> The term *Indians* was born out of the belief that Christopher Columbus had reached India.

<sup>19</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 85.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

ones who left their communities and tried to integrate into the broader culture. They gave up their language and customs to adapt to the new ones.

On the other hand, there are those who, regardless of their lighter skin, higher education and different beliefs, had to fight to be accepted in their communities. They had to prove to others that even though they were *mestizos*, they still were part of the wider community. Even in modern times, the Mestizo culture still suffers oppression and rejection from the broader communities. A recent example of this, is how as President Donald Trump was a candidate for the U.S. presidency, he said, when referring to Mexican immigrants, that “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” He added, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best, they’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”<sup>21</sup> As we can see, *mestizos* still suffer oppression and rejection from the Anglo community.

### **Paul and Jesus: Cultural *Mestizos***

Centuries passed until the *mestizo* community started seeing the stories of the Bible in a new way. When rejected *mestizos* started listening to Bible stories in their own language about Jesus, Moses, Paul, and others, they identified with them. They saw in those stories the same kind of rejection and persecution they suffered. For example, Paul was from Cilicia, and Cilicia was a Hellenistic city. The Jews who lived there were

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<sup>21</sup> Time. “Here are All the Times Donald Trump Insulted Mexico,” accessed March 15, 2018, <http://time.com/4473972/donald-trump-mexico-meeting-insult/>

suspected of not being true followers of the law. According to Gonzalez, the Hellenistics were “people from the Diaspora who have been influenced by pagan culture and customs.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Conn and Ortiz write how “The Essenes described the Hellenistic cities as an ‘infectious germ,’ an unclean world they sought to avoid.”<sup>23</sup> Jews in Jerusalem saw these Hellenistic Jews as outsiders, in the same that President Donald Trump referred to Mexicans.

In order to prove themselves to be true Jews, Gonzalez tells us, people like Saul had to persecute those who, like Stephen, did not follow the strict Jewish law. Saul was rejected by his own culture and in order to be accepted he had to go to great lengths to prove himself to be a true Jew.

Jesus lived the same kind of double rejection that *mestizos* do. Jesus was a Jew living in Galilee, and “The Jews in Galilee were too Jewish to be accepted by the gentile population and too contaminated with pagan ways to be accepted by the pure minded Jews of Jerusalem.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the Jews referred at Jesus as a Galilean, which served to further label him as an outsider. According to Virgil Elizondo, “The fact that Jesus had been conceived by the Holy Spirit meant that the people did not know how he had been conceived. According to human standards, he was of doubtful origins, and thus by reason of his very birth he encountered himself into solidarity with the masses whose origins are questioned by those in power.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Gonzalez, *Santa Biblia*, 81.

<sup>23</sup> Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 138.

<sup>24</sup> Virgil Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 77.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Elizondo points out how Jesus as human did not choose to be part of the rejected, but he was born one. The rejected no longer have to feel looked down upon or that nobody would defend them, for now one of them is sitting on the right side of the Father in heaven. From the Hispanic point of view, Jesus is considered the bridge between different races to create unity between those who suffered like him and God the Father.

### **Holland, Michigan**

The story of Holland, Michigan, started with a group of people who left their lands to look for religious freedom. The leader of this group of people was Dr. Albertus C. Van Raalte. In the book *Albertus and Christina: The Van Raalte Family, Home and Roots*, the authors state that Van Raalte was not only the patriarch of the family, but also “the primary leader of the Dutch immigration to western Michigan.”<sup>26</sup> Van Raalte and those who decided to join him in the journey were planning to travel from Rotterdam to New York. However, due to winter weather, they were forced to stop in Detroit, Michigan. There, they heard about the opportunities to own land in West Michigan.<sup>27</sup> Burns then mentions that Van Raalte, like his father, decided to become a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. However, due to his suspicious answers during his examination, he was denied the opportunity to become a minister in that church. Consequently, Van Raalte joined a newly formed Separatist Church and was ordained as one of their ministers on March 2, 1836. Due to religious persecution, Van Raalte, his

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<sup>26</sup> Elton J. Bruins et al., *Albertus and Christina: The Van Raalte Family, Home and Roots* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Holland. “Our History,” accessed December 9, 2017, <http://www.holland.org/our-history/>.

family, and a group of people decided to leave for America.<sup>28</sup> After their arrival in the new world, they cleared part of the land and built log cabins and a church.<sup>29</sup> This church became the First Reformed Church of Holland. Its lands, first populated by the Native Americans, became the place where Van Raalte and his followers founded the city of Holland on February 9, 1847. Van Raalte and his followers did not establish an amphitheater or a circus, like the Corinthians did, but they “cleared a one-block square of land in the center of the city—today’s Centennial Park—to serve as a market square.”<sup>30</sup>

Van Raalte established a public school in 1848. Three years later, a pioneer academy was founded, and fifteen years later, the academy became Hope College. The college included a theological department, which later became Western Theological Seminary. Due to Van Raalte's affiliation with the Dutch Reformed Church, this seminary became the first seminary of the Reformed Church in America in the west. The seminary opened its doors as an independent institution in 1885.<sup>31</sup> To this day, the city of Holland is made up of more than two hundred congregations from over forty-two different denominations.

Like most cities, Holland is changing. As of 2014, it is estimated that 25.1 percent of the total population of 33,644 are Hispanics, 64.9 percent are whites, 4.3 percent are

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<sup>28</sup> See pages 1-6 of *Albertus and Christina: The Van Raalte Family, Home and Roots* by Elton J. Bruins et al., for more on the circumstances that led Van Raalte and others to make the decision to travel to America.

<sup>29</sup> Randall P. Vande Water, *Holland: The Tulip Town- Images of America* (Chicago: Arcadia, 2002), 7. Dr. Van Raalte, his wife, and fifty-three followers were the first group to arrive to this land.

<sup>30</sup> "Holland History," accessed April 9, 2017, <http://www.holland.org/about/holland-history/>.

<sup>31</sup> Western Seminary. "The Story of Western Theological Seminary," accessed May 10, 2017, <https://www.westernsem.edu/about/mission-vision/#toggle-id-8>

Asian, 3.5 percent are black, 2.5 percent are two or more races, 0.2 percent are American Indian, and 0.06 percent are of other races.<sup>32</sup> However, the demographics of the Holland public high school show that 43.6 percent of students identify themselves as Hispanics. Furthermore, “The demographic breakdown of Holland High School is drastically different from that of a typical school in the state of Michigan, which is made up of 7.1% Hispanic students on average.”<sup>33</sup> Through the sponsorship of various churches, there has been an influx of Latino families and Southeast Asian refugees. However, since many Hispanics do not participate in the census, an unofficial count says that the Hispanic population is around 42 percent. Many farms surround the city, attracting migrants from many countries and states to come work the fields during spring and summer.

While locals can find houses valued around \$400,000 in the historical district of Holland, there are also homes just a few blocks away that have been sold for \$80,000 and in which two or three families live together. Likewise, people have the choice to send their children to Holland Christian schools for \$6,000+ in tuition per year or to the Holland public schools. Lately, charter schools and private Catholic schools have added to families’ choices for educating their children. The city of Holland was built on Christian principles; however, public schools are shifting to a more liberal curriculum in some parents’ opinion. Many of the parents that do not approve of these changes have opted to send their children to private schools. For example, Vanderbilt Charter Academy boasts of being founded on academic excellence, moral focus, parental partnership, and

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<sup>32</sup> “Holland, Michigan,” accessed December 14, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Holland-Michigan.html>.

<sup>33</sup> “Holland High School in Holland, Michigan,” accessed December 14, 2017, <http://public-schools.startclass.com/l/45287/Holland-High-School-in-Michigan>.

student responsibility. Furthermore, students draft a social contract reinforcing their commitment to the school, teachers, and each other.<sup>34</sup> In like manner, Holland Christian Schools proudly states that its mission is to “Equip minds and nurture hearts to transform the world for Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup>

For the most part, people are very friendly. However, the Dutch people in the city of Holland have a saying that “If you are not Dutch, you are not much.” A sense that white privileged Christians have an opportunity to bless the migrants pervades almost every white church in town. Most churches have programs to evangelize to the farm workers. City council is run mostly by white people with a Dutch background. In the last ten years, Holland has seen a wave of migrants who have decided to establish their families in town. Because of the city’s growth, a new bus system was started. Also, the police department hired more officers to keep order in the city.

The new generations of Hispanics are now being educated and some have run for public office. Hispanics had generally not been successful in winning public office elections. However, after many attempts, a Hispanic candidate finally won an election in November 2017. The church in Holland is also changing as some of them have been adapting to the demands of the population. For some churches, this is a struggle as they know that at some point they will have to change their strategies in order to reach out to minorities or could eventually have to close their doors. Fourth Reformed Church is one of these churches.

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<sup>34</sup> Vanderbilt Charter Academy, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.nhaschools.com/schools/vanderbilt/en/pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>35</sup> Holland Christian Schools, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.hollandchristian.org/>.

### **Fourth Reformed Church is Born**

Fourth Reformed Church was founded by a group of people who split from Third Reformed Church, discontented with the decision to discontinue the Dutch language in worship services. In 1896, Fourth Reformed Church was incorporated as part of the Holland classis with a membership of twenty adults plus some children.<sup>36</sup> The main language of the worship services was Dutch. However, years later, and due to the arrival of new generations unable to understand Dutch, English services began and the last worship service in Dutch took place in 1936.<sup>37</sup> For many years, Fourth Reformed Church has played an important part in the community. Its present emphasis on serving the neighborhood is well received by the community that surrounds the church.

Currently the church has a monthly food pantry, weekly Wednesday programs for families and youth, monthly bilingual Sunday, and a program for pregnant women or moms with babies. In order to help those around the church improve their lives, the church also serves as a meeting place for different groups such as Narcotics Anonymous, Catholic Charities, Westcore Neighbors, and a group of young break dancers. Likewise, the installations are used by a Pentecostal church and by a group of elderly people who meet once a month to play, sing, and listen old hymns. The church is situated in the core part of Holland. Like most churches in town, the senior pastor is an Anglo man with a Dutch background. The community that surrounds the church reflects the city's census as 50 percent of the community is white, 40 percent Hispanic, 5 percent African American,

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<sup>36</sup> The Reformed Church in America, *In Christ's Service: The Classis of Holland, Michigan, and Its Congregations 1847-1997* (Holland, MI: Classis of Holland, 1997), 18.

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

and 5 percent other. However, currently Fourth Reformed Church's attendance does not reflect the tapestry of the community that surrounds it.

Many churches have been trying to reach out to the Hispanic community in Holland without success. New charismatic (Pentecostal, Baptist, and non-denominational) churches have been planted and have been doing a better job in reaching out to Hispanic and African American neighbors. However, many of the established churches struggle with allowing a minority pastor to be in charge of the church.

Due to the increase in churches in the area, we can find at least twelve different churches in a mile and a half radius from our church: three Reformed churches, one Apostolic, three Pentecostals, one Seventh Day Adventist, one Catholic, one Baptist, and two community churches. This mix of races, beliefs, dogmas, cultures, and languages is a challenge by itself and many members of the community feel that, since there are so many churches in the area, they do not have to be committed to one.

After many conversations with the congregation, community, leadership of the church and staff members, Fourth Reformed Church came to the conclusion that its role—as is stated in the new mission statement adopted in August of 2012—is to “Grow together in Christ into a new community together with all of our neighbors.” This allowed the church to understand that they are not only the ones who can bless the community, but that the community can also bless the church in many ways. The church has learned, and is still learning, that it is only a conduit for God to do his will.

Corinth and the community that surrounds Fourth Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan have many things in common. Both are communities where people from different backgrounds, social levels, beliefs, and allegiances live. In the same way that

Paul was called to build the Corinthian church into this context, Fourth Reformed Church has been called to re-think the ways the church uses to approach the community.

Understanding these contexts and its parallels with each other serves as a guide for the church in bringing the good news to its community in ways people can understand.

### **From English to Bilingual Worship**

Fourth Reformed Church has existed for 121 years, and, as mentioned before, the community that surrounds the church has been changing over the last three decades. Consequently the church had to make the decision of looking at its surroundings in order to give the community what they need from the church. For example, Sunday Bible School was moved to Wednesdays and Living in Community was started. This ministry attracts people from the diverse community to its fellowship and teaching time. Even when many who come to Living in Community do not come to Sunday worship, the church's leadership decided that it was important to keep the program as it is and allow not only the children of the congregation to participate, but also the children from the community. Since many of the church's neighbors that come to the church's outreach programs are Hispanic, the church hired a Hispanic pastor as part of the staff. Then, songs in Spanish started to be sung once in a while during Sunday service, and after a couple of years a monthly bilingual worship service was put in place. Once a month, the songs as well as the sermon are translated simultaneously, from English to Spanish so that both cultures can understand.

When I arrived for the first time at Fourth Reformed Church in 2008, Sunday worship was completely attended by Anglos. By Anglo I do not just mean that the service

was in English, but that the way things were done did not welcome the Hispanic community that surrounded the church. For example, music was not sensitive to other cultures and the bulletins were only in English. When I visited the church for the first time, I was reluctant to join the congregation because I felt unwelcomed. Two weeks after I started working there, I was approached by a deacon of the church who asked me: where are all the Hispanics that you were supposed to bring in? My response was simply that the Hispanic community is based in relationships and to build relationships takes time. He walked away.

It took some time to build trust and create relationships, and after several months, some members of the Hispanic community started coming to Sunday worship. Then, some of them decided to be part of the Sunday service on a regular basis, and finally some decided to join the church. The tapestry of Sunday worship started changing from being totally white to a more multiethnic church. The leadership of the church felt that it was more important to make Hispanics feel welcomed than to tailor services to the Anglo community. A monthly potluck that was already in place became a setting where many different types of people shared different kinds of food after Sunday service. People shared anything from tacos to lasagna with other members of the church. The leadership of the church became more diverse as some Hispanics were elected to be part of the governing body. As Sandra Van Opstal says, “A diverse group of leaders that are culturally competent is key to multicultural worship.”<sup>38</sup> Hispanics finally felt that their voice was heard at the church’s leadership level. Currently Fourth Reformed Church

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<sup>38</sup> Sandra Maria Van Opstal, *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 114.

continues making changes to become more culturally competent. Recently the pew Bibles were replaced with bilingual Bibles, the church's sign has been replaced by one in English and Spanish, most of the signs inside of the church are now in two languages, and the church is in search of a bilingual worship leader.

A few years before the church changed its mission statement, the church realized the importance of becoming a new community to those around it. Consequently, the name Fourth Reformed Church was changed to New Community-Fourth Reformed Church in the fall of 2004. The new name allowed the church to pick something that would translate well into Spanish (Iglesia Nueva Comunidad-Cuarta Reformada) in order to make the Hispanic community feel welcomed. In like manner, the name also allowed the church to honor its past. The short name of NC4 (New Community Fourth Reformed) was adopted and to this day it is how many people in the community know the church.<sup>39</sup>

The leadership of Fourth Reformed Church has taken the time to listen to the community that surrounds it. In like manner, the church has improved its efforts of becoming like others in order to connect the community to Christ. Moreover, Fourth Reformed Church has understood that in order to connect with the community, the good news has to be lived out and not just preached from the pulpit.

### **Being versus Doing**

It is important to remember to be the type of person God is calling his followers to be and not just do what God is asking us to do. Jesus performed many miracles while on earth, however, we can also see in his life the embodiment of what being a godly man

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<sup>39</sup> From this point I will use Fourth Reformed Church or NC4 when referring to the church.

means. He embodied the good news. In Luke 4:18 we read that Jesus was called to bring good news to the poor. However, Jesus was not only talking about preaching the good news in the sense of using linguistic tools, but he was also calling us to live them out. As we are reminded many times, the passage of Scripture mentioned above is a repetition of what Isaiah spoke in the book that holds his name, Isaiah 61:1-2. Jaco Hamman points out that the word that we usually translate as preach in this passage, “is *basher*, from the stem *bashar*, which literally means meat or flesh.”<sup>40</sup> Considering this, the closest translation of Isaiah 61:1a would be: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on [you], because the Lord has anointed [you] to ENFLESH or EMBODY good news to the poor.”<sup>41</sup> Hamman also reminds us that “Preaching implies preparation and an hour of performance. Embodiment is 24/7/365; a way of being with people and a way of seeing the world.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, Jesus was not only telling us that he was sent to bring the good news, but moreover, he was giving us the perfect example of what it means to embody the good news.

John 1:14 says “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” According to Karoline M. Lewis, this Word “was in the beginning with God, a partner in creation, in relationship with God and who is God, has now become human” and is the one that dwells among us.<sup>43</sup> However, the Greek word *skēnoō*, which is usually translated

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<sup>40</sup> Jaco Hamman, *When Steeples Cry* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 10.

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

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

<sup>43</sup> Karoline M. Lewis, *Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries: John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 17.

as dwell, in reality means to tent or to tabernacle.<sup>44</sup> In other words, even when most Christians know that The Word dwells among us, the closest translation to the original Greek would be “The Word took up residence among us,” or as Eugene Peterson’s Bible translates it “moved into the neighborhood.” Hirsch agrees and says similarly that “When God came into our world in and through Jesus, the Eternal moved into the neighborhood and took up residence among us.”<sup>45</sup>

From the beginning of creation, it is clear that God wants to be among humans, living with us, and setting up his residence around us. This, Lewis tells us, “is much a declaration about the Word as it is about who God is, what God is about, and to what and whom God is committed.”<sup>46</sup> God is committed to his people to the point that he became a human. In Lewis’ words, “In the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, now God not only goes where God’s people go, but is who they are. That is, God now dwells with us by taking on our form, our humanity.”<sup>47</sup>

Jesus’ followers, as a representation of Christ, are call to embody the good news to people, to take residence among those in need, and if possible to physically move into the neighborhood. The Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) calls this: Relocation.<sup>48</sup> William Brownson points out how Jesus “entered our history, took our nature, lived our life, endured our temptations, experienced our sorrows, carried our sins,

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<sup>44</sup> Another example of this is Revelation 21:3.

<sup>45</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 140.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis, *John*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> Christian Community Development Association. “Relocation,” accessed March 25, 2018, <https://ccda.org/about/philosophy/relocation/>.

and died our death. He could not have identified Himself with us more closely, more completely, than He did.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, we are called to do it in ways people can understand and be receptive to. Lesslie Newbigin writes that “If the gospel is to be understood...it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them.”<sup>50</sup> God will not only transform those who will see Jesus in us, but he will also transform us.

Jesus was sent to bind up the broken hearted, to set the captives free, to release from darkness the prisoners, and to bring comfort to those who mourn. By helping those in need, Jesus became an agent of change, a person that will transform people’s lives forever. Before Jesus, God used the prophets to change the communities they were sent to. As a student of the Torah, Paul was aware of this. Furthermore, Paul was aware that in the same way in which God became flesh to him and to those in need, his job now was to become the good news to those in need. He was called to move in into the neighborhoods of those in need, as he did in many occasions. Paul was called to proclaim release to the captives and to let the oppressed go free from background, from culture, from religion, and from any ideology. When Paul became a follower of Christ, he also became an agent of transformation. He became his disciple and his apostle. He was sent to the world to become whatever he needed to become, without forgetting the reason for doing it—for the sake of the gospel. Many years after Paul’s life, Fourth Reformed understood the importance of becoming like the diverse community that surrounds it.

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<sup>49</sup> William C. Brownson, *Life in the Light of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Words of Hope, 1994), 113.

<sup>50</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 141.

Eckhard J. Schnabel tells us that Paul was willing to become what others were in order to save some. Paul did not ask them to enter his comfort zone but rather he entered theirs. For instance, Paul “does not require them to keep the stipulations of the law: he eats what they eat, he drinks what they drink.”<sup>51</sup> For Paul to become like others was not based in typologies, education, religious or cultural background, but in personal relationships, and in loving others as yourself, like Christ did, like many leaders of NC4 do with community members. Paul became like others to the point of sacrificing whatever needed to be sacrificed, including himself.

Many times, Jesus went out of his comfort zone in order to love people as they were and where they were. To be sent (*apostello*) is to become who God is calling us to become, to be what he is calling us to be. For Paul, to become what God called him to become—an apostle of Christ—meant to reflect part of his essence as created in the image of God. Edgar Krentz tells us that “When Paul says that he ‘enslaves himself’ to all, he uses terminology that carried overtones about the lowest possible status in the Early Roman Empire. Paul not only preached the leveling power of the gospel; he lived it.”<sup>52</sup>

For Paul, to become whatever he needed to become in order to save some was a reflection of who God made him to be. He understood that part of his call was to deny himself in order to be the leader God called him to be. As can be seen, Jesus was the representation of what it means to live out the good news to others.

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<sup>51</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 136.

<sup>52</sup> Edgar Krentz, “Paul: All Things to All People—Flexible and Welcoming,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24 (1997): 243.

## How Not to Embody the Good News

In his book *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*, Emmanuel Katongole relates the story of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. This story, Katongole reminds us, began on “April 7, the Thursday of Easter week.”<sup>53</sup> In Hirsch’s words, the Rwandan genocide was “a murderous frenzy that involved active, professing Christians and churches in the slaughter.”<sup>54</sup> The irony of this story is that Maundy Thursday is when Jesus’ followers are supposed to remember his new commandment of loving one another, even to the point of laying down our lives for others as he did for his church.<sup>55</sup>

However, when the time came to exterminate their enemies, Christian lines were erased and lines between Hutu and Tutsi took precedence. Before the war, people in Uganda saw no differences in race. Hutu married Tutsis, grew up next to each other, and worshiped the Lord as one body. However, after the persecution began against the Tutsis, “Brothers and sisters who had sung together the day before were suddenly mortal enemies.”<sup>56</sup> Christians put their beliefs in God aside, and Hutus started persecuting Tutsis. Brother versus brother, sister versus sister, entire communities disappeared to machetes and clubs. The church, the only refuge for those being persecuted, became a slaughter house. In some instances, Katongole tells us, the priest “handed over the

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<sup>53</sup> This would not have been important in a non-Christian part of the world, however, more than 85 percent of the people in Rwanda were Christians. Emmanuel Katongole, *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 18.

<sup>54</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 106.

<sup>55</sup> Katongole, *Mirror to the Church*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

refugees to be killed.”<sup>57</sup> Men, women, and children died, and in the spring of 1994, more than three-quarters of a million people died at the hands of their persecutors.<sup>58</sup> Two tribes were at war. The church, the one that was supposed to be on the side of the persecuted, had fallen to the powers of the institutions in Rwanda. “Maybe the deepest tragedy of the Rwandan genocide is that Christianity didn't seem to make any difference. Rwandans performed a script that had shaped them more deeply than the biblical story had.”<sup>59</sup>

### **Rotten food**

One of the ways Fourth Reformed Church serves the community, is through a monthly food pantry. For many people, these kinds of food pantries are the only way to make ends meet. As part of my responsibilities, I was asked to help people carry their baskets, boxes, or bags as they went through the line collecting the different kinds of food and then helping them load their cars. While doing so, I had opportunities to start conversing with them about life, marriage, children, and hopefully establish new relationships.

During one of these events, and while some volunteers were waiting for the food truck to arrive, I started talking to a man that was expressing his thankfulness to the church for the food pantry. Then the truck arrived. However, when the truck's side doors opened, we realized that most of the food was rotten and that most of the drinks were a year past their expiration dates. Then some volunteers asked the senior pastor if they could sort out the food and just give away the good food. However, they were told by the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 84.

senior pastor that there was not enough time to do this and the families would have to do the sorting in their homes.

The next morning a couple e-mails were sent out to the leadership of Fourth Reformed Church expressing concern with what happened the day before and its moral implications. A follow-up e-mail stated that even though the food was not great, our church should be thankful for being able to bless the community during these times. Other volunteers voiced that even though the food was not always perfect, our church has one of the best food pantries in the area. At the end of the day, and after many more e-mails, the senior pastor wrote an e-mail saying we should not complain about the quality of the food, but that we should be grateful for the opportunity to be servants to the community.

Every time an e-mail was sent out, I received a copy. I decided not to reply to any of them, since many times e-mails can be misinterpreted. Instead I waited for the opportunity to meet and talk with the senior pastor. A couple days later he asked my opinion about what happened. I expressed that as a part of my family values, we do not give away food that we would not eat. I explained that since childhood I had been taught in the Church that Jesus is in the face of the poor, and that in the same way we do things for the least of these we also are doing them for Jesus. I told him that many of these people come with fear, desperation, shame, and anger for the situation that they are in. Even then, some of them were hungry to the point that they had to wait for hours in line and put their feelings aside in order to receive their share. I also reminded him how many of the volunteers have lived in the community for years, and that perhaps at some point their parents were in the same situation. Then I asked the senior pastor if he would have

given this food to his children. I followed by asking if he would have used the moldy bread and the expired juice for communion. He apologized and said that he had already called the place where the church gets the food and explained what happened. He also said that if a truck like this would come again the church would not accept it.

I also apologized if I had been harsh with my comments, but I told him all I wanted to do was to help him understand the feelings these people have and what it meant for them to have received rotten food from our church. I asked him to consider their position and how it must feel to be in line for as long as they were and to then have to prepare a meal with the food we gave away.

Even when the church in Rwanda and Fourth Reformed Church did not do a good job of becoming like others in need, Katongole tells us that “The church’s primary purpose is not to make America more Christian, but to make American Christians less American and Rwandan Christian less Rwandan. We are no longer Rwandans or Americans, neither Hutu nor Tutsi. If we are in Christ, we have become part of a new creation.”<sup>60</sup> Our communities have been waiting too long for a change. Christ is calling us to embody the good news, to *be* and not just to *do*.

In conclusion, to indigenize, contextualize, embody or en flesh ourselves when reaching other cultures is part of God’s calling for his church. Fourth Reformed Church has decided to respond to that call. The church has understood that God has called it to embody the good news to others. Furthermore, Fourth Reformed Church has decided to become agents of change and transformation the community that surrounds it.

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<sup>60</sup> Katongole, *Mirror to the Church*, 156.



PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

## CHAPTER 2

### CONNECTIONS

Through time, scholars have researched the Apostle Paul's life, philosophy, theology, background, and conversion experience in order to understand who Paul was. Most of the information we have about him comes from his writings, both disputed and undisputed letters, and from the Gospel of Luke and Acts. The goal of this project is not to fully describe who Paul was, but to focus on what we know of his world, background, and conversion experience. For Fourth Reformed Church, like for Paul, it is important to be able to connect with those who speak, are, or look differently than us.

This chapter examines some of the customs and traditions that were part of Corinth at the time Paul arrived in the city, its multicultural context, religious views, and the importance of its location and boundaries. It also addresses how he was able to relate to the city's inhabitants in ways that they were able to understand. Paul's work convinced many members of the Corinthian community to leave their polytheistic life and believe in Jesus. Finally, the chapter explores the importance of focusing on the community that surrounds Fourth Reformed Church, and the meaning of becoming like those in need.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:1-23). However, for NC4 to try to understand how he was able to become all things to all people, the church needs to try to understand who Paul was. For instance, when talking about the culture in which he lived, it would be easy to say that during Paul’s time his world was divided between Jews and Gentiles. However, the truth is that it was not so simply divided. Even when all the Jews commonly believed The Torah was their only and final authority, they were divided in their ways of understanding it and in their practices. There were many cultural and religious differences within these main groups. The main branches of Jewish groups that most scholars agree existed at the time of Paul were the Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Pharisees, and Messianic Jews.<sup>1</sup> Then passages such as Romans 11:1, 2 Corinthians 11:22 and Philippians 3:5, describe Paul’s Israelite background, and in Romans 11:1 and Philippians 3:5, states that he belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.

Acts 26:15 tells us that while Paul was on the road to Damascus in pursuit of Christians, Christ appeared to him. As a result of his encounter with Christ, Paul was converted and called to preach the good news.<sup>2</sup> As Krantz puts it, “Paul, from the moment of his conversion, knew that God, who had set him apart from birth, revealed his son in him in order that he might announce him as good news to the Gentiles.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a wider explanation of these groups, see Tatha Wiley, “Paul’s World,” in *Encountering Paul: Understanding the Man and His Message*, Tatha Wiley (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 4-7 and Lucien Legrand, *The Bible on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 84-94.

<sup>2</sup> See Phil 3:4-10, Acts 7:57-8:3, Acts 9, Acts 22, Acts 26, Gal 1 and 1 Cor 15:1-11 for more on Paul’s life before and after encountering Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Krantz, “Paul: All Things to All People,” 241.

Paul was also well instructed in the law (Acts 22:3). Therefore he studied how God communicated to his people in ways they could understand. Later, as a follower of Christ, Paul saw how Jesus also spoke to people in ways and in methods to which they could relate. This was the Christ Paul followed. In fact, the way Christ encountered Paul demonstrated Paul's own calling. Jesus spoke to him in a way he was able to understand.

Paul made sure his followers in Corinth were aware that the God he was introducing to them was able to communicate with them in a way they could understand. This attribute from God was a major difference from the other gods and idols the Corinthian community worshipped. In other words, Paul's followers communicated with God and vice versa. Furthermore, Paul made his hearers understand that God made no distinctions: ethnicity, social status, and gender were no longer divisive.<sup>4</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Corinthian community not only saw Paul as someone who spoke in ways they could understand, but they also saw someone who empathized with them. By speaking in a common way, they saw in Paul someone who became like them. Because of Paul's multicultural background and double citizenship, he was able to cross cultures. He became all things to all people so the gospel could be preached in both Jewish and Gentile communities.

### **Culture**

Public orators were held in high standards in Corinth, this helped Paul as he was trained in public speaking. As L. Michael White points out, "The major cities courted these orators for their fame, for their influence with emperors and governors, and for their

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 242.

wealth.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, White observes, thanks to some sophists holding public offices, the orators were respected, adulated, and could expect public honors. Local places and folk heroes were also important for the Corinthian community. For example, Peirene was famous for being “the place where the Corinthian hero Bellerophon tamed Pegasus with the help of Athena.”<sup>6</sup>

Mary Walbank points out that one of the beliefs of Roman citizens was that the dead and the living needed to be separated. Urban cemeteries could not be part of the inner parts of the city. This practice continued at least until the mid-fourth century C.E., when it began to change under the impact of Christianity.<sup>7</sup> According to Roman agrimensores, “public areas on the outskirts of a city had to be reserved for the funerals of the poor.”<sup>8</sup> Up until the beginning of the second century CE, cremation and inhumation were the typical ways to dispose of the dead. However, cremation was mostly practiced by the wealthy Romans. According to Christine Thomas, the lower classes “may not have been able to spare the fuel necessary to dispose of a corpse.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> L. Michael White, “Favorinus’s ‘Corinthian Oration’: A Piqued Panorama of the Hadrianic Forum,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Daniel N. Showalter and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 65.

<sup>6</sup> Betsey A. Robinson, “Fountains and the Formation of Cultural Identity at Roman Corinth,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Daniel N. Showalter and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 118.

<sup>7</sup> Mary E. Hoskins Walbank, “Unquiet Graves: Burial Practices of the Roman Corinthians,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Daniel N. Showalter and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 250.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>9</sup> Christine M. Thomas, “Placing the Dead: Funerary Practice and Social Stratification in the Early Roman Period at Corinth and Ephesos,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Daniel N. Showalter and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 286.

Thomas observes that during the Imperial period as well as earlier in the Republican, Hellenistic, and Classical periods, two main beliefs about the dead and the living existed. First, they believed that the spirit of a dead person is somehow set free from the body at death so that it continues to live. Second, the dead resided in their graves after death.<sup>10</sup> Equally important for Thomas is the knowledge that Romans held banquets at the tomb of the dead on their birthdays. In fact, “Romans often made provisions in their wills for a foundation to finance these annual dinners.”<sup>11</sup> Most of these provisions were so specific that even the food and the flowers were specified as part of the wills.

Anointing the body during the preparation of the dead person was also one of their customs. Walbank notes that this was used “to help in preserving the body—or at least to disguise the smell.”<sup>12</sup> Gold talismans played an important role in the life of the Corinthian community, but more important were the images on the talismans. The most popular of these images was the Sikyonian dove. In fact, even though “the dove was not a common symbol for the early Christians, the later portrayal of the soul as a dove would have made the Sikyonian coins acceptable to Christians as well as to pagans.”<sup>13</sup> Paul was able to use some of the Corinthian traditions in order to explain the good news to them in ways they understand. For example, he talks about the burial of Christ and resurrection in 1 Cor 15. In this same chapter, he mentions how “someone will ask, ‘How are the dead

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Walbank, “Unquiet Graves,” 274.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 276.

raised? With what kind of body will they come?” This was a normal question, since, as Thomas points out before, the Corinthian belief was that their dead reside in their graves after death.

### **Religious Views, commerce and the ruling class**

Being a Roman colony, it is not surprising that the Corinthians worshiped different gods and goddesses. According to Krentz, “The Roman empire, in terms of religion, was an inclusive multicultural society.”<sup>14</sup> For example, there is evidence that cults of Apollo, Asklepios/Aculapius, Zeus/Jupiter, Aphrodite/Venus, Demeter/Ceres and Kore/Proserpina existed in Corinth.<sup>15</sup> Krentz adds that Hera Akraia, Dionysos, Osiris, the Tyche of the city, and possibly the Ephesian Artemis were also worshipped at Corinth.<sup>16</sup> Likewise Sanders states, “The cults attested tend to be of deities with local rather than pan-hellenistic significance.”<sup>17</sup> Aphrodite was the city’s goddess and her sanctuary was situated at the top of Acrocorinth.<sup>18</sup>

According to Bookidis, three levels of religious operation existed in Corinth. The official Roman cults were gathered in the forum, and then those cults that had Greek roots were instated in the city. Finally, what she calls “fringe Greek cults” were part of

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<sup>14</sup> Krentz, “Paul: All Things to All People,” 238.

<sup>15</sup> Bookidis, “Religion in Corinth,” 161.

<sup>16</sup> Krentz, “Paul: All Things to All People,” 238.

<sup>17</sup> Sanders, “Urban Corinth,” 22.

<sup>18</sup> Bookidis, “Religion in Corinth,” 147.

the third level. She discusses Medea's children's cult as part of these.<sup>19</sup> The fountain of Glauke was related to the Medea story. For Robinson, even though this was not a religious building, "The fountain was an earnest memorial to Glauke, thematically associated with a cult site of Medea's children near the Oideion."<sup>20</sup> In some places where a fountain was present, even if a local cult was not established, the Corinthians believed that a spirit was present. Furthermore, during the different festivities in Corinth, the spirits were remembered at the fountains.

In Corinth, Thomas points out, "the ruling class of the young colony from Augustus to Nero was primarily composed either of freedmen from prominent Roman families or Roman businessmen from less prominent families and their freedmen associates."<sup>21</sup> These freedmen were extremely wealthy, due to their social positions and the fact that most of them were entrepreneurs. Besides the Roman citizens and the freedmen, most people in the new colonies did not have Roman citizenship. However, those who held Roman citizenship also held a higher status than those in the city who did not.

Slavery has functioned as an oppressive and exploitative institution in many historical societies. In the Roman era, owners had the right to do whatever they pleased to and with their slaves. The Corinthian slave community was not an exception. However, Dale Martin writes that some Roman slaves experienced somewhat of a better life. For example, some were able to manage money and have limited financial independence,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>20</sup> Robinson, "Fountains," 138.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas, "Placing the Dead," 297.

even though they were not allowed to own anything under the Roman law. This was due to the convention of peculium. The convention of peculium worked for both master and slave as “the master ‘lent’ a slave peculium, or working capital to enable him to engage in some business enterprise.”<sup>22</sup>

Slaves held all kinds of positions and did all kinds of jobs. Some were involved in production, others were personal servants, and still others were entrepreneurs. In this third category Martin explains that these types of slaves had more freedom to make businesses and have more social mobility. Martin also notes that slave owners psychologically manipulated their slaves to make them believe they were part of the transactions. They did this to ensure that the slaves would look after their master’s benefit more than their own. He states that “if the master is wise, he will convince the slaves that their master’s interests are their interests.”<sup>23</sup>

Slavery was also seen as a way to climb up the social ladder. In fact, the slaves of Roman citizens that were freed were usually given Roman citizenship. Many of these emancipated slaves were then educated. Many Romans in high positions would educate slaves in order for them to educate their children, Martin observes. These freed slaves would also have patronages, something that the free men would not have.

It is for these reasons that “Slavery was arguably the most important channel through which outsiders entered the main stream of Roman power structures.”<sup>24</sup> During

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Garnsey, *Cities, Peasants and Food in Classical Antiquity: Essays in Social and Economic History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 34.

<sup>23</sup> Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1990), 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

that time, slaves stated their status in the same way that today we use our last name. This was done, Martin observes, to establish their relationship with someone of a higher social level.

However, while slavery may have been used as a social ladder, manual labor was seen as despicable and beneath the dignity of any gentleman or lady in the Greco-Roman culture. Martin observes that a part of Socrates' Republic states that manual labor degrades the people and makes the ones who do it unfit for philosophy and politics. It is in this sense that slavery terminology "almost always carries a negative connotation in Greco-Roman literature."<sup>25</sup>

In Corinth a division between social classes clearly existed. However, this division was not only defined by finances, but also extended to levels of education. This belief is similar to the way Christians value literacy today. Willie James Jennings mentions how "Christianity and especially its theologians rarely failed to understand the importance of literacy. Most theologians, especially Protestants, lived out the idea that reading, writing, and textual production were fundamental to Christian theological vision."<sup>26</sup> In fact, according to Jennings, Christians were "without a doubt people of the book."<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, lack of knowledge was considered a sign of weakness. Abraham Malherbe tells us about the presence of Cynics and Stoics at Corinth: "The weak were generally identified by philosophers as people who found it difficult to live up to the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>26</sup> Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Grace* (Ann Arbor, MI: Sheridan Books, 2010), 218.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

demands of the virtuous life.”<sup>28</sup> However, Paul took this as an opportunity to let the Corinthians know that true wisdom comes from God (1 Cor 1).

For the Stoics, it was true knowledge that gave freedom. Philosophy or reason was the way to become a truly free human being. Neither the Stoics nor the Cynics believed in the compulsion of doing things according to Malherbe. The Stoics believed that they needed to be willing to conform, while the Cynics thought that it was their personal decision to do something. He says that the Cynics were “fully aware of the difference between choice and compulsion, and insisted that we are masters of our own will, and that we cannot be virtuous unwillingly or without choosing to be so.”<sup>29</sup> Cynics and Stoics differed in their definition of security. For the Stoics, security came in aligning themselves to a divine being, while Cynics believed that their security lay in the free life. In other words, Stoics and Cynics tried to demonstrate that freedom only comes through the ability to choose what to do.

### **Language**

Martin presupposes that “the population in Corinth may even have been, to some extent, bilingual and bicultural during the time Christianity was establishing a foothold there.”<sup>30</sup> However, even though some people probably spoke more than one language,

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<sup>28</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, “Determinism and Free Will in Paul: The Argument of 1 Corinthians 8 and 9,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. Troels Engberg Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 234.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>30</sup> Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, xviii.

Bookidis asserts that “The official language of the city was Latin.”<sup>31</sup> For Gerd Theissen, there is “no accident that eight of the seventeen surviving names of Corinthian Christians are Latin: Aquila, Fortunatus, Gaius, Lucius, Priscilla, Quartus, Titius Justus, and Tertius.”<sup>32</sup> However, although Latin was the official language of the city, William Baird posits that Latin was soon replaced by Koine Greek.<sup>33</sup>

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he discovered that its citizens had a variety of different backgrounds, beliefs, socio-economical levels, education, dogmas, and languages. However, Paul knew this was the place where God had sent him to preach the good news. Just as Paul was called to the multicultural, multilingual, polytheist, and multiethnic city of Corinth to preach the good news, the leadership of NC4 feel the call to reach out its diverse community.

### **The Good Samaritan**

The story of the good Samaritan offers an example of caring for those outside one’s own community:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus: “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened

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<sup>31</sup> Bookidis, “Religion in Corinth,” 151.

<sup>32</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 99.

<sup>33</sup> See William Baird, *The Corinthian Church: A Biblical Approach to Urban Culture* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 21.

to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Lk 10:25-37).

Kenneth Bailey indicates that if the wounded man had been a fellow Jew, the priest would have been obligated to take care of him. Bailey call to mind how when the man was attacked he was stripped of his clothes and knocked unconscious. Without his clothes, it was hard to determine the community the man was from. Without consciousness, it was even more difficult to identify his background. Since the man on the side of the road was unable to talk, the priest did not know whether the man was alive or dead. If the man was dead and the priest would have touched him, he would have become unclean. Then "He would have to return to Jerusalem and undergo a week-long process of ceremonial purification."<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, he would not have been able to eat from the offerings or to collect them. If the man on the side of the road was not a Jew, the priest was not obligated to help him. But even if he did help him and the man died later, the priest was obligated to destroy his clothes and could have been accused of destroying the temple's property. The priest, Bailey observes, decides that his ceremonial purity was more important than the man's well being.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 293.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

The Levites had a different function from that of the priests. They were to help the priests and to assist them in their ceremonial duties. This Levite, Bailey argues, “Probably knew that a priest was ahead of him and may have been an assistant to the same priest. Since the priest had set the precedent, the Levite could pass by with an easy conscience.”<sup>36</sup> When the Levite was confronted with the decision of whether or not to help the man, he relied on the way he interpreted the law. But if he had decided to help the wounded man, it may have implied that he believed that his interpretation of the law was better than the priest’s. Bailey claims that “Such an act would be an insult to the priest!”<sup>37</sup>

To help the wounded man was equivalent to risking one’s own life. Bailey argues that for the Samaritan to help the man, it would have been equivalent to a Native American finding a cowboy during the 1850’s wounded by a couple of arrows and deciding to help him. Most Americans know that the people in town “would probably kill him even though he had helped the cowboy.”<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, as part of the Jewish law, the people that were not able to pay their debts could be sold as slaves. By leaving some money at the inn and making the promise that he would come back and pay if something else was owed, the Samaritan made sure the wounded man would not be sold as a slave. “In this parable the Samaritan extends a costly demonstration of unexpected love to the wounded man, and in the process Jesus

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 296.

again interprets the life changing power of costly love that would climax at his cross.”<sup>39</sup>

Bailey also observes that the question “Who is my neighbor?” is never explicitly answered. “Jesus reflects on the larger question, ‘To whom must I become a neighbor?’ The answer being: Anyone in need.”<sup>40</sup>

When the expert in the law asked Jesus about his neighbors, what he really wanted to know was who Jesus considered to be the people of God. Jesus told him a story in order for him to come to his own conclusions, but even then, he was unwilling to name this person. His response was, “The one who had mercy on him.” The original question—who is my neighbor—was transformed into a new question: to whom did the Samaritan become a neighbor? In the Samaritan’s consideration of the Jewish law about debts, the Samaritan became like the stranger he helped to the point of risking his life. In other words, becoming like another serves as a central part of the story and shows the reader how one should live.

Bailey also continues his examination of the passage by considering Jesus’ question of how one should read the law. This question exposes the expert in the law with respect to how he interpreted it and shows the limitations of his understanding. By bringing the Samaritan into the story, Jesus exposes these limitations. The answer to the question the expert in the law asks—what should I do to inherit eternal life—is a story about crossing cultures. By telling him to go and do likewise, Jesus tells us to cross cultural barriers, love the rejected, communicate effectively and relevantly, and love by embodying the good news to those in need.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

To cross boundaries means more than asking people to come into our context. It means more than sympathizing or empathizing with others. It means more than helping others when in need or to see things the way we see them. We need to follow Jesus' example and relinquish everything may be a barrier in order to make the other feel cared for and loved.

### **Doing things different**

My father has always encouraged me to be educated. However, he also told me that I needed to learn the family's profession: carpentry. As an adult, the only skill I had to sustain myself was carpentry. However, due to the economy of Mexico, it was hard to find customers. I realized that in order to get customers, I had to do things differently. I started to pay more attention to the environment inside customer's houses in order to obtain more work.

For example, some people had posters of their favorite soccer teams, while others displayed hunting trophies. After the first meeting with potential customers, I would go home and research their particular interests. Then I would go back with the job estimate and before giving it to them I began a conversation about whatever I noticed they liked. After a short conversation and making a connection with them, I would give them the estimate. Most of the time they would call me to give me the job. As time went on, it became easier for me to spot people's passions. However, this did not mean that I became a fan of their favorite soccer team or that I started hunting, but for the time I worked for them, I became like them. As a by-product, my life has become enriched because I learned many things from other people and cultures.

Today, many churches believe that missions<sup>41</sup> and church are interconnected. For example, a church's website can demonstrate their commitment to missions if they promote certain trips or service events. Churches encourage their congregants to go on mission trips. Sometimes these are local, while other times they travel to another city, state, or country. During these trips, there is typically a sense of needing to introduce God to the people who are to benefit from the trip. More than simply embracing others and telling them how the church does things, the church needs to allow its members to be embraced by the people God sends to bless them. Fourth Reformed Church's members are trying to gain wisdom in how to do it best. God keeps asking people to go to other nations, but for the most part, many of these nations are already represented in local communities. In addition, God is now sending other nations to us to help us understand the Bible in different ways.

According to Newbigin, today's Church needs to "discover the form and substance of a missionary church in terms that are valid in a world that has rejected the power and the influence of the Western nations."<sup>42</sup> Putting it another way, we need to change our tactics in order to be a church of transformation to those around us. The world is changing, and to remain relevant to our communities, we need to adapt new ways of reaching out. The truth is, Hirsch states, "if you fall in love with your system, whatever that system may be, you will lose your capacity to change it."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In here, I defined missions as leaving the church environment and going to where the people in need is in order to present Christ, as a difference of talking about the mission of the church.

<sup>42</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 5.

<sup>43</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 232.

Newbigin affirms that in order to bear witness in today's world, the church needs to take an approach "from a position not of strength but of weakness."<sup>44</sup> However, based in Bevans' translation model and the concept that all theology is conceptual theology, it is important to translate Scripture, or contextualize it, into the languages of those cultures with which we are trying to communicate. By doing this, the Church will be externalizing the way the Bible is understood. However, translation is also more than the use of language. Bevans writes how "Any translation has to be a translation of meanings, not just of words and grammar."<sup>45</sup> He adds that a good translation "is one that captures the spirit of a text."<sup>46</sup> In other words, it is important to understand the surrounding community in order to present the good news in a relevant way.

Bevans uses the example of the kernel and the husk to explain how the core of the gospel needs to be preserved. Even when the husk changes, the kernel remains the same. In other words, even when the church finds new ways to present the gospel to its surrounding community, the church needs to make sure that the core of the gospel remains intact. In some ways, it is like unwrapping the core and then rewrapping it for the community Jesus' followers are trying to communicate it to. For Bevans, there is a need to clothe the gospel "in language and patterns that the men and women of the new context can understand."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 38.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 41.

Newbigin also affirms how when we go to a new place, God has already been working there. We simply join him in what he has already been doing. Newbigin states that “our business is not to promote the mission of the church, but to get out into the world, find out ‘what God is doing into the world,’ and join forces with him.”<sup>48</sup> Hirsch agrees with Newbigin. He states that “Church is not something that is done apart from the world. Our evangelism and social action are communal; we join with God in redeeming the world (he’s already there).”<sup>49</sup> Perhaps instead of the church bringing salvation to the world, the world is bringing salvation to the church. The work of the church is only to make people aware that God is already around them. For Bevans, the role of the church is not to capture the spirit of the gospel and make it fit into different environments, but rather to be captured and embraced by it.<sup>50</sup>

Living and confessing the Christian faith can transform the different social and cultural contexts we live in. For Bevans, the praxis model “focuses on the identity of Christians within a context particularly as that context is understood in terms of social change.”<sup>51</sup> Put differently, God is a God of transformation and as such he is calling his followers to respond to the needs of the communities the church is part of. Today’s actions affect the present realities with future consequences. Newbigin writes that for many years “People have accepted their lot as something that cannot be radically changed and have accepted the ancient picture of human affairs as part of the cycle of nature,

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<sup>48</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 18.

<sup>49</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 232.

<sup>50</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 40-44.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

rising only to fall again, being born only to grow old and die.”<sup>52</sup> However, God’s call is not to remain stoic, for “Where the gospel is preached the way is opened for movements offering the hope of total liberation.”<sup>53</sup> By announcing the good news, the church makes those who suffer aware that there is hope and freedom in Christ, not only from spiritual bondages, but also from social ones. Faith in action results in transformation of both the recipient and the presenter of the good news.

As part of the Hispanic culture, I am part of an inherited patriarchal position in society. This patriarchal structure can also be seen in many Hispanic churches. In most Latino churches, only men are given leadership positions. Often male pastors and leaders in these churches choose scriptures which they interpret to justify their practice of valuing men over women.

However, when a pastor explains that Jesus loves us all equally and that God values men and women equally, Hispanic women are often attracted to this message. They want this kind of freedom they have not seen in the church or their lives. On the other hand, Hispanic men see such a message as a threat to their power at home which they have come to believe has been given to them by God. This kind of behavior is a common part of the Hispanic culture and is not left behind when people come to the United States.

In his book *The Mexican Mind! Understanding and Appreciating Mexican Culture*, Boyé Lafayette De Mente discusses how part of the Mexican culture is to value men over women. For example, he states that machismo “often translated as ‘The Cult of

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<sup>52</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 38.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Masculinity,' has been one of the most important factors in Mexican society for well over 300 years."<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, De Mente explains that machismo repudiates all feminine virtues. He goes on to say, "The proof of every man's manliness was his ability to dominate his wife and children."<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Hispanic men are taught since childhood to not show their feelings. De Mente asserts how a Hispanic man is "never to reveal his true feeling to anyone lest they somehow take advantages of him."<sup>56</sup> In fact, it is not out of the ordinary to hear a Hispanic father telling his son *Los hombres no lloran, eso es de mujeres* (Men do not cry, that is for women) when his boy falls to the ground, gets hit by another family member, or feels emotional about a situation. In other words, regardless of where they live, Hispanic culture holds men in a higher position than women.

As a Hispanic pastor, my responsibility is to become like these women who have been told that they need to submit to their husbands. To live in the freedom that true Christian life gives and offering it to those in need is the beginning of breaking the cycle of sexism. For Newbigin, "Where the gospel is preached the way is opened for movements offering the hope of total liberation."<sup>57</sup> It is the movement of God that does not want any culture to live in physical or spiritual bondage.

For the reasons listed above, it is critical to be living and preaching the Christian faith in order for cultures to experience the kind of freedom that only comes from God. Put it in other way, there is plenty of missional work that can be done in our

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<sup>54</sup> Boyé Lafayette De Mente, *The Mexican Mind!: Understanding and Appreciating Mexican Culture*, (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Books, 2011), 194.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 38.

neighborhoods, communities, and surroundings. However, even though missions are part of the DNA of most churches and there are many opportunities to preach the gospel locally, it seems that the church has become inactive in going where people are. NC4 has understood this and more than looking for a mission experience outside of the building, the church is looking for ways to be with the community.

George Hunter claims that “When it comes to the call of Jesus to be ‘fishers for men and women,’ most of our congregations are content to wait for the ‘fish’ to find us.”<sup>58</sup> Consequently, “80 percent of the 360,000 churches in America are stagnant or declining, and most of the remainder grow mainly by shuffling believers from one congregation to another.”<sup>59</sup> Hirsch also states how “George Barna and Dave Kinnamin have recently stated that as of 2014, the estimated number of unchurched adults in the United States stood at 114 million.”<sup>60</sup> For Hunter, there is a clear parallel between the church in Corinth and today’s church in the United States. He states that “North America will soon look like a Corinthian continent.”<sup>61</sup> This is due to big influence of the many waves of migrants that have become a part of this country.<sup>62</sup> When they come, they bring their beliefs and traditions with them. For example, when talking about the Lady of Guadalupe, De Mente points out the belief that the mother of Jesus appeared to a Mexican Indian called Juan Diego in order for him to deliver a message to the bishop of

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<sup>58</sup> George Hunter III, *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>59</sup> Hunter, *Radical Outreach*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 29.

<sup>61</sup> Hunter, *Radical Outreach*, 23.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

the local diocese. The mother of Jesus told Juan Diego to pick some roses for the bishop. When Juan Diego opened his cloak, “in front of the Bishop they discovered an image of a dark-haired, brown-skinned woman imprinted on the side of the garment.”<sup>63</sup> From that day forward, De Mente writes, “The Catholic Church promoted Our Lady of Guadalupe as the patron saint of all Indians, and used the imagery to help it achieve virtually absolute spiritual, intellectual and economic control over the Indians of Mexico.”<sup>64</sup>

People today have become more open to different types of spiritual experiences. According to Hunter, “we observe an unprecedented harvest of open, receptive, searching people who are looking for life, often in all the wrong places. We observe the symptoms of this receptivity as people explore religious options from astrology to Zen, and self-help books, exotic new therapies, and drug-induced experiences.”<sup>65</sup> In fact, some of these beliefs have been imported into the life of the church, in the same way in which this happened to the Corinthians.<sup>66</sup> Hunter also points out that in the same way the Corinthian church was not serving nor evangelizing, that “the mainline churches of North America are not reaching their receptive neighbors.”<sup>67</sup> In other words, even when missions are a big part of most churches, we do not know how to reach out to the unchurched. Missions today have become an inward matter, in which even when we send people out, the reality is that churches are seeking their own fulfillment. This can be seen when the some of the

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<sup>63</sup> De Mente, *The Mexican Mind*, 171.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Hunter, *Radical Outreach*, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Hunter, *Radical Outreach*, 25.

church's programs are focused on providing opportunities for church's members to serve, or when the end goal of an outreach event is for the membership of a local church to increase.

Acting as saviors, churches send people to the world to bring Jesus to others and by doing so feel they have accomplished our mission. We do not know what it means to bring the rejected into our buildings, and many times when they come, we are not prepared to make them feel welcomed. Van Opstal states, "As long as our worship makes people feel excluded or in constant visitor status, we are not accomplishing the ministry of biblical hospitality."<sup>68</sup> However, Hunter affirms, "we reach people, in part, by loving and serving them, by welcoming them into the fellowship of the faithful, and by praying with sick, struggling, possessed, and oppressed people."<sup>69</sup>

The church at the present time spends a lot of time creating curriculums, setting meetings, plans, and goals to serve better its members. However, the time it is spend internally planning needs to be spend externally, helping people and reaching out to those in need. Pastors who are trained in seminaries seem to "understand themselves not as 'fishers of men' (and women), but as 'keepers of the aquarium.'"<sup>70</sup> In fact, to be more externally focused, Jesus' followers need to follow his example in becoming the good news to those in need. To proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor is a present need.

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<sup>68</sup> Van Opstal, *The Next Worship*, 63.

<sup>69</sup> Hunter, *Radical Outreach*, 33.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

Once the focused on following the patterns of the church is switch to become like the unchurched, then they can be reach out for Christ. The church must learn to think like them, feel like them, live like them, and love them like Jesus does. For Hunter, “In effective ministry, especially evangelism, we communicate the gospel’s meaning through forms that are culturally ‘indigenous,’ rather that culturally ‘foreign,’ to the target population.”<sup>71</sup> For example, Jesus talks about becoming fishers of men to fisherman and about harvesting to a farming community. In this manner, his audience was able to understand and relate to Jesus’ message. The good news has been given to Jesus’ followers to deliver to those outside the walls of the Church, and needs to be done in relevant ways. However, “If the gospel is presented in a way that lost people are not likely to ‘get it,’ the gospel has been compromised.”<sup>72</sup>

George Hunsberger claims that Christ’s followers need to be willing to let the gospel loose and give it away.<sup>73</sup> In other words, once the gospel reaches the community it was intended to reach, it needs to be set it free to do as it pleases. At the end, or from the beginning, the role of the church has never been to keep it, but as God’s messengers, to deliver it, Hunsberger asserts. However, as such, the church needs to understand that part of its job is to find the best ways to deliver it. Jesus’ followers must enable people to see what or who has always been there: Jesus Christ —the good news.<sup>74</sup> Hunsberger states

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<sup>71</sup> Hunter, *Radical Outreach*, 82.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>73</sup> George R. Hunsberger, “Is There Biblical Warrant for Evangelism?” *Interpretation* 48, no. 2 (April 1, 1994): 131-144.

<sup>74</sup> See Hunsberger, “Is There Biblical Warrant for Evangelism?” 131-144.

that the church needs “a new sense of missional identity that is more than the achievement of a mandated task. And we need to develop a missional lifestyle that does not aim at conquest and cultural dominance.”<sup>75</sup>

Put it differently, it is when the church decides to relinquish completely its will to the point of becoming whatever it needs to become, that total freedom is attained, not our freedom, nor the Greeks’ or Gentiles’ or the church’s freedom, but the Gospel’s. Free to all and for all. Paul relinquished his freedom, his rights as a Jew, and perhaps as a rabbi. He understood that it was not his right to hold on to God’s message, to define it or to explain it. He set it free. Free from cultural expectations, from religiosity, from the hands of the Jews. He gave it to the Gentiles without knowing the possible outcomes of this. To become like others means to allow Christ to take over his followers’ lives in order to free them from themselves. Hunsberger observes, “For us as for Paul, it is in the weakness of giving the gospel away and losing our grasp on it as its sole possessors that we participate in it most fully.”<sup>76</sup>

As can be seen, Corinth was a community where people from different backgrounds, social levels, beliefs, and allegiances lived. It was in this context that Paul was called to build the Corinthian church. Understanding this context and its parallels to the present day in the United States will guide Fourth Reformed Church in how to bring the good news to the community around it. As God called Paul to Corinth, he is calling Fourth Reformed Church to its diverse community.

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<sup>75</sup> Hunsberger, “Is There Biblical Warrant for Evangelism?” 135.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

## CHAPTER 3

### BELIEVING VERSUS DOING

Once I was invited to church by a friend and when I asked for the name of the pastor, my friend explained they did not have a pastor, but rather a prophet. This piqued my interest, so I made a point to attend. During the service, after a couple of worship songs, the prophet stopped singing and began reading the Bible. Then, he explained that he felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to start prophesying. My friend asked later for my thoughts of the worship service. The following section is based on my experience and my response to my friend.

Walter Brueggemann explains that prophets are usually described as future-tellers, ones who can predict the future, or as people who illuminate the path that God wants to be followed.<sup>77</sup> But prophecy is more than future-telling. Brueggemann states that prophecy is not only limited to the future, but also has an impact on the present.<sup>78</sup>

Prophesy is part of the already—not yet part of our spiritual lives. In 1 Corinthians 12,

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<sup>77</sup> See page 3 of Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001) for a more detailed definition of what prophets are seen as in today's world.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Paul says that the different gifts of the Spirit are given to us for the common good (NIV), as means of helping the entire church (Living Translation), for everyone's benefit (The Message), and for the good of the whole community (The Voice). In other words, prophesy is a gift from the Holy Spirit from which the whole community will benefit.

To be a prophet is to become a voice for the voiceless, a mediator between God and humans, a carrier of good and bad news, and one that suffers with and for the people, but also with God. To be a prophet means to live a life of going back and forth between humankind and God. As Heschel says, "Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world. It is a form of living, a crossing point of God and man. God is raging in the prophet's words."<sup>79</sup>

Prophets see worth and importance in topics or situations that others may dismiss as insignificant. Heschel writes, "To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster."<sup>80</sup> Prophecy is a message that comes from God to confront those who do wrong to others. The voice of the prophet must be heard. The message must be delivered and those who have ears to hear it must hear. The prophet as God's voice is the arrow that is thrown at a specific target. His message penetrates to the deepest of the souls of those who listen.<sup>81</sup> Part of his job is to intercede for the lost. Many times, prophets experience intense emotions at the expense of their message, which prompts them to go back to God and ask for forgiveness for

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<sup>79</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (United States: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 6.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>81</sup> From here forward, I will be using he/his/him term when referring to a prophet even when the Bible is clear that God's call is to both men and women to prophesy.

those who walk against his will. Another part of their calling is not to just deliver the message and walk away, but to act while communities are waiting for God's message.

To prophets, social action is important.<sup>82</sup> Good deeds are not just what they want to do, but what they are called by God to do. George Barna calls the prophets of the present day revolutionaries.<sup>83</sup> Barna writes that as such, "You either stand for Jesus or you stand for all that He died to repudiate."<sup>84</sup> Prophets cannot stand for both. Without God's call, prophets cannot fulfill their role.

Brueggemann remembers of the assignment given to Moses by God to confront Pharaoh in order to free the Israelites. Prophets are called by God to complete a hard task. Heschel retells the words Jeremiah speaks in chapter 20:14, 17-18 about what Jeremiah thinks of being a prophet: "Curse be the day on which I was born! Because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave. Why did I come out of the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?"<sup>85</sup>

However, to be chosen by God to be his messenger has its reward. Contrary to what many may expect from God, the reward of the prophets is neither wealth nor a life without problems. In most cases the reward is loneliness, misunderstanding, rejection, misery, or depression. In Heschel's words, "He who loved his people, whose life was dedicated to saving his people, was regarded as an enemy."<sup>86</sup> People do not understand

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<sup>82</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

<sup>83</sup> George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>85</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 6.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

them, their friends may desert them, and their families will betray them; “Just as the prophets of old were unwelcomed in their hometown, so are Revolutionaries looked at askance by even their closest friends and family members.”<sup>87</sup>

If such is the life of a prophet, it may seem better to stay silent, live a quiet peaceful life, and avoid the role. However Jeremiah teaches that to be a messenger of God is like having a burning fire inside which cannot be put out until the words are spoken, and their “duty is to speak to the people, ‘whether they hear it or refuse to hear.’”<sup>88</sup> One positive outcome of a prophet's life is that sometimes they will see how those who listen are transformed by their message. The beauty of a prophets’ message, Heschel mentions, is that through the prophets’ words “The invisible God becomes audible.”<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, in the prophet's message the presence of God becomes tangible so that those who listen can feel God’s presence and can choose to let themselves be embraced by it. Prophets are simply normal people who are chosen by God to mediate between God and humans. “In the presence of God he takes the part of the people. In the presence of the people he takes the part of God.”<sup>90</sup> He is the one that stands in the gap, the one that is willing to pay the price of being insulted. The prophet has not ambition; his main desire is to do God's will.

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<sup>87</sup> Barna, *Revolution*, 16.

<sup>88</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 22.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

## A Christian Goliath

Goliath was a Philistine that was defeated by the young David. Philistines were mortal enemies of Israel. They were pagans, unclean, and Israel believed them to be unworthy of God's mercy. The story of David and Goliath has come to symbolize any situation in which a small or weak entity has to fight someone or something with greater power. Modern examples include an individual trying to defeat a corporation, a person fighting for one's livelihood after being fired unjustly, and a minority group striving for justice against an oppressive majority.

As I said before, today churches tend to worry more about those inside the church building than about the community that surrounds them. Churches have thousands and sometimes millions of dollars for an annual budget, but many times the communities that surround them do not reflect the affluence these churches have. In Soong-Chan Rah's opinion, "Too few Sunday sermons focus on how the community is called to respond to social problems or to reflect a corporate identity as God's people."<sup>91</sup> In other words, the church has become a kind of social club in which it only worries about its members and not about those outside it. Individuality becomes the norm that rules our lives. Congregants look for ways the church can serve their own needs. As Fourth Reformed Church pondered over this issue, the church decided to look at its surroundings and to become the hands and feet of Jesus to its neighbors, not only inside the walls of the church, but outside as well.

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<sup>91</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2009), 33.

To be the voice for the voiceless is difficult, and in order to deliver a message, Christians need to be sent out. However, many church leaders do not want to raise their voices against injustice because it would go against the status quo. They do not want to challenge the church. As Rah states, “Small groups become a place of support and counsel rather than a place where Scripture challenges the participants toward kingdom living. They can feel more like support groups rather than a place of spiritual growth.”<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, according to Rah, the reasons behind the silence are rooted in how church members can benefit from these groups. Instead of confronting sin, “We begin to look for ways to categorize it as a theological liberal agenda—thereby stripping corporate confession and repentance of its prophetic power.”<sup>93</sup>

Claiming to be Jesus’ followers includes opposing the materialism which has invaded the church. However, many times Christians are afraid of speaking up for fear that members will leave and Sunday offerings will diminish. Rah states that “The church's captivity to materialism has resulted in the unwillingness to confront sins such as economic and racial injustices and has produced consumers of religions rather than followers of Jesus.”<sup>94</sup> As a result, the Church has been transformed into a place where the highest bidder gets the final say in how to do things. The Jesus many churches present is quite different than the Jesus in the Bible. Jesus cared for the poor, told his disciples not to worry because his father would provide for them, and spoke out when a woman caught in adultery was about to be killed.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 63.

The church, as followers of Christ, are called to speak up against injustices performed not only outside of the church, but inside it too. Truly, it is often the church the one that needs to be confronted. Barna points out that the presence of those who speak up against the norm “makes the typical American citizen—yes, even the typical churchgoer—uncomfortable.”<sup>95</sup> Those who belong to a minority group know that the call to speak up is also a call to confront the powers inside of the church. Speaking out against injustice is like the story of David and Goliath. The challenge today is that sometimes the church itself is acting as Goliath instead of as David. Rah explains that “Power becomes the currency of the American church and the dominant group has the greatest access to that currency.”<sup>96</sup> Confronting the White church today means to confront the powerful.

To be a true prophet of God is not easy, as many times prophets become the David fighting the Goliath inside of the Church. In order to be a prophet, one must sacrifice comfort and popularity. For many who have been chosen for this task, the price has been hard to pay. To be chosen to be a prophet in today’s world means that through the message one delivers, the presence of God comes alive. For many who hear the message, it could be the only opportunity they have to hear from God.

### **Babel or Pentecost?**

Today, even when many churches strive to be multicultural or diverse, the reality is that most of them do not take the time to prepare themselves to reach their communities in the best possible ways. However, Fourth Reformed Church has been able

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<sup>95</sup> Barna, *Revolution*, 16.

<sup>96</sup> Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 147.

to discuss the importance of analyzing the surroundings of the church, community, and ministry to which God has called it to serve. In the same way Paul learned to communicate with the Corinthian people in ways they were able to understand, NC4 is learning how to find the best ways to communicate with those around us. However, the local church needs to be challenged on their views on how to do ministry in order to live out the gospel in their communities. The separation between the church and its community is, in large part, a result of many churches, whether intentionally or unintentionally, allowing the same kind of separation that existed many years ago. It is as if the curtain that was torn in two when Christ died has been mended and hung again. These churches have created a bubble around them to protect themselves.

Before Christ, the Jewish community believed they were the only ones to receive God's promises. This attitude carried on in the Christian community after Jesus' death and resurrection as some of Jesus' disciples shared the good news with only the Jews. They did this without thinking of those who were not part of that community. It took a brave man to receive Christ's call to start reaching those outside the Jewish community even when this became a major disagreement with the leaders in Jerusalem.

Because of Paul preaching the good news to the Gentiles, the Christian church grew and spread all over the world. After Jesus rose to heaven, his disciples dedicated themselves to preaching the good news everywhere. The communities they reached were changed and transformed. In Acts 2:42, the believers are said to have "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." The passage goes on to say that "All the believers were together and had everything in common." Even when they had disagreements in how to reach others and to

whom the good news should be brought, their bond was their faith in Christ. Even when some of these churches change the ways they relate to people around them, there is still much work to do.

An example of how God is calling his church to unity can be found in the story of Pentecost. The Bible states in Genesis 11:1 that “The whole world had one language and a common speech.” In verse 7, God confused their language so they would not understand one another. Before Babel, the whole world had one language in common. However, they tried to use it with intentions that were not in line with God’s will. As a result, humanity was scattered all over the world and many languages were spoken. Centuries later, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and they began to speak in other tongues. As a result, those who were listening began to hear in their own language. God spread people around the world when they were trying to construct a tower in Babel, but at Pentecost he made them understand each other with the intent of teaching them about God’s wonders.

Today, even when it seems that God continues to try to unite his followers as he did at Pentecost, many churches are acting like the people in Babel. Instead of looking for unity, many church leaders are content with the separation caused by different cultures, languages, or unspoken racism. Rah writes that many churches are trying to break down racial, ethnic, and cultural divisions, but “To reverse centuries of negative history between the races and to rectify ignorance and incompetence when it comes to cross-cultural sensitivity is not an easy task.”<sup>97</sup> In other words, “When God brings diverse

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<sup>97</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing World* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), 11.

people into the one fellowship of Christ and his church, Pentecost is re-engaged. But when humans, no matter how well intentioned, disregard God's truth in order to form a religious fellowship of their own design, a tower of Babel results."<sup>98</sup> As a consequence of our inability to accept diversity, a cloud of uncertainty and fear has been developed within the church. Without noticing it, this cloud keeps getting thicker and darker every time we deny diversity in the church. As Rah mentions, "To begin to attempt to plant, develop, or move a church that crosses these boundaries means to push against centuries of church history. Even now in the twenty-first century, we still note a great divide in most churches, a disconnect between races, cultures and ethnicities."<sup>99</sup>

The body of Christ often forgets that it is Scripture that calls us to embrace differences, to be united as one church. Furthermore, it seems that believers have forgotten that this is not our church but Christ's. According to Achtemeier and Purves, "If we evangelicals are going to claim to be 'more biblical', that claim must be just as true of our manners as it is of our orthodoxy. Otherwise we are frauds."<sup>100</sup> Like prophets, Christians are called to speak the truth. Even when God is trying to bring unity in the church as he did at Pentecost, some churches keep creating their own Babel.

### **Engagement and Challenge**

However, as with all the things God does, there is hope for redemption. There is hope in Christ to create an environment where people from all backgrounds can

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<sup>98</sup> Mark Achtemeier and Andrew Purves, *A Passion for the Gospel: Confessing Jesus Christ for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2000), 174.

<sup>99</sup> Rah, *Many Colors*, 52.

<sup>100</sup> Achtemeier and Purves, *A Passion for the Gospel*, 188.

experience the love of Christ. There is hope that doors can be opened in the church to everybody. One day Christ's church will be worshiping him without caring about skin colors, socio-economic levels, or languages. Today, there are churches that serve as models of how this can be possible. These churches have listened to God's voice and have decided to open their doors to those who are, look, or speak differently than the majority.

By listening to the community and responding to its needs, Fourth Reformed Church has embodied the good news to those around them. Moreover, it has taken difficult steps in order to look like the community that surrounds it. For example, the senior pastor, an Anglo man, has decided to spend almost a month in a Mexican city to learn the language and the customs of some of the community members the church is trying to reach. He is doing this to serve the surrounding community better. Fourth Reformed Church, its staff, and congregation have found in Paul's path an example of the true meaning of becoming like others.

Congregations may call themselves diverse or multicultural just because some of their members are from a different race or cultures than the majority. However, to be truly diverse is more than having a few non-majority members. It means getting to know the different cultures that surround the church and making changes in the worship, preaching, and church culture so those around it can be reached by the good news. More than simply embracing others or telling them how to do things, the church needs to allow itself to be embraced by others. As an immigrant, I have been told many times that I had to learn the customs of this country in order to succeed. However, in some of these

occasions I have had to remind the people that made these comments that as Christians the only customs that should apply to us are, or should be, biblical principles.

Like the prophets from the past, part of our role at the present is to engage the systems and powers that control the communities in which we are called to minister. These powers could be the same organizations for which we work. Brueggemann emphasizes that in everything we do we should have a prophetic presence.<sup>101</sup> Our pledge should be to God and to those who suffer any kind of mistreatment, injustice, or discrimination. The pastor of Fourth Reformed Church and his wife make this a priority. In fact, they were awarded a social justice award in 2009 for their hard work with the community that surrounds the church. As one member of the church says, “They immediately set to work brushing up on their Spanish and finding ways to nourish those living nearby, both spiritually and with community meals.”<sup>102</sup> Thanks to their heart for the community, some other members of the church have opened their homes to those in need of a place to stay and by doing so, lives have been transformed. For example, when Leo Vardo was recovering from heart surgery and had no place to stay, some members of the church allowed him to stay with them. “He doesn’t have family here,” said Connie Amaya, “He is our brother in the faith.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Peg McNichol, “A Sense of Community: Minister, Wife among Winners of Social Justice Awards,” accessed September 29, 2017, <http://www.hollandsentinel.com/x1437793431/A-sense-of-community-Minister-wife-among-winners-of-social-justice-awards>.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

## **Prophethood of all Believers**

I am part of a denomination that believes that Jesus is our prophet, priest, and king. My denomination believes in the priesthood of all believers. This means that all believers have direct access to God, do not have to come to an individual to perform sacrifices on their behalf, and have the responsibility to act as priests. In short, all believers can perform priestly work.

However, perhaps the focus has been mostly directed on being priests and has forgotten that Christ's followers are also called to be prophets. Prophets are agents of change and transformation in their present time, just as Jesus was. The changes Jesus made continue to be part of our daily lives. Prophets were not only part of the past but are part of the present and future. Prophecy is not something that ended at the cross, but through his church God continues to point out injustices and change lives. The church, as representatives of Christ, are called to become agents of change and to be part of a prophethood of all believers.

To be a prophet means to pay a high price, and not everybody is willing to do so in order to speak the truth. According to Elizondo, "What happened to Jesus will continue to happen to those who dare to speak the prophetic word today. The structures will react violently to silence them."<sup>104</sup> However, there are still people willing to respond to God as Isaiah did, as a willing prophet to speak truth to the people.

Christians have a responsibility to be on the side of those who suffer, those who are mistreated, and those who need the good news. Moreover, God has given his church

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<sup>104</sup> Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 113.

the power of the Holy Spirit to confront and expose injustices. As Dr. King says, “Like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed.”<sup>105</sup>

Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 about the need of becoming like others in order for some to be saved. Perhaps God is calling his church at the present time to become the prophet communities need. To save those in need spiritually and physically, the church needs to intentionally engage in its surrounding communities and neighborhoods to meet their needs. According to Rah, “Christians used to be people of influence. That influence arose not from a political power base or from an economic power, but it arose from being engaged in the culture and speaking truth to the culture.”<sup>106</sup> God keeps calling people to speak up when necessary to be agents of change. In Dr. King's words, “The church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion: it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.”<sup>107</sup>

### **Agents of Change**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s courage to confront evil powers with non-violence resistance left an inheritance of freedom that many still follow. Dr. King followed the non-violence resistance method used by Gandhi to free India from the British Empire.

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<sup>105</sup> James M. Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1986), 295.

<sup>106</sup> Rah, *Many Colors*, 71.

<sup>107</sup> Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope*, 300.

During his life, Dr. King expressed on many occasions that the most important thing people can do is to love those who demonstrate hate. As he said, “The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him.”<sup>108</sup>

Additionally, Dr. King taught about the value of unity. The Montgomery bus boycott was a success because people worked together. Such cooperation ended segregation in the bus system. Dr. King also expressed how “there is more power in socially organized masses on the march than there is in guns in the hands of a few desperate men.”<sup>109</sup> Dr. King spoke hard words against the systems of racism and exposed communal sin on many occasions. His search for justice caused him to confront many systems that sided with injustice. He confronted the Church and the government. He confronted his fellow clergymen and leaders in all levels. However, he always tried to do it in a peaceful way and with love for those who hated him. Though he earned recognitions and was a winner of the Nobel Prize, he suffered greatly before he was killed on April 4, 1968. Even if he had known about all the suffering he would undergo to achieve what he accomplished, he probably would have still done what he did. His life affected enormous change in our country.

In another part of the world, El Salvador, Oscar Romero also fought against injustice and oppression. Oscar Romero became the voice for those who were suffering under the Salvadorian government in a time of turmoil. In a time when Salvadorians who opposed the government were killed, his words, as well as Dr. King’s, became a threat for those in power. Romero writes that

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 33.

When the prophet bothers the consciences of the selfish, or of those who are not building with God's plans, he is a nuisance and must be eliminated, murdered, thrown into the pit, persecuted, not allowed to speak the word that annoys. But the prophet could not tell them anything else.<sup>110</sup>

The price to pay is always the same. There is not celebration; the reward is insults, lies, ostracization, alienation, and for many-death.

Like many others, Romero also spoke of love as the way to fight injustice. He stated, "The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work."<sup>111</sup> Most of Romero's sermons were directed to the search for justice for his people, and like Dr. King and others, he also confronted the powers of the Church.

For example, during one of his sermons he remarks how

A religion of Sunday Mass but unjust weeks does not please the Lord. A religion of much praying but with hypocrisy in the heart is not Christian. A church that sets itself up only to be well off, to have a lot of money and comfort, but that forgets to protest injustices, would not be the true church of our divine Redeemer.<sup>112</sup>

These were hard words to hear for those who lived hypocritical lives that did not align with Jesus' way of life. Romero went further than just speaking during his sermons about injustices. As he saw needs, he acted on them. For example, he wrote a letter to then President Jimmy Carter in order to plead that the U.S. government would stop helping those in power in El Salvador. However, those in power felt threatened by Romero and on March 24, 1980, while he was performing Mass, he was shot and killed.

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<sup>110</sup> James R. Brockman, trans. *The Violence of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 5.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

To be a voice for those who suffer is hard, therefore not many people have decided to speak up for justice. Furthermore, many of those who have done so have paid the highest price with their lives. Dr. King and Romero are just two examples of those who responded to God's call. Like many others, their lives were shortened by those in power. In the minds of those in power, the voices of those who decided to be quiet no more were silenced. Though the agitators died, their voices continue to resound in the hearts of those who are willing to face the injustices of the present. Like these leaders, the Church is now called to be the voice of the voiceless, to pay the price, and to become whatever we need to become—prophets of today, true agents of change and transformation.

### **Individual Versus Corporate Sin**

The United States is known for its value of independence. However, independence has created a strong sense of individualism as part of the American culture. Extreme individualism has led to egocentric lifestyles in which each person only cares for themselves. People assert that what they do in their own lives only affects themselves. However, this way of living has created a gap between many cultures based in racism. Furthermore, a separation between Whites and minority groups has been part of the American culture for many years, including in the church.

In the words of Booker T. Washington, “In all things purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 41.

In other words, even when Christians are part of one body, separation still exists. Furthermore, separation was accepted as the norm. However, Rah writes that the category of race “was created by American society in an attempt to justify and regulate the social injustice of slavery.”<sup>114</sup> Slavery was not an individual matter, but rather a corporate decision. For example, Jennings writes that race divisions were used as an instrument to subdue the native peoples of the different countries conquered by Portugal, Spain, England, and Britain.<sup>115</sup> What perhaps started as an individual nation conquering another transformed into corporations exploiting many of these same countries through slavery. Jennings uses Zurara’s words when talking about how slaves were divided with no respect to their personhood: each “was shown either to friends or relations, but each fell where his lot took him.”<sup>116</sup> Through history we see how what started as a communal good ended as an individual gain. In other words, exploring other lands was not inherently wrong, but once institutions saw the opportunity of gaining economic power, it became sinful.

In Jerusalem, for example, “We see how institutions set up to help the people—the law and the temple—in turn become absolutized and self-serving.”<sup>117</sup> In like manner, “Too few Sunday sermons focus on how the community is called to respond to social problems or to reflect a corporate identity as God’s people.”<sup>118</sup> The pattern repeats itself

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<sup>114</sup> Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 66.

<sup>115</sup> See chapters 1-4 of Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Grace*, to read these histories.

<sup>116</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 19.

<sup>117</sup> Elizondo, *The Galilean Journey*, 70.

<sup>118</sup> Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 33.

and what started as a communal settlement has become an individual society. In it, the individual is more important than society and what one wants is more important than what the community needs.

Consequently, people believe that their thoughts and actions do not, or should not, affect others. They do. Rah states how “Our reduction of sin to a personal issue means that we are unwilling to deal with social structural evils, and this reduction prevents us from understanding the full expression of human sinfulness and fallenness.”<sup>119</sup> People believe that racism has stopped being a communal sin and has become a particular point of view. Some would say that since they have never personally benefited from slavery or committed an equally offensive act, then they are not racist.<sup>120</sup> Communal gatherings do not see the need to fix the corporations, including the Church, that continue to exercise racism. When a seminary graduate that belongs to a minority group is not called by a church because he or she does not match the church’s racial majority, we can see that racism still exists. When minority pastors are hired part-time only to become the minority token of the church, racism still exists. When decisions have been made by a minority staff member in a church and the senior pastor over rules them, racism still exists.<sup>121</sup> White privilege, Rah states, “is the system that places white culture in American society at the center with all other cultures at the fringes.”<sup>122</sup> Jennings writes that during the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 72.

founding years of the United States, Africans were not given the opportunity to become literate. For Jennings, “Understanding this historic reality is crucial for grasping the formation of segregationist mentalities in operation in Christianity that were unchallenged by Christian theology.”<sup>123</sup>

In summary, the decisions of those in power are seen by their communities as coming from God, and if that is the case, it is very difficult to challenge them. Minority members need bravery to confront these issues. Furthermore, the lack of true openness to diversity is a problem for most churches in the twenty-first century, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church can be better prepared for diversity. Changes have to be made in the way the church demonstrates love to its neighbors, church signs have to be translated for community members to understand them. As a consequence, the church’s way of living changes, as it allows the good news to embrace us. Christ’s command to reach out to community members in his name results not just in being intentional about welcoming community members, but to actually break the walls of division that racism, discrimination, and pride keep creating inside of the church. It is our decision to become the agents of change and transformation the community needs.

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<sup>123</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 233.

PART THREE  
MINISTRY PRACTICE

## CHAPTER 4

### GOALS AND PLANS

Analyzing the environment is a key first step before a church engages in communicating the good news. Connecting to other cultures enables it to communicate the gospel in ways that listeners can understand. Furthermore, it is important to use the right language when communicating with other cultures. In this work, God's people must be prophets who are voices for the voiceless and agents of change and transformation that our communities need. When God send us out, he is with us.

Answering God's call includes completing the hard work of building relationships before planting the seeds of the gospel. When Isaiah had an encounter with God, his life was transformed (Is 6:1-8). In these verses Isaiah listened, responded, and finally acted. He was sent out or commissioned as God's messenger. He did not know at that time how hard his job would be. The Bible describes many parts of his journey. For some, this simple action of answering the call made Isaiah into a prophet. Yet God did not ask him to become a prophet. In fact, Isaiah probably did not expect to become one. He knew he needed to respond to God and he did so. Prophecy may be seen as foretelling, but it is more than that; prophecy is about becoming agents of change and transformation. Jesus'

followers are called to listen, to respond, and to act. In Isaiah's case, to grow with God's people, he needed to convince them to change their ways to the Lord's. Through his lips, God spoke to many people to turn their eyes toward him. Even when some people decided not to listen to Isaiah's words, most of the time his job was done once the message was delivered.

### **Here am I, Lord**

Acts 9 describes Paul's conversion experience on his way to Damascus. Something important about his conversation is the awareness that Christ's voice was calling Paul's name. McLaren states that "Jesus entered Paul's life, and Paul entered Jesus' way."<sup>1</sup> The simple act of listening plays an important part in our ministry, in Paul's, and in the life of Fourth Reformed Church.

In their book *Welcoming Justice: God's Movements toward Beloved Community*, Charles Marsh and John Perkins talk about the importance of listening, answering, and acting.<sup>2</sup> For example, Marsh writes that due to personal experiences, he was "taught to listen more closely to voices outside the academic guild, to engage the subject with humility but also with courage."<sup>3</sup> For him, theology became something more tangible once it left the classroom. Marsh explains that "Faith is authentic when stays close to the ground."<sup>4</sup> In other words, our theology needs to be a theology that comes from those who

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<sup>1</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 250.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Marsh and John Perkins, *Welcoming Justice: God's Movements toward Beloved Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

suffer such as the outcast, the rejected, and the ones that feel God's bride does not want to invite them to the wedding feast. To change this view of the church, some members of NC4, which belonged to a minority group, have been empowered to teach Bible classes, lead prayers, and be part of the worship band. In like manner, a class led by a native of Mexico was held in the church in order to learn more about the Mexican culture, its traditions and customs.

As agents of change, Christ's church is called to be close to people, to invite the outcast to become the teachers, to be transformed by them. John Perkins has been called to bring reconciliation to the church, and as such he has become an agent of change. He is the representation of what a prophet should look like today. To be a prophet is hard and it means that sometimes the message to deliver is not easy to hear within the church context. According to Perkins, "We've developed a church culture where we tell each other what we want to hear but don't take the time to listen to what God wants for our lives."<sup>5</sup> He uses the example of how many times during Sunday service the pastor asks the congregation to turn to each other and to tell them how God has blessed them. To talk about God's personal blessings has become the norm of today's church.

Most people in the church volunteer to help, to feed the poor, to bring snacks, or to show love to others. But as Perkins emphasizes "Love isn't just a feeling. It's an action that requires conversation."<sup>6</sup> But conversation requires listening to God and to each other. Church members need to spend more time asking people what their needs are instead of

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<sup>5</sup> Marsh and Perkins, *Welcoming Justice*, 40.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

assuming they know them. By doing this, the church assures to love others in their context. Fourth Reformed Church has understood the importance of listening to its neighbors and today listening takes place during many of the church's programs. Round tables are used strategically to send the message that everyone is the same in God's eyes. In addition, the title of leader has been change to facilitators.

Loving others in their context can seem like a complex idea that is difficult to accomplish, but as more members of Fourth Reformed Church open their doors to their neighbors this type of love can be achieved. According to Fuder, "The process starts one neighborhood at the time, or even just a few streets at a time in a community."<sup>7</sup> He makes this simple; we do not have to create programs, but simply love and listen to those around us. For him, "The best way to start is one life at a time."<sup>8</sup>

Hirsch affirms that "God is everywhere. He is already deeply involved in human history and in all people's lives."<sup>9</sup> When we present the good news to the church's neighbors, Jesus' followers are not necessarily bringing Jesus to those they encounter but rather are participating in what God has already been doing in that community. The most important thing to remember is that the ultimate goal is being with the people.

Agents of change should rise from inside the structures in order to bring authentic change. As Douglas A. Hall writes, "The first and most basic positive contribution of systems thinking to urban ministry is that any real, long lasting change must come from

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<sup>7</sup> John Fuder, "Exegeting your Community: Using Ethnography to Diagnose Needs," in *A Heart for the Community: New Models for Urban and Suburban Ministry*, eds. John Fuder and Noel Castellanos (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 72.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 185.

within the system.”<sup>10</sup> The leadership of NC4 has understood the importance of change within and is working in training new leaders to become the agents of change the community needs.

### **Responding**

Karl Barth is quoted as saying that when preaching, we should hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper on the other. Sermons should be relevant to the present needs. For Paul, this meant responding appropriately to the needs of his people. He made special trips to visit some of the churches he planted and wrote letters to them. For NC4, this means being willing to look at the needs of the community and do its best to respond to them. For example, NC4 has become one of the locations where a program, named circles, which focus on helping people from a diverse range of social and economic levels, in order to help them achieve financial goals, meet.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, some members of NC4 have become the mentors the participants need. By doing this, church members have become agents of transformation for many of the families that have participated in the program.

To live in the present and be able to respond to the needs of the world is part of being a Christian. Like Paul, the response should be immediate. To open the newspaper and the Bible looking for God’s guidance every morning needs to be part of Jesus’ followers devotional. As a part of the church’s response to God, it must repent daily of

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas A. Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 44.

<sup>11</sup> Good Samaritan Ministries. “Circles,” accessed March 12, 2018, <https://www.goodsamministries.com/what-we-do/circles/>

the unjust ways the poor and oppressed have been treated. As Hall proposes that perhaps instead of asking what Jesus would do, the church should ask itself what is it doing and why.<sup>12</sup> Jesus' followers have to break the mental models that for generations have been carrying, whether racism, elitism, or heroism.<sup>13</sup> Hall stresses that in our hearts, "We want to serve Christ. But somehow, unintentionally, we change from being humble servants of God to acting like masters!"<sup>14</sup>

During a monthly event at NC4, before we greeted and served meals to members of the community, the volunteers gathered to pray. Around twenty people formed the circle and nineteen of those prayers were thanking God for the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus. The prayers included being thankful for the opportunity to serve the poor. To pray before a church program is not uncommon, however, to thank God for the opportunity to be him to others has become the norm of most prayers. When my turn to pray arrived, I asked God for forgiveness for not seeing him in those outside the church building, for not treating strangers as if they were angels, and for not treating others like they were Jesus. By allowing members of the community, that are part of a minority group, to influence the church's majority, the majority group will be empowered to see its neighbors in different way. NC4 now makes an effort in inviting a community member to lead the prayer time in some of the church's programs. The goal is that by fall 2019 most, if not all, prayer times are led by a community member. Involving neighbors' participation is part of the goals of NC4 to increase church membership.

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<sup>12</sup> Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> See Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 93-94 for a longer explanation.

<sup>14</sup> Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 220.

## Acting

In *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, Volf and Bass argue about how instead of talking about our Christian life as a whole, we should talk about the practices that make our Christian lives.<sup>15</sup> They write, “Christian practices address needs that are basic to human existence as such, and they do so in ways that reflect God’s purposes for humankind.”<sup>16</sup> People see the love of Christ reflected in how his followers act.

Beliefs and actions are usually related as Volf and Bass explain. For them, “Religious beliefs shape and are shaped by religious practices.”<sup>17</sup> However, perhaps the church at the present time does not know what practicing our beliefs looks like. Many people are in search of love and mercy, of someone who will act justly, or of the voice they feel they have lost. There are still many people living in the margins, and the church’s presence may be the only chance they have to feel God’s love, mercy, and grace. As Volf and Bass write, “Belief in God’s indiscriminate mercy is rendered more credible by religious practices of mercy.”<sup>18</sup> In the same way Isaiah was sent out or that Paul chose to become like others, we the church need to be willing to serve God in our communities.

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<sup>15</sup> Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

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

## **Becoming or Not?**

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 Paul explains how he became all things to all people, so that by all possible means some people might be saved. He traveled to Corinth to save as many people as he could for Christ. He did this by learning new ways to meet people in their environments, confronting obstacles presented to him by the context and culture, and spreading the good news through understanding and presenting it in their context. In fact, he became what they were. He did not go expecting that they would come to his comfort zone, but rather he entered theirs. Even when he did not agree with many of their views and ways of living, Paul respected who they were. He loved them, and therefore tried to save them.

However, when Paul writes how he became all things to all people, he also gives some limitations when becoming like others. For instance, Paul never writes that he became all of them at the same time. Paul “adapts the form of his preaching to different audiences, but he never downplays or omits the central truths of the gospel that audiences might find unreasonable or impertinent.”<sup>19</sup> If Paul had decided to become all things to all people at once, he would have been burnt out, depressed, questioning his calling, and perhaps quit altogether. However, like most agents of change he paid the price and continued his ministry until his life was taken away. Paul did not try to become many things to many people either. If this had been the case, he would have ended up becoming nothing to anyone.

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<sup>19</sup> Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary*, 398.

Paul's model when becoming all things to all people was none other than God himself. In fact, Paul saw that this was the only boundary we need in order to become like others. By doing what Christ did, and becoming like him, Paul could not be mistaken in doing whatever he needed to do in order to save some. As a student of the Torah, Paul saw how God talked to people in ways they could understand. Later as a follower of Christ, he became aware that Jesus was not the exception, but communicates to those around him in the same manner that his Father does.

Schnabel points out that "Paul never says that he became 'a pagan to the pagans.'"<sup>20</sup> Even in verses 20-22 when Paul mentions his adaptability to the Jews, Gentiles, and the weak, he defines the limits of his adaptability. Paul is not advocating that a Christian should become anything for anybody. In other words, "Paul does not argue for cultural relativism but for cultural relevance."<sup>21</sup> In like manner, Schnabel also makes the point that Paul does not change the content of the gospel to satisfy his hearers or to make them feel that to become a follower of Christ could be convenient. Paul "adapts the form of his preaching to different audiences, but he never downplays or omits the central truths of the gospel that audiences might find unreasonable or impertinent."<sup>22</sup>

Paul became like those around him and took time to really know people, to learn from them, to work alongside them, to suffer with them, and to listen to what they had to say. Schnabel states that, "Paul's 'identificatory' maxim of missionary behavior means

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 398.

that he listens to the people so that they will listen to him.”<sup>23</sup> More than a messenger that delivers the message and leaves, Paul understood those around him. Paul became a prophet of his time when it was needed the most. Paul’s main hope by becoming all things to all people was to win people for Christ. However, God will not only transform those that will see Jesus in us, but by enfleshing Christ to others we will also be transformed by him.

Schnabel emphasizes the importance of learning from those to whom we are trying to present the good news. For him “The ethnic, religious, and social identity of the audience helps to shape the structure, content and linguistic formulations of the sermons and speeches.”<sup>24</sup> Hirsch mentions how “A genuine missional church is, therefore, a genuine learning organization.”<sup>25</sup> In order to be able to minister to those around us, NC4, like Paul, needs to understand the environment, culture, and language before being able to present the gospel.

In today’s world, people still worship many gods, speak different languages, eat different kinds of foods, and try to use the gospel to do as they please. However, people do not need to as travel far as Paul did to encounter other cultures. In fact, almost every day is easy to encounter someone from a different culture at the grocery store, at the gas station, and in our neighborhoods. An example of this, is how NC4 is surrounded by gas stations, restaurants, local markets, and a mechanic shop that are owned by people from other countries. However, the pastors of NC4 decided to learn how to greet people in the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>25</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 280.

languages represented by these cultures. The owners of these businesses saw in the pastors of NC4 a couple men willing to leave their comfort zones and enter theirs, as a result a reciprocal language program started in which the participants learn basic skills to communicate with each other. The goal is that a program to teach each other's languages is established by the fall of 2018. This program is going to be run by community members during the church's Wednesday program. The plan is to have ten members of the church and ten members of the community, who do not speak English, as part of the program. As Christians, we are called to become all things to all people in order to save others.

David Smith writes that we need to be open to what those who are different than us have to say and to the ways they want to say it. By doing so, the church learns from those it consider strangers. In fact, if the church allows God to do his will, he will teach new ways to see those around us, to live, and even to interpret Scripture in a new way. As Smith writes, "God may be at work in them in ways that you desperately need. Hear the call to learn from the Samaritan, the stranger, who did not use a checklist of neighbors. Let down your pride and seek to receive and offer a compassion that crosses cultural lines."<sup>26</sup> By doing this Jesus' followers learn new ways not only of approaching others, but of living the good news in a free environment that reflects Christ.

### **Warning**

For a long time, I have spoken with people about the importance of becoming like others. More than that, I have talked to people about the difference between ministering

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<sup>26</sup> David I. Smith, *Learning from the Stranger: Christian Faith and Cultural Diversity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 76.

to others and ministering with others. I have asked some members of the church to stand in line outside of the church with those who were waiting for hours to get food from the food pantry. On other occasions, I have them to go and apply for government assistance in person, even when they know they will be rejected. I explained that these exercises can help feel the humiliation and mistreatment that many people go through to get help. However, this is not merely an exercise for many in the community but part of their lives. To become whatever we need to become in order to save others means more than empathizing with others.

However, I understood this truth in a new way when I saw a video clip about a fictitious Christian couple that became swingers in order to talk about God with other couples that share the same interests. They claimed to hear God telling them they needed to do this to share the gospel.<sup>27</sup> This is a clear illustration of using the Bible in the wrong way and becoming like others without having Christ as the cornerstone.

Paul is very specific about the limitations that God has set in order to reach the lost. There is only one God and Christ was the human incarnation of him. Jesus' followers need to reject all other gods and idols, including our human desires. In other words, in order to be able to minister to those around the church, it needs to understand the environment, culture, and language before presenting the gospel. Finally, the church needs to do this within the boundaries of the Bible.

In conclusion, as Fourth Reformed Church defines what being agents of change for the community may look like, the church is also trying new ways to find the common

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<sup>27</sup> New York Post. "These Christian swingers like sharing Bible verses, sex partners," accessed June 5, 2017, <http://nypost.com/2014/09/25/these-christian-swingers-like-sharing-bible-verses-sex-partners/>.

ground with those the church is trying to reach. To do this, NC4 is willing to get out of its comfort zone, to get its hands dirty, and to leave whatever hinders its learning from those that are, look, think, and believe differently from us. To burst the bubble that surrounds the church, it need to become like others.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See chapters 1 and 4 of D. I. Smith, *Learning from the Stranger* to see his use of Genesis 20:1-18 and Luke 10:25-37. He states that we should not approach an unknown culture thinking that we know what they need. Likewise, we need to be open and willing to learn from other cultures that we may consider lower or less than us.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLEMENTATION

The previous chapters examined the city of Holland, its surrounding area, and how the city demographics are changing. The project has put forth a biblical foundation for the church's work based on some similarities between the city of Corinth, the United States, and particularly the city of Holland. God, through Jesus, has shown on various occasions that he embodies the good news. Furthermore, by deciding to respond to God's call, Fourth Reformed Church is being transformed as the agent of change the community that surrounds it needs.

When Paul entered Corinth, he was confronted with a group of people that already had developed their own belief system. Most of the members of the Corinthian community believed that if they worshipped one of the many gods they had, their lives would be better, their wrongdoings would be forgiven, and deceased loved ones would have a better after life. However, after listening to Paul's message, many Corinthians' lives were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul became an agent of change and transformation for the Corinthian community. Just as Isaiah and Paul did many years ago, at the present time, Fourth Reformed Church has accepted God's challenge to

become the agents of change and transformation the community needs. The church has completed a yearlong plan that will be divided in four phases and plans to start the fall of 2018. A little over a year ago, a congregational workshop took place to discern the next steps for the church to develop new areas and strengthen others. The main areas covered in the workshop were outreach, multicultural worship and agility, discipleship and leadership development (see Appendix A). Due to the responses from church members, the workshop has become an annual meeting in which participants set goals, talk about accomplishments, and dream together about NC4's future.

### **Phase one (0-3 months)**

Peter M. Senge mentions in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organization* that the Greek word *metanoia*, which is usually translated as repentance and implies shifting of the mind, is also related to learning.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Christians need to learn, or relearn, new ways to see and do things. In Senge's words, "To grasp the meaning of 'metanoia' is to grasp the deeper meaning of 'learning,' for learning also involves a fundamental shift or movement of mind."<sup>30</sup> In Corinth, for example, those who decided to follow Jesus needed to learn how to become a monotheist community. In Holland, Fourth Reformed Church has learned that even when Hispanics worship the same God in the same church building, the ways they identify with him and their understanding of the Bible may be different. NC4 understands the need for learning new ways of doing ministry in a growing Hispanic community. The pastors of NC4, together

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<sup>29</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organization* (USA: Doubleday, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

with the governing body of the church, have put together a yearlong plan. The main goal of this plan is to discover new ways to be present in the lives of those who surround the church and to help all involved be transformed. Even when NC4 has been making many changes already, the goal is to officially begin this journey on the fall of 2018. An important part of the journey is a journal that is going to be used to describe the transformation of the church. The church has also understood that it needs to learn to look for Christ in others. To be more intentional about this, a diversity team will be created in three months. This team is to be formed by three members of the church and three members of the community. A major part of the team responsibilities include to find what the community needs are, and to learn how to work together. As Hirsch explains, for the church to change its behavior, it needs to do more than change our way of thinking. The way to do this according to Hirsch, “is to act our way into a new way of thinking.”<sup>31</sup> The next step of the project is to schedule an envisioning/planning workshop with members of the community and congregation. In this workshop, the goals and plans for this project, as well as the members of the diversity team, will be presented. A time for praying and discernment as well as a time for discussion are part of the workshop. During the workshop, the governing body of the church discusses how they came to the approval of the project. The final step of this phase is to schedule a time for all the members of the congregation to fill a cross-cultural assessment that will help understand how diverse the church thinks it is.

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<sup>31</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 131.

### **Phase two (3-6 months)**

To change the way the church do things, it needs to be intentional about breaking the barriers between groups and looking for ways to work with each other. Jesus' followers need to be willing to get out of our comfort zones to reach the lost, to become like others in order to save some. The church needs to become agents of change. However, as Van Opstal eloquently writes, people "are prone to do things that are comfortable. We either like things that come easy or that feel authentic to who we are and organic to our community."<sup>32</sup>

During phase two, the pastors of NC4 will start a sermon series based in the Corinthian community, culture, religious background, and traditions. In like manner, the series focuses in Corinth before Paul's arrival and what he had to confront there. Then the focus progresses to how Paul listened, responded, and acted to follow God's voice to go to Corinth. Then, the series continues by talking about God's call to NC4 to engage in the community that surrounds it.

In his book *Incarnational Ministry: Being with the Church*, Samuel Wells talks about the importance of being with a person when doing ministry.<sup>33</sup> For him, it is not a matter of empathizing, but rather engaging fully with the other. Wells emphasizes, "'With' is the most important word in the Christian faith."<sup>34</sup> He defines working with as a model that obtains its energy from solving the problems and overcoming the obstacles

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Wells, *Incarnational Ministry: Being with the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 7.

that may be present while doing so in partnership with those in need. Furthermore, working with others looks for ways in which all of those involved can come together as one. Additionally, being with means that the focus is not so much on the problems, but on accompanying those in need while they find their own ways to resolve the situations.<sup>35</sup>

The church needs to be prepared at all times to be with those in need because the opportunity may present itself at any time. Wells proclaims that the church needs to seek for God's guidance, as he mentions how "The ministry of being with begins with being with God in prayer."<sup>36</sup>

NC4 has been praying for God's wisdom and discernment in order to know how to be with the community. The church wants to discover what steps to take in order to become agents of change, to help people's lives be transformed, and to be like Jesus. NC4 understands the value of being with the people that surround the church. To better understand what being with the people means, and as part of phase two, a ten week class that follows the sermon series topics will be offer once a week during the church's Wednesday program (Appendix B). In like manner, and after realizing how many predominantly Anglo churches in the Holland area offer English as a Second Language Programs (ESL), NC4 plans to start a reciprocal program in which the English and Spanish speakers teach each other basic conversational language skills. While plans of how to reach these goals are being draw to a close and while understanding that some of them can be modified, the most important step for NC4 has been to listen to God's will for the church and the community.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 24.

NC4 understands the value of being sent to those around the church. As Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch asserts, “Through Jesus’ eyes, the church is the sent people of God. A church is not a building or an organization. It is a collective of believers, centered on Jesus and sent out into the world to serve others in his name.”<sup>37</sup> When the senior pastor of NC4 is asked about the size of the church, his response is not numerical, but instead he names the streets that the church has identified as its parish. For Frost and Hirsch, “Jesus’ community is not a static band of learners. They are moving, living, breathing, organic team of little Jesuses.”<sup>38</sup> Time after time, Jesus sent his disciples to the community to love and heal them. Sometimes, the disciples came back feeling they had failed, but they tried. Similarly, NC4 is trying to become a reflection of the community, and though sometimes it will be discouraged, Jesus calls us to try again just as he did the disciples. The senior pastor does not see the size of the church in terms of numbers but as a parish, in a community, in his neighborhood. The pastor goes on a run around the community every morning and prays for the neighbors. Sometimes, when encountering people in need, he prays for them, but he also tries to help if there is a physical need. As a leader of the church, he has truly been sent to the community he serves. For Hirsch, “We are being sent in the same way in which the Son was sent”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 28.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>39</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 136.

### **Phase three (6-9 months)**

One of the things NC4 has learned in past months, is a new way to do communion. Communion not only happens during a Sunday service, but also on the table on the parking lot while distributing the food the church gives to the community. In order to make participants aware of this, and before starting to distribute the food to the community, the pastors take time to explain the significance of breaking bread together. Furthermore, before distribution starts, the pastors pray for spiritual and physical nourishment as well as with and for members of the community. Furthermore, members from the community are invited to lead, or participate during, the prayer time. During one of the monthly food distribution time, a member of the community asked if communion could be served during the time that distribution happens. As a result, and as part of phase three, communion is served in the church's parking lot every three months, using the bread and juice that is given away to the community. This is done as a response of what happened in the past with rotten food being distributed. In like manner, members of the church and community are invited to a potluck in the parking lot during the months of June, July and August. People will be encouraged to use the food from the food distribution program as well as to share meal recipes and ideas about different meals. Even when at the present time and while serving others, volunteers pray for the participants of the food program, ask about family members, and if needed, bring the food to their homes, the goal is that deeper relationships are established.

Communion also happens at the tables in the gathering room when people are invited to share meals during various events, such as a child's birthday, a baby shower, a baptism, or a funeral. Perhaps communion, as we do it on a worship service, will not be

served during these events, but a bilingual banner will be put in the gathering room reminding people that every time we break bread in community Christ is present. Finally, communion happens during a church service, when the words of Jesus celebrating his last meal are remembered, when bread is broken and wine is poured in the cup. Alan Hirsch describes the importance of finding new ways to do things as he says, “Remember that if the only tools you have is a hammer, then everything begins to look like a nail.”<sup>40</sup> When Fourth Reformed Church prayed, and God revealed that communion happens in many places, the church saw a different way to do ministry.

Jesus became like us, suffered like us, and died like us on our behalf. He identified himself with us so that we could identify with him. As NC4 plans to implement its new goals, “we will need to exercise a genuine identification and affinity with those we are attempting to reach.”<sup>41</sup> Some of the objectives of the diversity team are to find the right person to be in charge of the potlucks, to make sure that the banner to be use in the gathering room is culturally relevant, and to make sure that the food that is distributed during the food program meets the standards of the church: No food will be given away that a member of the church would not eat.

#### **Phase four (9-12 months)**

To serve the community better, NC4 realized that the church needed to be aware of its surroundings. To be aware of its surroundings, the church hired an independent consultant to help the church become understand the neighborhood better. The

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 142.

independent contractor helped the church understand its current strengths, areas of growth, and changes the church can make to welcome the Hispanic community. As part of the process, the consultant met with past and current members of the congregation in order to listen to their opinions about the church. He also met with several community members with the same purpose. He then presented a report to the governing body of the church in which the main recommendation was that the church needs to become more relational and welcoming to community members. As a consequence, the church decided to change the way it does discipleship. Discipleship has changed from helping members of the church grow in their relationship with Christ to find ways to help members of the community feel welcome. For example, a small group of four people that used to get together every week in the church for Bible study, has open the doors of the members' homes during the months of June, July and August to have conversations with neighbors about life, parenting, marriage, etc. The members of the group rotate the place of meeting as well as the teaching topic. To this point the topics to be talk about are: June-A purpose driven life, July-Marriage, and August-Parenting. The goal of these groups is to give tools to community members to have a better life. The secondary goal of the groups is for community members to become part of a discipleship pathway, in which they can have a closer relationship with Jesus. In like manner, changes have been made in other church's programs. The following sections describe a few examples of this effort.

### **Breakfast with Baby (BWB)**

BWB is a monthly program that started many years ago in NC4. The focus of this ministry is to help mothers-to-be and mothers of babies up to one year old. Baby clothes,

diapers, wipes, and sometimes big items such as cribs, car seats, and changing tables are given to the mothers that participate in this ministry.

Breakfast is served first. The main goal of this ministry is for church members and volunteers to serve mothers that work during the week and for fellowship to happen around the tables. Around 70-80 percent of the recipients are Hispanic. However, all of the food that was served during breakfast was Anglo such as casserole dishes, macaroni and cheese, and quiche. When the leaders of the program were aware of the need to change some of these dishes in order to make the program recipients feel welcome, the first response was hesitation. Since the cook volunteers were mostly Anglo women, it would be hard for them to change the menu. Moreover, some of their feelings might be hurt if asked to cook different items. The concern was expressed that many recipients of the program had spoken about how the type of food being served did not make them feel welcome. After several meetings, the leadership of the program decided to make small steps and introduce Hispanic foods during breakfast. Beans, tortillas, salsa, and scrambled eggs were added to the menu of BWB. Later, during conversations with Hispanic participants, some church's members were told how they felt the church was taking steps to make them feel welcome. Participants saw in these changes, interest from the church in making meals appetizing to them.

### **Nuestra Casa (Our Home)**

Several years ago, a church neighbor came to the senior pastor's office to donate a house across the street from the church. However, the owner said the house needed a lot of work. The pastor thanked him, but also said he needed to talk to the governing body of

the church to make a decision. During the next consistory meeting, the governing body voted to accept the gift even though the church was unclear about what was going to happen with the house. After many meetings with the community and months of discerning, the decision was made that the house would be converted into a community home. It took few years to gather the resources and the right people to help in this project.<sup>42</sup> With the generous help of individuals and local organizations, Nuestra Casa started to take shape and become a beacon in the community. Now the home hosts events like community gatherings and meetings with local police officers. Furthermore, different kinds of classes are offered such as youth mentorship and life skills. Participants are invited to become part of the home gatherings in order to create closer relationships between community and church members. NC4 adjusts the purpose of some of these classes based on what the community requests. In order to do this, a comment/prayer card has been printed out for members of the community to ask for a specific class or topic.

### **Final Phase and next Steps**

NC4 is currently creating its own cross-cultural assessment or hiring a company that will develop one. This assessment will help the church grow in its understanding of incarnational ministry. The church hopes that the assessment will create a common language when talking about cross-cultural ministry and will define the best ways to deepen relationships with the community. For example, there are three main steps the diversity team of NC4 has encounter already in the congregation. First and foremost is: denial. Most Anglo members denied that a problem exists in the church. The denial

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<sup>42</sup> To learn more about Nuestra Casa, visit <https://nuestracasathegatheringplace.wordpress.com/> and <http://www.westcoreneighbors.org/nuestra-casa/>.

comes from their perspective that those who are different should adapt to the context in which the majority has the power. The second step is: Polarization—us and them. The last step the diversity team has identified is: Acceptance. Acceptance that something has to be done in order for the members of the community to feel welcomed and loved. However, even when these steps have been identified in NC4, the reality is that the church lacks of the expertise to know what to do next, and for this reason, the church is working with the denomination an independent person to help the church find the best ways to move forward.

NC4 is listening to God as it discerns a vision for the church and its community. The church will continue to move forward in this important ministry. By the fall of 2019, the results of this project will be presented to the congregation. These results will include: how many members of the community assist to the home groups and to the classes at Nuestra Casa, how many lives are transformed (in order to do this we will ask for personal testimonies). In like manner, the report will include how many signs have been translated into Spanish, how many members of the church have learned basic communication skills in a language different than English.

The leadership of NC4 has been intentional in reporting last how Sunday worship has change in diversity and how many new members of the community have joined the church. In like manner, the journal that was started at the begging of this project, with the changes NC4 has done and how the church has change its ways to minister to the community, will be presented as well. McLaren uses a quote from Vincent Donovan which speaks to our situation, “Do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You

must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.”<sup>43</sup> As the future of NC4 remains uncertain, the church knows that they, along with the community that surrounds it, have been call to a new place, to a new community.

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<sup>43</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 260.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In 2008 I had traveled to Muscat, Oman. I was part of a group of seminary students that went to experience a different culture. At our arrival the group was welcomed by the leader of the American organization that seminary had arranged to be the host. He took the group to the place where it stayed during the trip. The next morning, the leader came by and offered to take the group on a tour of the city. I had a strange sensation of being home, perhaps because as a Mexican could see many similarities with Muscat. For example, in Mexico people uses liters instead of gallons, meters instead of inches, and check the temperature in centigrade instead of Fahrenheit. I also experienced anew the importance of sharing food together. Part of the group's agenda for the time it spent in Muscat was to have conversations with local families, groups of people, government officials, and business owners. The group was surprised that every time it visited a home, the group was invited to eat. We were told on different occasions that as the guests of honor, we deserved the best.

### **The Front Porch**

I once met with a couple of church leaders and an Anglo pastor to talk about what needed to be done in their church to bring unity between Hispanics and Anglos. During the conversation I was told that many times part of the problem is that Hispanics choose the wrong times to try to do things together. As an example, the senior pastor described how on one occasion a Hispanic pastor asked him to do a Christmas service together. The pastor then said that was an example of Hispanics choosing the wrong time of year to do something together. He explained that Advent is the busiest time of the year for the

church and things must be done right to attract more people and for visitors to come back. I asked how he responded to the Hispanic pastor; he told the Hispanic pastor that his congregation could have a service on the same day but at a different time.

I explained my view through the following example. If the pastor hosted a large birthday party for himself at his home, and then told the Hispanic guests that due to space they had to stay on the front porch, then they would feel insulted no matter how kindly you treated them. Even when an excuse can be made that the front porch is part of the house, the reality is that exclusion happened and the host decided who is welcome inside and who is not. I then posed the question of when the ideal time would be to have a service together and who gets to make that decision. I concluded our conversation with the above story of what happened in Oman.

Those in power might say that minorities have been invited to be part of the decision-making process. However, it is like being invited for dinner at the senior pastor's house, but having the table on the front porch. Hispanics have never been invited to enter further than the front porch, to actually go in the house and be treated like equals. Those who look different than the majority are being served at the front porch, and as long as they do not interfere with the Anglo ways of doing things, they are content. Like in the old days, the master still decides when, how, and who will enter the house. Power has never been truly shared. Minorities are still on the fringes.

As it was said before, it is important for the church to prepare and study the culture the church is trying to reach out before presenting the good news. The church needs to really know who its neighbors are. Their traditions, likes and dislikes, the kind of food they eat, and the meanings behind it. Through conversations with community

members and the work of the diversity team, these goals can be accomplished. The church is aware that to do this takes time and effort. Moreover, God has been already working in people's lives before we enter their context. Christ's followers are not necessarily bringing the good news to them, but only making people aware of what has always been around them. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 gives an example of how to become like others to bring them to Christ. However, he also gives boundaries to follow in order not to lose ourselves in the transition. Paul shows that by following Christ, he was also following the way Christ lived out the good news. Paul gives us the meaning of becoming the good news in order to become agents of change and transformation. More than preaching the good news, God, through Paul's experience in Corinth, is calling Fourth Reformed Church to embody the good news to those in need. By setting aside personal identities and deciding to join those the church is trying to reach, Jesus' followers learn new ways to see and live out Scripture. In addition, NC4's members can learn new ways to communicate to others, member's homes are open to community members, and friendships can develop. In fact, the church and neighbors together can create a common ground in which everyone learns from each other. It is only at the point that Jesus' followers decide to put aside their expectations, backgrounds, and religious traditions that the gospel is introduced to others in a relevant way.

As the United States becomes more multi-cultural, NC4 has heard God's call of becoming a church that reflects its community. Furthermore, NC4 understands that God has called it to be a multicultural bridge through which the good news will be presented to the lost.

At the present time, God has placed me in a multi-cultural setting in which I am part of two cultures. However, just like Paul, this has been a source of many blessings for me as well as a source of challenges. Sometimes by trying to be part of both cultures, I have found myself part of none. However, as Jesus follower, I have been able to realize that my identity is in Christ. Through this project, Fourth Reformed Church has been able to widen the view that God has for it. It is important to know who Christians are in order to know how far we can go before having to learn new things. Paul was a city man and he was called to bring the good news to many cities. In the same way, I am a city man and I believe that my calling at the present time is to help Fourth Reformed Church to become a reflection of the community

## APPENDIX A

### **Strategic Priorities of New Community Fourth Reformed Church Fall 2016**

#### **A. Outreach**

Definition: NC4 will deepen its current focus on outreach by growing relationships with those in the community who are not members of NC4.

Metrics:

1. How many church members have reached out to community members not in this church to have at least one intentional relationship?
2. Of those relationships formed in metric #A.1, how many does each person have?
3. How many small groups formed by the church include members of the community from outside the church?
4. How have the church and the community benefited through these deepened relationships?

#### **B. Multicultural Worship and Agility**

Definition: NC4 will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to grow our worshipping congregation in diversity and size.

Metrics:

1. How is the Holy Spirit empowering us through cultural agility to be with our diverse neighbors when we gather for worship, discipleship, and outreach?
2. How diverse is our worshipping congregation?
3. In what ways are we growing to become a worshipping congregation of 120 believers (Acts 1:15)?

#### **C. Discipleship**

Definition: NC4 will cultivate an environment in which all church members and friends are growing as disciples, including their capacity for outreach, particularly through small groups. Metrics:

1. Are both friends and members of NC4 provided appropriate opportunities to grow as disciples?
2. How many small groups exist in the church that are made up of both church members and community members outside the church?
3. How many members and friends of the church are part of the small groups noted in #C.2?

4. How are these groups capitalizing on shared interests and concerns between NC4 and members of the community?

**D. Leadership Development**

Definition: NC4 will equip leaders for its mission.

Metrics:

1. How many current leaders are equipped to further the mission of NC4?
2. How many leaders of various Strategic Priorities have been identified and trained?
3. How do all of these leaders' experience support in their service?

## APPENDIX B

### **New Community Church Becoming 10 Weeks class**

#### **Course Description**

In today's world, cross-cultural ministry is not optional. Church leaders are required to be equipped in order to serve effectively in today's cross-cultural society. To minister effectively in today's world is to be challenged to be a missionary amongst differing cultures.

This course will help the church become cross-cultural aware. Using 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 as the base for our journey, the class uses experiential methodology in order to learn the meaning of becoming like others in a multi-cultural setting in order to communicate the gospel. By doing this, participants will learn how to become inter-cultural bridges to others as we work and live in a multi-cultural world. This course will unite readings, lectures, group discussions and site visits to local ministries.

#### **Course Goal**

To find a basis for understanding the meaning of crossing cultures when working in a multi-cultural setting and to encourage participants to practice a lifestyle that focus on the community throughout their live and ministry.

#### **Course Objectives**

To assist participants in learning about and becoming more competent in inter-cultural ministry by equipping students with the following:

- A theological and Biblical basis for doing cross-cultural ministry
- A wider understanding of the social, political, economic and cultural issues and its importance for us today.
- An increased knowledge and awareness of pastoral/ministerial/lay leadership in a cross-cultural setting.
- An awareness in how to appropriately connect with those to whom we are trying to communicate the gospel.
- An understanding of how by learning from those to whom we are trying to reach out, a common bridge can be built.
- An exploration of different models of pastoral/ministerial/lay leadership in various cultural, social, and geographic ministry contexts.

- An understanding of the root causes of cultural disconnect within and among faith communities.
- A personal discernment of one's own perspectives, biases, and limitations and how they help or hinder one's ministry.
- An awareness of some tools and resources that can be used to foster continued personal growth as a cross-cultural ministry leader (i.e. journaling, books, websites, other training and learning opportunities)
- A wider definition of what it means to cross cultures in Holland, Mi.

**Course requirements:**

**Prayer and journaling**

- Dedicate time to pray each day and to read and meditate in the book of 1 Corinthians. Read and reflect on approximately one chapter per week, focusing on Chapter 9 especially.
- Write in a journal your thoughts and insights in order to talk about those with the rest of the group.

**Cross-cultural ministry visit**

During this course, and before week 5 and 6, the participants will visit and participate in a particular cross-cultural ministry. Using the questions below as a guide, a verbal report that describes your experience will be presented to the group.

Questions:

- How did you personally engage a person from a different culture of your own? How did you build a bridge in order to communicate with them?
- Identify the church/ministry leaders:
  - Observe how the leaders engage people from other cultures and build bridges with them, in the context of ministry?
  - What can you learn from them and what do you think they can improve, based in what you have been learning in course?
- Interview one of the participants (receiver) in order to evaluate whether the ministry is culturally appropriate from this person's perspective.

**Book Review**

During this course, the participants are expected to read one book center in cross-cultural ministry. While there are many out there, and the participant can choose what book to read, below there is a list of suggested books that can be used.

**Week 1**

- Welcome, Introductions, syllabus and Q/A.

**Week 2**

- 1 Corinthians 1
- Journal, Insights and round table discussion

### **Week 3**

- 1 Corinthians 2
- Movie Night: Romero
- Insights

### **Week 4**

- 1 Corinthians 3
- Visit to the local mission, dinner and conversations

### **Week 5**

- 1 Corinthians 4
- Oral presentations and discussions

### **Week 6**

- 1 Corinthians 5
- Oral presentations and discussions

### **Week 7**

- 1 Corinthians 6
- Conversations with a local leader (TBD)

### **Week 8**

- 1 Corinthians 7
- Book Reports

### **Week 9**

- 1 Corinthians 8
- Group decision: Open conversations, Movie: McFarland, USA or Journal reports

### **Week 10**

- 1 Corinthians 9
- Becoming like others
- Conversations:
  - What have we learned?
  - What has changed in us?
  - What skills have we gained?
  - What is next?

### Recommended reading for Relinquishment course

- Alvarez, Julia. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (Plume, 1991).
- Carroll R., M Daniel. *Christians at the Border* (Baker Academic, 2008).
- Castellanos, Noel, *Where the Cross Meets the Street* (IVP Books, 2015).
- Cone, James. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis, 2011).
- Conn, Harvie M. and Manuel Ortiz. *Urban Ministry* (InterVarsity Press, 2001).
- Corbett, Steve and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts* (Moody, 2009).
- David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).
- David I. Smith, *Learning from the Stranger: Christian Faith and Cultural Diversity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).
- Elizondo, Virgilio. *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Orbis, 2007).
- -----. *The Future is Mestizo* (University Press of Colorado, 2000).
- Gonzalez, Justo. *Manana* (Abigdon Press, 1990).
- Hauerwas, Stanley and William Willimon. *Resident Aliens* (Abingdon, 1989).
- Heurtz, Chris and Christine Pohl. *Friendship at the Margins* (IVP Books, 2010).
- Linthicum, Robert. *Building a People of Power* (World Vision Press, 2005).
- Lohfink, Gerhard. *Does God Need the Church?* (Michael Glazier Books, 1999).
- Myers, Bryant. *Walking with the Poor* (Orbis, 1999).
- Newcomb, Steven. *Pagans in the Promised Land* (Fulcrum, 2008).
- Rah, Soong-Chan. *Many Colors* (Moody, 2010).
- -----. *The Next Evangelicalism* (InterVarsity Press, 2009).
- Salter-McNeil, Brenda. *Roadmap to Reconciliation* (IVP Books, 2016).
- Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Word Publishing, 1997).
- Twiss, Richard. *One Church Many Tribes* (Regal Books, 1979).
- Van Opstal, Sandra, *The Next Worship* (IVP Books, 2015).
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- Brownson, William C. *Life in the Light of the Gospel: Studies in 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Words of Hope, 1994.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
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