Short-term Mission Trips: A Wesleyan Theology for Service and Lifelong Spiritual Formation

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SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS: A WESLEYAN THEOLOGY FOR SERVICE AND LIFELONG SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS: A WESLEYAN THEOLOGY FOR SERVICE AND LIFELONG SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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BY

KATHRYN C. NIX
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ABSTRACT

Short-term Mission Trips: A Wesleyan Theology for Service and Lifelong Spiritual Formation
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2018

This study creates a ministry plan for a short-term mission trip with multi-generational participants for the purpose of connecting spiritual formation with missions in order to create life-long discipleship practices. The curriculum created in this project was implemented at Trinity United Methodist Church in Moberly, Missouri, where recent data identified a deep disconnect between service and spiritual formation. The curriculum connected the spiritual disciplines to all aspects of the mission trip, including pre and post trip meetings, with the goal of uniting the discipline of service into the deeper work of spiritual formation.

Both scripture and the work of John Wesley set a model for service that occurs within community, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The goal of this dissertation was to create a ministry plan that addressed spiritual formation in regards to a short-term mission trip in order to create a curriculum that will better connect a scriptural and theological understanding of missions as part of lifelong discipleship. To fulfill this goal, participants engaged in several spiritual disciplines within the context of the community. Following the completion of the mission trip, an assessment was given to judge if participants had a new understanding of service and engaged in new or increased their participation in the spiritual disciplines.

This study concludes that the integration of spiritual disciplines into a mission trip did translate into spiritual growth and a greater articulation in the connection between spiritual formation and service. The role of community provided an avenue for discussion and reflection that allowed participants the opportunity to integrate spiritual insights into long-term discipleship practices and change their previous theology on service. The materials created in this study will be available for use in other Methodist Churches.

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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

In almost all churches, the mission trip stands as the crown jewel of outreach opportunities. It is the pinnacle of excitement for youth groups and the stand-out event for a congregation’s summer calendar. After months of traditional food drives, special financial offerings in worship, and the occasional activity, the week-long mission trip provides the attraction and charm to coax non-engaged members into a chance to do their good deed and satisfy their internal need to check off the service outreach box.

In 1949 the Methodist Board of Missions redefined the idea of missions from lifelong ministry to shorter experiences by opening up a new three-year opportunity for college students.¹ In 2014 the United Methodist Church reported approximately 125,000 volunteers in mission in over 120 countries.² Some estimates put the cost of international short term mission trips at $2 billion per year spent, which ironically is enough to pay the yearly wages of almost four million people living in extreme poverty.³

I remember my first mission trip experience: a week-long high school trip to South Dakota. Every day for lunch our mission group would sit at one table, while the members of the community sat at another. No interaction, no crossing of boundaries.

Something in my soul felt uncomfortable with this method of service. I looked around the


community and saw piles of trash in the street, members of the community that avoided eye contact, and I found myself wondering what this community looks like in the winter months when the self-proclaimed mission trips saviors had packed up their gear and returned home. “The good news is that our hearts are in the right place. The bad news is that many of us are novices who might be doing more harm than good.”

The final night during devotions on that trip we washed the feet of our friends while many cried out in tears how life-changing the experience had been. Except it was not. Because only a week after returning home to the familiar, my friends picked up their normal routine. Church attendance did not change, personal giving in some ways decreased (because they had to make up for the week they lost by not working their summer jobs), and any evidence of spiritual formation or discipleship was non-existent. To this day, the memory still leaves a sour taste in my mouth.

Fast forward several years to the summer I worked as a seminary intern at an inner-city church. This tiny Presbyterian church, led by a strong and faithful female pastor, had developed a deep connection to the Hispanic community, particularly immigrant single mothers and children. The church recognized the special opportunity that the summer months brought to their community: children without the assurance of the federally funded school lunch program and parents who could not afford daycare. The church spent several weeks during the summer funding and organizing a summer camp at the church that would continue to encourage the education of these bi-lingual children while providing for some basic needs. I spent the summer immersed in this community,

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listening to stories, being challenged in my faith, experiencing the highs and lows of my prayer life. That summer became one of the most influential experiences in my understanding of the church’s call to mission.

These two starkly different experiences highlight polar opposite understandings of the church’s purpose in mission and the role of spiritual formation in relation to service. While the first experience left me longing for real transformation, the second revealed the power of the Holy Spirit to work through a body of believers to bring God’s kingdom in lasting and meaningful ways. And other authors, such as Robert Lupton in his work *Toxic Charity* and Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert in their work *When Helping Hurts*, are starting to notice the difference as well. Regardless of worship attendance or denomination, churches are rising up to address the deep divide between missions and discipleship. Pastors and leaders are reexamining the purpose and focus of the mission trip. Rather than engaging in temporary solutions that satisfy the participants, a paradigm shift is starting to emerge in literature that suggests a move towards deeper justice. Instead of service as an event, as something that is done for others, leaders are looking for ways to return service to the larger fold of a justice lifestyle, as something that is done with others.⁵

While many quick-fire answers are available on bookshelves to address this spiritual division, the answer instead may be lying in the very history and foundation of the United Methodist Church. John Wesley saw a similar problem emerging in the Church of England and as his Methodist revival continued to grow and spread, Wesley stressed the unity of faith formation and service in his understanding of the means of grace.

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⁵ Ibid., 16.
A frequent theme in his sermons, Wesley preached, “By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.”6 Today, Methodists celebrate and affirm the importance of grace, especially as it brings together our love for God and love for neighbor. John Wesley knew that the life of discipleship involved all areas of life and that the means of grace were foundational for spiritual growth. “He encouraged the Methodists to participate in what he called the ‘means of grace’ which included acts of piety like worship and prayer, along with acts of service like feeding the hungry and giving to the poor. These acts are gifts strengthening us to live into the two-fold nature of discipleship: loving God and our neighbors.”7

Central to Methodist theology today is the importance of living a public faith, of an outward sign of an inward transformation. Methodists believe that there is a deep relationship between service and spiritual formation and that missions is part of the larger call to discipleship. “For John Wesley, there was no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. In other words, faith always includes a social dimension. One cannot be a solitary Christian. As we grow in faith through our participation in the church community, we are also nourished and equipped for mission and service to the

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world.”⁸ It was within the blessedness of community that God’s Spirit could bring transformation to the believer and the culture to which they were called.

At the local church level, the community of believers at Trinity United Methodist Church has enjoyed a deep connection to the surrounding community of Moberly, Missouri. The Methodist theology runs deep in their identity. But John Wesley’s understanding of the two-sided nature of discipleship (spiritual growth and service or love God and love others) has struggled. Their commitment to local missions has resulted in strong partnership with area ministry organizations. But, like many other churches in the denomination, it struggles to connect missions as part of the greater realm of spiritual formation. Like the warning from the writer of James, “Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove… The very moment you separate body and spirit, you end up with a corpse. Separate faith and works and you get the same thing: a corpse (James 2:18, 26).”⁹

This project will create a curriculum for a short-term mission trip with multi-generational families at Trinity UMC for the purpose of connecting spiritual formation with missions in order to create life-long discipleship practices. By drawing upon the theology of John Wesley and the deep history of different spiritual practices during the trip, I hope to help participants begin to see how God is already present in their

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⁹ Message Translation.
experience and to reconnect the physical acts of service with the unseen, deeper seeds of faith formation.

Chapter 1 presents the history and challenges of connecting missions to lifelong discipleship at Trinity United Methodist Church. The lack of mission trip opportunities combined with a weak theology on missions has left a void for connecting missions to faith development. A week-long mission trip provides the opportunity to understand God’s call to service and to integrate spiritual insights during the mission trip experience into life-changing discipleship practices.

Chapter 2 will examine how Christian formation occurs within a community and in the process of serving. The chapter will begin by examining the role of community and relationships as foundational to the process of spiritual formation. This chapter will then examine the relationships between mission and discipleship and how the call to service is foundational to mature spiritual formation. This chapter will examine five twentieth-century theologians to give insight into the complex and central relationship between community and mission as pillars for spiritual formation.

Chapter 3 will present a theological foundation for spiritual formation within the community and the role of mission and service in discipleship. This chapter will first examine the importance of community and the role of the Holy Spirit as Jesus shaped a theological model for the early disciples. The chapter will then look at how the Apostle Paul interpreted and brought new depth to this understanding in the early church, by again emphasizing the role of community and the need for service as an integral part of discipleship. Finally, this chapter will focus particularly on the interpretation John Wesley took and the influence community and service have played in spiritual formation.
in the early and current expressions of the United Methodist Church.

Chapter 4 will develop a ministry plan that addresses the role of community and spiritual formation before, during, and after a short-term mission trip. This chapter will first address some of the issues that prevent participants from having a correct theological understanding of the role of missions in discipleship. The chapter will then describe the multi-faceted approach to introducing, participating, and sustaining spiritual formation. Before the trip, leaders and participants will engage in training that will introduce different spiritual disciplines and how they relate to formation during a mission trip. During the trip, the group will engage in several different activities that will help translate spiritual insight into discipleship changes, allowing participants to learn how to notice God in their service. After the trip, the participants will continue to meet as a small group to help integrate their spiritual formation into lifelong discipleship practices.

Chapter 5 will outline the implementation of the doctoral project. First, the leaders and mission site will be selected, followed by a finalizing of the trip participants. Training for leaders will occur next, followed by a pre-trip retreat involving all participants. Leading up to the mission trip week, participants will engage in fundraising activities and begin meeting with their prayer partner from the congregation. The group will be commissioned during worship on Sunday, travel to the host church, and spend the first evening in devotion and prayer. Monday through Thursday the group will spend the mornings and afternoons at the work site, and evening participating in spiritual disciplines and devotions. Friday will be a day of Sabbath and fellowship. Saturday morning will close with devotion and the group will travel home. After the trip, the group will meet again for another retreat and continue to hold each other accountable for
spiritual formation. The main tool for assessment for this project will be a questionnaire that will be completed at the pre-trip retreat and again at the post-trip retreat to measure the understanding and involvement in spiritual formation on a daily basis.
In 1866 the President of the North Missouri Railroad donated land for the first congregation that would build a church. By 1868 a Methodist class was awarded the land and Methodist Episcopal Church South was built. By 1941 two Methodist churches voted to merge and Trinity was born. The history of Trinity United Methodist Church is as deep and rich as the town that it treasures, and in many ways their stories are intrinsically linked.

Moberly was once the proud home of the railroad workers; however, with the decrease of business, the strong identity marker in the community has dried up, leaving the town to reminisce about its former glory. Moberly hosts the potential for rebirth, with its location on a major highway and slow resurgence of economic opportunity. But the community, like the church, is struggling with its larger identity. Located in the heart of old downtown, Trinity’s own story of declining membership mirrors its struggle to adapt to changes in culture and demographics. Trinity, by its location and deep history in the town, is primed to be a major voice in the future of Moberly, but seems to be suffering from similar uncertainty as to its purpose.
Part of the United Methodist Church denomination, the church receives pastors through an appointment system, which means that each pastor is only guaranteed to work at Trinity for one year at a time. This can be both positive and negative. Ideally, this fosters a strong lay leadership culture in the church and allows for the bishop to pull out a harmful pastor at the first signs of potential problems. Unfortunately, this has led to pastors staying for short terms of ministry, usually five to seven years at a time. This high turnover in leadership, and with it pastoral direction, style, vision, and emphasis, has left Trinity with a void in identity and purpose. Each pastor has brought a particular strength to the ministry at Trinity, helping to target and correct specific areas of weakness. However, there has been a noticeable lack of overarching direction and vision, mostly from the rotating door of senior pastors.

To borrow the language of Elizabeth Johnson, Trinity is emerging from a wintry season.¹ Many in the congregation struggle with the loss of Christianity’s influence in society and culture, and many visitors to the church come from a more modern starting point where science and intellect are god rather than Jesus Christ. It is indeed a “little church in a bigger world.”² Similar to a mighty tree shedding extra leaves and fruit, Trinity’s long list of extra programs and community involvement have disappeared even though the memory of days of higher attendance and giving live on. Only the basics: a focus on worship, growing and serving, bring nourishment to the church’s mission.


² Ibid., 27.
Playgroups, Boy Scout charters, and even the choir are dwindling. But God’s presence is not.

Even in this season of pruning and reaping, there are signs of new growth bursting forth. For the first time in many years the church now has an operating budget, children participating in worship, and a choir that performed a beautiful Christmas Cantata service. Older lay leadership is gracefully stepping down and new, young, passionate leaders are being mentored into their roles. The staff is coming alive with a new atmosphere of encouragement and support. The ethos of the church is like an expectant mother.

The previous pastor at Trinity served for five years before I was appointed to this church in June 2015. He was deeply committed to the community and to the church and boldly called for Trinity to begin having difficult conversations that were desperately needed. Part of his crusade to improve the structure of the church was to have the congregation participate in the Healthy Church Initiative.

The Healthy Church Initiative is an opportunity through the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church. It is an extensive process that requires deep commitment from the congregation. Data research, consultations, home study groups, and experts are all brought together to analyze a congregation and recommend difficult conversations and changes that need to occur in order for the church to become healthy and return to a path of growth and vitality in fulfilling their mission. As stated on the Missouri Conference website:

The Healthy Church Initiative (HCI) is a process designed to transform churches. The focus is on providing resources and strategies to church pastors, staff, laity, and congregations so that they will be able to reach new people for Christ. Many
churches today are stagnating or declining, so HCI is a team of talented coaches and consultants backed by a solid, proven process that works with each church to address problems and develop contextualized solutions. After having successfully implemented this process in the Missouri Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church for several years, HCI is able to share this established method with other conferences and other Christian denominations.³

The leadership of Trinity decided to enter into this process in 2012 and began submitting extensive material about the demographics, financials, membership, and other details about the church. After the creation of both a prayer and leadership team to guide the church through this initiative, the consultation process began. Interviews with congregants were scheduled, focus groups were formed, and town hall meetings were set on the calendar. As part of the process mystery shoppers, a title given to paid staff who come unannounced and anonymous, attended worship services and submitted reports on their experience. This extensive process ended with a substantial report and a five-point plan on how to improve the overall health and vitality of the congregation.

The Center for Congregational Excellence, through the Missouri Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, presented the Readiness 360 report in March 2013.⁴ In the report it assessed four main areas that strategically place the church on the path for multiplying thriving ministries: spiritual intensity, missional alignment, cultural openness, and dynamic relationships. The Readiness 360 report brought to light some important concerns.


Missional Alignment: Many folks at your church have a good sense of where God is calling you to go, but others are not aligned with this point of view. There is seldom enough personnel or financial resources to run in many directions at once. Now is a time for serious conversation about Trinity Moberly’s priorities… Your church has: a low priority for reaching new people, alignment to a clear direction, fear of backlash if the church makes decisions that are in line with its mission as opposed to pleasing people or maintaining status quo, a shared sense of competency about the church’s ability to start new ministries, clarity about the core principles of the church’s faith, and passionate support for the church’s direction… In many respects, Trinity Moberly is on fire in its love for God, but there is also some hesitation to go the full mile… Many people have an expectation of encountering the living Christ personally and/or in the congregation. Practicing spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible study, fasting, Christian works, etc.) is not a major part of life together. People are a bit risk-averse and not likely to take bold steps of faith. Areas of potential improvement: people report utilizing their spiritual gifts and talents. Your church has discovered the blessing received in serving and blessing others.5

The findings from the Health Church Initiative provided a deep and hard look into the challenges facing Trinity, and their loss of a missional identity. The HCI showed Trinity its need to “turn outward” and reclaim service as foundational to discipleship. The congregation was presented with the final report in April 2013 which included the following:

Shared Mission and Vision: There is a lack of intentional strategies in place for bringing the community to Christ and the church beyond mission activities. Trinity UMC is a very busy church. It’s obvious that people are working hard, but it lacks a fully developed and cohesiveness and a unified direction. Discipleship Connections and Pathway Process: The team clearly heard a desire and sensed a new spiritual awareness, however, there is not a clear path of spiritual development. The faithfulness of this congregation will be enhanced by a keen focus on its stated and published mission/vision of the Church. Lacking this clear mission/vision can lead to a spiritual malaise permitting an unintentional

5 Ibid., 2, 5, 3.
inward focus upon the church’s ministry and an ineffective process for connecting: connecting with people during projects in the mission field.  

Five prescriptions were offered as a way forward to help address the concerns and weaknesses discovered in the HCI process. The first was to clarify the vision of the church. The second was a clear discipleship process and spiritual growth path.

Trinity UMC will work to adopt a clear, simple and compelling focused mission and vision statements. This should be augmented by a strategic planning/evaluation process to align ministries with the mission and vision of the church…(Trinity) will create a definitive plan for new disciple recruitment, training and reception into the life of the church. The teams planned outcome will be a clear, intentional and step by step plan for: connecting with people during projects in the mission field, connecting with guests when they attend, and connecting us to Jesus… A step by step plan will be developed for the making of disciples that communicates clearly the commitment and expectations of a fully devoted disciple of Jesus Christ. This process will include tracking and measuring participation in worship attendance, participating in a small group and self-giving in service ministries.

As expected, the outcome of the reports was met with mixed results. While the initial sting caused some tension in the congregation, as the following months unfolded Trinity began to slowly embrace the need for tough conversations and difficult changes in order to become more effective in their ministry. Initial changes in staffing and the undertaking of a massive sanctuary redesign gave the congregation the first step. However, three years later, there is still much to be done towards creating a paradigm shift.

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7 Ibid., 1-2.
A major shift that was brought to light through the Healthy Church Initiative was the need to reexamine the understanding of discipleship. More than just hiring new staff or changing the color of the carpet, exterior changes fail to address the overarching need that stretched throughout the reports. The consultation accurately discerned a disconnect between worship, community, service, and a clear missional identity. Woven together, these pieces had the potential for connecting visitors to Christ and congregants towards greater spiritual growth.

Trinity had succumbed to separating out areas of discipleship, like a check-list of boxes rather than recognizing how each piece of the puzzle worked together to create a holistic understanding of discipleship. In the process it had lost its missional identity. The uniting theme that runs throughout the HCI report is a vagueness of purpose. Trinity lacks a clear understanding of who they are, the unique call God has given the church for the community, and their mission for Moberly.

In a recent article for Faith and Leadership, Andrew Forrest, a Methodist pastor, wrote, “Every dying church in America has a community garden. What do I mean by that? I have no problem with community gardens; a garden is a beautiful thing. But Jesus didn’t tell us to start a community garden, he told us to make disciples. That’s literally the mission of the church.” The problem is not the gardens, just like the problems facing Trinity are more than paint on the walls or a new sound system. These changes needed to happen but it’s easier to point to these secondary details rather than dive deeper to the primary concern of discipleship. The result, according to Forrest, “We don’t actually

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disciple our people. We don’t teach them about the Bible; we don’t actually do the core practices of the faith. So there are dying Methodist churches in every ZIP code in America that have a few old people coming to them, and they say, ‘We need to reach out to young people, so let’s start a community garden.’”

This is the foundational problem at Trinity. Their historical presence in the community is no longer a strong enough driving force against the cultural demands on people. Gone are the days when people will just come to church because they are supposed to. This old mentality also segregates discipleship into programs, like keeping missions as a committee, rather than the purpose of the church.

Like the image below, Trinity had placed service at the end of a path towards Christian maturity. Those who were fully integrated into the church were considered mature enough for service. Many who were less-active deemed they were not far enough long their spiritual journey to be part of the mission committee.

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9 Ibid.

While members were encouraged to financially give or support the upcoming food drive, opportunities for service were limited to those who had ample time (such as recently retired) or who were selected for a specific project. This separation was especially evident on the few occasions congregants had the opportunity to participate in mission activity. In the past ten years the church has organized one mission trip that was longer than a single day, and it was only for adults. Ten adults attended, representing only six percent of the active worshipping population. During the experience there was pushback from the participants on the need for spiritual formation. Participants were ready and willing to build a well but they saw no need, and openly expressed their displeasure, in bringing faith into the experience. There was no need for evening Bible Studies or offering prayer with the local population; that was not what they signed up for.

This sentiment was not an isolated incident. Service continues to be the pinnacle of faith development, something that is done as an afterthought rather than integrated into daily discipleship. A committee of four members plans out events for the year. The events are advertised, usually asking for only an hour of time. The task is presented, the job fulfilled, and mission is complete. The goal is to complete a to-do list in a speedy fashion and not to waste time doing any spiritual formation. Learning about faith is designated to the area of discipleship and small groups, something to be discussed usually at Sunday School. If the event calls for help, such as assembling backpacks of school supplies or treat bags for people working on Christmas Eve, about ten to fifteen people participate. For other opportunities, such as a food drive, the event requires even less time; members would simply bring canned goods to worship and consider their participation requirement fulfilled.
Underneath this model for missions is a struggle between culture and discipleship. The expectation on individuals, especially those who are younger than retirement age, is so great that those who are organizing events express guilt for asking people to donate more of their time. The most common response to any request for mission work is, I would love to, if I only had the time. It separates service to be a result of discipleship rather than an integral piece. Service is something you do after you have attended worship, matured in faith, and have anything left to give.

This is not a unique challenge for a historic, mainline protestant church. Like many similar congregations, Trinity’s history of missions can be traced back by the one or two individuals who oversaw all mission work. Their faithful dedication to helping the church serve is to be commended. But this style of separation created a historical understanding that missions is a code word for service, not part of the central identity of a disciple. Therefore missions is designated for the few and it is their duty to provide opportunities for the rest of the congregation to serve.

The lack of mission trip opportunities, combined with a weak theology on service, has left a void for connecting service to faith development. In response to the previous image, a more appropriate way of understanding service and discipleship is the image below. In this diagram service is not placed as the end result but rather integral to fully understanding the call to discipleship.

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In many ways, this understanding mirrors more closely John Wesley’s understanding of sanctifying grace. For Wesley, salvation was not a static, one-time event in our lives. A constant conversion to holiness was possible due to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. God’s sanctifying grace is the miracle of God working in and through us until we reach perfection. “Through God’s sanctifying grace, we grow and mature in our ability to live as Jesus lived. As we pray, study the Scriptures, fast, worship, and share in fellowship with other Christians, we deepen our knowledge of and love for God. As we respond with compassion to human need and work for justice in our communities, we strengthen our capacity to love neighbor.”

Through this grace Wesley believed our hearts and hands, mind and will could become more like Christ, aligning our inner thoughts and outer actions to God’s will.

The United Methodist Church is governed by Wesley’s theology as found in the Book of Discipline. The glue that binds this very diverse document together is the Holy Spirit. As United Methodists, we believe that among many things, the main force in

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sanctifying grace - the Holy Spirit - acts as a guide and guard. A guide is someone who helps keep someone else on their path, and the Holy Spirit guides each believer as they grow in their love for God and others. The Holy Spirit is also a guard, and anyone who has driven a steep mountain road knows the importance of guard-rails. The Holy Spirit is the answer to the Lord’s Prayer “do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one” (Matt 6:13). 13

The Social Principles, 14 a substantial section of the Book of Discipline, rest on this understanding of God’s Spirit to help guide the believer into further spiritual growth and guard them from temptation (to help them stay on the path towards glory). Throughout the Social Principles is Wesley’s understanding of sanctification, of growing in perfect love towards God and others. The Social Principles act as a written attempt to explain how one can grow in this love for God and others.

The Social Principles are important, because there are some in the congregation who fervently celebrate their Methodist heritage while at the same time make decisions that do not always support the call to grow in love towards others. Too many times I have seen people in the church uphold the need to love God, and then fail to love the earth, the immigrant, the homosexual, and the call for peace. Wesley’s understanding of sanctification and perfect love called for both an internal and external love. To love God we must love others and when we love others we love God.

While this paradigm shift for the entire congregation will take many difficult conversations and an extensive period of time, a short-term mission trip can provide the

13 All Scripture quoted is from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

catalyst for beginning this substantial shift in the congregation’s ethos. By beginning with a small multi-generational group and forming an experience that brings together Wesley’s understanding of the unbreakable relationship between spiritual formation and service, this opportunity can spark larger conversations about the mission of the church, the role of worship and community, and the importance of service within the larger journey towards sanctification. A short-term mission trip addresses both the realities of time constraints created by current culture, and still create a space where the Holy Spirit can bring illumination to understanding God’s call to service and integrating spiritual insights during the experience into life-changing discipleship practices.

Kara Powell and Brad Griffin, in their book *Sticky Faith Service Guide*, have created resources for helping students move “from mission trips to missional living.”15 Traditionally a majority of the time spent preparing for a trip revolves around fundraising and logistical needs; Powell and Griffin challenge churches to consider the spiritual preparation needed for the experience. I believe their ideas, combined with Wesley’s theology, can be translated into a multi-generational setting. In small-to-medium sized churches, like Trinity, the availability of a thriving youth group is not always plausible. However by extending the parameters to be a family mission trip, it opens the opportunity to more participants and creates a unique atmosphere where each generation can contribute their gifts and their spiritual insights.

Working with a multi-generational group involves both a different set of planning skills as well as the potential for different problems during the trip. However, the power

of a multi-generational trip in helping to bring back together spiritual formation and service is in the dynamics of a community. One of Trinity’s strengths, as outlined in the Healthy Church Initiative, was “your church has seen some amazing relationships and friendships across the years.” By drawing upon this positive characteristic of Trinity’s identity, a multi-generational mission trip can mirror, in some ways, the communal aspects of the early church communities. Like the monasteries of old that wove together work and prayer, discipleship and service, a multi-generational trip can utilize the power and resources of communal living so children and adults can learn and experience together God’s transforming Spirit. More will be said on this in the following chapter, especially with Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s and Richard Foster’s insight into the role of community in faith development.

Finally, the greatest challenge in short-term mission work is the days and weeks following the experience. Too often as a pastor I have heard deep and passionate expressions of faith on the final night of a mission trip by sincere teenagers, only to see the work of the Holy Spirit fade away when they return to their comfortable and culture-driven daily routine. This project must focus on the end from the very beginning, by crafting a curriculum that starts with faith formation, teaches spiritual disciplines throughout the trip to help participants connect their service to spiritual formation, and provides follow-up opportunities after the trip in order that participants of all ages can continue in their journey towards sanctification. The goal is not just an awakening on the

mission trip, but a more slow and substantial lifestyle change that better incorporates spiritual disciplines with a new holistic understanding of service and mission.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will examine how Christian formation occurs within a community and in the process of serving. The chapter will begin by examining the role of community, and the role of family, as foundational to the process of spiritual formation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Richard Foster provide two theological pillars instrumental in utilizing community as an avenue for spiritual formation. Evidence of their work can be seen in Kenda Dean’s work that translated this concept into youth ministry, using the role of family as key to the formation process. This chapter will then examine the relationships between mission and discipleship and how the call to service is foundational to mature spiritual formation. Lesslie Newbigin helps provide the bridge between Dean’s insight and a theology on mission. David Fitch pulls it all together in his new work, calling the community of believers to spiritual growth as they serve “the least of these.”¹ These twentieth century theologians give insight into the complex and central relationship between community and mission as pillars for spiritual formation.

¹ David Fitch, *Faithful Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 111.
Christian Formation and the Community: Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Written during a time in Germany’s history when the Gestapo were relentlessly trying to divide fellowship and the community within the nation, Bonhoeffer’s simple experiment at Finkenwalde has become a theological staple for examining the role of community in spiritual formation. Bonhoeffer wanted to create a community based on the Sermon on the Mount. His proposal in 1935 stressed three important truths: one, it was the community, not the individual, that brought “strength and objectivity”\(^2\) to preaching the Word; two, that Christian life is not an ideal but something lived out in relationship to others; and three the role of the Church, especially in regard to the crisis of separation and division promoted by the Nazi party, was called by God to serve others.\(^3\)

Bonhoeffer’s goal in writing this book, spelled out in the very first sentences, was not for “some private circles,”\(^4\) to be lost in academia only to be studied, but with what he believed was the very heart and soul of the Christian experience, the “mission entrusted to the church.”\(^5\) Bonhoeffer answers the question, “How is the community the vehicle for transformation?” by expanding on three themes. The strongest theme that weaves throughout Bonhoeffer’s work is his strong Christology. His whole work rests on the assurance that Christ is in the community, acting as the mediator between God and humanity and between each individual. Second is Bonhoeffer’s belief in the *imago dei*,


\(^3\) Ibid., 13,18.

\(^4\) Ibid., 25.

\(^5\) Ibid., 25.
that the community is the bearer of salvation to each other. Therefore, because of these
two theological claims that Christ is in community and that the church is God’s self-
revelation, Bonhoeffer draws the conclusion that Christ calls us to relationship with God
and others and that the body of Christ is the tangible expression of grace and service as
we live out our relationship to our sisters and brothers.⁶

Bonhoeffer is able to draw the connection between community and spiritual
formation and eventually onto service through his incredibly strong understanding of the
nature and purpose of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the physical expression of God’s desire
to be in relationship with humanity. Citing passages from the prophet Zechariah,
Bonhoeffer connects Christ’s ability to bind a sinful humanity to a holy Creator with
Christ’s ability to bind a sinful people together in community.⁷

It is only because of who Christ is that Christians are able to enjoy the blessedness
of community and be transformed by Christ working through their sister and brother. If
Bonhoeffer’s entire work could be summarized into one quote it would be: “The Christ in
their own hearts is weaker than the Christ in the word of other Christians. Their own
hearts are uncertain; those of their brothers and sisters are sure.”⁸ Bonhoeffer believed
that God created each person in the image of God’s crucified son, Jesus Christ and that
Christ bridges the gap between humanity and the divine through his sacrificial death.
From that defining moment each person in the community bears the image of the
crucified. Christ’s sacrificial death was not for humanity’s containment or assimilation.

⁶ Ibid., 127.
⁷ Ibid., 28.
⁸ Ibid., 32.
Instead Bonhoeffer declares (in response to the cultural theology of the Nazi Party), “God did not give them to me so that I could dominate and control them, but so that I might find the Creator by means of them.”\(^9\) As Jesus proclaimed in John 14:9, “to see me is to see the Father”, the believer can now see Christ (and therefore the Father) through the community. Therefore Bonhoeffer defies the cultural expectation of community upheld by the Nazi party, by writing:

Strong and weak, wise or foolish, talented or untalented, pious or less pious, the complete diversity of individuals in the community is no longer a reason to talk and judge and condemn, and therefore no longer a pretext for self-justification. Rather this diversity is a reason for rejoicing in one another and serving one another.\(^10\)

To believe that Christ is found in the other, and to acknowledge the other as the bearer of God’s good news in my life, is the foundation of grace. Bonhoeffer believed that only because of Christ could grace occur within the community. The realities of sin only make way for the saving nature of Christ to bring grace.

Here, because of the other, Christians suffer the breaking of the community with the other established in Jesus Christ. But here, too, it is only in bearing with the other that the great grace of God becomes fully apparent. Not despising sinners, but being privileged to bear with them, means not having to give them up for lost, being able to accept them and able to preserve community with them through forgiveness… As Christ bore with us and accepted us as sinners, so we in his community may bear with sinners and accept them into the community of Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of sins…That is grace for Christians.\(^11\)

Bonhoeffer believes that the church becomes God’s self-revelation only through the transforming power of Jesus Christ. “Christian community means community through

\(^9\) Ibid., 95.

\(^10\) Ibid., 95.

\(^11\) Ibid., 102.
Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ… We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”¹² While we are saved individually through Christ, we are also saved as a community. This is why Bonhoeffer spent a significant portion of his work expanding on the events of the day together, believing in the communal call to singing and the hearing of the Word. For Bonhoeffer, the community was a tangible expression of Christ, the avenue for the Holy Spirit, and the answer to the prayer in Matthew 6:10, “your kingdom come.” Bonhoeffer left little room for comfortable personal piety, and instead boldly wrote:

You are called into the community of faith; the call was not meant for you alone. You carry your cross, your struggle, and you pray in the community of faith, the community of those who are called. You are not alone even when you die, and on the day of judgment you will be only one member of the great community of faith of Jesus Christ. If you neglect the community of other Christians, you reject the call of Jesus Christ …”¹³

Jesus Christ invites believers into community in order to bring transformation. Through Christ’s forgiveness of sin, “Christ made us into the community of faith, and in that community Christ made the other Christian to be grace for us…Christ became our brother in order to help us; through Christ other Christians have become Christ for us…”¹⁴ The natural result, for Bonhoeffer, is that the community brings Christ’s transforming power, helping sinful believers grow in holiness and love. Only together in community can believers achieve sanctifying grace.

We talk to one another about the help we both need. We admonish one another to go the way Christ bids us go. We warn one another against the

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¹² Ibid., 31.

¹³ Ibid., 83.

¹⁴ Ibid., 109.
disobedience that is our undoing. We are gentle and we are firm with one another, for we know both God’s kindness and God’s firmness… Or do we really believe there is a single person in this world who does not need either comfort or admonition? If so, then why has God given us the gift of Christian community?15

Because of Christ, salvation could not stay individual. Because of Christ, the community is called to tangible acts of grace. Because of Christ, faith cannot stay theoretical or a personal pursuit. Because of Christ, the believer is called to a community whose sole purpose and identity is service, to be the hands and feet of the Savior who has transformed them into a new creation. Bonhoeffer begins his work by quoting Psalm 133 “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity.”16 The unity of community is pronounced good because, according to Bonhoeffer, it is within that community that Christians find their purpose, their calling, their “work.”17 Called by Christ into this privilege of living together, Christ then points the community outward to their enemies, calling them to acts of service and grace. “The Christian community should not be governed by self-justification, which violates others, but by justification by grace, which serves others. Once individuals have experienced the mercy of God in their lives, from then on they desire only to serve.”18

These three themes, the foundation of Christ which is seen in community and calls us to serve, brings a full circle to Bonhoeffer’s thesis, “The Christ in their own hearts is weaker than the Christ in the word of other Christians. Their own hearts are

15 Ibid., 104-105. Italicize author.
16 Ibid., 27.
17 Ibid., 27.
18 Ibid., 96.
If John Wesley brought language to the idea of sanctification, of growing in Christian perfection, then Bonhoeffer’s contribution in understanding the role of community as the avenue that Christ uses to bring that perfection to fruition. Bonhoeffer writes a few paragraphs after his thesis, “Christ opened up the way to God and to one another. Now Christians can live with each other in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one. But they can continue to do so only through Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one; only through him are we bound together.”

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth by Richard Foster

Richard Foster’s faced a similar struggle to Dietrich Bonhoeffer in helping his congregation experience the transforming power of faith. Foster writes, “My problem was more than having something to say from Sunday to Sunday. My problem was that what I did say had no power to help people.” If results could be based on a person’s good intentions and their efforts to pull a group of believers by individual strengthen closer to God, Foster was proving unsuccessful. His soul-stirring sermons did not result in a transformation of lifestyle of his hearers (a lament echoed by many pastors today). Foster longed to help move his congregation to a deepening of the soul. Foster’s solution

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19 Ibid., 32.
20 Ibid., 33.
is rather ancient in nature with a return to the classic disciplines to “move beyond surface living into the depths” and “exercised in the midst of our relationships.”

Foster invites the reader to dive into the depths of faith, to abandon shallow living and easy answers. His work stands in stark contrast to the commercialized mission trip that offers all the benefits of a vacation style service project: easy to book, easy to participate, easy to leave with a pat on the back. Foster demonstrates the deep well of faith cannot be easily reduced to a week-long trip that spends more time on keeping the paying customers happy than investing in the slowly steady work of the kingdom of God. He strikes at the very notion that if one just works hard enough, plans smart enough, and presents the perfect enjoyable stress-free mission trip experience, in one week one can create a new batch of on-fire disciples for Jesus.

What Foster hits, at its very core, is the reality that spiritual formation is not about individual willpower (something easily controlled, planned, and executed) but a surrender to grace, to creating a space for the Master farmer to cultivate the soil. Only then can the seeds of faith grow. “The Disciplines are God’s way of getting us into the ground; they put us where we can work within us and transform us.” Like Bonhoeffer’s, Foster shows spiritual growth is both very easy and very hard. “The grace of God is unearned and unearnable, but if we ever expect to grow in grace, we must pay the price of a consciously chosen course of action which involves both individual and group life.”

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22 Ibid., 1.

23 Ibid., 7.

24 Ibid., 8.
The disciplines, both personal and communal, help to submit to the mystery of faith, to surrender to the divine grower. The disciplines, on their own, do not create this growth (for it is only by the grace of God). The disciplines, at their core, address the stumbling block of self. It is clear through Foster’s writing his goal in presenting the disciplines is to dismantle a false understanding of self and to transform the believer into the image of Christ. The goal of spiritual formation is to become more like Christ and less like the world. What is striking is Foster’s call to “deeper, fuller living” happens “in the midst of our relationships.”

Of all the disciplines Foster explores, the discipline of service acts as a pivotal practice, for in the midst of relationships service is unnatural and difficult. Like chickens in need of a pecking order, the discipline of service pushes back against worldly values, lifting up not position or titles but a towel to wash the disciple’s feet like Christ on the night of his arrest. Temptation for a theology of me, rather than a focus on Christ, is disarmed through service. “Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness.”

In the context of a week-long mission trip, this discipline becomes even more vital. When the temptation of all-about-me threatens both the community (in which spiritual formation can occur) and the mission (putting the focus on what I receive rather than what I give), the discipline of service forces us to rethink our approach. Foster

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25 Ibid., 1, 2.
26 Ibid., 128.
27 Ibid., 130.
outlines two different approaches to serving, one that hinders spiritual growth and one that promotes community.

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<tr>
<th>Theology of Me</th>
<th>Christological Service</th>
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<td>Based on human effort</td>
<td>Listens for the Divine whisper</td>
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<td>Calculates greatest external results</td>
<td>Small acts of service</td>
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<td>Looks for human applause</td>
<td>Done in secret, hidden from praise</td>
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<td>Frantic and temporary</td>
<td>Delights in serving</td>
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<td>Keeps score, impresses others</td>
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The discipline of service creates a space for God’s grace to transform because it promotes authentic community. “Self-righteous service fractures community. In the final analysis, once all the religious trappings are removed, it centers in the glorification of the individual. Therefore, it puts others into its debt and becomes one of the most subtle and destructive forms of manipulation known. True service builds community. It quietly and unpretentiously goes about caring for the needs of others. It draws, binds, heals, builds.”

In essence, service within the community is part of God’s method for creating a lifestyle-

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28 Ibid., 129. The comparison chart was created by Rev. Kathryn Nix to summarize the work of Richard Foster.

29 Ibid., 129-130.
change from self-centeredness to discipleship. Foster begins with these words, “Service is not a list of things that we do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living.”

He then ends his thoughts by referencing Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together*. “The second service that one should perform for another in Christian community is that of active helpfulness… There is a multitude of these things wherever people live together. Nobody is too good for the meanest service.”

The path to a new way of living is not through a list of items to accomplish, something can be controlled and dictated by my own desires, but through service in community, through the act of becoming like the servant Christ and caring for the other. It is by focusing on my sister and brother, in the transforming power of community, that I can release my own sinful desires and take on the nature of Jesus Christ.

**Almost Christian by Kenda Creasy Dean**

The National Study of Youth and Religion conducted in 2001 provided the launching point for a shift in the understanding of spiritual formation in teenagers and emerging adults. The results of the study, which fueled Kenda Creasy Dean’s book, found that moralistic therapeutic deism, a feel good no commitment brand of religion, was the most prevalent and articulated form of theology (regardless of a teenager’s supposed spiritual affiliation). What the study revealed was John Wesley’s critique of the

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30 Ibid., 134.

church from 1741, “The Church is full of almost Christians who have not gone all the way with Christ.”32

Dean’s book looks deep into the results of the study to examine this emergence of moralistic therapeutic deism (or MTD) within the youth of the church and what can be done to help teenagers grow into highly devoted disciples. Dean asks the same questions that led to this paper, “Some young people we encounter in ministry come away with life-changing faith, but many (perhaps most) do not. Why?” Rather than place the source of blame solely on the shoulders of youth ministers and church programs, Dean instead suggests the results of the study were a glimpse into a larger problem plaguing the whole church. The opening line of Dean’s book bluntly states, “Let me save you some trouble. Here is the gist of what you are about to read: American young people are, theoretically, fine with religious faith – but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate from high school. One more thing: we’re responsible.”33

Dean believes teenagers are like a mirror, giving a glimpse into the heart of a community. If there is something that stands out with our teenagers, it’s because the community had created and taught it to them. “When we blithely hope that young people will ‘grow’ in their faith, what we usually mean is that we hope that soon their faith will look like ours. The NSYR suggests that we have gotten our wish: the faith of American teenagers does look like the faith of their parents, which as we have seen is not an


Dean’s broad conclusion is that the solution lies in more than just finding the right pastor or the right set of programs. The solution lies within the community, the very relationships that have the greatest influence on helping teenagers develop spiritually. “We spend a lot of time hunting for flux capacitors: gadgets, curriculum, methods, and even cultural tools that we hope will somehow (we’re not sure how) convert human practices into holy fire…For centuries, these two strategies – telling God’s story and enacting it – comprised the heart of Christian formation, or catechesis, the ‘handing on’ of a faith tradition from one generation to the next.”

Dean’s answer to this incorrect, or even lack of, spiritual formation in our teenagers is to pull the curtain back and reinvigorate the ancient mission of the community of faith. No one piece of the community can grow in isolation; each piece is a marker of the community as a whole. Dean claims if we want our teenagers to become faithful disciples, it’s going to take the whole church getting on board. Spiritual formation requires a community, the whole church, embracing their identity. In a nutshell, becoming spiritually mature followers of Jesus will not happen by just sending our kids to the right program. MTD is letting our teenagers get off easy by just instructing them to be nice. Dean’s solution is for the church to recover its mission. Dean believes if we, as the community of faith, reclaim our identity and mission, we will find a fierce and passionate God that demands more than just being nice.

It would be unlikely for teenagers to develop any religious framework besides superficial Christianity if churches have supplanted the gospel with a religious outlook that functions primarily as a social lubricant,

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34 Ibid., 81.

35 Ibid., 62.
about themselves, meets their needs when called upon but otherwise stays out of the way. If this is the god we offer young people, there may be little in Christianity to which they object, but there is even less to which they will be devoted. By contrast, the God portrayed in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures asks, not just for commitment, for our very lives. The God of the Bible traffics in life and death, not nice-ness, and calls for sacrificial love, not benign whatever-ism… The most likely explanation for Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is simply that we reap what we sow. We have received from teenagers exactly what we have asked them for: assent, not conviction; compliance, not faith. Young people invest in religion precisely what they think it is worth – and if they think the church is worthy of benign whatever-ism and no more, then the indictment falls not on them, but on us.  

Dean believes that mission is central to addressing the issue of MTD. What runs silently throughout Dean’s thesis that binds everything together is a strong incarnational theology. The church is showing and transmitting our understanding of who God is and how God forms us to our teens. Like Bonhoeffer who claimed, “The Christ in their own hearts is weaker than the Christ in the word of other Christians. Their own hearts are uncertain; those of their brothers and sisters are sure.”  

Dean sees community as the antidote to MTD and the catalyst for regaining mission. “Handing on faith with young people is not a matter of giving them Jesus, as though he were ours to give, or as though Christ’s presence in their lives depends on us. Approaching mission as translation assumes Christ is already present in their lives…The gospel of Jesus Christ is God’s living translation – and requires living translation as well, people who offer us fresh perspectives on Jesus, on young people, and on the church itself.”

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36 Ibid., 37.


Spiritual formation occurs in community because of the incarnational nature of Christ. Programs fail because they are in their very nature not incarnational. Formation means to be formed in the image, and if our teens are being formed in the image of MTD, then the community needs to help show our teenagers (and in doing so, ourselves) how to be formed in the image of Christ. Dean uses the examples of an apprentice to show that formation of any kind has always occurred within the context of relationships as young people had to “see” how to mature. “The earliest form of discipleship education…was apprenticeship. Talking about Jesus is no substitute for following him, for Timothy or for us; yet talking about Jesus is necessary to claim and confess our identity in Christ, and to discern through the community of faith the footprints we should follow… Youth are apprentices in a community that talks about Jesus, where people testify to what it costs to love him and love others because of him.”

Dean’s book provides the connection between the role of community in spiritual formation and the role of service in spiritual growth. Pulling from her Methodist roots, Dean lifts up John Wesley’s theology of sanctifying grace, growing in holiness, as the fruit of living in community. “I ache for them to know Christ’s love in their bones, to belong to a community that bathes them in grace, and to experience the kind of communion that weds them to God and to all humanity. The love of God shows young people in the cross is passion, a love worthy of suffering, not an absence of hostility. God’s love is consequential love, which calls for a consequential faith, which calls for

39 Ibid., 151.
communities where holiness – not niceness – rules the day.”

Dean weds together her incarnational theology with Lesslie Newbigin’s missional theology to show spiritual formation occurs in community as the community fulfills its mission and participates in the spiritual discipline of service. Dean upholds Newbigin’s theology stating, “Newbigin’s concern was that the church never separate mission from Incarnation, God-made-flesh sent into the world. The point of God’s Incarnation was mission.”

Dean offers a quote from Newbigin’s work *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, “…the gospel does not come as a disembodied message, but as the message of a community which claims to live by it and which invites others to adhere to it, the community’s life must be so ordered that ‘it makes sense’ to those who are so invited. It must, as we say, ‘come alive.’ Those to whom it is addressed must be able to say, ‘Yes, I see.’”

**The Open Secret by Lesslie Newbigin**

Lesslie Newbigin’s work is considered by many to be a primary for missional theology. In his classic, “The Open Secret” Newbigin echoes the claims of previous authors. Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who saw community as a vehicle for God’s grace by writing that the Christ in the hearts of others was stronger than the Christ in their own, Newbigin affirms the role of relationships by stating, “We are fully person only with and through others”

Like Richard Foster, who believed the spiritual discipline of service

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40 Ibid., 38.

41 Ibid., 91.


was not one characterized by control, demands, and seeking human applause, Newbigin agrees instead to serve is not to grasp our hands around God (as if that were possible) but to believe “our business is not to promote the mission of the church, but to get out into the world find out ‘what God is doing in the world,’ and join forces with him.” And like Kenda Dean, who places her understanding on spiritual formation on the incarnational love of Jesus Christ, Newbigin upholds the identity of God as the one who reveals and therefore invites us into witness.

It is this understanding of God as Trinity that links Dean’s understanding of formation with Newbigin’s whole thesis. It is within the very nature of God that one can understand the role of service as central to spiritual formation. “The fundamental belief is embodied in the affirmation that God has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. I shall therefore begin by looking at the Christian mission in three ways – as proclaiming the kingdom of the Father, as sharing the life of the Son, and as bearing the witness of the Spirit.” God, revealed in the Trinity, is Newbigin’s avenue for explaining his theology of missions. The Father is the proclamation of the Kingdom, the Son is the presence of the Kingdom, and the Spirit is the prevenience of the Kingdom. If God is a missional God, revealed in the Trinity, then the incarnational nature of God, the desire to reveal God’s self as the Trinity, is God’s way of showing the people of God how to be participants of the Kingdom. The community of faith is a people being formed into the image of the triune God. To know who God is leads to the question, “What are the

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44 Ibid., 18.
actions by which the believing community will fulfill God’s purpose for it as the community chosen, called, and sent with a view to the salvation of the world?”

The mission of God becomes the mission of God’s people, forming the community so that their hearts mirror the heart of God. If the presence of the Kingdom took on the nature of a servant, then the community is called to grow like the servant Christ. “Mission is the proclaiming of the kingdom of the Father, and it concerns the rule of God over all that is… But mission is also sharing the life of the Son, for it is in Jesus that God’s kingdom is present in the life of the world, and this presence is continued – under the sign of the cross – in the community that confesses Jesus as Lord and belongs to him as his body.” If the Trinity is the proclamation, presence, and prevenience of the Kingdom, then as the community prays, “your Kingdom come” (Matt. 6:1) the prayer becomes an act of formation. To repeat the words Christ taught, to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be formed in his image, which comes to the heart of this paper. For Newbigin, growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ within the community does not end with a conversion. Bound together is the act of faith and service, that obedience is central to the identity of the community that confesses the crucified Savior. “There cannot be a separation between conversion and obedience. To be converted in any sense that is true to the Bible is something that involves the whole person. It is a total change of direction, which includes both the inner reorientation of the heart and mind and the outward reorientation of conduct in all areas of life. The original announcement of the gospel

46 Ibid., 90.

47 Ibid., 121.
(“the reign of God is at hand”) immediately turns to a call to be converted (“repent”), to believe in the present reality of God’s reign, and to follow Jesus.⁴⁸ How the community lives out the reality of God’s reign and continues on this journey of growing and becoming more like the servant Savior, is addressed by the work of a modern author, David Fitch.

Faithful Presence by David Fitch

Echoing the frustrations of many church-goers, Fitch opens his work by searching for the real church. Tired of endless programming that leaves its members exhausted rather than mature disciples of Jesus Christ, Fitch asks, “What has happened to the body of believers?” Fitch is disheartened to see that the great fellowship of disciples, known as the church, finds its identity as just another time commitment to fulfill rather than a space where God is met, relationships cultivated, and lives transformed.

The real church, Fitch argues, is a community that engages in faithful presence. Fitch strives to give back to the church its true identity, helping to reshape their understanding of how God works in and through disciples.

God’s plan is to become present to the world in and through a people, and then invite the world to join with him…a group of people gather and become present to God. In our life together, we recognize God in the presence of Jesus Christ through disciplines in which he has promised, ‘I am in your midst.’… The world then sees God’s presence among us and through us and joins in with God. And the world is changed. This, I contend, is faithful presence. This is the church.⁴⁹

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⁴⁸ Ibid., 135.
Fitch’s ecclesiology runs strong throughout his introduction to the seven disciplines. It is when we gather together that God is present. The church must abandon its identity as defined by a set of walls and become instead a people engaged in the disciplines. “The church is more than a space where some individuals gather to affirm they believe in something. It is the place where God’s people discern his presence and submit to Christ’s concrete rule. He has given us disciplines for doing this… Here an incredible faithful presence takes shape.”  

Fitch lists the disciplines as: the Lord’s Table, reconciliation, proclaiming the gospel, being with “the least of these,” being with children, the fivefold ministry, and kingdom prayer. When the church engages in these disciplines, Christ is present.

It is through the community of believers, called the church, that Fitch believes God brings transformation. Just as Jesus is the intersection between God and humanity, the church (the community of those who follow Jesus) becomes the intersection between God’s presence and God’s mission. When Jesus gives the Great Commission at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, he instructs the disciples teach others these disciplines so the church will be able to recognize Jesus in their midst. Jesus leaves with the promise to be with the believers always (Matthew 28:20); a promise that is fulfilled when the church becomes the concrete place where God’s mission and God’s presence come together. The church is the space where, “a people become present to God’s presence in the world

\[50\] Ibid., 32.

\[51\] Ibid., 35.
(missio Dei) and make space for Christ’s presence to become real among them (incarnation).”

When Jesus gives the Great Commission (and gives the charter for the creation of the church), sending his disciples to reproduce this fellowship where the holy and humanity intersect, “He was asking them to teach the disciplines, just as he had taught them. To ‘make disciples’ implies the use of disciplines. This is the means by which Jesus will be with us…”

Pushing back against the church of me, of an individualistic view of faith, Fitch believes Christ’s call for the church was to be an open space for the community to “rearrange the world, starting in our social relationships. These disciplines invite us into what God is actually doing in the whole world… These disciplines are always about more than just me…they open space for God’s presence in Christ to become real among us. They form a community in and around his fullness.” For Fitch, you cannot have Christ without the church, and the church cannot experience the fullness of God’s power to transform without Jesus Christ. And the way the church recognizes Christ in their midst, the way God uses the church to change individual lives and the world, is through the disciplines. “In these disciplines Jesus has given us all we need to shape our lives into his presence for the transformation of the world… They have been proven over time to form the foundation of life in Christ’s community.”

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52 Ibid., 34.
53 Ibid., 34.
54 Ibid., 36.
55 Ibid., 35.
Trying to correct a false ecclesiology, Fitch shows the danger of keeping the church inside an incorrect understanding of engagement through only programs. To reduce the mission of God to a volunteer one hour a month controllable service program, misses the wider understanding of the discipline and reduces God’s presence and transforming power to human ability. Fitch describes this incorrect ecclesiology in two different forms. When a community stays within its walls, failing to build relationships with the least of these, they fall into maintenance mode. “When we separate what happens in the close-circle gathering (members in a church) from the rest of life, we inevitably focus on doing the disciplines correctly, smoothly, professionally, and conveniently. We focus on maintaining… Less concerned with those outside of Christ, the church retreats into itself.”

At the other end of the incorrect spectrum is the community focuses on service and justice without taking time to connect and discover the richness of Christ’s presence. This becomes a community of exhaustion. “… exhaustion mode happens when Christians leave the close circle (church) behind to work for justice and mission in the world… It’s not that God is not present in the world but that, devoid of knowing his real presence in the close circle, we lose the wherewithal to discern his presence in the world. We end up relying on our own efforts to solve the problems of the world. We are eventually depleted and disappointed.”

For a community to engage in the missio Dei without the power of the incarnation (or vice versa) is to be incomplete in their identity as the church. Both the maintenance

56 Ibid., 41-42.
57 Ibid., 42-43.
mode and exhaustion mode of ecclesiology have a similar foundation: a fruitless attempt to be the kingdom of God on human terms, an attempt to regain the transforming power of God by human effort, and an unsuccessful endeavor to produce spiritual formation by human willpower. Faithful presence sits between the two, engaging in these disciplines as opportunities to see and experience Christ in our midst, and to witness God changing lives (both ourselves and others).

Of the seven disciplines, the discipline of being with the least of these becomes foundational for helping the church live into its God-given identity and call. “In many ways, being with ‘the least of these’ is what faithful presence looks like in all its dynamics.”

This discipline destroys the notion that discipleship happens on an individual basis, engaging in a project for a few hours each month. It instead “shapes the whole community into Christ’s kingdom… It starts with people being present to groups of people in need. This is something we do as a regular part of our lives as followers of Jesus. We offer our presence and who we are to the other person. We are present to the other person and tend to the presence of Christ between us.” Being with the least of these is more than finding the next justice project to dump money into and feeling good for the next few days. This discipline is learning a lifestyle of kinship for deeper transformation. The church engages in this discipline because the space between disciples of Jesus and the poor is sacred. Part of the spiritual formation that occurs for the community in this discipline is to learn a new vision and to see the poor, hurt, and outcast

58 Ibid., 115.
59 Ibid., 114.
not as another program but as sisters and brothers. To be with the least of these is to tend to relationship, to open up a space to see the Christ in others.

Our relationship with the poor is not to be organized as a program at our local church. Instead, in everyday life we are to come alongside, be present to the poor in a relationship of family. In the relational space something truly amazing happens. Jesus becomes especially present… Antagonisms become unwound. Resources are shared back and forth. Healing takes place. Relationships are restored. And a new world is born. This is the discipline of being with the “least of these” that is to characterize our everyday life as Christians, as Christ’s church.60

**Conclusion**

Each of these authors in different ways has highlighted a central piece to spiritual formation. Transformation occurs within relationships, and the discipline of service allows a dismantling of the self so Christ can be seen in the life of the other. Within the power of community, serving moves from a project to a deeper growing of an identity and a way of living. For all of these authors, the witness and call of Jesus Christ has placed an identity upon the church to be a community of servants who participate in bringing God’s Kingdom. The testimony of Christ in the Gospels, the formation of the early church in the Apostle Paul’s letters, and the interpretation of these scriptures in the ministry of John Wesley and the Methodist movement is the focus of the next chapter.

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60 Ibid., 119-120.
This chapter will present a theological foundation for spiritual formation within the community and the role of mission and service in discipleship. This chapter will first examine the importance of community and the role of the Holy Spirit as Jesus shaped a theological model for the early disciples. This chapter will then look at how the Apostle Paul interpreted and brought new depth to this understanding in the early church, by again emphasizing the role of community and the need for service as an integral part of discipleship. Finally this chapter will focus particularly on the interpretation John Wesley took and the influence community and service have played in spiritual formation in the early and current expressions of the United Methodist Church.

**Christological Model**

In the Gospel of Mark and in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus early in his ministry sends out his disciples in pairs for mission. While both Gospels record the sending of the two, the context and reasoning for the sending differ in the account. Even with this difference,
Jesus begins to shape, in both Gospel texts, a model of ministry that involves community and mission (or going out).

In Mark 6:6-12 chapter six, the writer shares,

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.’ So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

The calling of the twelve in the Gospel of Mark came after the rejection of Jesus’ ministry in Nazareth. While many there marveled at his wisdom, their unbelief amazed Jesus (Mark 6:2, 6). And so Jesus began to travel to the villages to continue his teaching. Jesus spreads the work of ministry to the twelve, sending them in pairs with a two-fold proclamation: repent and be healed. The writer of Mark begins the Gospel with Isaiah’s prophecy and John the Baptist’s message of repentance, followed by Jesus’ first miracle of driving out an unclean spirit. Now the work is passed on to the believer, to continue the ministry through the power of fellowship.

Jesus requirements for serving seem hasty compared to modern day standards. Jesus sends out the disciples seemingly early in their belief. They have only witnessed a few miracles and have yet to receive the full power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Mark spends ten more chapters talking about Jesus’ teachings and miracles, and yet Jesus feels ready to send out his disciples with authority. The disciples are to go without the safety net of security: no Board of Ordained Ministry has given approval for these disciples, no
seminary training completed or salary package discussed, just the command to go out and share the message. Jesus’ only requirement for mission in this passage is be in fellowship with another, proclaim repentance, and cure the sick.

In Luke 10:1-12, the writer shares,

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

Several similarities appear between this text and the passage from the Gospel of Mark. The sending of the disciples, this time seventy instead of twelve, happens early in Jesus’ ministry (The Gospel of Luke has fourteen more chapters after this passage). The disciples are sent without training or provisions to prepare for Jesus Christ’s arrival. While in the Gospel of Mark the disciples bring a message of repentance, in the Gospel of Luke Jesus compares the ministry to a field ready for harvest. Obedience to Jesus’ call for the disciples will be the promise of peace.

In this passage the importance of fellowship and community for service and formation is highlighted with greater significance. The reference to Sodom evokes the theme of hospitality. Sodom’s great sin was the refusal to be in relationship with others,
while in contrast the very message Jesus sends his disciples to bring is the promise of peace by being in fellowship with the disciples. The kingdom of God will come near only when the disciples are in relationship with the community they have come to serve and proclaim the good news.

Only five verses later the seventy return to Jesus, exclaiming with joy, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” (Lk 10:17). Jesus is approached by a lawyer and asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk 10:25). Jesus refers the lawyer back to the holy text, asking him what is written in the law. The lawyer responds, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Lk 10:27). Jesus affirms the lawyer’s answers and encourages him, “do this, and you will live” (Lk 10:28).

But then the scripture takes an interesting turn. The lawyer seems unsatisfied with the conversation and wishes to engage further. His follow up for Jesus does not bring into the question the ability or details of how one can love God with all their heart, soul, strength and mind. The lawyer surprisingly has no need for further insight into how to love God; instead the idea of fellowship is called into question. The bulk of the Jesus’ response is passed over; instead the lawyer focuses in on the second half of his answer by asking, “And who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:29). In essence the lawyer feels confident in his love for God, but unsure about his required love for humanity.

In Luke 10:30-37, Jesus responds by sharing the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other
side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

While there is much in this parable, one detail is important to note. In essence, Jesus shares a story about the relationships between service and fellowship. While the lawyer was trying to separate the love of God from the love of neighbor, Jesus instead shows him that the hero of the story is the one who enters into relationship with the man who is injured. By serving another, the Samaritan fulfills the whole of God’s law. To love God you must love others with your whole heart, soul, strength and mind. While the lawyer struggles with seeing the relationship between service and spiritual formation, the seventy disciples sent in the previous section have embodied the heart of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

While Jesus sends the disciples out to serve early in their ministry, it is after Jesus’ resurrection the full power of formation is possible with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:6-8, we hear “So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’” Jesus makes the mission clear to the believers; they are called to be witnesses to what God has done. They
are to shift their focus from an earthly kingdom of Israel to the greater kingdom of God by sharing the news of repentance and healing to the very ends of the earth. The power for their mission will come when the community receives the outpouring of God’s Spirit.

The Apostle Peter continues this message of repentance and fellowship after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the disciples were once again in community, locked in an upper room, the Holy Spirit broke through the barriers and descended upon the believers like fire and wind. Filled with God’s Spirit, the disciples rushed out of the room into the crowds on Pentecost. The Kingdom of God had indeed drawn near as Peter preached the good news. In Acts 2:43-47,

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their numbers those who were being saved.

The most defining characteristic of the early church is the life together. It is within the community of believers in Jesus Christ the early church experiences this period of expansive growth. In fellowship, the work and mission of the Kingdom of God continues. Together the community engages in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, communion, worship, and service. These acts of noticing God were woven into the routines of daily life. It is here within the community another believer will pick up the model of formation through community and service and begin to shape the ecclesiastical understanding of mission for the early church.
**Pauline Understanding**

Perhaps the greatest voice in the forming of the early church was the Apostle Paul. Through his influence and his letters, his theology took the Christian movement from a small revival within Judaism to the religious worldwide movement, which still exists today. His writings shaped the early believers and translated the teachings of Jesus Christ into this new community. The Apostle Paul’s ministry was expansive, stretching across the Roman Empire. While his missionary journeys provided opportunities to either plant or strengthen several churches, it is within his letters his lasting legacy is still seen today.

While each church differed in context and character, the Apostle Paul’s message remained consistent. Looking at passages from two different ministry settings (the church in Ephesus and the church in Colossae), it is clear the Apostle Paul believed the power of community and the need for service were the backbone of the newly formed community of Christ believers. Spiritual formation, the goal of every disciple, was to happen in relationships through the discipline of serving.

*The Church in Ephesus*

The church in Ephesus was Gentile in background, as the Apostle Paul writes in chapter two. “So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth… remember that you were at that time without Christ… but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:11-13). The Apostle Paul opens his letter to the church by praising their spiritual growth, most noticeably through their care for others. He prays because of their dedication to this discipline, God will continue
to help them deepen in their knowledge and ability to love God and love others. “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks… I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ… may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him…” (Eph 1:15-17).

The Apostle Paul then continues in the next chapter by elaborating on the relationship between faith and works. While salvation rests on God’s grace, the Apostle Paul then explains this new and intimate relationship with God is maintained through acts of love towards others. In fact, the Apostle Paul goes so far as to suggest salvation, a life of faith through grace, is possible because it is the way through which God calls us to good works. The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-10 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the results of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” This passage from the letter to the Ephesians has been the bedrock for the Protestant church, emphasizing the role of God’s grace in the work of salvation. But it is important to recognize the Apostle Paul believes this saved life is saved for a reason. The way of life for the believer is a way of service and good works. While the works do not produce salvation, they are essential in the growth of a disciple.

The Apostle Paul also makes a connection in this chapter between these good works and their relationship to being in community. The very act of being in relationship shows the power of God in their formation, The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:14-15, “For he (Jesus) is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us…that he might create in
himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace.” The Apostle Paul saw God’s Spirit working in and through them because of their desire to be in fellowship with each other. The spiritual discipline of being in community had become an avenue for spiritual growth as God transformed them into a dwelling place for God’s spirit. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints… In him (Christ Jesus) the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph 2:19-22).

The focus on relationships dominates the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus. After spending the first half of the letter highlighting the relationship between the believer and Christ, the Apostle Paul turns to the relationship with others. The Apostle Paul builds a strong foundation of God’s love through Christ so he can then turn to how that love affects relationships within the community. His pivot from God’s love to the call to love others comes in Ephesians 4:1-6, 12-16.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all… to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.
This section of the letter weaves together the previous sections on community and service. The Apostle Paul reminds the community of the weight of their discipleship journey, reminding them of their calling and their new commitment to a way of life that is marked by unity and service. The Apostle Paul outlines the marks of maturity in this passage as something that is achieved by the whole body of Christ, knit together in relationship as they grow in love through the work of ministry. The community’s goal is to become more like Jesus Christ, and their journey of discipleship is tied to the exercising of the gifts God has given for them to use together in unity as they care for one another.

The Apostle Paul uses this section as the springboard for expanding upon how the believer is called to grow through acts of love within other relationships. The Apostle Paul elaborates on spousal relationships, familial relationships, and even work relationships (between masters and slaves) to demonstrate that to grow as a disciple of Jesus involves being in fellowship and upholding service in all areas of life. The journey of growth as the believer becomes more like Jesus Christ is to embrace the new identity, and learn that what God calls the believer to do is to “be courteously reverent to one another” (Eph 5:21).

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is… Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:8-21).
The Church in Colossae

The Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Colossae has many similarities to his letter to the church in Ephesus. While the two churches were located physically close, their ministry contexts were different. While the letter to the Ephesians emphasized relationships, the letter to the Colossians deals more with the rising problem of Gnosticism. Even with his attention to theological matters, the Apostle Paul still spends time encouraging the community to continue their spiritual growth through fellowship and acts of service.

The Apostle Paul opens his letter praying for the community to learn how to grow as believers so they could be faithful to the life God to which had called them. This life of discipleship is marked by good works. In their service God will help disciples grow in knowledge and strength. He writes in Colossians 1:9-12,

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

The Apostle Paul then continues on to relate his own journey of spiritual growth, reminding the church that because of his relationship with Christ, he was called to help others grow in faith and wisdom. This call to serve others presses the Apostle Paul to work with all his might. “It is he (Christ Jesus) whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.
For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me” (Col 1:28-29). The Apostle Paul shares this, encouraging the believers to learn this life of faith through imitation, because he desires the believers to be united in community as they grow in this new life of knowing God more intimately and serving God by faith. “I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery… I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col 2:2-7).

Now that the believer has accepted this new way of living as a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul outlines the marks of maturity for the believer in Colossians 3:12-17.

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

There are two observations to note about this section of the letter. One, maturity is explained within the context of relationship. The Apostle Paul does not describe maturity in terms of individual piety but within the community. Two, maturity is demonstrated through service. As God’s chosen ones, as disciples of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul outlines the requirements for living within the community. The one body to which the
believer is called to be in unity is marked by compassion, kindness, the ability to bear with one another, to forgive, and thankfulness. The life together, seeking God, learning, admonishing, and singing, is the way by which God helps the community grow in knowledge towards God and love towards one another.

**The Wesleyan Way**

“Our forebears in the faith reaffirm the ancient Christian message as found in the apostolic witness even as they applied it anew in their own circumstances.”1 The ecclesiology of the Apostle Paul continued through the centuries to the reformation movement in England. John and Charles Wesley did not plan on starting a new church. Their goal was to encourage a revival within the Church of England, to address the abundance of “almost Christians”2 sitting in the pews. Their passion for discipleship lead to the modern day United Methodist Church. Refusing to reduce their theology to a doctrinal document that would serve as a litmus test3, John Wesley eventually organized the new movement with *The Book of Discipline*, a document that binds together in fellowship today United Methodist from across the globe. “Their task was not to reformulate doctrine. Their tasks were to summon people to experience the justifying and sanctifying grace of God and encourage people to grow in the knowledge and love of God through the personal and corporate disciplines of the Christian life.”4 In this book

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2 Ibid., 14.
3 Ibid., 55.
4 Ibid., 49.
lies the theological heart of the denomination, capturing John Wesley’s theology while addressing modern day issues.

The Book of Discipline outlines several beliefs that John Wesley instilled in the United Methodist Church. It was vital for Wesley the believer continue to progress in spiritual growth through acts of service. For Wesley, the foundation of faith involved a call to growth that manifested in daily living. “The underlying energy of the Wesleyan theological heritage stems from an emphasis upon practical divinity, the implementation of genuine Christianity in the lives of believers … The Wesleyan emphasis upon the Christian life – faith and love put into practice – has been the hallmark of those traditions now incorporated into The United Methodist Church.”

John Wesley believed in the power of grace. God’s prevenient grace reaches out to the creation before they are even aware of God. God’s justifying grace restores the relationship between a fallen creation and a holy God through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. While baptism marks the beginning of a new journey of faith, Wesley strongly stressed God’s sanctifying grace continued the work of transformation in the believer.

We hold that the wonder of God’s acceptance and pardon does not end God’s saving work, which continues to nurture our growth in grace. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to increase in the knowledge and love of God and in love for our neighbor. New birth is the first step in this process of sanctification. Sanctifying grace draws us toward the gift of Christian perfection, which Wesley described as a heart “habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor” and “having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked.”

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5 Ibid., 49.

6 Ibid., 51.
One of Wesley’s most defining theological beliefs was the need for continued spiritual growth. For Wesley, baptism does not mark the completion but the beginning of the Christian’s journey towards holiness. Sanctifying grace allows the believer to grow in personal faith and public piety. This continual growth in grace to love God and love neighbor is the hallmark of Methodist belief.

Wesley’s understanding of sanctifying grace influenced his model of discipleship. In order for belief to continue to influence living (and vice versa) Wesley created the three Rules. “Wesley insisted, however, that evangelical faith should manifest itself in evangelical living. He spelled out this expectation in the three-part formula of the Rules… First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind… Secondly: By… doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible to all…; Thirdly: By attending upon all ordinances of God…”7 Every time Methodist gathered together in fellowship, they were to ask and encourage one another in these three questions. The community structured their time together around confession, an accounting of their acts of service, and by sharing together in the sacraments as they increased in their love for God and for neighbor.

In order to understand where and how God’s sanctifying grace was working in the life of a believer, Wesley created a four-part formula for discerning the movement of God’s Spirit. “Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by

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7 Ibid., 52.
The quadrilateral, as it became known, helped shape Methodist theology in matters of doctrine and practice. Wesley found it important to uplift the experience of a believer as one of the ways God’s sanctifying grace brings spiritual growth. “The Christian witness, even when grounded in Scripture and mediated by tradition, is ineffectual unless understood and appropriated by the individual. To become our witness, it must make sense in terms of our own reason and experience.”

For Wesley, and for modern day Methodists, God’s sanctifying grace brings transformation through the ability to discern and respond to God through the journey of faith. The insights of Scripture are better understood and applicable through the light of experience.

For Wesley, a cogent account of the Christian faith required the use of reason, both to understand Scripture and to relate the biblical message to wider fields of knowledge. He looked for confirmations of biblical witness in human experience, especially the experiences of regeneration and sanctification…In our theological task, we follow Wesley’s practice of examining experience, both individual and corporate, for confirmations of the realities of God’s grace attested in Scripture. Our experience interacts with Scripture. We read Scripture in light of the conditions and events that help shape who we are, and we interpret our experience in terms of Scripture.

The role of the community is essential for interpreting experience as part of the process of spiritual growth. “We share the Christian belief that God’s redemptive love is realized in human life by the activity of the Holy Spirit, both in personal experience and in the community of believers.”

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8 Ibid., 80.
9 Ibid., 81.
10 Ibid., 84-85.
11 Ibid., 47.
Methodist Church is the connectional system of churches. Bound together by belief (in the Book of Discipline) and in fellowship (through the church organizational structure), Wesley created a system that utilized the power of community to the fullest. For Wesley, sanctifying grace, flowing through the four-part formula for understanding and responding to God, could best occur within the power of fellowship.

Finally, we emphasize the nurturing and serving function of Christian fellowship in the Church. The personal experience of faith is nourished by the worshipping community. For Wesley there is no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. The communal forms of faith in the Wesleyan tradition not only promote personal growth; they also equip and mobilize us for mission and service to the world.\(^{12}\)

If the goal of sanctifying grace is to help the believer love God and love neighbor, according the Wesley, then the community is the vehicle by which God’s grace could help the church fulfill its potential. “Although profoundly personal, Christian experience is also corporate; our theological task is informed by the experience of the church and by the common experiences of all humanity. In our attempts to understand the biblical message, we recognize that God’s gift of liberating love embraces the whole of creation.”\(^{13}\)

Wesley’s understanding of sanctifying grace places a heavy importance on the spiritual disciplines. The believer is to constantly attend to the ordinances of God, what is translated today as falling in love with God. To abide in God’s sanctifying grace is to live a life in the spirit. This life ebbs and flows from personal communion with God and communal growth in faith. “‘Life in the Spirit’ involves diligent use of the means of

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\(^{12}\) Ibid., 51-52.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 85.
grace such as praying, fasting, attending upon the sacraments, and inward searching in solitude. It also encompasses the communal life of the church in worship, mission, evangelism, service, and social witness.”

In addition to individual disciplines, the discipline of service was one of the defining markers of the early Methodist movement, and still is today. “No motif in the Wesleyan tradition has been more constant than the link between Christian doctrine and Christian living. Methodist have always been strictly enjoined to maintain the unity of faith and good works through the means of grace…” Wesley was known for his acts of charity and his strong insistence upon them from the pulpit.

John Wesley, and United Methodist now, believe there could be no life of faith, no growth in the Spirit, without acts of service. “We insist that personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. By joining heart and hand, we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness, and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Scriptural holiness entails more than personal piety; love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and renewal in the life of the world.” Wesley did not believe acts of service were essential to salvation. However, because of God’s sanctifying grace, he believed every believer was called to engage in good works as their avenue for spiritual growth. “We see God’s grace and human activity working together in the relationship of faith and good works. God’s grace calls forth human response and discipline. Faith is the only response essential for salvation.

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14 Ibid., 47.
15 Ibid., 52.
16 Ibid., 51.
However, the General Rules remind us that salvation evidences itself in good works; even repentance should be accompanied by “fruits meet for repentance,” or works of piety and mercy.”

John Wesley’s understanding of the nature of spiritual formation and the role of community and service in the process of discipleship is still foundational to the United Methodist denomination today. For over 200 years the United Methodist Church has engaged in service to all of God’s children, “the poor, the orphaned, the aging, the sick, the oppressed and the imprisoned.” Today the United Methodist Church has four areas of focus for mission and service. In addition to improving global health, developing principled Christian leaders, and creating new and renewed congregations, the people called United Methodist believe in engaging in ministry with the poor.

Christ calls us to be in ministry with the poor and marginalized. Our emphasis is on “with” – standing with those who are regarded as “the least of these,” listening to them, understanding their needs and aspirations, and working with them to achieve their goals. It also means addressing the causes of poverty and responding in ways that lift up individuals and communities. United Methodists believe working side by side with those striving to improve their situation is more effective long term than top-down charity.

Conclusion

The journey of discipleship is a process of growing in love for God and for others. Jesus first modeled this process with his disciples. The Apostle Paul helped implement

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17 Ibid., 51.


this model within the early church. And John Wesley integrated the importance of community, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual discipline of service in the early and current expression of the United Methodist Church. All of these elements of spiritual formation: the community, the spiritual disciplines, and acts of service will be part of the project to help members of Trinity United Methodist Church. The next chapter will lay out the goals and plan to create an opportunity for spiritual growth utilizing these different elements within the context of a week-long mission trip.
PART THREE

MINISTRY PRACTICE
Overhauling an established missions program at any church is a daunting effort. Trying to navigate change while supporting the faithful volunteers who have kept the programs running for many years is a delicate process. Jim Collins, in his book *Great By Choice*, encourages leaders to shoot bullets before cannons, to take small steps before making giant leaps.¹ By addressing some of the theological implications for serving in a smaller setting, such as a week-long mission trip, the hope is that the success of the project and the support of the participants will help begin a wider conversation that can address systematic change throughout a congregation’s mission ministry.

Many churches have a history of engaging in short-term mission work. The size and location of the projects may vary based on the size and financial state of the sending congregation. The opportunity for mission work, especially for students during the summer months, has become so normative many families expect a mission trip for their

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children, even if the church cannot support youth programs throughout the year. In some ways, this expectation exasperates the problems of short-term mission work. Churches see the mission trip opportunity as a way to keep the students in their congregation happy and participating in church, and their students see it as an affordable way to experience a mini-vacation that makes them feel good and fulfill a requirement for community service hours mandated by their school.

David Livermore shared his experience with mission organizations that highlights a significant problem in the way we view and engage in short term mission work.

I’m often at national conventions where short-term mission organizations are exhibiting. When I walk up to talk to ministry reps from these organizations, I ask them how the national church is engaged in what they’re doing. Consistently I hear, ‘Oh yes, we’re very committed to working with the national church there. We ask them if they want to be involved.’ Did you catch that? We ask them if they want to be involved. Maybe we should start by asking if we should be involved at all, and if so, how?²

The challenges and opportunities facing Trinity are unique to its ministry setting. While there are strong and historical relationships with mission organizations in the community, there is little precedent for serving outside of the town limits. Recent involvement by younger families has reignited the children and youth ministries at the church and with this growth has come a desire for parents to either serve with or have opportunities for their students to engage in service. Like many churches in the area, the youth who regularly attend on Sundays are dedicated, even if they are few in numbers. Many in the congregation are voicing a desire to open conversations on the allocation of funds and labor for current mission work.

Many of the larger systemic concerns seen at Trinity are shared by other churches in the Missouri United Methodist Conference. Rather than resort to the historical models of missions, which involves a handful of members organizing small service projects, Trinity’s desire to engage in relationship-based community development missions is similar to conversations occurring in other similarly sized congregations in Missouri. Many congregations recognize the need to move the discipline of service from an add-on to membership to an integrated part of their identity as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Along with this desire to reexamine the theology of missions within the church, Trinity is not alone in their critic of the role and purpose of short-term mission work. While the ease of planning a mission trip through an organization is undeniable, the intended result of the trip could be disastrous.

It would be amiss to not mention the work of Robert Lupton in his book *Toxic Charity*. Lupton beautifully articulates much of the underlining concerns when it comes to mission work, both at Trinity and with many churches in the denomination. Lupton writes,

> Across the span of four decades I have observed many well-resourced, well-intentioned people attempting to help the poor. I have been among them. My church has been among them. Most of the time, these efforts have produced little lasting benefit for those ‘served’ with a few notable exceptions. For the most part, when those of us who serve are candid, we admit an uneasiness in our viscera, a largely unspoken concern that our helping might not be accomplishing what we had hoped. This is especially true when it comes to the now-routine practice of sending groups of youth or adults to do service projects.³

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Lupton bluntly calls out the realities of most mission trips. “Often, though, we miss the big picture because we view aid through the narrow lens of the needs of our organization or church – focusing on what will benefit our team the most – and neglecting the best interests of those we would serve.”4 Lupton gives countless examples of how short-term mission trips run the risk of producing no long-term lasting change while instead supporting unhealthy relationships of dependency. Lupton offers a vision for how churches can rethink their purpose and partnership in mission work, not as the savior come to rescue the poor but by building equal partnerships that focus on empowerment and justice.

Keeping Lupton’s cautionary tale in mind, the ministry plan will focus on developing a healthy theology on missions and design a service opportunity which supports, rather than dominates and ignores, the local community. While the ministry plan for this trip will be created specifically for Trinity UMC in Moberly, MO, the hope is the literature may be utilized by other congregations in the Missouri United Methodist Conference. A vast majority of Methodist churches in the state are unable to afford paid staff for youth ministry or mission work. There is currently a lack of resources available for small-to-medium size congregations to organize and implement a mission trip, especially for an intergenerational group. This should not disqualify the congregations from organizing a short-term mission trip. One of the goals of this ministry plan will be to create a process that can be reciprocated in other ministry settings.

With so many churches of all denominations and size engaging in short-term mission work, a lot of research has been done by the Fuller Youth Institute to address

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4 Ibid., 15.
some of the problems. Kara Powell and Brad Griffin have done tremendous work in their book *Sticky Faith Service Guide: Moving Students from Mission Trips to Missional Living*. Similar to the concerns expressed by Robert Lupton, Powell and Griffin write, “…most service trips away from home…tend to create an aura of what’s been called mission tourism. We want to see and experience local culture, but we can easily romanticize the poor and make them objects for our growth or, worse, the targets of consumer experiences that make us feel like ‘good Christians.’”5 Powell and Griffin ask the questions that scripture and Methodist tradition also ask when looking at the theological implications of mission work. “How do we move service beyond spiritual tourism? How can our service work be part of God’s kingdom justice? How does service contribute to identity development?”6

Powell and Griffin want service to move from a thing we do to part of who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ. This will shape the serving experience so it creates lasting spiritual formation for the participant and impact on the people and places that are served. Mission trips can be a very powerful experience for those who participate, however many pastors (including myself), if brave enough to admit, have misplaced the purpose of a mission experience into a selfish gain. “Many of us do service trips not because of their benefits for those we serve but because we believe they transform our students. While


6 Ibid., 17.
that’s understandable, it makes us all the more likely to unintentionally exploit the poor for the sake of our own spiritual growth, which is an injustice in itself.”

The good news is short-term mission trips do have the potential of becoming formative opportunities in a person’s spiritual journey. The research from the Fuller Youth Institute shows service, both near and far from home, does “correlate with lasting faith in young people.” Diana Garland and a team of Baylor researchers found mission trips that are successful in creating this lasting faith have the following markers: preparation for the volunteers, opportunities for relationships between those who are serving and those who are served, an approach of doing ministry with rather than for the recipients, utilizing volunteer gifts and skills, and having time after the experience for reflection.

These factors highlight some theological implications of short-term mission work. Rather than rush through a list of projects, scripture calls us to “Be still and know” (Ps 46:10) that spiritual growth involves discipline and intentionally. The author of Hebrews writes, “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together…” (Heb 10:24-25). We are called to accomplish the work of good deeds and love within the context of community. Each believer is given spiritual gifts. The Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the church in Ephesus, “The gifts he gave were … to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to

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7 Ibid., 16.
8 Ibid., 17.
9 Ibid., 24.
maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13). Spiritual formation comes from exercising those talents in order to build up the community (the body of Christ) as God’s Kingdom unfolds here on earth.

Service opportunities, regardless of length and location, are foundational to the call to discipleship. The role of relationships in serving are instrumental in this spiritual formation; this includes the relationship between the participants who are serving and the relationship between the sending and receiving communities. And finally, the Holy Spirit is active in helping translate the serving experience into lasting spiritual growth.

Powell and Griffin through their research have helped countless ministries realize if a short-term mission trip is going to be successful in helping the participants deepen their commitment to discipleship, “we need to do a better job of walking with students before, during, and after their mission experience… if we want greater transformation, we need a completely different time frame for our service.”10 Rather than limiting preparation sessions to discussions of fundraising and medical releases, Powell and Griffin suggest “our job as youth workers is to facilitate a series of gatherings and events that prepare students emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and relationally for what lies ahead.”11 During the experience, participants need opportunities for reflection, to understand and debrief those insights that God has given. “Our job is to give space for both students and adults to catch their breath and ask questions that help decipher the deep meaning behind their observations, thoughts, and feelings.”12 Recognizing that most

10 Ibid., 18.
11 Ibid., 19.
12 Ibid., 20.
of the significant growth during the mission trip occurs in an environment that is vastly different from the home communities, participants need opportunities to translate their experiences into lasting transformation.\textsuperscript{13}

A defining factor in helping students translate their spiritual insights into life-long spiritual growth is putting into place key relationships that assist in the debriefing process. “In order to facilitate the experience-and-reflection cycle, our students need to be surrounded by walls of support and feedback.”\textsuperscript{14} Having the opportunity to utilize relationship while serving as well as having a support network for the re-entry process once returning home are essential. “Research shows a strong correlation between individuals’ success in a cross-cultural experience and the emotional and tangible support they receive from friends and family at home.”\textsuperscript{15} The work from Fuller Youth Institute provides an important lens for translating the research for successful mission trips to the specific needs and challenges at Trinity United Methodist Church.

The goal of this ministry plan is to create a mission trip opportunity that will allow participants to gain a deeper spiritual insight into the role of service. The mission trip will embrace a new time frame that connects spiritual disciplines to preparation, helping to build a healthier theology for service from the beginning. The trip will also utilize the cross-generational relationships as part of the spiritual formation and “experience and reflection” process. Once participants return home, they will continue to

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 20-21.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 21.
engage in the spiritual disciplines and continue to build upon the spiritual formation that occurred during the mission trip week.

The definition of a successful mission trip will be an experience that helps participants grow spiritually through the experience, deepen their understanding of the role of service in discipleship, and integrate their spiritual insights into lifelong spiritual practices. In order for this to occur, four key components must be met in the formation and execution of the mission trip. First is the role of accountability. Participants on the trip must make a commitment to the group and to their own spiritual growth. In addition, key support figures, such as immediate family and members of the congregation, must also make a commitment to helping the participant in all stages of the experience. The role of the community, which is the team that is engaging in the mission trip and the church congregation that will continue to support them once returning home, will play a substantial role in the awakening and sustaining of spiritual formation.

The second component is the preparation work. Powell and Griffin note this is crucial to changing the paradigm of traditional mission projects and creating an experience that is both formative and lasting. Most mission opportunities at Trinity have required no preparation work: simply arrive on the assigned day and work for a set amount of hours. The process of spiritual formation must begin before the trip by engaging the participants in the experience-and-reflection cycle as well as building a theological foundation for the purpose and implications of mission work.

The third component of a successful mission trip is utilizing the relationships between the participants during the mission trip to help in the work of discernment and integration for spiritual growth. For “two are better than one, because they have a good
reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other…” (Ecc. 4:9-10). Being part of the Methodist tradition, the work of John Wesley plays an important role. Wesley’s understanding of small groups, such as the band, and the three Rules (do no harm, do good, fall in love with God), will shape the pedagogy for the experience-and-reflection cycle.

Finally, there must be a strategy for the re-entry process and for continued spiritual growth after returning. Too often, participants struggle in the re-entry process. Their spiritual fervor and enthusiasm can quickly fade away unless support relationships are prepared and opportunities for continued interaction with the community are available. These relationships and the church community will help continue the work of discernment and reflection for the participants long after the mission trip is complete.

The strategy for shaping a short-term mission trip will be a multi-facet approach to introducing, participating, and sustaining spiritual formation and utilizing relationships for experience-and-reflection opportunities. Rather than separate acts of service from theological reflection, the strategy will be to weave together prayer and service as the group works together, eats together, prays together, and grows spiritually together. By building a community before, strengthening during, and continuing afterwards, the participants can help each other notice God in their mission trip experience and help translate the promptings of the Holy Spirit into lifelong practices.

Taking into consideration the smaller potential pool of students in middle and high school combined with no recent history of week-long mission trip opportunities for those under the age of twenty-one, the ministry strategy for this project will be for an intergenerational trip. The goal will be to have a variety of ages participate in this
experience to help ensure a large enough group to make the trip viable. For safety concerns, participants under the age of fourteen will be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert in their book *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor…and Yourself* offer several factors to consider when designing a short-term mission site, especially in creating a balanced and healthy relationship between the mission group and the mission location. In their chapter “Doing Short-Term Missions Without Doing Long-Term Harm” Corbett and Fikkert write,

> It is important to pay very careful attention to the overall design of the trip itself. Here are a few tips: Make sure the host organization… understands the nature of poverty and practices the basic principles of appropriate poverty alleviation. Make sure the host organization and community members have requested a team as part of their plan to improve their ministry and lives… Make sure the host organization and community members are the lead decision makers concerning what the STM (short term mission) team will and will not do… Design the trip to be about ‘being’ and ‘learning’ as much as about ‘doing.’… Ensure that the ‘doing’ portion of the trip avoids paternalism. Remember, do not do for people what they can do for themselves… Keep the number of team members small. This will promote more learning and interaction with the host environment…

With this in mind, the mission trip team will travel to Neighborhood Houses, an established ministry in St. Louis, MO. There are several reasons for choosing this ministry setting. One is logistics; it is a manageable driving distance and will be an affordable option in terms of fundraising needs. Second is the connectional system of the

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17 Neighborhood Houses believes in inspiring the magnificent potential of children and families. For more information visit neighborhoodhouses.org.
denomination; there is a Methodist church nearby that will house the mission group for free. Third, and most important as seen in Corbett and Fikkert’s work, there is an established relationship with the site. Mission team participants gain respect for ministry work that is already occurring by building a partnership with an established local ministry. Neighborhood Houses has partnered with churches previously to have small teams come and assist their staff and community in smaller projects around the mission site. It allows the group to come in as extra support and encouragement instead of an unhealthy attitude of we know better than you. Partnering with an existing ministry encourages the group to safeguard against short-term mission solutions that do not have the potential for long-term support. By partnering with an existing ministry that is engaged in the deep, long-term work of the Kingdom, we can move from a project mentality to partners in the work of justice.

Expectations for accountability to spiritual growth and to the group must be articulated at the very beginning. Before a participant can commit to attending, he or she must sign a covenant (see Appendix 1). This document will outline spiritual formation and service work together, and spiritual growth is not an afterthought but foundational to the experience. This document will also help set a variety of expectations: preparation is important to setting the right tone and tenor for the group, respect and dignity is foundational to the relationships within the group and the relationships with the community being served, and while completing a set of tasks is important, spending time to notice God through the experience is even more essential.

Successful mission trips utilize support relationships to help the participant before, during, and after the experience. Connecting the team being sent to the
congregation that is sending them is vital for building bridges. Not everyone in a church is able to engage in a short-term mission trip; however, the entire congregation can benefit from the experience if intentional opportunities are created to connect those who are going with those who are sending. Each participant on the trip will select a person to be a prayer partner through the entire experience (see Appendix 2). This person from the congregation will meet with the participant before the trip to help prepare them mentally and spiritually. This person will pray for the participant during the experience, reading the same scriptures in which the participant is engaging during daily devotions, and receiving email updates on prayer requests each day. After the trip the prayer partner will meet with the participant to help the process of debriefing and aid in translating any spiritual growth experienced during the trip into deeper spiritual formation. For most people, it can seem like a daunting task to help point out the Divine in someone’s life and coach them in spiritual formation. Utilizing resources from Kara Powell and Brad Griffin’s book *Sticky Faith Service Guide* will be helpful in equipping prayer partners to lead conversations with their mission trip participant.

The other influential relationship is the family unit of the participant. These persons will be the first to hear the stories once they return and will be the most influential in preparing and debriefing the participant. In many cases the family unit is utilized for fundraising and medical forms. But, by helping to strengthen the ability of the family unit to play a more significant role in the support and encouragement of the participant, it will help foster a more lasting impact. Immediate relationships in the family unit have the greatest influence in a person’s faith, so resources from Powell and Griffin’s *Sticky Faith Service Guide* will be provided to help the family understand their
role in the participant’s spiritual growth and transformation (see Appendix 3). Similar to the prayer partners, the family unit will have conversations with the participant before the trip to help begin the spiritual growth process, pray and read the same scripture with the participant during the week, and be part of the experience-and-reflection process once the participant returns home.

Once all participants have signed the covenant and committed to attending the mission trip, a date will be chosen for a pre-trip meeting. This meeting will occur at least three months prior to the trip. Being realistic about scheduling demands, either a single meeting that is four hours long or a series of meetings that are shorter in length will be set on the calendar. This pre-trip meeting will be an opportunity to begin forming relationships between the participants and preparing them spiritually for the trip (see Appendix 4). The strategy for this pre-trip meeting will be multi-faceted.

The meeting will open with a chance for participants to get to know one another and begin to share their spiritual starting point for the trip. A series of questions will begin to help form bonds and create groundwork for deeper spiritual conversations. Understanding all members of a community are called to work, and accountability and service are essential to the well-being of a group, each participant will commitment to different leadership opportunities throughout the experience, from pre-trip fundraising to leading devotions to planning the final day of Sabbath.

Then the group will begin to dive into the spiritual ramifications of serving. Utilizing resources from Powell and Griffin’s *Sticky Faith Service Guide* the group will begin discussing how mission trips are an opportunity to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Questions from this devotion will help participants understand that a mission trip
is not spiritual tourism but a time to engage in humble service while listening to God’s
Spirit. Halfway through the activity, the group will also learn about John Wesley’s
understanding of the power of small groups. They will see the Methodist tradition was
built upon the idea that class meetings, a community of believers growing as disciples of
Jesus Christ, was the vehicle Wesley believed God used for transformation. By
examining the questions Wesley created for class meetings and the three Rules of
Methodism, the group will create a covenant that is based on Wesley’s expectations for
small groups. The group will revisit the three Rules every night on the trip, following the
model for class meetings, as a model for the experience-and-reflection process.

Wesley’s third Rule is to fall in love with God. This will transition into the next
part of the meeting: a discussion on how intentionally living in community and service is
part of the call of discipleship. Wesley’s expectation is Methodists would fall in love with
God by engaging in the spiritual disciplines. Each morning and evening of the mission
trip, participants will engage in different spiritual disciplines to help them see God in
their work and service. One of the main vehicles for spiritual discipline, and the
experience-and-reflection process, will be a journal. Participants will have their first
journal entry while at this pre-trip meeting, and will continue to have entries every night
of the mission trip.

Spiritual journaling will probably be a new experience for most participants at
Trinity. Mark Thibodeaux, S.J. offers a wonderful explanation of the purpose of
journaling.

A prayer journal is like a diary of the spiritual movements of my life, like
a spiritual scrapbook of the graces (the insights I receive) God has sent me
throughout my prayer life. The journal can help clarify exactly which
grace I am presently receiving. Just as a scientist may not understand what she is observing until she walks away from her experiment, and, with pencil and paper, works out the math, so I too must often work out the problems of my prayer experiences. There are various ways of journaling. I can write every day or only every now and then. I can address the entries to God, myself, or to whomever is on my mind at any given time. I can write pages and pages or just a few lines. I can make it strictly confidential or I can share it with others. It might contain only my own written entries or it might be filled with poems, cutouts from magazines, a Christmas card that touched me, famous quotes I really like, artwork, dreams, letters and so on. There is no right or wrong way to journal. I can custom fit it to match my own particular personality.  

In addition to journaling, the participants will engage in a variety of other spiritual disciplines during the week, such as confession, Holy Communion, lectio divina, centering prayer, and Sabbath rest. The expectation is most, if not all, of the participants will have little to no experience engaging in the classic spiritual disciplines. In order to help bring the discipline of service into the larger fold of spiritual formation, a variety of classic exercises will be utilized, starting at the pre-trip meeting and incorporated into the devotion material during the trip. The spiritual disciplines will help the experience-and-reflection process by teaching the participants different techniques for discernment and becoming aware of God’s Spirit. Part of the discussion for the pre-trip meeting will be to introduce and explain what these disciplines are and how they are part of the spiritual growth process.

Finally, the participants will learn about the importance of having support relationships throughout the service experience, and they will choose their prayer partners. Prayer partners represent the larger Trinity community that is sending the team and will be surrounding each participant with prayers and support. This relationship will

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be another point of contact to help participants engage in spiritual reflection before and after the trip.

The mission trip team will begin their week of service by worshipping together at Trinity on Sunday morning before departing for the mission site. Utilizing John Wesley’s thoughts on serving, the commissioning service frames the mission trip as the beginning of an intentional time of spiritual renewal, marked by worship, service, and living together in community. During the service, the congregation will pray for each member of the team by name and remember their own call to engage in service as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Each morning and evening on the trip, the group will engage in a time of spiritual reflection. Participants will begin each morning with individual devotions and close each evening with group meetings, both of which are outlined in their journal (see Appendix 6). The morning devotions will utilize the disciplines of scripture reading, journaling, silent prayer, and readings from Christian writers. The theme for each day of the trip will be introduced in the morning devotion and expanded upon at the evening group meeting. At the beginning of each evening meeting, John Wesley’s rules for class meetings will guide the discussions and experience-and-reflection process. The purpose of framing the morning and evening with spiritual formation is to help draw a connection between the inner spiritual work of faith and the outer spiritual work of service.

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19 Where did you do harm (confession), where did you do good, and how did you fall in love with God (where did you see God today in your work)?
In an interview for Chap Clark and Kara Powell’s book *Deep Justice in a Broken World*, Tony Campolo shared about the importance of using the spiritual disciplines, especially Scripture, as part of the experience-and-reflection process.

I think praxis always presupposes what we call in sociology—and what Robert Merton, one of the deans of American sociology once called—the “serendipity pattern” of investigation. That serendipity pattern works like this: You read Scripture, you discuss it and say, “This is what I think it says.” And then you go into the existential situation, and you begin to recast your understanding of the Scripture in light of that setting. Then you come back and ask, “What did we think about this Scripture prior to our involvement, and how has our perspective on the Scripture changed?” So that it’s think first, then act, then reflect, then come back and recast your thinking, then act again. That process goes on endlessly.20

The first night of the trip, the group will discuss the sacrament of communion. This powerful tenant of the Christian faith helps create community through confession and fellowship as bread is broken and prayers are shared. This discipline will be familiar to most, if not all, of the participants, so a variety of discussion questions will be used to help bring a deeper connection between breaking bread, acts of service, and the power of community.

The devotions for the first full day of work will center around the idea of sight. The goal of the ministry plan is to help participants see works of service differently, not as an addition but a foundation to discipleship, and to see how God works in and through their gifts of service. The evening devotion will introduce the participants to the awareness prayer pioneered by St. Ignatius of Loyola. This prayer will be a new experience for many, and a resource to help participants in the experience-and-reflection process throughout the mission trip.

The second work-day will center around the idea of community and being with the least of these. This will build upon the goal of helping the participants see service as a spiritual discipline by showing that respect and relationship guide Kingdom work more than accomplishing a to-do list. The evening devotion will introduce participants to *lectio divina*. This ancient discipline will help participants utilize scripture as a method for experience-and-reflection.

The third work-day is traditionally the most difficult. The group will begin to experience fatigue and the mental difficulties of reaching the half-way point. The focus for devotions this day will be identifying spiritual gifts. The evening devotion will be a community exercise in affirmation. Different members of the group will take turns talking about how they see God working in a person’s life and through their gifts.

The fourth and final work-day will build upon the previous three days of devotions and culminate the experience-and-reflection process. These pivotal devotions in the morning and evening will help the participants draw a connection between the spiritual growth they have received during the week and ways to implement these insights into lifelong practices. The goal of this final full day of devotion is to help the participant move to a new understanding and new practices in the spiritual discipline of service.

The final day of the trip will be a Sabbath experience. The morning devotion will help frame the idea of Sabbath rest not as a reward for a job completed but as part of the identity of a beloved child of God. Even though the physical work of the week is complete, the deeper spiritual work of growing in grace continues and permeates all aspects of life, including the final day of rest and fun.
There are some logistical elements that need to be addressed when implementing this project. Since the mission site was chosen based on a previous relationship with an established ministry with the hope of a continued future relationship, the group size cannot overwhelm Neighborhood Houses’ current capacity. The mission team must consist of at least nine members to make the trip viable for creating a community and completing the tasks at hand, but no more than twenty to accommodate for housing needs and the number of volunteers able to be present at Neighborhood Houses without disrupting their ministry work. Also, with the smaller number of active teenagers at Trinity, the trip will be opened to anyone age eight and older. The goal will be a multi-generational group with representatives from youth, young adults, and recent retirees.

**Conclusion**

The ministry plan for Trinity United Methodist Church will be to create a mission trip opportunity that addresses the role of community and spiritual formation as part of the discipline of service. Having addressed some of the theological misperceptions that come with missions, the ministry plan will be a multi-facet approach that introduces spiritual disciplines before, during, and after the mission trip. These different activities will aid in the experience-and-reflection cycle that will help participants integrate spiritual growth into lifelong discipleship practices. The next chapter will address the implementation of this plan and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy.
CHAPTER FIVE
IMPLEMENTATION

Chapter 5 will outline the implementation of the doctoral project. First, the leaders and mission site will be selected, followed by a finalizing of the trip participants. Training for leaders will occur next, followed by a pre-trip retreat involving all participants. Leading up to the mission trip week, participants will engage in fundraising activities and begin meeting with their prayer partners from the congregation. The group will be commissioned during worship on Sunday, travel to the host church, and spend the first evening in devotion and prayer. Monday through Thursday the group will begin and end the day with devotions and spiritual disciplines while spending the bulk of the time at the work site. Friday will be a day of Sabbath and fellowship. Saturday morning will close with devotion and the group will travel home.

The main tool for assessment for this project will be a questionnaire that will be completed at the pre-trip retreat and again at the post-trip retreat to measure the understanding and involvement in spiritual formation on a daily basis. One of the goals for this project is to create material which can be utilize in other churches. To measure the level of translatability and comprehensibility, the material will be sent with the
mission trip group without the author present. The leaders of the mission trip will be interviewed after the experience specifically regarding the participant journal and spiritual discipline exercises that were utilized.

**Timeline**

The timeline of this project spans from December 2016 to November 2017. In December 2016, I had been lead pastor at Trinity for eighteen months. During this acclamtion period, I began to observe the need for a deeper understanding concerning discipleship and the role of service and spiritual formation. The ministry strategy for this project addressed specific concerns at Trinity. The youth at the church had no access to major serving opportunities, such as a mission trip. While the congregation had a strong presence in local mission work through outside organizations, the church had not sent a team on a week-long mission experience in a few years, and the previous experience was only for adults. The students at Trinity had never experienced a mission trip, and because of this, the connection between service and spiritual formation was almost non-existent. Several new, younger adults joined the church in the first eighteen months of my pastoral appointment, and many approached me about the need for a mission serving opportunity as well. For those few adults who did attend the previous mission trip, their biggest regret was the lack of spiritual formation during the experience.

Because Trinity is a smaller congregation with an average worship attendance of one hundred twenty, the youth program was vibrant but not large enough to justify a student-centered mission trip. Also, one of the strengths of Trinity as a congregation was their multi-generational focus. In worship and in fellowship the church wanted members
of all ages to be in relationship with each other. Drawing on this strength, a ministry strategy was designed that would create a multi-generational mission trip opportunity. This would allow a larger cross-section of the congregation to experience and develop a deeper understanding of service and spiritual formation that could begin to transform other areas of service within the body of the church. Practically, it also ensured the creation of a team large enough to justify sending on a mission trip.

The success of the ministry strategy was dependent upon assembling a strong team of leaders who would implement the curriculum and help the participants continue to connect their experience to life-long discipleship practices once returning home. It was determined a group of at least nine would be necessary for a viable group. Ideally the group would have an even distribution across the generations: at least three students (middle to senior high youth), three young adults (age twenty to forty) and three older adults (over age fifty). Within the group each member would be assigned different leadership positions; however, two main leaders would need to be chosen to coordinate logistical needs and ensure the strategy was properly implemented.

Ideally, as pastor and author of this mission trip, I would be the main leader to oversee this ministry strategy. The dates for the mission trip were chosen first to coordinate with summer school schedule and other ministry events, such as Vacation Bible School. Soon after the week of July 23-28 was chosen by myself in consultation with the leadership at Trinity, I discovered I was pregnant and would be unavailable the entire summer due to maternity leave. After discussing the situation with the leadership at Trinity and with the advising staff at Fuller Theological Seminary, it was determined the trip should still proceed with my absence. This now allowed for a better understanding of
the translatability of the curriculum and see if measurable spiritual formation could occur without the author present. If the group could understand the curriculum and implement it without me being present, then that would fulfill the hope of offering this strategy to other churches for future use.

A shift in leadership for the trip needed to be discussed. I would lead the pre-trip retreat and help prepare all leaders for the experience. However, I would be absent for all fundraising, the commissioning worship service, and the mission trip itself. The associate minister, Pastor Patty Miller, quickly volunteered to help take the lead on the project once I began maternity leave. It was also decided Emily Everett, a young adult who recently joined the church, would be hired to help fill many of my duties during maternity leave. Ms. Everett grew up in a Methodist church and had several experiences attending mission trips as a student. Ms. Everett would help with logistics leading up to the trip, such as fundraising, assembling journals, and collecting medical release forms. During the trip Pastor Miller would oversee morning and evening devotions and help the other trip participants in their leadership duties.

**Preparation for the Project**

The mission trip was advertised in the various church publications. In March 2017 I hosted an information meeting for all those who would be interested in attending the trip. At the meeting it was explained the trip was open to anyone ages eight and older. Participants did not have to be a member of Trinity but did need to commit to all pre- and post-mission trip meetings. If a participant was under the age of twelve they had to be accompanied by their parent or guardian. A student age twelve to seventeen could attend
without their parent or guardian if another adult on the trip would offer to be their surrogate guardian. This provided extra support so the student would have a safe adult to turn to if problems arose on the trip such as loneliness or illness, and it gave Pastor Miller the ability to have the surrogate guardian speak to the student first if disciplinary issues arose.

The trip would begin Sunday, July 23, 2017. The mission team would be commissioned during the 10:15am worship service. The group would have lunch together at Trinity then travel to St. Louis to spend the night in the host church, Salem in Ladue United Methodist Church. The group would spend Monday through Thursday working with Neighborhood Houses, a local inner-city ministry that has been serving the north St. Louis community for over one hundred years. The focus of Neighborhood Houses’ ministry is to help children reach their magnificent potential by providing educational and empowering experiences to help close the opportunity gap.1 The mission group would email the director of Caroline Mission, the early childhood branch of Neighborhood Houses, requesting a list of projects and needs. The mission group would focus their fundraising efforts to finance all supplies needed to complete the project. I had developed a good relationship with Neighborhood Houses over the years and had taken two separate mission teams in the previous five years while ministering at First Congregational Church in St. Joseph, MI.

Each participant on the trip would be given a leadership opportunity, regardless of age. It was determined before the information meeting that Pastor Miller would oversee

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leading the evening devotions. The other leadership roles included: creating a food menu for the week and the rotation schedule for each participant to take a turn helping in cooking and cleaning up, organizing fundraising events, creating a small gift to give to each worker at Neighborhood Houses as appreciation, organizing the activities for the final day of Sabbath rest, and coordinating with the host site (Salem in Ladue UMC) for logistical needs. Once the participants of the group were finalized, each member would choose their leadership position during the pre-trip retreat. It is important for each member of the group to take a leadership role, so each person may understand they are a valued member of the community, regardless of their age or ability. Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “The chain is unbreakable only when even the smallest link holds tightly with others. A community, which permits within itself members who do nothing, will be destroyed by them. Thus it is a good idea that all members receive a definite task to perform for the community, so that they may know in times of doubt that they too are not useless and incapable of doing anything.”

The strategy for the mission trip is to mirror communal living, similar to ancient monasteries. At the informational meeting it was explained the group would utilize their relationships between each other to foster spiritual growth. The participants would pray together, work together, eat together, and dive into the depths of the spiritual disciplines together. Every morning each participant would engage in private devotions before heading to the work site. Every evening after dinner the group would come together and answer Wesley’s three Rules: where did they do harm, where did they do good, and how did they notice God?

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In order for the spiritual formation goals of the trip to be possible for the participants, each person must commit to fully invest into the joys and frustrations of living together in community. To solidify their commitment and their understanding that this experience was not about accomplishing a to-do list but engaging in the spiritual discipline of service, those who wished to be part of the mission trip would sign the group covenant and return it to the church office by the April 30, 2017. Because several of the students and young adults who initially expressed interest in the trip were unable to attend the information meeting, I sent out letters to several families encouraging them to consider participating in the mission trip (see Appendix 9). Since there were few previous opportunities for mission trips, building a quorum for the group was going to be difficult.

On April 30, 2017 I was six weeks until my due date and ready to finalize the group participants. I had set a goal for nine participants to attend in order for the trip to be viable. As of April 30, 2017, only eight individuals had committed to the trip, two of those eight being under the age of twenty-one. I scheduled the pre-trip meeting to occur after worship and opened the meeting time by asking the participants if they still wanted to plan and prepare for the mission trip even if it would not qualify for the doctoral project. The eight were incredibly committed and eager to still engage in the pre-trip meeting and begin preparation for the mission trip.

The group make-up at the pre-trip meeting was promising: two female students entering seventh grade, three young adults who had joined the church in the past two years (this included Ms. Emily Everett), and three adults who were over the age of sixty (this included Pastor Patty Miller). Of the eight participants, half had engaged previously in a mission experience. Due to the smaller size of the group, each member was able to
find a leadership task that suited their abilities. As I led the group through the material I had written for the preparation meeting, I was encouraged to see relationships starting to form as members opened up about their joys and concerns for the trip. Spending intentional time discussing the role and importance of spiritual formation on a service opportunity helped set the understanding early on that devotions and prayer would be foundational to the week and not just an afterthought. Surprisingly there was no push back on the expectation of morning and evening devotions and the need to engage in the spiritual disciplines during the week. Those who had been on a mission experience previously praised the decision to make spiritual formation a foundational component for the experience.

At the end of the meeting I invited each participant to choose a person from the congregation who would partner in prayer for this experience. This partner should be someone that is spiritually mature and ideally already has a relationship with the participant. The partner would be given resources to help guide each participant before and after the trip with discussion questions aimed at helping the participant link the serving experience to spiritual formation. The partner would also be given a list of scriptures that matched the evening devotions, allowing them to read and pray over the same verses the participants were studying during the mission trip. The goal of the partners was to create another link between those who were going to St. Louis and the congregation that was sending them.

Four weeks before the group was due to depart to St. Louis, my daughter Rebecca Josephine Nix was born. While my attention shifted to caring for this new member of the family, the group dynamics also made a significant shift. One of the young adults had to
drop out due to work related issues, and another high school student and recent retiree joined, bringing the group’s number to nine, my original goal for this project. Because the two participants who joined were family members of other participants, the expectations for the trip were already articulated and understood even though I was absent. Adjustments were made to leadership roles and prayer partners were chosen, all in time for the commissioning worship service on Sunday, July 23, 2017.

Mission Trip

Rev. Nate Berneking, Director of Finance and Administration for the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church, was the guest preacher on Sunday, July 23, 2017. Even though I was in the middle of my maternity leave, I was able to attend the worship service with my family to watch and pray for the group as they were commissioned. While the commissioning litany was not used completely in the way it was intended (Rev. Bernkeing did not individually bless each participant with oil), the commission was a prayerful and powerful moment in the service. Ideally each member of the mission trip team would also participate in other areas of the worship service, such as ushering, reading scripture, and leading the Children’s Message. Because of the nature of having a guest preacher during maternity leave, logistically this was not possible.

Since I did not attend the mission trip, the following analysis has been compiled based on what was shared by the participants. When recalling the details of the experience, the participants did not dwell on logistical details such as the travel to St. Louis or what was served each night for dinner. The air temperature of the host site, which was described as colder than the North Pole was given in the context of an inside
joke and something special shared within the group. It was heartening to hear the participants, regardless of age or previous experience, all wanted to articulate the spiritual aspects of the trip when recounting the experience. Half of the stories shared involved something that occurred during evening devotions, and the other half involved an experience at the work site that became a powerful moment in someone’s faith experience.

One of the most obvious things that happened during the trip was the creation and strengthening of intergenerational relationships. The students shared their excitement of working alongside the older men as they worked together with power tools to build benches and tables. The recent retiree that joined at the last moment became the cook of the trip and everyone shared the joy they experienced when helping her in the kitchen each night. It seems from their account of the week that no one person was isolated or deemed unfit to engage in the work during the day or devotions at night. All voices were heard and celebrated during devotions and all hands were utilized to complete projects.

This is not to suggest that the trip was without its moments of contention. During the middle of the trip, one older participant at the end of the work day lashed out verbally at two of the students. The situation was brought up that night during the confession time of the devotions. Pastor Miller and Ms. Everett, when recounting the situation, suggested that the intentional time of confession allowed for the group to revisit the issue and work through the unspoken frustrations. No other major events that disrupted the unity of the group were shared.

One unexpected situation did present a major change in the group dynamics. Two days before the group left for St. Louis, one of the middle school students was diagnosed
with lupus. After consulting with her parents and Pastor Miller, she decided to still attend the mission trip with the provision that she would have to miss one day in order to return to the local hospital for scheduled tests. This young woman became a significant piece of several members’ testimonies for the week. Her perseverance during the trip and her willingness to discuss her recent diagnosis of a life-long illness had a major impact on several participants’ spiritual growth and many cited her as the way they noticed God’s presence during the experience.

Part of the ministry strategy for the week was to keep a strong connection with the prayer partners and families during the week. Ideally families and prayer partners were to receive an email every night recapping the day and sharing some examples of God-sighting by the participants during the day. Since this was not specifically delegated to a member of the team as a responsibility, it slipped through the cracks. Prayer partners did receive the list of scriptures and themes for each night of devotions, in the hopes they would follow along in their own personal devotion time while the participants were away.

Post-Trip Analysis

I finished my maternity leave and returned to full-time work two weeks after the mission team returned. One of the first things scheduled on my return to-do list was to meet with the team to hear about their experience and to debrief in a post-trip meeting. Similar to the pre-trip meeting, finding a time for the group to commit to meet was extremely difficult. I meet with half of the group immediately after worship one Sunday, had an evening meeting with another two, and struggled to connect with the final three participants until several weeks after returning.
My first debrief meeting with half the participants after worship was very promising. At first the two adults and two middle school students were hesitant to speak up; it was as if an outsider was trying to break into a sacred trust. The students were less eager to answer until the adults began recounting stories and inside jokes from the trip. The intergenerational relationships formed during the week had created a safety net of trust, and the adults were able to help draw out and illuminate where God’s Spirit had revealed itself to the students. Once the students felt comfortable sharing their very personal and meaningful experience to someone who had not participated, the flow and tenor of the meeting completely changed. During the pre-trip meeting there was formality and hesitation between the members of the group; now there was a comfort and openness to share and a great deal of laughter. It was obvious this mission experience had a profound impact personally on the participants and had altered the group dynamics.

Two themes emerged from this post-trip meeting. First, the participants had begun to articulate a new theology of service. All four participants were eager to return to Neighborhood Houses again next summer. Relationships had been formed between the mission team and the staff and children at Neighborhood Houses. The mission team shared with me a handwritten note from the President and CEO of Neighborhood Houses, Darlene Sowell, addressed to the angels of Trinity thanking them for their support and closing with warm wishes to seeing the group again next year. As the mission team shared stories of responding to different opportunities during the week there was no hint of bragging or superiority. Instead, they recognized because of their humble attitude of being assistants in the work of ministry during the week, they were able to see needs and respond, such as noticing the group needed a new washing machine (which the group
purchased) and helping the teachers decorate for the five-year-old graduation ceremony. The group did not use any language of trying to fix problems but instead saw their role as helping to fill a gap and enhance the ministry work.

The second theme that emerged from the meeting was a greater awareness of spiritual formation. When asked how their faith had changed participants were able to identify spiritual disciplines and how they helped increase their awareness of God. Several noted having to answer every night in devotions where they noticed God helped them gain an awareness to look for God’s Spirit throughout the day and a vocabulary to understand their spiritual experience. The greatest influence in spiritual formation was the community of relationships. The students frequently referenced their relationship with the adults on the trip as avenues for learning how to talk about their faith. When students struggled to talk about faith, they felt comfortable watching and learning from the adults as they shared each night during devotion. The underlining theme of apprenticeship was woven through the stories. Students learning how to work power tools, learning how to pray, and learning how to open up in confession confirmed spiritual formation has its greatest potential for success when done in the context of relationships and community.

When asked at the close of the meeting how participants were going to continue to engage in the discipline of service, the students were vague in their responses. It was the adults that helped them connect their current involvement in the church, such as singing in the choir and helping with the nursery, as examples of how they are currently engaging in the discipline.

My second post-trip meeting was a conversation with the two young adults who attended the trip. One was Ms. Everett, the summer intern who had engaged in several
mission trips previously. The other was a young adult who had recently been baptized and had never participated in a mission trip. When reflecting on their spiritual formation before the mission trip both articulated the theme of being out of the habit, as in “I was out of the habit of reading my Bible, I had gotten relaxed on prayer, etc.” Out of the countless stories and examples from the trip, the young women spoke of the intergenerational relationships, particularly between one of the middle school students and older male adult. The student had recently lost her grandfather, and her connection with this other member in the team provided an opportunity for healing and growth. This adult of the church stepped into the role of grandfather for this student on the trip and both were blessed from the relationship.

These two young adults demonstrated the clearest connection between events of the mission trip and the impact and change that occurred in their daily discipleship once returning home. One adult recognized starting each morning with devotion translated into a better outlook for the day and being energized. She had struggled in her faith journey finding motivation and time to spend in reading scripture, but the discipline of daily devotion during the trip had continued after returning home and she was able to articulate its impact on her spiritual formation. The other adult shared her increased desire to serve in her marriage once returning home. She had a new lens for viewing her daily routine and was more aware of God’s Spirit leading her in a new job, in a new focus on prayer, and even in mundane chores around the house.

Both of these young adults were able to connect with their prayer partners after the trip. This gave them a greater ability to translate insights from their mission experience into daily living. When surveying the participants of the trip, those who had a
strong relationship with their prayer partner had a higher connection for growth. There was a correlation with participants that did not articulate any change in spiritual disciplines and not following up with their prayer partners. The debriefing conversations confirmed the connection between accountability relationships and integration of spiritual disciplines. Moving forward, one of the changes that should be made to the curriculum and format would be a meeting for prayer partners before the mission trip. There needs to be an opportunity to educate and encourage support relationships and their role in the spiritual formation process.

**Spiritual Assessment Questionnaire**

Participants were given a spiritual assessment questionnaire during the pre-trip meeting (see Appendix 7). They were given a similar questionnaire the final night of the mission trip, and again five months later (see Appendix 8). The purpose of the pre-trip assessment was to create a starting baseline for how each participant viewed their own personal spiritual formation, their ability to articulate it, and their views on the role of formation during a mission trip. The assessments that were distributed after the mission trip had similar questions and language to the pre-trip assessment in order to gauge any changes in awareness and articulation of spiritual formation. Each participant signed a consent waiver allowing me the ability to share his or her answers (see Appendix 10). To ensure confidentiality, each participant has been assigned a number and will be referred to by their number in the following analysis.

Before the mission trip, each participant was asked, “On a scale of 1-10 (1 being distant and 10 being extremely close) how would you describe your relationship with
God? Are you satisfied with the number you gave? How do you anticipate this trip affecting your faith?” Below are the answers for each participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Scale 1-10</th>
<th>Satisfied?</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>I feel I am not the servant to God that he wants me to be and not sure how to reach a closer relationship with God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No answer given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I feel close to God but I know there is so much more to know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Always room to grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>I feel I try to keep up with my faith but sometimes I fall short and could do more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>I know I could be/should be closer but find myself putting my relationship with God on the backburner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>I can always work on my relationship with God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I think it is the right answer for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>I don’t feel close but I feel after confirmation I will.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>How will this trip affect your faith?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not sure how.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trip will reinforce my faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No sure, I guess we’ll see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I pray that it will boost my faith with a refreshing spirit and tie this group of people together so that we can share our excitement in God with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I am hoping it will help me to get closer to God and put all my trust in Him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I anticipate this trip deepening my faith, because I shut out all the distractions when I attend mission trips.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bring me closer to God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Getting more close to God and get more faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>To help people makes me feel good already so … helping people, pray, connect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were a few themes that emerged from the pre-trip assessment. When asked to list spiritual practices most to all the participants listed prayer, church/worship, and reading the Bible. Two participants listed tithing/giving, one listed inviting others to worship, and one listed communion. Before the trip the ability to recognize and discuss the vast array of spiritual disciplines was very low. The participants did not articulate in the assessment a strong understanding of different spiritual disciplines or how they affect faith formation. There was a low response (two participants) to participants making any reference or connection between serving and spiritual growth and a similar low response (two participants) to participants listing any serving experience as an example of currently engaged spiritual disciplines.

During the first initial debrief meetings after the trip the interviews suggested that the exposure to different spiritual disciplines during the mission experience was both
welcomed and helpful. Participants were able to articulate different spiritual practices that occurred during the mission trip and cited examples of how those disciplines aided in the process of noticing God during the experience. Several participants (eight of the nine) showed an initial increase in worship attendance, financial giving, and articulated an increase in private disciplines, such as personal Bible reading and prayer. However, the goal of the curriculum was to help translate spiritual insight during the mission trip into life-long practices. The assessment given five months after returning from the trip was an indicator if the curriculum and mission experience could help integrate and foster a deeper understanding and involvement of spiritual formation.

**Results of Project and Next Steps**

Five months after returning from the mission trip, the group met again with me for a final post-trip meeting. One of the goals of this project was to have markers of spiritual growth that continued for a significant period after the trip. For the final debrief meeting seven of the nine participants attended, one participant phoned in, and the last participant was absent due to a medical reason. Each participant was given a final assessment (see Appendix 8) to measure how each participant felt their relationship with God had been altered due to the trip and if they would be able to better articulate an understanding and demonstrate continued practice of the spiritual disciplines. Below are each participant’s answers to the questions: “Since the mission trip, have you engaged in any new or increased in your participation of the spiritual disciplines?” Each participant also answered the question before and after the trip: “On a scale of 1-10 (1 being distant
and 10 being extremely close) how would you describe your relationship with God?” and those comparisons are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Participation of Spiritual Disciplines</th>
<th>Pre-Trip</th>
<th>Post-Trip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phoned in, did not answer this question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>My faith has improved, spontaneous prayers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Absent due to medical reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Prayer, listening, serving</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Prayer, Bible Reading, awareness of spirituality on daily basis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Scripture, Prayer, Tithing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I go to church more</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Confession, an openness to talking to others and talking about God</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the seven participants that answered, six of them indicated an increase in how they viewed their relationship with God. In addition to this encouraging result, the participants demonstrated a greater understanding of the spiritual disciplines, with several listing other disciplines in addition to prayer and scripture reading. Each participant filled out this assessment at the beginning of the meeting and during the discussion many participants elaborated on their answers. The other encouraging result was that all seven participants stated quite strongly the morning and evening devotions were their favorite
part of the mission trip, and all agreed it should be essential to any future mission opportunities.

The first discussion question I asked the group was for them to share what stood out the most for them during the week. The first participant to answer was an older adult who had not been able to attend the first debrief meeting immediately after the trip. His worship attendance and financial giving had increased some after the mission trip but had recently returned to less consistent levels. He was not engaged in a current small group and rarely spoke about his faith. It was somewhat surprising that he was the first to answer and his tone was very excited and enthusiastic. He praised the devotions each day and emphasized how much they worked for him. He loved having quiet time each morning and found the questions very meaningful. He also appreciated the debriefing every evening and how each participant had an opportunity to engage and talk about how God had been present in their day. He also then turned to one of the young female adults and openly praised her for the ways she bonded with the teenage girls and the great role model she had been on the trip. He ended by saying, “It was everything I thought it would be.”

This participant’s willingness to be open and honest set the mood for a very thoughtful and encouraging discussion from the other participants. When asked the same question (what stood out), the answers from the other participants had common themes. The multi-generational interaction between the trip participants stood out; many enjoyed the opportunity to work and pray alongside others of different ages and stages in life. The relationships formed between the trip participants and the recipients of the mission were very positive. Many of the teenage students shared the excitement on the kids’ faces as
they worked and played alongside them was impactful and memorable. The student who had discovered her diagnosis of lupus while on the trip never mentioned her illness and other adults lifted her up as their inspiration and encouragement. The entire group agreed a deep friendship had been formed between the participants of the trip, and it was very evident from an outsider’s perspective as the group laughed and shared inside stories that strong bonds had indeed been formed. One participant shared that they still pray for the group continually because of how close they got that week.

My second question to the group was for them to share how their faith and their life had changed since the trip. Many interpreted this question as an opportunity to talk about their spiritual formation growth. One participant referenced the morning devotions and talked about how that habit helped her realize that she had time to engage in prayer and scripture reading regardless of her daily schedule and by doing so it helped her have a happier day and better mood. One of the teenage students shared this experience was the moment of awakening in her faith and because of this trip, she had decided to make a public declaration of faith and be baptized in worship (her baptism occurred one month prior to this meeting, roughly four months after returning home from the mission trip). The other two teenage students, who were sisters, shared how their relationship had grown stronger because of the experience and they both are trying to be more helpful in their daily life.

Three of the participants articulated new language that suggested a change in their understanding of the role and purpose of service. One participant shared her new awareness and ability to notice God in her daily routine and she now tries to think about her opportunities to serve as a way to help others and not focus on what she can gain
from the experience. Another, who phoned in, spoke at length about the great work the mission site was already doing for the community and how she appreciated coming in and supporting the ministry that was already in place. The third participant, who is currently the head of the mission committee at Trinity, talked about how the experience helped her have a new vision for the ways our church can serve the local community. She expressed her desire to change missions from a committee that distributed money to a group that was intentional in seeing how God is calling Trinity to respond to new opportunities to partner with organizations in our community (her example included the local schools).

These three answers revolved around a theology of service that did not “exacerbate the poverty of being of the economically rich – their god-complexes – and the poverty of being the economically poor – their feelings of inferiority and shame.”³ Instead the participants articulated a more humble approach, sharing their appreciation of being able to partner with Neighborhood Houses and understand their limited impact as a small gift in the larger work of their ministry. At the end of the discussion, the group requested to return to Neighborhood Houses next summer to continue to strengthen the relationship between Trinity Church and their ministry in St. Louis.

Another goal of the project was to create a curriculum that could be translated into other ministry settings through the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church. The materials that were created for this project (see Appendix 1-6) were changed into generic forms and submitted to the Mission, Service, and Justice Office of the Missouri

³ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 62.
Conference of the United Methodist Church. Lucas Endicott, mission strategist and staff member of the conference, created a website titled “Global Connect.” It is “a training and resource tool for missions around the block and across the globe.” The material from this project will eventually be put onto the website under the heading “Family Mission Trip” as resources and examples for other churches to use.

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4 Missouri Annual Conference United Methodist Church, “Global Church,” http://globalchurchconnect.org/.
CONCLUSION

“Often, though, we miss the big picture because we view aid through the narrow lens of the needs of our organization or church – focusing on what will benefit our team the most – and neglecting the best interests of those we would serve… Mission trips have value. They open up new worlds, new perspectives, new insights… But isn’t it time we admit to ourselves that mission trips are essentially for our benefit?”¹ In many mainline Protestant churches the short-term mission trip opportunity is the shiny example of a deep misunderstanding of the theology of the spiritual discipline of service. Like many churches, Trinity United Methodist Church had struggled with their understanding and implementation of mission work. Previously delegated to a single dedicated volunteer, the recent Healthy Church Initiative highlighted the need to deep, systematic reevaluation of the mission programs.

As a first step for initiating conversation and reassessment of the role and purpose of missions at Trinity, this doctoral project focused on creating a multi-generational mission trip opportunity. The goal of this trip would be to reunite the discipline of service with the other spiritual disciplines to help participants have a deeper and more substantial spiritual formation. By helping participants understand the theology of service by utilizing the role of community, these multi-generational relationships would help encourage spiritual growth that would continue after the mission trip experience. Like ripples in the water, this pilot group of nine participants would return from the trip with a

new understanding of service that would translate into ongoing conversations that could shape and transform the greater realms of mission work at Trinity United Methodist Church.

The materials created for this mission trip were heavily influenced by the theology of John Wesley and his understanding of the power of small groups for spiritual transformation. By crafting morning and evening devotions that loosely mirrored Wesley’s Three Rules and format for class meetings, the participants engaged in a variety of spiritual disciplines as well as the “experience and reflection” model as outlined by Kara Powell and Brad Griffin. After engaging in these disciplines, participants demonstrated a greater awareness in their spiritual journeys, articulated a deeper understanding of the spiritual disciplines, and continued to engage in faith formation through small group meetings, daily prayer, and weekly worship.

This project was able to initiate wider conversations regarding mission work. Participants from the mission trip have created a new mission committee, moving decisions about finances and serving opportunities from one person to a group of committed individuals. This new mission committee has plans to engage in a small group study around Robert Lupton’s book *Toxic Charity* as they begin reexamining and creating a vision statement for all mission work at Trinity United Methodist Church. Insights and material created for this project are also being shared at the conference level with the Mission, Service, and Justice Office of the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church.

John Wesley’s understanding of the role of service in spiritual formation is much deeper than a low-commitment non-sacrificial project-based add-on to daily living.
Service is deeply tied into a believer’s spiritual formation, and when married together with the other spiritual disciplines, creates opportunity for God’s sanctifying Spirit to create lasting transformation both to the believer and to the community to which they are called. While the work of sanctification is never complete, it can do its best work within the context of community. The community of Trinity United Methodist Church has been a blessing through this experience and, I hope, has received a blessing that will continue to transform and bring new vitality to the great work they are doing in Moberly, in Missouri, and to the ends of the earth.
APPENDIX 1

Family Mission Trip Covenant

I plan to attend the family mission trip to Neighborhood Houses in St. Louis, MO from Sunday July 23rd through Friday July 28th and I commit to the following:

1. I recognize the importance of building team unity before leaving for a trip of this physical and spiritual demand, and I agree to participate in all pre-trip meetings. _______ (initial)

2. I understand the need for a serious commitment to this trip, and I agree to participate in at least 75% of all fundraising activities. _______ (initial)

3. I respect that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and I will not harm it with alcohol or drugs. _______ (initial)

4. I know that during this trip, I will be setting an example to all the people I interact with, from other trip participants to leaders to residents of Neighborhood Houses. I promise to treat everyone I encounter with respect and dignity, especially those in a position of leadership over me. _______ (initial)

5. There may be times during this trip that I will be tired, crabby, or asked to do something that I may not feel like doing. I know that I am part of a team, and I will do my best to fulfill all of my duties, and communicate with someone when I am having difficulty. _______ (initial)

6. I recognize that this trip is not a vacation, but an opportunity to grow spiritually and fulfill my Christian call to be the hands and feet of Christ. I recognize that the physical aspect I do on this trip is only part of the work I am agreeing to do. I understand that the spiritual side of this trip is also important, and I will be asked to participate in a variety of spiritual disciplines (such as worship, journaling, prayer, and conversations). _______ (initial)

7. I will respect all boundaries given to me, such as curfew, dress codes, language, and site rules and regulations. _______ (initial)

8. I look forward to the ways God will work through me and through our group on this trip, therefore in order to help me see God working, I agree to leave anything that may be a distraction, including cell phones. _______ (initial)

9. Finally, I agree to the smile clause, which mean any other rules or assignments given to me by Pastor Katie or one of the adults leaders, I agree to do with a smile! ☺ _______ (initial)

Participant’s Signature ______________________________________________________

Print Name ______________________________________________________________

Parent’s Signature (if under 18) _____________________________________________
APPENDIX 2
PRAYER PARTNER LETTER

Greetings!

On Sunday July 23rd, several members of our church will be traveling to St. Louis, MO, to participate in a week-long mission trip in partnership with Neighborhood Houses. As part of their preparation for the trip, I asked the participants to choose someone from the congregation to be their prayer-partner for the week. You are receiving this letter because _________________ would like for you to enter into this covenant with them, lifting them up in prayer, encouraging their faith, and supporting them spiritually during this experience.

If you say yes to being a prayer partner, then you are committing to the following things:

1. Praying for this person. Enclosed is an index card with their name and specific prayer requests that they have identified. Please place their card in an obvious place to remind you to pray for them daily.

2. Meet with your participant once before July 23rd. I recognize that this may be a new and uncomfortable experience for some people, and I encourage you to share this meeting with another participant and their prayer partner if that would make the experience more comfortable. Enclosed is a resource from Sticky Faith Service Guide that will provide questions to discuss. Do not feel like you have to ask everything, this is a tool to help get the conversation going. If it works with your schedule, having this meeting over a meal (or ice cream) can also set the experience up for success.

3. Stand up with your participant at the commissioning service on Sunday July 23rd as a representative of the church. As the church prays for this group, you will stand next to your participant with your hand on their shoulder as a physical sign of the body of Christ blessing and sending the group.

4. You will receive daily email updates during the trip. These emails will help you continue to lift up your participant in prayer each day and keep you connected to their experience. Also enclosed are the scripture passages that we will be studying during our evening devotions as well as some suggestions for prayer. I encourage you to study the same scripture passages each day. Keep a journal of your prayers and insights from scripture so that when your participant returns you can share it with them and see how the prayers were answered.

5. Meet with your participant no later than one month after their return. The re-entry process is just as important as the preparation, and your participant will need help integrating their spiritual growth into life-long transformation. This meeting will be a great opportunity to talk to your prayer partner about their experience and see how your prayers were answered. Enclosed is a second resource from Sticky Faith Service Guide with some guiding discussion questions that can help you guide your partner as they translate their experience into a deeper level of discipleship.
I hope you feel honored by being chosen, and encouraged that your commitment to be a disciple of Jesus Christ has been an example to __________. If you have any questions or feel that you cannot make this commitment, please feel free to contact me.
Dear Family of ______________

July 23rd is quickly approaching, and as you prepare to send your family member on their week-long mission trip, I’ve put this packet together for a couple of reasons.

One, there are some things that we need for the trip to be a success. Please make sure that the enclosed liability release form has been returned to the church along with a copy of their medical insurance card.

Two, you are the greatest influence in your family’s faith. Did you know that? It’s not the pastor or a Sunday School/Small Group leader. It’s you. I’ve put together a sheet to help you support your family member before, during, and after the trip. This experience will be more than just a week away, it will be a time of spiritual growth and transformation. My goal is to help you prepare your family member for the ways the Holy Spirit will work in their life before the trip, and help them in the re-entry process as they translate their insight into a new level of discipleship.

If you have any questions, concerns, comments, or ideas as we get closer to our departure date, please feel free to shoot me an email or give me a call.

Before the Trip

1. Enclosed is a family covenant, a great resource from Sticky Faith Service Guide. It is a tool to help your family know how to spiritually, emotionally, and physically prepare for the trip. Use this resource to guide a “family meeting” before the trip and to give each family member ideas on how to pray for your participant.

2. Challenge your family member. You have a good handle on the strengths and weakness of your participant. Help them set a goal for this trip. How could she or he grow in their faith this week? Do they want to grow in a certain practice (ie prayer, being in community, listening for God)? Is there an area of their faith they are struggling with (issues of doubt, frustration, etc)? How would they like God to shape, change, or challenge them this week? A mission trip is not just an opportunity to travel and serve, it is a chance to connect with God through service and be transformed.

During the Trip

For each day of the trip, I have included the scripture passages that we will be studying during our evening devotions as well as some suggestions for prayer. I encourage you to study the same scripture passages and to pray for your family member each day. Also,
keep a journal of your prayers and insights from scripture so that when your participant returns you can share it with them and see how the prayers were answered.

**After the Trip**
The re-entry process is just as important as the preparation, and your family member will need help integrating their spiritual growth into life-long transformation. Set a time before they leave to talk to your participant when they get home about their experience and see how your prayers were answered. Enclosed is a second resource from *Sticky Faith Service Guide* with some guiding discussion questions that can help you guide your family member as they translate their experience into a deeper level of discipleship. Keep in mind that:

1. It takes time to process everything. Be patient, it may take several conversations for them to really understand all that God did during the trip.
2. It’s easy to ask what they did; it’s deeper and more lasting to help them understand what they learned about themselves, about God, and about their call to service and discipleship. The enclosed resource will provide some questions to help you guide your family member through this.
3. Understand that coming home will not be easy. During the week a community was formed and your family member will feel the loss of the team and the shock of re-entry. Help them find time to reconnect with their prayer partner and other team members so that the process of spiritual growth and transformation can continue after the trip.
4. Help your family member draw connections between their experience on the trip and their daily routine. Find ways to help them examine habits (like spending, their social activities, and commitment to worship) and evaluate if any changes need to happen in light of what they experienced spiritually. Work together to list out ways you can help hold them accountable to this deeper level of discipleship. Be warned, it will probably cause you to examine some of your own personal spiritual disciplines. Allow your family member to help hold you accountable as well.

**Family Covenant**
*Sticky Faith Service Guide*²

We acknowledge that the upcoming trip requires energy, work, prayer, and commitment on the part of both the participant and their family. Each of us would like to commit to the following together over the course of this experience (please write a goal for each category).

**Prayer Support**
Participant: My prayer requests for this trip are…

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Family: We will pray (list time, location, frequency)….

**Logistical Support**
Participant: I will commit to this trip by (example: attending all meetings, participating in fund raising, etc)

Family: We will support by (example: driving participant to meeting, making meetings a priority for the family schedule, etc)

**Financial Support**
Participant: I will commit this amount of my personal finances to this trip

Family: We will commit this amount of our finances to this trip

**Post-Service Support**
Participant: After this trip, this is how I think I may want to continue to serve and grow when I return home…

Family: After the trip, this is how we will serve and grow as a family and support our family member…
APPENDIX 4

MISSION TRIP PREP MEETING

Schedule

12pm: Gathering time and eat lunch.
12:15pm: Get to know the team. Choose leaders
12:30pm: Opening devotion: Wesley, Class Meetings, and Covenant
1:30pm: Schedule for the week and commitment to post-trip meetings
1:45pm: Role Playing scenarios and St. Louis 101
2:00 Discipleship = Serving and Spiritual Growth. Introduce journals
2:45pm: Prayer Partners
2:55pm: Take pictures, group closing prayer
End by 3pm.

Get to Know the Team
Have the group sit in a circle. Allow each person to answer the question before moving on to the next.
1. Your name and age/grade in school.
2. Why you decided to go on this trip
3. If I’m honest, I’m a little nervous about (name a fear related to the trip)
4. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being completely distant and 10 being very intimate) I would rate my relationship with God as…
5. A way that I currently enjoy/try to serve is (give an example of local service if possible).

Choose Leaders
During this trip we will be living together in community. Like the early monasteries we will work, eat, and sleep together. Everyone will take turns supporting the group by preparing meals, participating in evening worship, and sharing the tasks given to us by Neighborhood Houses. While we will all help in the preparation for this trip, we need to select leaders who will help guide us in this work.

- Food: This leader will help plan the meals for the week, create a shopping list, and organize a schedule for participants to assist in food prep and clean-up. All participants will help implement.
• Fundraising: This leader will help plan fundraising events that will provide the financial resources to support the needs of Neighborhood Houses. All participants will commit to participating in 75% of fundraising.

• Appreciation: This leader will help design an event and/or gift to show appreciation for those who serve at Neighborhood Houses. All participants will help implement.

• Sabbath Day: This leader will organize our final day. This includes researching and planning events for the group, selecting a lunch restaurant, and creating a budget.

• Host Site Liaison: This leader will be in contact with our host site Salem in Ladue UMC. They will complete necessary paperwork, be responsible for communicating the schedule to the host site, and overseeing that the group be respectful and uphold cleanliness while on site.

Opening Devotions - Wesley, Class Meeting, Covenant
John Wesley believed in the power of small groups gathering together. He believed that it was in the context of community that we could grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Wesley created a list of general rules for groups who met together, and today we call them the “General Rules of Discipleship”. (Have on poster for group to see as you read).

To witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow His teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

1. What does this statement mean to you?
2. In what ways are worship and devotion connected to compassion and justice?
3. Why is it important as we prepare for our mission trip?
4. How can it help guide our group?

As Wesley created classes, which were groups of about 12 people, he had three questions that were to guide their meeting. (Have these questions and following expectations on a poster)

1. How is it with your soul?
2. Where do you need advice, comfort, encouragement, or reprimand in your spiritual life?
3. How did you help the church and the poor?

The expectation of these classes were to

1. Do no harm
2. Do good
3. Fall in love with God

Every night on our mission trip we will encourage each other and examine our faith as a community by following these questions and expectations. Today, we are going to expand on those expectations as we create together a group covenant.

As a group we commit to do no harm by:
(Have the group come up with a list of expectations. Some ideas from Wesley’s General Rules include: taking the name of God in vain, drunkenness, uncharitable conversation, doing to others as we would not they should do unto us, putting on of gold and costly apparel, needless self-indulgence.)

As a group we commit to do good by:

(Have the group come up with a list of expectations. Some ideas include: encouraging other believers, serving the least of these with respect and humbleness, being patience.)

Finally, a mission trip is not just a vacation or a chance to fulfill a to-do list. It is an intentional time to live in community and see how service is part of our call to grow in our faith. Wesley’s final expectation of falling in love with God talks about the importance of spiritual disciplines. These are things that help us hear God, change our lives, and deepen our discipleship. Each morning and evening we will spend time participating in different spiritual disciplines that will help us see God in our work and as we serve with those at Neighborhood Houses. Our hope is that by the end of this week by participating in these different spiritual disciplines you will be open and understand better how God wants to challenge and change you.

As a group we commit to falling in love with God by:
Public Worship – we will gather every evening to read scripture, pray, and encourage each other
The Supper of the Lord – we will participate in Holy Communion
Prayer – we will pray individually and as a group, engaging in different prayer exercises
Reading the scriptures – every morning and evening we will read from God’s Word and journal about any insights we may have.
Confession – we will spend time every evening recognizing the ways we did harm to others
Sabbath – we will spend the final day of our week in rest and fellowship
Fasting – we will intentionally leave behind things that may distract us from God and others. For example, what are our expectations for cell phones and social media?

Schedule and Post-Trip Commitment
Sunday: Commissioning service at 10:15am. Lunch at church. Drive to St. Louis. Dinner at Salem in Ladue UMC. Evening devotions. Plan evening activity (board games, group movie, etc)
Friday: Sabbath day in St. Louis. Return home in time for dinner.

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The re-entry process is just as important as the preparation, and it will be a challenge to integrate your spiritual growth into life-long transformation. To help you translate your experience into a deeper level of discipleship, we need to pick two times to meet as a group after we return. We want to plan a meeting fairly soon after we return (within 2 weeks) and another later (closer to 6 weeks). Let’s choose a time that can work for the whole group, such as Sunday before worship for an hour.

**Role Play Scenarios**
For each of these, invite someone to come up and act out the scene like charades. Then talk as a group about appropriate responses to the scenario. You do not need to cover all of them; the goal is to start preparing the group for possible situations that may be challenging/uncomfortable.

Scene 1
You are working outside and a homeless person asks you for money.

Scene 2
You get injured on the site

Scene 3
You hear a gunshot while working

Scene 4
You see another team member slacking off or leaving the site to go get a snack

Scene 5
You did not sleep well, it’s hot, and you are crabby

Scene 6
A neighbor wants to thank you by offering lemonade. They also smell.

**St. Louis 101**
Divide into two teams (boys vs. girls) for this trivia quiz. The winning team gets to eat dinner first!

1. Name the St. Louis native who was the first to be inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and wrote the classic “Blueberry Hill”. (Chuck Berry)
2. What two rivers connect at St. Louis? (Missouri and Mississippi)
3. St. Louis is nicknamed the Gateway to… (The West)
4. What two explorers left from St. Louis to chart the Louisiana Purchase? (Lewis and Clark)
5. This Italian dish (if you can call it that) is unique to St. Louis. Always served with marinara sauce. (Toasted Ravioli)
6. Name the NHL team that has been in the play-offs 50 times but never been able to nab the Stanley Cup. (St. Louis Blues)

7. Bonus Question (worth two points) – How would a native St. Louis pronounce “Highway 44”? (Highway forty-four)

**Discipleship**

**Group Discussion Questions**

1. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?
   a. A disciple is a student, meaning we are constantly learning and growing to become more like Jesus Christ.

2. What are some things we do as disciples of Jesus Christ?
   a. Pray, read scripture, attend worship, give financially, serve, build relationships

3. Do we ever stop growing as disciples of Jesus Christ?
   a. No

4. The Methodist Church was started by John Wesley. He was concerned that the church had become too focused on staying inside the church building and missing the opportunity to share the news of Jesus and serve others outside the church walls. He believed in a couple of key ideas that we still hold as foundational to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Let’s take turns reading each idea, and then have the group discuss what this means and how it might affect the way we see our upcoming trip.⁴ (Have these ideas on paper to pass out)
   a. Sanctification – We hold the wonder of God’s acceptance and pardon does not end God’s saving work, which continues to nurture our growth in grace. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to increase in the knowledge and love of God and in love for our neighbor. New birth is the first step in this process of sanctification. Sanctifying grace draws us toward the gift of Christian perfection, which Wesley described as a heart “habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor” and as “having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked.”
   b. Faith and Good Works – We see God’s grace and human activity working together in the relationship of faith and good works. God’s grace calls forth human response and discipline. For Wesley, even repentance should be accompanied by “fruits meet for repentance,” or works of piety and mercy.
   c. Mission and Service – We insist that personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. By joining heart and hand, we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness, and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Scriptural holiness entails more than personal piety; love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and renewal in the life of the world.

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d. Nurture and Mission of the Church – Finally, we emphasize the nurturing and serving function of Christian fellowship in the Church. The personal experience of faith is nourished by the worshipping community. For Wesley, there is no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. The communal forms of faith in the Wesleyan tradition not only promote personal growth; they also equip and mobilize us for mission and service to the world.

5. We can see that serving others is not the end result of our faith, like crossing a finish line, but a central part to our growth. As we move towards sanctification, growing more like Jesus Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit, a key part of our growth is worship and service. The two are linked together.
   a. Can you have worship without service? Or service without worship?
   b. List some ways that a mission trip can help you grow in your faith.
   c. Now list some ways that we can get so caught up in completing a to-do list on our trip that we miss the worship side.
   d. What is the goal of the trip? To grow as disciples? To serve others? Or a third option?

6. A large part of our mission trip will be spending time growing in our faith through different disciplines. Throughout our week together we will begin each morning and end each evening engaging in different spiritual disciplines. The goal is to “move beyond surface living into the depths”
5 That is because, “Service is not a list of things we do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living. To do specific acts of service is not the same thing as living in the Discipline of service. Just as there is more to the game of basketball than the rule book, there is more to service than specific acts of serving. It is one thing to act like a servant; it is quite another to be a servant.”
6
   a. Can you name some examples of the classic disciplines (practices that Christians have been doing for centuries)?
   b. Which disciplines are easy for you? Which ones are harder?

7. One way we will be growing in our faith this week is through doing a morning devotion in our journal. Each day, before we head out to the worksite, we will spend time individually in prayer, reading a scripture passage, and answering a few questions. This will help us keep our eyes open for how God is already at work while we complete our tasks. Tonight we will start with our first journal entry (pass out journals and pre-trip questions). We are going to take (choose an amount of time based on your schedule, at least 10 minutes) to split off and begin to think about our current relationship with God and what God might want to do in and through each one of us on this trip.

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6 Ibid., 134.
8. Has anyone kept a journal before? At first, a prayer journal can be an intimidating exercise so let me share this with you.

9. A prayer journal is like a diary of the spiritual movements of my life, like a spiritual scrapbook of the graces (the insights I receive) God has sent me throughout my prayer life. The journal can help clarify exactly which grace I am presently receiving. Just as a scientist may not understand what she is observing until she walks away from her experiment, and, with pencil and paper, works out the math, so I too must often work out the problems of my prayer experiences. There are various ways of journaling. I can write every day or only every now and then. I can address the entries to God, myself, or to whomever is on my mind at any given time. I can write pages and pages or just a few lines. I can make it strictly confidential or I can share it with others. It might contain only my own written entries or it might be filled with poems, cutouts from magazines, a Christmas card that touched me, famous quotes I really like, artwork, dreams, letters and so on. There is no right or wrong way to journal. I can custom fit it to match my own particular personality.⁷

10. As we prepare for this time of prayer, let’s talk about a few details:
   a. Make yourself comfortable. You don’t want to fall asleep, but it’s good to help your body ease into this time of prayer. Sit in a chair, stretch out on the floor, whatever feels relaxing to you.
   b. When you get settled, start by taking a few slow deep breaths. And then start to center your mind. It’s easiest to pick a word or phrase, like “Come Holy Spirit” or “Jesus” and say it a few times until you are focused.
   c. Do not worry about distractions. If you start to pray and something else pops into your mind, take a breath and mentally set it aside for later and return to the prayer. Or, perhaps God is trying to tell you something with that distraction. Follow the idea for a little bit and see if it relates to your prayer.
   d. God made each of us unique, and that means we will all have different forms of prayer that work better for us. Just know if you do not immediately connect with journaling, we will be experiencing other types of prayer exercises throughout the trip.

Preparation Meeting Journal Entry

Take a few slow deep breaths. Take a minute to quiet your mind and whisper to yourself a simple phrase to help enter into this time of prayer (such as “Come Holy Spirit”).⁸

Dear God, this is how I am at this moment and this is what’s on my heart…

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⁸ Ibid., 69.
If I’m honest God, this is what I’m fearful of, going on this trip…

God I know you will be on this trip, but I don’t know yet how I’m going to encounter you. God, this is what I’m hoping to gain from this experience…

God, this is the person that I really want to be…

God, I know that to be this person, some things may need to change. God help me with this struggle…

When you are finished writing, drawing, or just sitting in silence, take a moment to rest in God. Let everything that has been swirling around your mind and through your pen just soak in. Take a few deep breaths, and thank God for this time. When you are ready, you can return to the group.

Prayer Partners
(Have index cards to pass out)
Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Christ opened up the way to God and to one another. Now Christians can live with each other in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one. But they can continue to do so only through Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one; only through him are we bound together.” ⁹ As we prepare for this trip, we recognize that we do not go alone. Our church family at Trinity is sending us on this mission and surrounding us with their prayers and support. Jesus has shaped our community and unites us as one, even as our group travels to a new community for a week. To help keep that connection and unity with our church, each of us are going to pick someone from the church that is not going on the trip to be our prayer partners. This person will pray with you and meet with you before you leave. They will stand up on Sunday July 23 when we are commissioned at the worship service and lay hands on you as a blessing from the church. They will receive daily updates while on the trip and study the same devotions we will be studying each night. And when you return, this person will meet with you again to debrief and help you see where God was working in your life and your faith during this experience.

(Pass out index cards). On the front of this card write your name. On the back list three prayer requests you may have for this trip. Let me know your top two choices for prayer partners. I will approach your first choice (and if needed your second) and if they agree I will give them your prayer requests and a letter explaining the role of prayer partner.

While we are on the trip, you will also be meeting in groups of three, like Wesley’s band meetings, every evening before devotions to spend time in prayer for each other and to answer the questions: how is it with your soul, where did you see God today, and where did you struggle or sin? I have chosen the groups for the trip and they are as follows… Take a moment now to meet with the other two members of your group and share the prayer requests you have written down on your index card, if you feel comfortable.

Closing
Are there any final questions?

Take a group photo and have someone from the group close out in prayer.
Matthew 22:37-40. Jesus said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.’ This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ These two commands are pegs; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them.”

Our church’s history traces back to John Wesley’s desire to help Christians form community and grow in their faith and acts of love by creating small covenant groups. Today, as Methodist, we uphold in the importance of growing in holiness and discipleship. Based off of Wesley’s ideas, we continue to believe that God calls us “to witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow His teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” This group before you has made a commitment to intentional community, to live and work and worship together for a week in St. Louis and to follow the teachings of Jesus from Matthew 22 as they engage in acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion.

While we have all vowed as believers in Jesus Christ to serve as Christ’s representatives in the world, today we send these people to serve alongside Neighborhood Houses in St. Louis as a living sign of our vow and Christ’s presence. (invite up participants and prayer partners). You are part of this family of God and we take time to cover you in prayer and send you with our blessing as you go fulfill your call to discipleship. Know that this body of believers stands behind and beside you as you spend this next week growing in faith and love. (invite prayer partners to place hands on their participant as physical sign of church’s commitment)

Pastor: Let us pray. Thank you God, for inspiring and preparing these people to be living signs of Christ among those who live in St. Louis.

**ALL: Thank you, God.**

Pastor: Thank you for their gifts, their willingness, and their commitment to be in community with each other and with their sisters and brothers in Christ at Neighborhood Houses.

**ALL: Thank you, God.**

Pastor: Your grace has been more than sufficient. You have provided all they will need. We thank you for those who have given of their time and finances to make this trip possible.

**ALL: Thank you, God.**

Pastor: Now we present to you, O God, our sisters and brothers, as disciples living into their call for service, entrusting them to your care.

**ALL: Come, Holy Spirit.**

Pastor: (Anoint head of each person with oil and say) Come upon … (name)

As Jesus as sent us

**ALL: Now we send you.**
Pastor: May God’s safety surround you, God’s peace fill you, God’s glory open your eyes and ears to see and hear the Holy Spirit working, and God’s protection shine over you and bring you back to us. Go in the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

ALL: Thanks be to God!
APPENDIX 6

JOURNAL ENTRIES

Sunday Evening Devotions
(Complete around the table right before dinner is served)

Group Discussion
1. How is it with your soul?
2. Where did you see God today?

Group Devotion
1. Food has the power to bring people together and break down barriers. Share a memory of a special meal (Thanksgiving, birthday, etc.)
2. Can you name a Bible story about food?
3. A lot of Jesus’ ministry revolved around food (feeding the poor, having meals, using food as illustrations). Why do you think that is?
4. What is communion/Lord’s Table?
5. Communion is celebrated by every Christian church. Why is it so important?
6. “The Lord’s Table is about presence. Surely it is about eating, but ultimately it’s a discipline that shapes a group of people to be present to God’s presence in Christ around the table, where we eat. Then, in the process we are able to connect with the other people around the table.”
10 How is Christ present when we come together to eat?
7. Communion begins with reconciliation (admitting wrong to God and to others in order to restore relationships), followed by offering thanks to God (Eucharist literally means thanksgiving), and ends with giving to God. Before we eat this meal together, take a moment to:
   a. Say sorry outloud for something you did today
   b. Say thank you outloud for something you experienced today
   c. Offer Gifts – this is our whole week of service!
8. 1 Corinthians 11:18-30 (CEV): I am told that you can’t get along with each other when you worship, and I am sure that some of what I have heard is true. You are bound to argue with each other, but it is easy to see which of you have God’s approval. When you meet together, you don’t really celebrate the Lord’s Supper. You even start eating before everyone gets to the meeting, and some of you go hungry, while others get drunk. Don’t you have homes where you can eat and drink? Do you hate God’s church? Do you want to embarrass people who don’t have anything? What can I say to you? I certainly cannot praise you. I have already told you what the Lord Jesus did on the night he was betrayed. And it came from the Lord himself. He took some bread in his hands. Then after he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Eat

this and remember me.’ After the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine in his hands and said, ‘This is my blood, and with it God makes his new agreement with you. Drink this and remember me.’ The Lord meant that when you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you tell about his death until he comes. But if you eat the bread and drink the wine in a way that isn’t worthy of the Lord, you sin against his body and blood. That’s why you must examine the way you eat and drink.

9. What is communion supposed to do? In Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church, what had it turned into?

10. “In this desolate place as a group of needy people gather together and share good, with Jesus at the center and with Jesus as the provider, we see God’s coming world glimpsed right here, right now. When your church family gathers together as a group of needy people, and shares food with Jesus at the center and with Jesus as the provider, you glimpse God’s coming world right here, right now.”

11. How is God among us now?

12. Tonight – prepare someone else’s dinner plate for them as an act of service. As you serve them say, “Jesus used food to change the world. Go and do the same.”

Monday Morning Devotions
(Complete before leaving for the work site)

Psalm 119:17-18 (MSG): Be generous with me and I’ll live a full life; not for a minute will I take my eyes off your road. Open my eyes so I can see what you show me of your miracle-wonders.

Ephesians 1:15-19 (MSG): That’s why, when I heard of the solid trust you have in the Master Jesus and your outpouring of love to all the followers of Jesus, I couldn’t stop thanking God for you – every time I prayed, I’d think of you and give thanks. But I do more than thank. I ask – ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory – to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him – endless energy, boundless strength!

John Wesley preached in a sermon, “By ”means of grace” I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.” It means that God uses different avenues (like prayer, breaking bread together,


serving, reading scripture, etc) to help followers of Jesus see God working in the world and to have their lives transformed.

Mark Labberton wrote, “We can choose to become better seers. It means deciding to live with eyes wide open to God and to the purpose of God in the world. It also means living with eyes wanting to see what truly is, whether or not it is appealing, attractive, desirable or comfortable. Truly seeing can be awkward and disruptive. Coming to see the poor, the forgotten, the imprisoned and so on may mean making the effort to look in places we don’t normally see. Short-term mission trips can help give us new vision. When we go on such adventures, we should be prepared to see with every sense and to ask God to help us see with the heart and wisdom of Jesus. When I have had the privilege of going on such trips, I have earnestly prayed that God would use the experience to burn into the eyes of my heart the images of the people and needs and circumstances so I will not forget and will not see the same way as I did before.”

Journal Questions

1. What is something you don’t want to see on this trip? Why?

2. Name some things that make it hard to see God.

3. The spiritual disciplines help us see where God is already at work. They help us focus our eyes and our minds to “tune in” to God. What is something you can do today to help you be ready to see God?

Write out your prayer for the day:
Dear God, thank you for…

Dear God, help me with…

Dear God, open my eyes so I can see…

Monday Evening Devotions

Begin in your groups of three and answer the following: How did you do today

1. Doing no harm (confession)
2. Doing good
3. Falling in love with God (where did you see God today?)

Big Group Check-In

1. How is it with your soul?

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2. Where did you see God today?
3. What was easy?
4. What was hard?

(For leader of devotions, read through)
Tonight we are going to participate in the awareness examen. This type of prayer helps us see God’s presence and call by going through the events of our day. It’s based off of an ancient prayer written by St. Ignatius of Loyola, who started the Jesuit order. As we engage in this exercise, it may be a new experience for many of you to sit in silence for this long and pray. Do not worry about distractions, just take a deep breath and return to your thoughts. They may in fact be something that God wants you to think about further.

As we begin I want to invite you to close your eyes and simply notice your breathing. Take a moment to image the air in the room is filled with God’s light and God’s love. For the next few minutes just pay attention to your breathing, imagining with each in-breath that you are breathing in God’s love, and with every out-breath you are releasing every distraction, every anxiety, every tension and resistance to God. (wait 30 seconds)

Now take a moment to invite the Holy Spirit to come and be present. (count to 10)

I invite you to slowly to walk through all of the experiences of the day, from when you first woke up to this moment right now. As you go through your day in prayer, I want you to ask the following questions “for what moment was I most grateful? When did I feel most alive?” Allow little things to emerge: a smile from a stranger, the sunlight through a window, a kind act from a fellow worker, an engaging conversation. (give participants a good length of time before moving on).

Choose one of these moments to meditate on. What does it have to teach you about your life with God? Don’t force anything, just be open and let the moment arise that seems to hold the most gratitude. (Again, wait, at least one minute).

I invite you to go back over your day in prayer, and this time ask the question “For what moment was I least grateful? When did I feel least alive?” Allow God to bring to your attention whatever moment seemed filled with desolation, disconnection, alienation, an absence of God’s Spirit. (give participants a good length of time before moving on).

Finally, in light of your reflections, I ask you to consider one last question. What is God’s call to you? How is God calling you to live?

Slowly, when you are ready, open your eyes and jot down some things that came up in your prayer in your journal.

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When everyone in the group is finished, take some time to talk about the experience and if people are comfortable, what God revealed in their prayer time.

**Tuesday Morning Devotions**

Psalm 133 (MSG): How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along! It’s like costly anointing oil flowing down head and beard, flowing down Aaron’s beard, flowing down the collar of his priestly robes. It’s like the dew on Mount Hermon flowing down the slopes of Zion. Yes, that’s where GOD commands the blessing, ordains eternal life.

John 17:20-23 (MSG): I’m praying not only for them but also for those who will believe in me because of them and their witness about me. The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind – just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me. The same glory you gave me, I gave them, so they’ll be as unified and together as we are – I in them and you in me. Then they’ll be mature in this oneness, and give the godless world evidence that you’ve sent me and loved them in the same way you’ve loved me.

For John Wesley, there was no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. In other words, faith always includes a social dimension. One cannot be a solitary Christian. As we grow in faith through our participation in the church community, we are also nourished and equipped for mission and service to the world.\(^\text{15}\)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer also wrote, “The Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies… He had come for the express purpose of bringing peace to the enemies of God. So Christians, too, belong not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the midst of enemies. There they find their mission, their work.”\(^\text{16}\)

1. What are some things that can divide:
   a. Our group?
   b. Our church?
   c. Our world?

2. Why did Jesus care that his disciples live in unity?


3. *Shalom* is a Hebrew word often translated as “peace,” and while that’s not a bad translation, we’ve tended to focus on only a few angles of the peace God intends. We often think of peace as an absence of conflict or some warm-and-fuzzy feeling that everything is going to work out. *Shalom* is far more than that. The type of peace God intends has many forms: peace with God, peace with other humans, peace with nature, peace with oneself.17

   a. Where do you need peace today?

   b. How can you bring peace to our group today?

   c. How will peace affect our work today?

   d. How is your serving this week being a source of *shalom*?

Write out your prayer for the day:
Dear God, thank you for…

Dear God, help me with…

Dear God, help me live in unity today by…

Tuesday Evening Devotion

Begin in your groups of three and answer the following: How did you do today
   4. Doing no harm (confession)
   5. Doing good
   6. Falling in love with God (where did you see God today?)

Big Group Check-In
   5. How is it with your soul?
   6. Where did you see God today?
   7. What was easy?
   8. What was hard?

Group Devotion/Discussion
Dom Câmara was a twentieth-century Roman Catholic priest who showed a relentless commitment to justice work among the poor of Brazil. He is famous for the following quote: “When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.”

   1. How would you rephrase this quote in your own words?

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2. What do you agree with in this quotation? What do you disagree with?
3. If Câmara walked up to Jesus and said these two sentences to him, what do you think Jesus would say in response?\(^\text{18}\)

David Fitch wrote, “Being with the ‘least of these’ is a discipline that shapes whole communities into Christ’s kingdom. It starts by coming alongside hurting persons. It starts with people being present to groups of people in need… We are with each other. In so doing, a space is opened where no one is over the other person, no one is an object, no one is a project. From this space of kinship, we share life.”\(^\text{19}\)

As Christians we believe that the Bible is God’s revelation to us and that the words found in Scripture are sacred and have the power to heal, to convict, to change, and to carry us to a closer relationship with God. This evening we are going to do a form of prayer called lectio divina, or sacred reading. This is a spiritual practice of opening yourself to the presence of God through the reading and meditating on the Word of God. This is an intimate relationship; it is not the words we attend to as much as the person who is speaking. Think of the scriptures as God’s love letter to you.

I will read through the passage 3 times. Listen for a word or phrase that speaks to you, or that seems to stand out like it was written in italics. This will not be easy, and it is okay if your mind starts to wander or become distracted. Just take a deep breath and come back to the word that you are focusing on. Don’t change the word you are focusing on just because it doesn’t seem holy enough. Trust that God is trying to say something to you, right now, through this message and just listen.

Take a moment to rest, relaxing into God’s presence. With each breath become aware of God’s love for you. When you’re ready, say a simple prayer silently offering yourself to God and welcoming whatever the Holy Spirit seeks to bring you in the prayer.

Matthew 25: “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.’

“Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 136.

\(^\text{19}\) David Fitch, Faithful Presence (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 114.
“Then he will turn to the ‘goats,’ the ones on his left, and say, ‘Get out, worthless goats! You’re good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because—I was hungry and you gave me no meal, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was homeless and you gave me no bed, I was shivering and you gave me no clothes, sick and in prison, and you never visited.’

“Then those ‘goats’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn’t help?’ “He will answer them, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.’

Now prayerfully repeat the word to yourself silently, and let the rest of the passage fall away. Try to notice what thoughts or feelings or images come to mind as you pray the word. What do you notice about this word?

Slowly, when you are ready open your eyes and jot down some things that came up in your prayer in your journal.

When everyone in the group is finished, take some time to talk about the experience and if people are comfortable, what God revealed in their prayer time.

Possible discussion questions

1. What word or phrase stood out for you?
2. What was difficult about this style of prayer? Helpful?
3. Looking back at some of the other disciplines, what role does
   a. Communion/breaking bread have in this passage?
   b. Community and being in unity?
   c. How does peace/shalom become a reality?
4. How does this scripture speak to the work we are doing this week?

**Wednesday Morning Devotion**

Mark 10:42-45(MSG): When the other ten heard of this conversation, they lost their tempers with James and John. Jesus got them together to settle things down. “You’ve observed how godless rulers throw their weight around,” he said, “and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It’s not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage.”

1 Corinthians 12: 25-31 (MSG): The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don’t, the parts we see and the parts we don’t. If
one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. You are Christ’s body—that’s who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your “part” mean anything. You’re familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his “body”: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, organizers, those who pray in tongues.

John Wesley sought to help Christians live faith in the midst of ordinary lives of family, friends, work, bills, and more. He encouraged the Methodists to participate in what he called the “means of grace” which included acts of piety like worship and prayer, along with acts of service like feeding the hungry and giving to the poor. These acts are gifts strengthening us to live into the two-fold nature of discipleship: loving God and our neighbors.20

You have reached the half-way point. You have spent two days serving at Neighborhood Houses, and have two days left. The routine is becoming familiar, the group is starting to bond in a unique way, and your muscles may be beginning to feel the strain of the work. Hopefully God has also been working in your life, helping you grow in your faith and discover new things. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means that God has called you to a life of serving and has given you special gifts to help fulfill your call to love God and love others, so as you prepare for another day of living your faith in the midst of ordinary work, think about what special part you play in the group.

Prayer Exercise: Seeing Our Gifts21
Imagine that Jesus suddenly appears next to you and ask you what do you like about yourself?

Jesus then invites you to see yourself through the eyes of others. First, Jesus allows you to step inside the body of a good friend. What’s one thing he or she seems to like about you?

Now imagine that Jesus invites you to look through the eyes of a close family member. What’s one thing this person values in you?

Now imagine that Jesus invites you to see yourself through his eyes. What does God value in you?

Write out your prayer for the day:
Dear God, thank you for…


21 Mark Yaconelli, Downtime: Helping Teenagers Pray (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 154-155.
Dear God, help me with…

Dear God, help me use my special gifts today by…

**Wednesday Evening Devotion**

Begin in your groups of three and answer the following: How did you do today
1. Doing no harm (confession)
2. Doing good
3. Falling in love with God (where did you see God today?)

**Big Group Check-In**
4. How is it with your soul?
5. Where did you see God today?
6. What was easy/hard?

**Group Devotion/Discussion**
“Learn the lesson that, if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a scepter but a hoe.” ~ Bernard of Clairvaux. Service is not a list of things that we do, though in it we discover things to do. It is not a code of ethics, but a way of living. To do specific acts of service is not the same as living in the Discipline of service. Just as there is more to the game of basketball than the rule book, there is more to service than specific acts of serving. It is one thing to *act* like a servant; it is quite another to *be* a servant. As in all the Disciplines, it is possible to master the mechanics of service without experiencing the Discipline.²²

**Discussion Questions:**
1. What is something you’ve learned about yourself this week?
2. How has this week challenged or changed your understanding of the relationship between serving and faith?
3. Who is someone in our group that has had a positive influence on you this week?

Tonight we are going to participate in an affirmation circle. This is an opportunity to call out the gifts in a person’s life and to lift up the ways God has used them. Each person will take a turn sitting in the center of the circle. While in the center, you cannot say anything; simply receive the words the group gives you. Each person around the circle will offer up encouragement by naming a gift/talent that person has or sharing an example of how God used them this week. Once everyone has affirmed the person in the center, that person may respond by saying, “Thank you” and then return back to the circle. We will break up into two groups. After everyone has had an opportunity to be in the center, the group can close in prayer.

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Thursday Morning Devotion

Isaiah 58: 6-12 (MSG) “This is the kind of fast day I’m after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I’m interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once. Your righteousness will pave your way. The God of glory will secure your passage. Then when you pray, God will answer. You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’ “If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people’s sins, if you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out, your lives will begin to glow in the darkness, your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight. I will always show you where to go. I’ll give you a full life in the emptiest of places— firm muscles, strong bones. You’ll be like a well-watered garden, a gurgling spring that never runs dry. You’ll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past. You’ll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, make the community livable again.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Justice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Something we do for others</td>
<td>Something we do with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An event</td>
<td>A lifestyle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expects immediate results</td>
<td>Hopes for results but recognizes that systematic change takes time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is to help others</td>
<td>Goal is to remove obstacles so others can be empowered to help themselves</td>
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| Focuses on what our own ministry can accomplish | Focuses on how we can work with other ministries to accomplish even more.  

Salvation is not a static, one-time event in our lives. It is the ongoing experience of God’s gracious presence transforming us into whom God intends us to be. John Wesley described this dimension of God’s grace as sanctification, or holiness. Through God’s sanctifying grace, we grow and mature in our ability to live as Jesus lived. As we pray, study the Scriptures, fast, worship, and share in fellowship with other Christians, we deepen our knowledge of and love for God. As we respond with compassion to human need and work for justice in our communities, we strengthen our capacity to love our

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neighbor. Our inner thoughts and motives, as well as our outer actions and behavior, are aligned with God’s will and testify to our union with God.\textsuperscript{24}

Journal Questions
1. How would you describe the idea of sanctification to someone else?
2. How has your faith grown this week?
3. How has your understanding of serving grown this week?
4. Has this week been an experience of service or justice?
5. How will this experience change the way you live when you return home?

Write out your prayer for the day:
Dear God, thank you for…
Dear God, help me with…
Dear God, on my last day of serving, I ask…

\textbf{Thursday Evening Devotion}

Begin in your groups of three and answer the following: How did you do today
1. Doing no harm (confession)
2. Doing good
3. Falling in love with God (where did you see God today?)

\textbf{Big Group Check-In}
4. How is it with your soul?
5. Where did you see God today?
6. What was something you learned this week about yourself and/or your faith?
7. What is going to be difficult about returning home tomorrow?

\textbf{Devotion}
Tonight is an opportunity to stop and think about all that God has revealed to you this week and how God is calling you to continue to grow once you return home. Find a

comfortable spot and take time to process where you were at the beginning of this trip and what you have learned this week.²⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I used to think God was like…</th>
<th>Now I realize God is …</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I used to view myself as…</td>
<td>Now I view myself as…</td>
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<tr>
<td>I used to view my problems as…</td>
<td>Now I view my problems as…</td>
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<tr>
<td>I used to view my future as…</td>
<td>Now I view my future as…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I used to think of the world as …</td>
<td>Now I realize that the world is…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dear Self,
Now that this trip is over, this is why I think God wanted me to come…

This week has affected my faith and relationship with God by…

This is what I want to remember from this week…

When I return home, this is what I think needs to change…

I’ve learned this week that my personal faith and outward service are important because …

This is what I’m afraid might happen when I return home…

God, I feel like you are calling me to do…²⁶


²⁶ Note for devotion leader: Encourage the participants to use multiple pieces of paper to write the letter to themselves. Have envelopes ready for participants to address and seal, then mail the letters one to two weeks after returning home. Encourage participants to bring the letter to the first follow-up retreat meeting.
Friday Morning Devotion

Isaiah 40:28-31 (MSG): GOD doesn’t come and go. God lasts. He’s Creator of all you can see or imagine. He doesn’t get tired out, doesn’t pause to catch his breath. And he knows everything, inside and out. He energizes those who get tired, gives fresh strength to dropouts. For even young people tire and drop out, young folk in their prime stumble and fall. But those who wait upon GOD get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles, they run and don’t get tired, they walk and don’t lag behind.

Mark 6:30-32 (CEV): After the apostles returned to Jesus, they told him everything they had done and taught. But so many people were coming and going that Jesus and the apostles did not even have a chance to eat. Then Jesus said, “Let’s go to a place where we can be alone and get some rest.” They left in a boat for a place where they could be alone.

Christ, from whom all blessings flow, perfecting the saints below, hear us, who thy nature share, who thy mystic body are.
Join us, in one spirit join, let us still receive of thine; still for more on thee we call, thou who fillest all in all.
Many are we now, and one, we who Jesus have put on; there is neither bond or free, male nor female, Lord, in thee. (Charles Wesley)

Nate Stucky wrote, “We do not observe Sabbath for the sake and purpose of rejuvenation, refreshment, and rest from work, though we may expect to receive these benefits. We do not observe the Sabbath for the sake of rendering service to God in the congregation, though we will surely do so joyfully in our freedom before God. Why not? Because both can be reduced to matters of human effort… On the holy day, the day made holy by God himself, we rejoice that God loves us simply and purely because he made us and we are his. We rejoice that our identity is found not primarily or principally in our work, but in our relationship to God. This does not abolish our work, it enlivens it… In other words, we observe the Sabbath for the sake of exercising the faith which insists that our freedom, joy, rest, and our very life take place not in some sphere separate from God’s grace, but only as we are confirmed and confronted by God’s grace. We know ourselves truly and rightly only in the light of God’s grace.”

Journal questions:
1. Is it easy or hard for you to take a Sabbath rest? Why?
2. Why is rest important for your faith?


3. Sabbath rest is not something you do, but something you receive. It is not earned, it is a gift from God. What do you need to receive from God today?

Write out your prayer for the day:
Dear God, thank you for…

Dear God, help me with…

Dear God, as we travel home today, I ask…
APPENDIX 7

Spiritual Assessment Questionnaire
(To be completed before the mission trip)

Note: There are no right or wrong answers. Simply answer to the best of your ability. All submissions will be kept confidential and anonymous.

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being distant and 10 being extremely close) how would you describe your relationship with God?
   a. If possible, give some examples and/or reasons for your answer
   b. Are you satisfied with the number you gave?
   c. Why or why not?

2. List some spiritual practices that you engage in:
   a. On a daily basis:
   b. Weekly:
   c. Monthly:
   d. Yearly:

3. How much time do you spend on your relationship with God?
   a. Daily:
   b. Weekly:
   c. Yearly:

4. If someone asked you, “What is the purpose of faith?” how would you respond?

5. List some ways that your faith affects the following:
   a. Relationships:
   b. Work/School:
   c. Serving Others

6. Where are some areas of dissatisfaction in your faith? (For example, this could be areas of doubt, problems with the church, or spiritual practices that you wish to engage in more).

7. Before the trip: Why are you going on this mission trip?

8. How do you anticipate this trip affecting your faith?
APPENDIX 8

Spiritual Assessment Questionnaire
(To be completed after the mission trip)

Note: There are no right or wrong answers. Simply answer to the best of your ability. All submissions will be kept confidential and anonymous.

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being distant and 10 being extremely close) how would you describe your relationship with God?
   a. Are you satisfied with the number you gave?
   b. Why or why not?

2. List some spiritual practices that you engage in:

3. Since the mission trip, have you engaged in any new or increased in your participation of the spiritual disciplines?

4. Looking back at why you decided to participate on the mission trip, how did the experience affect your faith?

5. How has your understanding of service been changed or reinforced from the mission trip?

6. Are you serving now? If so, how?
You may have heard that our church is planning on a family mission trip this summer to St. Louis Mo from Sunday, July 23, till Friday, July 28. I’m writing this letter because I think you would be a wonderful addition to our group and I would love for you to prayerfully consider joining us.

I believe that mission work begins with relationships, so we will be partnering with a great organization that has a long history of making a positive impact in the name of Christ in north Saint Louis. Neighborhood Houses began in 1913 and over the years has offered a variety of programs and services to children and families in need. Today they focus on strengthening children and families and helping them reach their own magnificent potential. I have lead over four of these partnering trips to Neighborhood Houses, and every time I feel that God used the experience to strengthen and transform me.

Our offer to Neighborhood Houses is simple: send us a project list and we’ll take care of the rest. Our fundraising goals will be to cover the cost of all supplies. On previous trips groups have painted classrooms, built outdoor picnic tables, done lawn maintenance, and anything else the director asked of us. Our goal is to get a group of at least 20 people, ages 8 and older (yes, you can bring a friend who does not come to our church, and yes, if you are 12 or older you may attend without your parent). You can probably deduce that we will need a variety of skill and work expertise. Trust me, there will be something for any age!

We will leave Trinity Sunday July 23 after worship and drive to Salem UMC in Ladue who will host our group for the week. Our work-days will be Monday through Thursday, and Friday will be our day to enjoy some Sabbath rest (and sites in St. Louis). We want to begin organizing fundraising events and our pre-trip meeting, so we ask that you prayerfully consider your involvement and let us know your commitment (by signing the enclosed family covenant) by April 30th. I think you would be a blessing to the group and
I pray that if your schedule allows, that you’ll join us! If you have more questions, don’t be afraid to pull me aside on Sunday or email me at Katie@trinitymobery.org
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Fuller Theological Seminary
School of Intercultural Studies

My name is Pastor Katie Nix and I am collecting research as part of my Doctorate of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary under faculty advisor, Dr. Kurt Fredrickson. I would like to invite you or your child to participate in a research project described below. I will explain this document to you in detail. Please feel free to ask questions. Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study.

Description of the project:
The goal of this dissertation is to create a ministry plan that addresses spiritual formation before, during, and after a short-term mission trip in order to create a curriculum that will better connect a scriptural and theological understanding of missions as part of lifelong discipleship. If you agree, you or your child will fill out a questionnaire that measures your understanding and involvement in different spiritual activities before and after the trip. The goal is to create a curriculum that can be used by other groups for short-term mission trips that allows participants to grow spiritually and continue to understand God’s call to service and integrate spiritual insights during the mission trip experience into life-changing discipleship practices.

Procedures:
If you decide to take part in this study here is what will happen: A questionnaire will be completed to develop a base line for measuring comprehension and involvement in spiritual disciplines. The same questionnaire will be given the last day of the mission trip, one month post-trip, and again three months post-trip.

Risks or discomfort:
There is no risk or discomfort in participating in this research.

Benefits of this study:
While there is no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study, our hope is that with you or your child’s participation I (Pastor Katie) will be able to better understand the relationship between spiritual formation and service and to create a curriculum that can be used by short-term mission trip groups that better develop spiritual disciplines and promotes accountability in discipleship after the trip.

Confidentiality:
Your part in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name. All records from the questionnaire will kept by myself (Pastor Katie).

Voluntary participation and withdrawal:
Participation in research is voluntary. I do ask that you take serious time to consider you or your child’s involvement with this project. You or your child have the right to refuse to be in this study. If you or your child decide to be in the study, however I ask that you or your child fully understand the requirements of this trip, including all post-trip meetings, before agreeing to participate. Full participation will allow for the best results in this study, however you or your child are allowed at any time to not answer any questions in the pre and post trip questionnaire.

Questions, Rights and Complaints:
If you have any questions about this research project, please call me, Pastor Katie at (269) 849-5944 or Dr. Kurt Fredrickson at (626) 584-5315. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, please direct them to Dr. Alison Wong, HSRC Administrator, at hsrc@fuller.edu.

Consent statement
This statement certifies the following: that you are 18 years of age or older and you have read the consent and all your questions have been answered. You understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time and that you will not lose any of the benefits that you would otherwise receive by withdrawing early. All of the answers you provide to Pastor Katie Nix will be kept private. You should know that you have the right to see the results prior to their being published.

I consent to participating in “Mission Trip Dilemma” D. Min project being given by Pastor Katie Nix.

__________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant      Date

__________________________
Typed/printed Name

A copy of the informed consent will be given to you.

If you are 17 years of age or under, you must have a parent/guardian give consent.

__________________________  _______________________
Signature of Parent/Guardian  Date


Missouri Annual Conference United Methodist Church. “Global Church.” http://globalchurchconnect.org/


United Methodist Church Website. www.umc.org