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# Common Grace as the Invitation to Missional Understanding: An Introduction to Fairview Presbyterian Church

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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

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COMMON GRACE AS THE INVITATION TO MISSIONAL UNDERSTANDING:  
AN INTRODUCTION TO FAIRVIEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

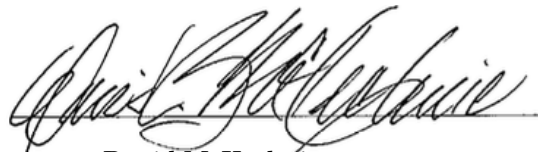
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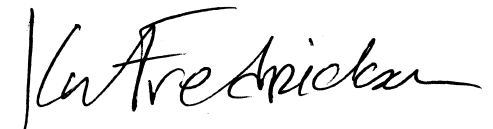
and submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary  
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



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COMMON GRACE AS THE INVITATION TO MISSIONAL UNDERSTANDING:  
AN INTRODUCTION TO FAIRVIEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

BY

ALLEN THOMPSON  
NOVEMBER 2018



## ABSTRACT

### **Common Grace as the Invitation to Missional Understanding: An Introduction to Fairview Presbyterian Church**

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The goal of this project is to enable a pastor in a new call to introduce his congregation to two theological emphases—missional theology and common grace—that shape his perspectives on ministry. In doing so, he begins to articulate his vision of the church's role in the community and to measure the congregation's resonance with that vision. The pastor contends the doctrine of common grace presents a framework for comprehending missional theology, both by helping followers of Jesus identify and participate in God's work in the world and by providing a point of contact in the task of evangelism. The thesis was tested in the context of Fairview Presbyterian Church in North Augusta, South Carolina.

Through a review of contemporary perspectives on Christian cultural engagement, this project explores a variety of components of missional theology and establishes common grace as the Reformed tradition's critical doctrine for the Church's relationship with culture. Additionally, the project challenges congregation members to interact with their context in specific ways according to the theology and doctrines presented. The execution of the project includes a seven-week teaching series and a three-week sermon series based on results of the teaching series. Following each series, intentional conversations with lay leaders and surveys to the congregation provide input as to the congregation's interest in the doctrines and desire to pursue further study and practice.

These evaluation tools indicate a high level of interest on the part of the congregation. Because this project is an effort to acquaint the new pastor and congregation with one another, these results can shape their future ministry efforts together. The positive response suggests further exploration of the relationship between common grace and missional theology is worthwhile.

Content Reader: Rev. Dr. David McKechnie

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I am grateful to Kelsey and Islay for allowing me the time and space to work and for welcoming me home upon each return. Thank you to First Presbyterian Church of Danville for being a crucible for much work that does not appear in these pages. To Fairview Presbyterian Church, I am grateful for your warm reception and interest, and I look forward to the Holy Spirit's leadership in this and our future endeavors together.

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PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT



## INTRODUCTION

No two churches are the same, but many churches are alike. A pastor may move from one call to another and discover there was little change in the appearance and personalities of the congregants. At the same time, that pastor may discover the seemingly similar congregants have very different responses to leadership and vision or are hungrier for spiritual growth, challenges, and opportunities for their faith. These changes can appear in the individuals themselves, or collectively in the congregation.

While many personalities are similar, each person is unique. Likewise, congregations can be very different, responding in dramatically different ways to the same styles of leadership, the same types of conflict, and the same challenges in their theology or context. Among Presbyterian churches in the American South, there is little demographic divergence, yet some congregations may embrace change and challenges while their sister congregations in other contexts resist them. Churches have different cultures of leadership and resilience. Such dichotomies are the genesis of this project.

This project must first be explained in light of the project it was initially intended to be: an immersive small group experience for the congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Danville, Virginia (FPC Danville). The initial project would gather a small group of congregation and community leaders to discuss missional church theology and

the doctrine of common grace while engaging in strategically chosen experiences relating to the city of Danville's economic redevelopment efforts. This project underwent a dramatic change when the project leader accepted a call to become the senior pastor at Fairview Presbyterian Church in North Augusta, South Carolina (Fairview) after the project's first submission. At FPC Danville, the impetus for the project was the need for congregation members to take an active and theologically-informed role in the renewal of the city of Danville, acknowledging and affirming the goodness in those efforts while recognizing aspects that could be detrimental to certain segments of the community.

Danville is a depressed city that lost much of its tobacco and textile industry simultaneously in the early 2000s. By then, FPC Danville had already experienced two decades of slow decline in size and resources, but after the loss of those industries, the size of the membership fell precipitously. After seven years of ministry in that context, there was a clear need for the congregation to embrace the new development occurring in Danville and to discern how God was at work in the gifts and talents of those who sought to rebuild Danville's economy. Much of the initial project would address the patterns and culture of leadership in both the congregation and the city that had presented challenges to FPC Danville's own revitalization.

Upon arriving at Fairview, it became apparent that applying the same project in a different context would be contrived, given the different leadership culture and sense of connection to the community present at Fairview and in North Augusta in general. Still, while the differences between the two congregations and cities are great, the core of the project—i.e., the need for missional transformation and the communication of the doctrine of common grace—remains relevant. In this new context, this project provides

opportunities to assess the missional acumen of Fairview and to develop a plan for introducing missional theology and common grace to a new congregation.

As such, the primary literary sources and general theological themes of the project remain unchanged. Unlike Danville and FPC Danville, North Augusta and Fairview provide the opportunity to work with these themes in the context of a relatively stable congregation in a growing metropolitan area. Still, the themes of revitalization and renewal are important, as the following pages make clear. Fairview is a congregation in need of stable leadership and clear direction, and like many similar congregations across the South and across the United States, the congregation faces the same challenges that gave rise to the missional church movement: pluralism, secularism, individualism, and disengagement from community and civic participation, to name a few.

Fairview Presbyterian Church is a 572-member congregation in the city of North Augusta, SC. North Augusta lies directly across the Savannah River from the city of Augusta, GA. The river constitutes most of the boundary between Georgia and South Carolina, and the Augusta metropolitan area is referred to as the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA), comprising counties in both states. The estimated 2017 population of the CSRA is 600,151 and has grown 6.2 percent since 2010.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the membership of Fairview has stagnated in size, even seeing a decline during the transition period between senior pastors.

That transition period has been stressful for the congregation, its staff, and its lay leadership. The previous senior pastor, Dr. Robert Fuller, departed in August of 2016 to

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<sup>1</sup> “Metropolitan and micropolitan statistical area population and estimated components of change: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, accessed October 15, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2017/demo/popest/total-metro-and-micro-statistical-areas.html>.

take a call to First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio. Dr. Fuller served at Fairview for over thirteen years, and his predecessor, Dr. Michael Andrews, had previously retired after twelve years. Relative to other small-town Presbyterian churches over the same time span, Fairview has had significant stability at the top level of leadership. This stability is also present in the staff as a whole, as the interim pastor has been at Fairview for fourteen years, the administrative assistant for twenty-two, and the finance director for thirty. Another ten-year associate pastor retired shortly before the transition period, and the longtime music director retired shortly after Dr. Fuller's departure.

The ensuing interim period lasted eighteen months, which is not atypical for a church like Fairview, but those eighteen months saw a change in denominational affiliation and three different interim pastors with drastically different leadership styles and personalities. The first was designated by Fairview's prior Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presbytery and took the position of interim pastor while Fairview was already planning to leave the denomination for ECO: A Covenant Order of Presbyterian Evangelicals (ECO). Given the dynamics of that situation, he had limited leadership capital. This led to conflict and difficulty between the interim pastor and the church staff, and his predilection toward presenting alternative theological views from the pulpit led to a general feeling he was chastising the congregation.

Once Fairview officially entered ECO, the congregation called a new transitional pastor. Shortly after arriving, however, he received a call to a permanent position at another ECO church. Nevertheless, he led the session and diaconate to change the structure and organization of committees and significantly altered the 9:00 AM contemporary service. Once Fairview found a third transitional pastor, the second left, having hired a congregation member to be the leader of the contemporary service.

The third transitional pastor subscribed to a different philosophy of interim ministry, adhering to a “stay the course” style of leadership and administration. He oversaw the hiring of a new music director and youth director at the end of 2017 and seemed to provide a steady non-anxious presence for the remainder of the transitional period. Nevertheless, the retirements, the changes in leadership, and the denominational switch created a short period of significant change in a congregation that had been accustomed to stability.<sup>2</sup>

These changes have taken their toll in the form of decreased attendance and membership departures. Again, this is not unusual during a pastoral transition, but Fairview had been an unusually stable congregation. Adding to the angst of transition, Fairview is still 1.9 million dollars in debt from a building campaign from 2006-2008. During the transition period, the congregation took on another 100,000 dollars of debt in order to address some longstanding capital improvement needs.

For a new senior pastor, these changes present a number of risks and a number of benefits. One risk is the pastor’s arrival could lead to the temptation of weary leaders and congregation members to relax and settle into comfortable patterns because of the presence of a long-term senior pastor. At Fairview, three of the elders whose terms ended in August 2018—each of whom are recognized as prominent leaders of the church—cited fatigue as a reason for taking at least a year off from committees and boards. Likewise, leaders in women’s ministries and missions have expressed the desire to step away after attempting to maintain momentum through the transitions.

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<sup>2</sup> These claims and comparisons of leadership styles are volunteered by staff, elders, and the administration and personnel committee in conversations about the pastoral transitions and their effects.

Another risk comes from the change in affiliation from PC(USA) to ECO. As is the case with many congregations that make a similar transition, the church expends a significant amount of energy on communications, extra meetings, and emotional discussions over the course of a few years about the direction of the congregation and the church at large. Congregations are prone to thinking that after a denominational transition is complete, their greatest challenge has been overcome. This is far from the case for any congregation but is especially a risk at Fairview because the congregation had reached a point of numerical stagnation even prior to the denominational discussion.

In fact, the capital campaign of 2006-2008, which resulted in the construction of a new fellowship hall/contemporary worship space, new offices, and a number of new classrooms, was undertaken with the expectation that the region's growth would aid in Fairview's own growth from a congregation of about 600 to a congregation of about 1,000. The expectation was the numerical growth would enable Fairview to easily repay the loan. Instead, the stagnant membership numbers and the 2008 economic recession resulted in continued debt. With such a debt burden, there is a risk of congregation members being apprehensive about adopting major initiatives and projects.

Nevertheless, there are some advantages to these difficulties. For example, the multiple changes in pastoral leadership and different styles of the transitional pastors present a blank slate regarding the staff's, session's, and congregation's expectations for the new senior pastor. Fairview has endured so many changes that the congregation exhibits a great openness to ideas and leadership and wants to be challenged and directed. There is an expectation of the new senior pastor to lead in a new way, rather than simply manage the church's traditions.

Additionally, ECO recognizes the tendencies of congregations to decelerate once they transition into a new denomination, and ECO leadership is intent on challenging congregations and providing new resources to help sustain energy and life in the church. Fairview's own leadership is receptive to these challenges and excited about new opportunities on ECO, even if leaders are weary from the transition period.

Finally, although the debt presents a difficult obstacle to Fairview's future, there is a consensus a capital campaign is necessary. Such a campaign has the ability to galvanize the congregation and compel members—ECO's term for church members is "covenant partners," but this project refers to "members" due to common parlance and smoother diction—to think of goals and ideas for future ministry. The debt also forces the church to take stock of priorities and avoid complacency regarding financial issues.

In the next one to three years, then, Fairview needs to conduct both a vision campaign and a capital campaign. Before those can take place, however, the new senior pastor must communicate some foundational concepts of his own theology that are thematic in his own leadership and vision. Having studied the missional church movement while pursuing a Master of Divinity degree and having participated on the board of Presbyterian Global Fellowship (PGF), which led the missional church conversation in the PC(USA) denomination from 2006-2013, I am well versed in missional theology. Through reading, relationships with other pastors, and Doctor of Ministry studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, I have also studied church leadership, church and culture, and the doctrine of common grace. In taking the call at Fairview and redesigning this project, then, I have seen the possibility for both missional theology and common grace to give energy and purpose to a congregation receptive to new leadership.

Therefore, the theological elements of the project remain the same as in the first submission for FPC Danville. The execution of the project has changed, however, to fit the needs of both the project leader and the Fairview congregation. Rather than select a small group based on seven years of experience with a congregation, the project focuses on teaching, preaching, and conversations in larger segments of the congregation.

This project consists of a two-part introduction to missional theology that communicates new theological concepts in the strategic few months following a pastoral transition. A Wednesday night teaching series in April and May of 2018 introduces six core aspects of missional theology to a group of twenty to thirty congregation members. Using class discussion and feedback from the participants, the project then presents a sermon series in September of 2018 communicating pertinent aspects of that theology to the congregation. The completed project and resulting feedback enable both clergy and lay leaders to have a theological foundation for navigating the coming years with a focus on joining Jesus's work in their lives together and in the CSRA.

The Wednesday lesson series consists of the same six topics to be used by the small group at FPC Danville, as they cover basics of missional theology and community engagement. Topic one is a two-part introduction to missional theology describing the current Western cultural milieu and the church's identity as missionaries in that context. Topic two offers an introduction to the doctrine of common grace encouraging participants to conceive of the Holy Spirit's work in the good aspects of their daily lives. Topic three presents a proposal for articulating the faith through relationships and the process of listening and asking questions. Topic four is a study on gifts and calling, incorporating workplace theology and encouraging participants to see the missional opportunities in their own personal contexts. Topic five provides a lesson and



conversation on community participation and the need for congregants to be participants in all aspects of the community. Topic six explores the nature of truth and faith, helping participants understand how to communicate with others in their daily lives. Each of these lessons include homework assignments designed to help the participants apply the information presented in the class. The lessons also include group conversations about the experiences and feedback on the relevance of the topics presented.

Because the Wednesday lessons involve only a small segment of the congregation and are not consistent in their attendance, feedback from the Wednesday lesson series informs the sermon series to be presented to the congregation at large. The project leader solicits this feedback in both the classes themselves and in subsequent conversations with class participants. Based on the feedback, the three-part sermon series begins with a message on workplace theology, coinciding with Labor Day Sunday and addressing the topics of gifts and calling. The second sermon addresses missional identity, articulating the nature of the church as being the sent people of Jesus Christ in the world. The third sermon introduces common grace, identifying God's goodness in all things as the connection point for seeing the Holy Spirit's work in the people and places in the church's local context. Following these sermons, the project leader conducts two surveys. The first is designed for the session to provide input on the relevance of and interest in pursuing these topics. The second survey polls congregation members on the relevance of the topics and the potential for applying them in their lives.

In addition to informing Fairview's eventual vision and capital campaigns, the results of the project and feedback serve to identify the need for future lessons and sermon series. Moreover, the project informs the project leader of the congregation's receptivity to these topics and comfort level in theologically engaging the community. As

Fairview moves forward, the project provides a foundation for continued work and growth for both the senior pastor and the congregation.

## CHAPTER 1: THE CSRA AND FAIRVIEW CHURCH

### **History: Entrepreneurship and Industry**

In a metropolitan area and region of the United States rich in history, the town of North Augusta and Fairview Presbyterian Church are quite new. North American natives have occupied the region for thousands of years, and European settlement began in 1685, yet North Augusta did not become an incorporated community until 1906.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the story and history of North Augusta and Fairview Presbyterian Church are tied to the greater history of the region.

North Augusta lies directly across the Savannah River from Augusta, Georgia. The city of Augusta was founded in 1735, but its position has been an important crossroads for many centuries. Due to its location on the fall line of the Savannah River, the area provides an ideal location for settlement and commerce.

Despite being 100 miles inland in a straight line and 200 miles inland on the Savannah River, the area is accessible by both land and water. Of the Southeastern United States' fall line cities, Augusta and Columbia, South Carolina, are the closest to

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<sup>1</sup> Historical information about Augusta and the CSRA in general comes from the Augusta Museum of History.

both the mountains and the coast, with Augusta being much more accessible from the west. As a result, the CSRA became an ideal place for indigenous people from the mountains and the rolling hills of the piedmont to rendezvous with traders from the coast.

Once European settlers arrived, Augusta became an outpost for trade into the western frontier. One of the most important trading routes led from the river northward into the foothills and mountains, tracing the river upstream. This route is now Martintown Road, which makes up the eastern border of Fairview's campus.

In 1730, trade between Native Americans and English settlers had become prosperous enough to warrant the building of a fort, Fort Moore, on the east (Carolina) side of the river. After Augusta was founded, however, the Carolina side of the river declined in population and development. Nevertheless, a number of communities sprang up to contribute to the trade of tobacco, cotton, and other goods at river crossings. Each time an enterprising settler established a trading post or ferry, the location attracted more people until another post was established and overtook it in popularity.

As Augusta continued to grow and colonists moved westward, the South Carolina side of the river became plantation and farm land. The city of Augusta remained an important river port and was occupied by the British for most of the American Revolution. American patriots, however, occupied much of the rural area on the South Carolina side, and present-day Martintown Road was the primary route of supply and correspondence between British forces in Augusta and the fort in Ninety-Six, South Carolina.<sup>2</sup> The Martin family, for whom the road is now named, had eight sons, all of

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<sup>2</sup> The Arts and Heritage Center of North Augusta, *North Augusta Remembers*, DVD, 2011.

whom fought on the American side while their wives, sisters, and daughters engaged in reconnaissance efforts against envoys traveling between the British outposts.<sup>3</sup>

Following the Revolution, Augusta remained an important military site while the South Carolina side of the river continued to grow in agricultural importance. One of the oldest plantation homes still stands less than a block from Fairview's campus and is still owned by descendants of the original Butler family. During the Civil War, Augusta was the home of the Confederate munitions plant, and the plant's chimney still stands. Following the war, Augusta diminished in prestige, as Atlanta grew in importance and overtook Savannah as the commercial hub of Georgia.

Toward the end of the Nineteenth and beginning of the Twentieth Centuries, the CSRA experienced a renaissance, as entrepreneurs identified it as an ideal winter retreat for wealthy members of the New England and Mid-Atlantic elite. Developers built massive resort hotels in Augusta and Aiken and capitalized on the newfound popularity of golf. One ambitious Augusta capitalist, James U. Jackson, identified the mostly undeveloped land across the river from downtown Augusta as the ideal place for a planned community and resort. Legend has it when he was a child, Jackson asked his father why no one had developed the South Carolina side of the river. His father's response was, "No one has ever had the vision, my son."<sup>4</sup> As an adult, Jackson saw his vision to fruition, accumulating capital, planning the city of North Augusta, and building

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<sup>3</sup> *History of North Augusta South Carolina* (North Augusta, SC: North Augusta Historical Society, 1980), 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Jeanne M. MacDaniel, *North Augusta: James U. Jackson's Dream* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2005), 9.

a massive hotel, the Hampton Terrace. Jackson and his brother also built two Greek Revival mansions, each now serving as bed-and-breakfasts in downtown North Augusta.

The Hampton Terrace burned in 1916 and was not rebuilt, but by then North Augusta had become a permanent community. Following World War II, the population of North Augusta boomed when the U.S. Department of Energy selected a massive tract of land in Aiken County as a site for a nuclear research, production, and containment facility. The Savannah River Site, or “the bomb plant” as it became known locally, has drawn thousands of scientists and engineers from across the country to the CSRA and to North Augusta in particular.

Meanwhile, on the Georgia side of the river, Augusta is known for The Masters golf tournament, which is its most identifying event and feature. Although access to Augusta National Golf Club is highly restricted, its presence and the prestige of The Masters give Augusta some amount of global recognition and high social credibility. Additionally, The Medical College of Georgia—now Augusta University—and three other large hospitals create another worldwide draw to Augusta. The U.S. Army’s Fort Gordon in Columbia County and its newly developed Cyber Command in downtown Augusta also draw a broad range of people to the CSRA. As such, for an area potentially dismissed as a Deep South or Bible Belt city, Augusta is home to people who have come from all over the country and the world.

In the midst of the CSRA’s Twentieth Century growth, First Presbyterian Church of Augusta planted a small worshiping community in North Augusta in 1946. In 1961, Fairview received a donation of land from two sisters and moved from a downtown storefront to the current location between the main arteries of Carolina Avenue and Martintown Road, on the former grounds of the Hampton Terrace Hotel. Due to the

timing of Fairview's establishment and growth, Fairview has always been a church home to people from across the country and not simply from the local area. Like most mainline or established churches, Fairview reached a membership peak in the 1960's and 1970's but has only seen gradual decline without sharp drops due to periods of conflict or organizational strife.

Today, Fairview is most recognized in the community for its Early Childhood Center (ECC), which has an excellent reputation for preparing children for elementary school. The ECC has a waiting list in excess of a year, and a larger budget than the church. While its facilities are not as new or as modern as other churches' day schools, its quality of teaching makes it most desirable. In recent years, the congregation's sense of connection with the ECC has waned, but the church leadership is working to strengthen that bond, as the school provides an important outreach opportunity and ministry connection to the community.

### **Fairview Presbyterian Church Today**

At first glance, Fairview's demographics present nothing unusual for the size of the congregation and nature and size of the North Augusta community. The congregation is almost completely Caucasian, and the median age of congregation members appears to be in the middle of the Baby Boomer generation. There are, however, some demographic and socioeconomic items of note.

A statistical profile of the congregation reveals that the members listed as "active" in the church database are younger than a visual survey of the congregation on an average Sunday or Wednesday suggests. The following are the age distribution percentages of Fairview's 572 total "active" members, regular visitors, and children: 17 and under: 26.2

percent, 18-24: 16.4 percent, 25-39: 2.4 percent, 40-59: 16.7 percent, 60-79: 12.7 percent, and 80+: 15.6 percent. From the accounts of younger people in the church, the transition period between senior pastors was especially difficult for those who had not been connected to the congregation for more than a few years, most of whom were in their thirties and forties. Members of the pastoral search committee refer to some of the young people whose attendance became sporadic during the transition as “Friends of Bob,” who had begun attending Fairview during the previous senior pastor’s tenure. Unlike the older generations, those members had not developed longstanding connections that lasted through prior transitions. The presence of other strong churches in North Augusta with more resources than Fairview helped ease those members’ decisions to depart amidst the discomfort of transition.

Major employers in the congregation are the Savannah River Site, the local hospitals, Augusta University, Kimberley-Clark, International Paper, and the local school systems. Each of these industries attracts people with expertise in sciences, technology, and engineering, and those characteristics are common in the congregation. Along with these highly educated positions, Fairview also possesses a significant amount of socioeconomic diversity for a Presbyterian congregation its size. Although Presbyterians have a reputation for being highly educated and upper middle class, it is not uncommon in the Southeast (or Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio) to find rural and blue-collar Presbyterian churches. In many cases over the course of the Twentieth Century, a small town’s industry leaders would have been active in a “First” Presbyterian Church or a Presbyterian church in an affluent neighborhood or suburb, and those older congregations would have planted smaller churches in less affluent neighborhoods and outlying areas around the town. Lower socioeconomic classes would have gravitated to those churches,



creating disparity between the “white-collar” and “blue-collar” churches. Over time, the newer congregations identify themselves less by shared theology and more by socioeconomic status <sup>5</sup>

Fairview, meanwhile, is the only Reformed congregation in North Augusta, so the socioeconomic discrepancy present among many small-town Presbyterian communities is not a factor. Additionally, because Fairview itself is a post-World War II church plant, it does not have the institutional and generational history of older affluent churches. Thus, local Presbyterians of all socioeconomic levels attend Fairview. Many members are employed in trades, manual labor, and public service. A truck driver and a plumber are among the most active adult volunteers to the youth groups, while an electrician is the leader of the fellowship team, a lead usher owns a tree service, and a golf course groundskeeper is an elder and the vice chair of the ECC board.

The neighborhood immediately surrounding Fairview’s campus is a mix of residential and commercial zones and reflects the stages of North Augusta’s growth. Some of the homes are Antebellum, Victorian, and early Twentieth Century Greek Revival and Four Square, but most are modest Mid-Century ranch homes with large yards and tall trees. When these ranch houses were built, they reflected the suburban affluence of the SRS work force. Today, their neighborhoods are mostly retirement and

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<sup>5</sup> This assertion is the product of years of observation and experience, particularly at First Presbyterian Church of Lenoir, NC and First Presbyterian Church of Danville, VA. The now-defunct or nearly-defunct industries in those towns are furniture and textiles, respectively, but the process of Presbyterian socioeconomic division described is evident in other towns in those churches’ presbyteries. This church planting strategy was also common in larger cities such as Atlanta, Charlotte, and Augusta at the time, but as those cities grew, the economic disparities between the newer and older churches decreased. In fact, most of the largest and wealthiest PC(USA) and ECO congregations are not “First” churches but are church plants whose neighborhoods and suburbs grew around them in the latter half of the Twentieth Century, following the sociological trend of suburban and exurban flight.

middle class, with the late Twentieth Century affluent neighborhoods of larger homes and smaller lawns built in subdivisions farther from the center of town.

The commercial areas around Fairview also reflect different eras of development. Downtown North Augusta has five central blocks of small businesses, shops, and restaurants, mostly of mid- to late-Twentieth Century construction. Aside from the two Jackson mansions, First Baptist Church, and Grace United Methodist Church, the two most prominent downtown features are the Municipal Building, a palatial brick structure that houses the city offices, and SRP Park, home of the Minor League Baseball Augusta GreenJackets and the center of a new urban development project. The latter is poised to play an important role in the future of North Augusta, and as the Fairview leadership hopes, the future of the church.

SRP Park opened in 2018, although some of its features are still under construction. In the stadium complex, developers are building multi-use structures to house condominiums, retail stores, restaurants, and a hotel. Along with the River Golf Club, the upscale and multi-zoned Hammond's Ferry residential development, and the newly renovated Riverview Park Activities Center, the North Augusta riverfront is home to four adjacent features of new residential, entertainment, recreational, and retail space.

Meanwhile, Downtown Augusta is experiencing a renaissance led by private development and strategic planning. The redevelopment of downtown Augusta has been hindered, however, by the combined governance structure of Augusta and Richmond County. For example, when the GreenJackets were in search of a new stadium location, the city and county factions of the Augusta-Richmond County Commission could not agree on a location or a timetable. True to their city's enterprising origins, North Augusta's leadership saw an opportunity and quickly expressed interest, and the

“Augusta” GreenJackets are no longer in Augusta. This story is a recent example in a larger narrative of North Augusta’s civic leadership capitalizing on Augusta’s tensions.<sup>6</sup>

Fairview’s role in this growth is yet to be determined, as much of the planning and fruition of the projects occurred during the pastoral transition or is yet to come. Many members embrace the new developments in their leisure time habits, so there is definite interest and excitement. While an upcoming Fairview vision campaign anticipates helping the leadership determine how to strategically engage the changing landscape of North Augusta, the themes of this project provide a theological foundation for doing so.

In addition to a vision campaign, Fairview is due to conduct another capital campaign. Fairview has a significant amount of debt from the capital campaign of 2006-2008, and debt servicing occupies 168,000 dollars per year, or twenty-one percent of the budget. The original plan for the campaign was to follow the initial building campaign with a debt reduction campaign two years later, but denominational issues raised concerns over property ownership and the projected growth of the congregation did not materialize. While it is remarkable that the congregation can provide 168,000 dollars in excess of its operating expenses and benevolences, the debt burden keeps missions support and staff support at a minimum.

Regarding staff, the previous senior pastor, Bob Fuller, arrived in 2003. In 2004, the congregation called the current associate pastor, Masaki Chiba. Soon thereafter, Fairview hired a retired pastor named Dan McCall to serve as a part time associate for congregational care. Dr. McCall retired again in 2016. From 2008 to 2012, Fairview also had a full-time associate for youth and children’s ministry, Carter Robinson. So, for a

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<sup>6</sup> Multiple sources within the Fairview congregation who have been involved in city leadership, real estate, and the financing of the stadium present this narrative.

decade, Fairview had at least three—and for a period, four—ordained pastors. Today, there are only two full time pastors: Associate Pastor Chiba and Senior Pastor Thompson. The greatest vacuum in pastoral presence has been in the area of congregational care, which Dr. McCall planned and executed almost exclusively.

While missions disbursement is lower than Fairview has historically given, the congregation still supports several global missionaries and contributes to three major local organizations that deal with a breadth of community needs and issues. Additionally, led by Rev. Chiba, Fairview is active in outreach to the local international population. The church hosts English as a Second Language classes on campus at the same time as Wednesday evening dinners and lessons and has a strong presence in the non-religious organization International Link, which provides resources and community for immigrants and expatriates of all backgrounds.

### **Cultural Influences**

North Augusta is a politically conservative community and South Carolina is a politically conservative state, and those sentiments are hegemonic at Fairview. While the pastors share many of the same views—at least philosophically—they and the congregation each experienced exhaustion with the prioritization of political advocacy in their previous denomination, the PC(USA). As such, politics may be a topic in informal conversations, but rarely, if ever, do politics enter discussions about the church's work.

There is some racial diversity in the broader community of North Augusta, but little in Fairview. North Augusta is seventy-six percent White, twenty percent Black or

African-American, five percent Hispanic or Latino, and less than one percent Asian.<sup>7</sup> The city of Augusta, meanwhile, is fifty-six percent Black or African American, thirty-eight percent white, five percent Hispanic or Latino, and two percent Asian.<sup>8</sup> In eight months at Fairview, I have encountered very little race-related commentary among congregation members aside from the acknowledgment of the populations helped by local ministry partners. While this does not indicate an absence of racial tension, it may suggest that tension has not been recently inflamed by any particular events or issues. There are certainly many race-related issues that should be in Fairview’s consideration of its ministry, and some of those issues may be revealed during the course of this project. In church participation, Fairview has only two regular attenders who are Black or African-American—one of whom is Caribbean—and a few families with Asian backgrounds.

### **Leisure**

Because common grace is a central theological focus of this project, congregation members’ interests in leisure pursuits are relevant to the project’s interests. While the relocation of the GreenJackets to North Augusta is a source of excitement, college football is the dominant sports interest, with Clemson University and The University of South Carolina being the two most popular teams in North Augusta. Across the state border, The University of Georgia is most popular. With Clemson and Georgia

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<sup>7</sup> “QuickFacts: North Augusta city, South Carolina,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, accessed October 15, 2018, [www.census.gov/quickfacts/northaugustacitysouthcarolina](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/northaugustacitysouthcarolina).

<sup>8</sup> “Augusta-Richmond County (balance), Georgia,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, accessed October 15, 2018. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/augustarichmondcountybalancegeorgia,US/PST045217>.

perennially being among the top five teams in the nation, local establishments capitalize on the sport's popularity with special deals and events.

The area along the Savannah River is among the best in the world for bird hunting, and nearby Waynesboro, Georgia is known as the “bird dog capital of the world.” Hunting and fishing are popular pursuits, and many congregation members have rustic cabins in sparsely populated areas in adjacent counties. Fairview leases a tract on a nearby lake operated by the Army Corps of Engineers, and this land hosts an annual July cookout, family outings, and youth events.

While Augusta National Golf Club may be the most famous golf course in the world, the CSRA has been a popular golf destination since the vacation heyday of the early Twentieth Century. Two major golf cart manufacturers, EZ Go and Club Car, are headquartered in Augusta, and patrons at The Masters often book rounds of golf at other courses as part of their visits. Many Fairview members rent their houses to Masters patrons each year for thousands of dollars. Next to The Masters, the second most famous sporting event in the CSRA occurs in July of each year at North Augusta's Riverview Activities Park. The Nike EYBL Peach Jam is college basketball's premier annual recruiting event, and it draws every top coach and many professional basketball players and personalities to the area.

The CSRA is located within two hours' drive of beaches and mountains and is within that distance of a number of recreational lakes. The city of North Augusta itself was designed to protect green space around each creek and ravine, and the Greenway—named for a former Mayor Greene—is a prized feature of the community. Most neighborhoods in town have Greenway access, and many neighborhoods have parks or

pools. With short and mild winters, the people of North Augusta and of Fairview align with the city's founding as a place of recreation and outdoor pursuits.

### **Stated Vision and Possibilities**

Fairview has the following Mission Statement:

At the beginning of this present age, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, gave His people, the church, both a Great Commandment and a Great Commission. In the first, He commands us to respond to His love for us by loving each other in a way that is in itself a witness to the world. In the second, He calls us to let that love overflow the bounds of the church, reaching out to all the world. We are to seek to enlarge His church, leading others to faith in Him and then nurturing them to maturity. In Fairview, we see this as the mission not just of the organization, or its committees, but as the corporate and individual mission of all of our members – to love one another, building one another up, encouraging one another and enlarging this circle of love as we meet the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of those people He puts in our path.<sup>9</sup>

While this statement is substantial and addresses goals and some aspect of the congregation's vision, it is not a statement that congregation members rehearse or adhere to in making decisions in committees or boards. It is theologically adequate, but at 159 words is difficult to memorize and include on letterhead, communications, and other written materials. The only members who refer to it are those who were on the committee that produced it.

This is not to say that the congregation does not have vision—lay leaders are ambitious and eager to work toward these ends and the statement does reflect the underlying intentions of the church—rather that there is little conscious adherence to the statement. Although this project does not directly address the need for Fairview to

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<sup>9</sup> "Mission Statement," *Fairview Presbyterian Church*, accessed October 13, 2018, <http://www.fairviewpreschurch.org/mission-statement>.

develop a more succinct statement, the material in this project will inform the crafting of a new statement that is both succinct and faithful to the goals of the statement.<sup>10</sup>

As indicated in the introduction, the varying styles of the interim pastors and the entrance into a new denomination have left the Fairview's leadership in a position of uncertainty with regard to decision-making and direction. The second interim pastor led a restructuring of the committees that changed their names to "ministry teams" and divided them between the session and the diaconate. These changes have led to confusion and disorientation among longtime leaders who seem unsure how to execute the duties of their committees. FPC Danville led a similar restructuring—an effort that was successful in developing new leaders, strengthening ties among the membership, and empowering the diaconate and its committees—but it took a full three-year cycle of officer terms to establish comfort with the new system among the lay leadership.

While the reorganization provides benefits such as leadership succession and streamlined communication, the wave of structural changes has created significant angst and has occupied a great amount of energy in the boards and staff. Meanwhile, a significant amount of administrative leadership time must be devoted to learning both the operations of the new congregation and how they differ from practices of only one or two years prior. An advantage of this is an opportunity to provide direction and opinions without challenging long-established norms, but a disadvantage is a high frequency of questions soliciting senior pastor input on non-essential matters ranging from the arrangement of tables for Wednesday suppers to the placement of donation boxes for Eagle Scout projects.

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<sup>10</sup> Direction for this process comes in part from the Fuller Doctor of Ministry class, *Visionary Leadership for the Church*, taught by Will Mancini and Richard Kannwischer.



For the congregation, expending a great amount of energy on structural changes results in precious little focus on necessary adaptive changes. This project, then, presents the opportunity to communicate some core theological motivations and focus on building the missional church lexicon through the natural senior leadership opportunities of preaching and teaching. Because ECO emphasizes adaptive changes rather than structural changes, the denomination has been an ally in communicating these needs.

The Fairview congregation is excited about the new denomination and eager to follow its emphases and interests. While one of the risks identified above is the possibility of complacency upon entering the denomination, this project communicates theological emphases that affirm and excite congregation members for God's work in places and pursuits that they already enjoy. If any theological doctrines are capable of affirming existing pursuits while yielding excitement from the mundane or rote aspects of life, then those doctrines are missional theology, workplace theology, and common grace.

PART TWO  
MINISTRY REFLECTION

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, by Lesslie Newbigin**

Lesslie Newbigin's magnum opus is also the seminal work for much of the missional church literature that has arisen since the 1990's. While Newbigin is not the only early author to address the church's role amidst the cultural changes in the late modern West, his missionary and cross-cultural backgrounds enable him to write with experience and clarity about Western cultural assumptions. In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Newbigin makes the case that in a pluralist culture, the church must hold fast to the gospel as public truth rather than private belief and must be in cross-cultural communication with other churches to avoid cultural accommodation and co-option.

In clarifying much of what the Western church has struggled with in recent decades, Newbigin draws heavily from the philosophy of Michael Polanyi, who upholds the validity of truth claims even as postmodern philosophy began to find them passé.<sup>1</sup> Informed by decades as a missionary in India with its genial system of polytheism, Newbigin returned to the West and saw similarities in its cultural acceptance of

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<sup>1</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 9-10, Kindle.

pluralism. Seeing that the church is comfortably sliding into acceptance of a public-private division of belief and practice, he impresses upon Christians the need to preserve the imperatively evangelistic nature of truth.<sup>2</sup>

While Newbigin's emphasis on global cultures is merely tangentially relevant to this project, the same concept of cross-cultural engagement can be applied to the micro expressions of cultures that occur in a local setting.<sup>3</sup> The project participants inhabit the local cultures of business, education, civic service, etc., and can provide varying perspectives on God's work in their own weekday worlds. Additionally, they interact with the creative and restorative cultures that are present in North Augusta's growth and Augusta's revitalization efforts, as well as with the culture of marginalization through gentrification that may be developing as a result. In reflecting on these interactions, participants are compelled to consider the church's call to participate in the city.

Meanwhile, Newbigin challenges the participants to engage the city with confidence in their faith. While the project addresses only select passages from the book, one is Chapter 18, "The Congregation as Hermeneutic of the Gospel," the thesis of which is eponymous. The participants come to understand themselves as those through whom

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Newbigin's cross-cultural emphasis is tangentially relevant because Fairview's associate pastor, Masaki Chiba, is a native of Japan and became a Christian during college in the United States. Rev. Chiba is directly involved in local English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and serves on the board of International Link, a fellowship of global immigrants to the CSRA. Due to Augusta's status as a hub for medical education and nuclear and chemical research, as well as the presence of industrial employers such as Firestone and Kimberly-Clark, the local immigrant population is economically diverse. Thus, while it is not the explicit goal of this project to study and develop cross-cultural ministry opportunities, those opportunities are part of the gifts and mission field that the project leads the Fairview to discern.

Jesus is at work to reach others and to communicate the Holy Spirit's presence in the local community.<sup>4</sup>

As a whole, much of Newbigin's work in this particular book may be a bit heavy for a class of laypeople who are studying a number of other resources. Newbigin has produced some more accessible works, but *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* is comprehensive and provides the opportunity to pick and choose major points for consideration. Notably, Newbigin's theology of the congregation is important, and participants cannot ignore his assertion that "The only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."<sup>5</sup> Given this and other revolutionary ideas about the role of truth, community, and confidence in faith, this book's benefits are seen more in the discussion periods and interpretations of local experiences than in the group's ability to analyze the book itself.

### ***Exiles*, by Michael Frost**

The next step in missional theology is the recognition of the post-Christendom experience. Whereas Newbigin writes to the post-Christendom church, he is concerned with laying the theological foundation for proclaiming the gospel in such a context and does not devote much attention to its existential realities. While the concept of Western Christians living an alien or exilic existence is been addressed by numerous authors who preceded Michael Frost, notably Stanley Hauerwas as early as the 1980s, *Exiles* is more

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<sup>4</sup> The participants also encounter Newbigin's *Proper Confidence and Truth to Tell* as recommended reading.

<sup>5</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

informed by aspects of globalism and technology that are not merely speculative but have come to pass and are familiar to the project participants.<sup>6</sup>

Frost also stands in contrast to some contemporary thought leaders who promote a form of contemplative, introspective, and community-building withdrawal from cultural engagement, which resembles the emphases of more conservative Christian groups that are numerous in the CSRA.<sup>7</sup> While Frost's emphasis on global factors such as persecution and economic welfare might have limited resonance with this particular project, they do serve to remind participants that community restoration is about more than art galleries, restaurants, and parks. The awakening of an exilic church to the needs of the world in *Exiles* parallels Fairview's own need to notice injustice in city, not simply through the work of local missions organizations, but through personal community engagement.<sup>8</sup>

At the heart of the book, Frost encourages his readers to embrace exile, not merely as the present condition into which God has called the church, but perhaps as the necessary location for God's formation of the church's identity.<sup>9</sup> He also makes the case

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<sup>6</sup> Even prior to Hauerwas, movements of "Street Christians" in the 1960's and 1970's recognized this exilic reality. While there may be some members of Fairview who recall that movement, the conservative and bookish nature of the congregation suggests more formal and Christendom-related upbringings.

<sup>7</sup> A popular concept in contemporary church-culture discussions is the "Benedict Option," advanced by Rod Dreher of *The American Conservative*, among others. While not a complete "withdrawal" from culture, the Benedict Option concedes much ground to the prevailing culture. In Fairview's context, however, the marginalization of the church is not so great that the Benedict Option would seem reasonable to Reformed, civic-minded Presbyterians.

<sup>8</sup> Again, with the goal of the project being the articulation of missional theology and the identification of the congregation's mission field, the applicability of these works may be broad.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 10, Kindle.

that Christians must embrace exile because the church is not returning to Christendom, saying, “We have been building churches for an era that has slipped out from under us.”<sup>10</sup> For the sake of this project, Frost’s emphases on responsibility and real experiences are especially helpful in giving group members a sense of responsibility for participating in the world around them.<sup>11</sup> Another, perhaps ironic, benefit of Frost’s work for Fairview is that his encouragement to embrace exile stands as a stark contrast from other churches in Fairview’s immediate area that promote forceful engagement with the community.<sup>12</sup>

One of Frost’s greatest assets as a thinker—and one that has garnered him wide appeal in the United States—is his critical distance. As an Australian, Frost understands Western tendencies but is able to point out particularities within the American church context that Americans might not notice. Still, he is unaware of some aspects of American culture that are important to consider for the local theologian.<sup>13</sup> Frost’s style does not always translate easily, and some longtime congregation members and dedicated servants of the church may bristle at the suggestion that they are not doing enough to serve others or not being the church in the right way. Still, the Fairview congregation appears to appreciate the challenge that *Exiles* presents, as the angst from transition and membership loss create a sense of urgency for new ideas and practices, as well as

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 84-92.

<sup>12</sup> For example, one large local church is known for encouraging people to enter Starbucks and confront baristas about salvation.

<sup>13</sup> Frost is subtler in his assertions and softer in his critiques than some other missional church authors, but he is still prone to cultural generalizations that must be parsed out by the leader who wishes to share his work with a congregation.

openness to constructive criticism. This congregational receptivity offers fertile ground for such a book.<sup>14</sup>

***After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*, by N.T. Wright**

The appeal of Wright's *After You Believe* is that it leads the reader into the questions and thoughts that new Christians might (or should) encounter upon applying their newfound faith to their lives in the world around them. For longtime believers, it speaks to challenges that they might never consider, but with which they are faced on a daily basis. Wright presents *After You Believe* as a companion to two earlier books, *Simply Christian* and *Surprised by Hope*, a reflection on Christian ethics.

Specifically, Wright is concerned with the cultivation of virtue as a response to faith. Because this project encourages many longtime believers who have lived a primarily Christendom experience to seek contact with people who may not share their faith or their experience, Wright's work helps participants to better understand the life of a new believer. Additionally, *After You Believe* helps participants to connect faith and work in a way that addresses not simply a need to do new things, which is a motivation of much missional literature, but also a need to be disciples, whereby believers develop new postures and perspectives toward the world based on Christian virtue.

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<sup>14</sup> A common first response to missional theology from people who have long been active in congregations and who have been involved in missions is that they already know that their life is supposed to be one of service. Such people take the missional imperative personally, but they are often so active in a church that they are unable to see the ways that a congregation as a whole might itself be inwardly or non-missionally oriented. While there is a personal element to missional church theology, the focus and posture of the local congregation herself is the primary focus of concentration for most missional authors. In *Exiles*, Frost's goal is to help people understand their context for the sake of their congregation, not simply for their personal lives of service and piety.



In particular, chapter seven, “Virtue in Action: The Royal Priesthood,” is especially helpful in connecting the traditional expectations of church participation to the missional aspects that Christians should seek and practice. Wright asserts:

Worship and mission are conjoined twins. They share a heart: the heart that loves God the triune creator and that loves, for his sake, the world he made and (particularly) the creatures that bear his image. This is the heart that can be trained in the practice of virtue. The frustrating thing, when you recognize this, is to realize how many people regularly attend the training ground but do not take part in the training itself...<sup>15</sup>

While this project celebrates the doctrine of common grace (see *He Shines in All that's Fair* below), it is important to remember that followers of Jesus do not celebrate good things simply for the sake of them being good. Rather, they consider good in terms of the virtue that it might reveal and inspire.

Most of the participants in this project are not new believers, and there are some redundancies between Wright's work and others on this list. A book on ethics can also skew the conversations and reflections of the group toward personal behavior rather than community engagement. Still, Wright never strays far from Scripture and provides a good understanding of the proper conduct and character of the believer.

### ***Center Church, by Timothy Keller***

While *Center Church* is an extensive work that covers many aspects of church life, it raises particular points about the church's perspectives on and relationship with her surrounding community that are helpful in this project. In many ways, the book is intended to be a reference, and as such it is somewhat difficult to identify a central theme. That said, Keller's emphasis is on the responsibility of the congregation to understand,

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<sup>15</sup> N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 220, Kindle.

engage with, and minister to her immediate context. The church's priorities should be knowing, dwelling in, and loving the neighborhood or city in which she is located. While each church must be centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ, she must also be the church for her neighborhood and city.

Amidst the breadth of *Center Church*, Keller provides a theological backbone for establishing gospel-centered ministry in any context. This is a helpful reminder that Christians' first call, regardless of context, is to evangelize and make disciples of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> Combined with Newbigin, Frost, and Wright, *Center Church* provides the language and tools for seeing the church as the sent people of Jesus in a particular time and place.

Keller and his team of thinkers and writers focus on New York and other "great cities," and their cultural observations and examples are much more suited to post-Christendom urban life.<sup>17</sup> On the surface, North Augusta appears to still be a culturally Christendom-style, Bible Belt city. As mentioned above, however, both North Augusta and the CSRA are remarkably eclectic for a medium-sized Southern metropolitan area. With local mainline congregations drawn toward socioeconomic discrepancies and social justice issues and local evangelical and Baptist congregations encouraging either withdrawal or confrontation with culture, Fairview is the only significantly large Reformed congregation in the CSRA that can be considered both evangelical and

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), chap. 20, sec. 3, Kindle.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 13, sec. 1.

egalitarian and would benefit from Keller's Reformed perspective, although Keller himself is not egalitarian.

That said, Keller points out that a truly evangelistic church looks like many different traditions depending on the perspective she has on her context.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis, then, is that the church herself must also figure out how to best be the church in her context. The scope of Keller's book goes beyond what the participants in this project are able to undertake, but the initial participants resonate with some of Keller's assertions because they have experienced the post-Christendom reality via their experiences in education, business, and travel.

### ***He Shines in All that's Fair*, by Richard Mouw**

This project heavily relies on the doctrine of common grace, to which Mouw has dedicated much of his literary work. While there are many resources available on the practice of seeking and noticing God's presence, the goal of the project is to provide a theological framework for engaging the community, and not simply to provide spiritual growth resources for the participants. As such, an introductory work on common grace such as *He Shines in All that's Fair* is appropriate.

Mouw devotes much ink to establishing and defending common grace as a doctrine, as well as to considering it in terms of God's work through those who may not be believers. While this project encourages people within the church to recognize God's work through those who are not in the church, it also takes a broader view of common grace that includes God's handiwork revealed beyond simply the elect and the presumably non-elect. This project also features creation- and creativity- based

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., chap. 3, sec. 1.

experiences, and Mouw’s work provides talking points for thinking theologically about such things. Essentially, the theme of the book as it pertains to this project is that “God himself continues to cherish that which he has created.”<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, Mouw presents some differing opinions not only on common grace, but also on Christian cultural engagement, and makes his case for active engagement informed by common grace. This resonates with many church leaders, who love the community and are already active in it. While leaders may not be the majority of the congregation, they are the ones whom this project is most likely to equip, with the hope that they proceed to equip others. Cultural withdrawal makes little sense to them because they are already involved in the good of the community. While their experience is not quite one of questioning whether God could work through the reprobate, as Mouw discusses, they see restoration taking place in the city and they cannot imagine God *not* being involved in it.

Additionally, it is advantageous for the project participants to learn about common grace alongside missional theology so that they can ponder the possibility of common grace being an entry point for evangelism. The goal is to take an inductive, rather than deductive, approach to common grace by entering the community with the assumption that God is at work and participants have the opportunity to point that out, celebrate it, and help people recognize it. The creatives and city leaders who are on the community side—rather than the church side—of the homework assignments and

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All that’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), chap. 6, sec. 8, Kindle.

community experiences understand that the participants are looking for God’s work, opening the door to conversation.<sup>20</sup>

The shortcoming of *He Shines in All that’s Fair*—and of many works on common grace—is that there is much more energy spent on establishing common grace as a doctrine than on contemplating the ways that it is manifest in everyday life. There is some benefit to this, as it compels the reader to enter his or her own context without rigid expectations of how the Holy Spirit is at work. Still, a group of laypeople is much less concerned about the infralapsarian-supralapsarian debate than with a local chef’s God-given ability to make Brussels sprouts palatable.

### ***To Change the World*, by James Davison Hunter**

While Hunter’s book is substantial and requires much effort for even theologically educated clergy to digest, it cannot be ignored by a project that seeks to equip Christian lay leaders to engage and influence the culture around them. Even though it is not the most accessible work in this list, its points are cogent and necessary for consideration. While the project participants do not need to study the book as a whole, certain passages and themes are important for class discussions and experiences.

Like Hunter’s previous book, *Culture Wars*, *To Change the World* is not a presentation of new and experimental philosophical material, but a learned response to trends in the interaction between church and culture. Hunter addresses the very desire of

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<sup>20</sup> Understanding the doctrine of common grace is necessary for this particular project, and I have hoped to present this doctrine on a group of people interested in exploring its richness in their own context. Moreover, I have wondered about the evangelistic capabilities of common grace. While Kuyper recovers it as a doctrine in a time of deduction-oriented modernism, Christians now live in a spiritually hungry world that may appreciate the inductive habits of assuming God is at work and identifying the Holy Spirit’s activity and presence through experience.

Christians to “change the world” and the difficulties associated with such an ambitious endeavor. He argues that in most cases, resources dedicated by Christians toward changing the world are at best misplaced, and at worst naïve, due to mistaken idealism.<sup>21</sup> As such, Hunter provides a foil for much of what church people might expect to be necessary for influencing the larger culture.

Critiquing worldviews and cultural changes that have emerged in different strains of late modern Christianity, Hunter breaks down many Christian traditions’ assumptions not only about how the church can change the world, but also about whether it is possible to do so. Ultimately, Hunter places responsibility for change in the hands of “elites,” who are able to have influence and change images and perceptions at the highest levels of culture. Through elites who are able to faithfully navigate the cultures around them, some change is possible to achieve.

While it may seem that Hunter sets the bar extraordinarily high for cultural change, he does assert that “When networks of elites in overlapping fields of culture and overlapping spheres of social life come together with their varied resources and act in common purpose, cultures do change and change profoundly.”<sup>22</sup> This project is not designed specifically for elites in the community, but Fairview members do have a broad range of community participation and impact. While the project is primarily directed toward the congregation’s theological understanding, it also helps missionally-minded leaders to have an impact on their community.

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<sup>21</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford UP, 2010), 18, Kindle.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

### ***Culture Making, by Andy Crouch***

As an excellent companion and an occasional foil to Hunter, Crouch presents an accessible and provocative explanation of what culture is and how followers of Jesus are called to be not only participants and consumers of culture, but also producers of it. In fact, it is the production of good and constructive culture, rather than the criticism of or resistance to bad and destructive culture, whereby the church may be able to gain a hearing in the world and begin to demonstrate what Christians are for rather than what they are against. By producing culture, Christians—or any group, as Crouch argues—present people with the ability to evaluate and choose their cultural preferences.<sup>23</sup>

Following Crouch’s emphases, this project compels participants to delve into the creative aspects of the CSRA, including art, dining, and community revitalization. The members who participate in the study relate to this book because many of them are culture makers in their own rights, as God has gifted them in their own mission fields. Thus, in studying Crouch, the participants are edified in their own work and encouraged to think about the cultures that they choose as members of the community. Additionally, Crouch is very accessible to laypeople and his illustration of rivers to demonstrate the changes in culture over time resonates well in a town that refers to itself as “South Carolina’s Riverfront.”<sup>24</sup>

Through Crouch’s encouragement, *Culture Making* motivates leaders and congregations to find ways to advance new ideas and create products and programs in the church. A concern is that in staid environments such as churches, in which it is difficult

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<sup>23</sup> Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), chap. 4, sec. 1, Kindle.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 1, sec. 7.

to introduce the most minor of incremental changes, culture makers risk trying to move so fast that their ideas and efforts are hardly noticed. Congregation members' identities can be so grounded in the things they have done and the ways they have related for years that the presentation of something new is often assumed to be for someone other than themselves—some mythical new people who are less ensconced in the established routines of the church.

*Culture Making* presents a challenge in this project because it can be very invigorating for some readers, but it can leave others resigned that they have missed their opportunities to produce culture. Crouch makes the point that “If we seek to change culture, we will have to create something new, something that will persuade our neighbors to set aside some existing set of cultural goods for our new proposal.”<sup>25</sup> This means setting aside comfort zones and getting to work. If those were easy things to do, then the church would be doing them.

So, while Crouch's book is exciting, it also presents difficulty. A church often has a static inner culture that continues to preserve and replicate what was done in one or two specific generations. The concept of doing something new is difficult for most churches, but Fairview has shown the willingness to take a step as drastic as transferring denominations. By engaging with the changes in their own community, participants may be inspired to pursue the creative abilities that God has given them.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., chap. 4, sec. 1.



### CHAPTER 3: MISSIONAL THEOLOGY, WORK, AND COMMON GRACE

The first months of a pastor's tenure are an opportune time to introduce theological concepts that are central to that pastor's understanding of the life of the church. It is also a time in which the pastor and congregation begin to form their identity together. That identity must be rooted in Scripture and in the identity given to the church universal.

Although missional theology is not uniquely Reformed, many of its progenitors are among the Reformed tradition's most influential voices on topics of church and culture in recent decades. Missional church proponents can trace their work to the missiology of Karl Barth, whose dialectical theology provided Reformed theology with a response to the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the early 1900's. Although this project does not make direct use of Barth, his influence is critical for a present-day Reformed understanding of Christ-centered missiology.

Following Barth, Reformed theologians such as David Bosch and Lesslie Newbigin reflect on the church's call to mission in a rapidly changing world. Their work provides a foundation for Reformed scholars Darrell Guder, George Hunsberger, and Craig van Gelder, three of the six members of the Gospel and Our Culture Network who produced the 1998 work, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in*

*North America*.<sup>1</sup> In the same era, there were theologians who may not be classified as missiologists, but who saw the opportunity to ponder the church's role in Western culture in the mid to late Twentieth Century. One of the most notable of these theologians was H. Richard Niebuhr, whose classic work *Christ and Culture* provides a taxonomy for different Christian traditions' interaction with the world around them.<sup>2</sup>

Given this project's focus on equipping the Fairview congregation for contemporary engagement of culture, the lessons and sermons focus on more current authors. Still, it is important to understand the development of these theological themes over time, even if some of the origins may be misattributed. For example, while Barth often receives credit for laying the foundations of missional theology, there is some debate about his intent in doing so. In much of the mid-Twentieth Century's work on missiology, Barth is credited with the genesis of "missio Dei" theology, which began to identify God as a "God of mission(s)," thus laying the groundwork for the eventual missional church movement. Barth, however, never actually uses that term or even alludes to it.<sup>3</sup>

The truth may be that Barth locates mission in the identity of God by default, as his theology emphasizes the removal of human agency from any activity pertaining to conversion and salvation. Thus, even though Barth has been credited with the

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell Guder et al., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 269, Kindle. Aside from a 1953 published lecture series by Newbigin, the Gospel in Our Culture writers identify Barth's *Church Dogmatics* chapter on reconciliation (1956) as the oldest "missional theology of the church."

<sup>2</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951). Niebuhr devotes a chapter to each of his classifications of the orientation of Christians to culture. In *Center Church*, Keller address Niebuhr and offers a set of classifications, while Hunter does the same in *To Change the World*.

<sup>3</sup> John Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 12, Kindle.

development of the concept of God's character as a God of mission despite his never actually using the term in that way, his theological impact on missiology is evident.<sup>4</sup> In that light, while Barth's credit for *missio Dei*-by-default may be humorous, it could hardly be more Reformed in its rejection of human agency and its focus on God's agency and activity in the world.

Regardless of the particulars of the early development of missional theology, many recent scholars attribute the synthesis of mid-Twentieth Century missiologies to Lesslie Newbigin. As Darrel Guder and companions in the Gospel and Our Culture Network state, "Newbigin brought into public discussion a theological consensus that had long been forming among missiologists and theologians."<sup>5</sup> While some of Newbigin's work is difficult for laypeople to digest, much of it is accessible, brief, and prescient for today's social and cultural realities.

So, while missional church theology is not uniquely Reformed, the historical tendency of the Reformed tradition to seek a middle way and the predilection of Reformed theologians to consider issues pertaining to church and culture provide an appropriate crucible for the development of missional theology as an avenue for the church's navigation of the late modern or postmodern West. Scholars of many traditions have attempted to define the church's situation in this moment, with common descriptions being those of aliens and exiles. In the same year that Newbigin published *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Methodists Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon produced *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Bosch himself credits Barth for connecting missions to the doctrine of the Trinity.

<sup>5</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 3.

While Reformed and many other missional church authors trace their arguments to Newbigin's consideration of truth claims, election, and advocacy for cross-cultural engagement as a hedge on cultural accommodation—a dialectical assertion that challenges Christians' thinking and self-awareness—Hauerwas and Willimon argue that “Christianity is an invitation to be part of an alien people who make a difference because they see something that cannot otherwise be seen without Christ. Right living is more the challenge than right thinking. The challenge is not the intellectual one but the political one—the creation of a new people who have aligned themselves with the seismic shift that has occurred in the world since Christ.”<sup>6</sup> This, of course, is not necessarily in contrast to Newbigin, who also asserts that “The only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”<sup>7</sup> Hauerwas's and Willimon's position does, however, elicit a response that focuses more on questions of engagement and disengagement than on orientation and influence.<sup>8</sup>

Rather than a community of aliens, the characterization of the Church as a community of exiles is more accommodating to those who seek to properly orient themselves in order to pursue change and influence. In *Exiles*, Michael Frost acknowledges Hauerwas's emphasis on the Church as a community formed by a unique story, but relates the Church's present-day story to that of the Babylonian Exile.<sup>9</sup> In a

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<sup>6</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 24, Kindle.

<sup>7</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 162. It should be noted that in the cited edition of *Resident Aliens*, Hauerwas responds to Hunter, noting Hunter's criticism as fair but contending that their positions are more compatible than Hunter suggests.

<sup>9</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 13.

world seeking authenticity in the midst of manufactured and artificial stories, Frost claims that “Exiles ought to be at its forefront, valuing and promoting that which is truly authentic.”<sup>10</sup> James Davison Hunter, meanwhile, identifies God’s commands to the exiles in Babylon regarding how they should live as the central motivating passage for proper interaction with culture.<sup>11</sup> Of course, as Alan Roxburgh points out in the more recent *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in our Time*, taking on the story of exile implies that there will one day be a return from exile.<sup>12</sup> Roxburgh’s concern is that the language of exile tempts church people to think that they will someday return to the church’s heyday of full sanctuaries and cultural influence. Neither Frost nor Hunter make such an argument, but Roxburgh’s point is salient. As Scripture shows, the people’s return from Babylon was not especially prosperous or successful. They had returned to Jerusalem, but God had said, “Return to me” (Zec 1:3, emphasis added).<sup>13</sup>

While the project leader appreciates the input of those who may advocate pietist separatism, prophetic distinctiveness, and even rejection of culture as the proper witness for this age, he favors those who promote thoughtful engagement and affirmation of God’s presence in line with his Reformed tradition. Of course, leading thinkers in non-Reformed traditions have also specifically championed the missional church movement or its themes. Non-Reformed contributors to the Gospel and Our Culture project are Lois

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>11</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 275-278. Hunter refers to Jer. 29:4-7.

<sup>12</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time* (New York: Morehouse, 2015), chap. 1, sec. 2, Kindle.

<sup>13</sup> All Scripture is from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

Barrett (Mennonite), Innagrace T. Dietterich (United Methodist), and Roxburgh (Canadian Baptist/Anglican). Other prominent missional theologians include Frost (Australian Baptist), Alan Hirsch (Churches of Christ-Australia), Reggie McNeal (Southern Baptist), Phyllis Tickle (Episcopal), and Eddie Gibbs (Episcopal). While this project does not draw from all of the authors specifically, there are a number of leaders in non-Reformed traditions who provide insights on church and culture that differ somewhat from mainstream missional church thinking but generally advocate a considered position of engagement.

One of the key points of the missional church movement is the emphasis on mission as the organizing principle of the church.<sup>14</sup> Even in the Reformed tradition, there is some reticence to make that assertion. A common criticism is that such a position may draw the church away from the importance of worship. Additionally, after the missional church movement rose to popularity, the phrase “missional vs. attractional” became commonplace among leaders seeking to differentiate the missional church movement from the “church growth” movement of prior decades.<sup>15</sup> From this false dichotomy, the perception followed that the missional church movement’s emphasis on being “sent” neglected the importance of cultivating personal discipleship and drawing people into a community of faith.

Once the Church recognizes that its own immediate context is its mission field, and that God is already present within that mission field, then the next step is to

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Frost, “Keynote Address,” Presbyterian Global Fellowship Inside-Out Conference, Houston, August 16, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Roxburgh, “Moving Back into the Neighborhood,” lecture, Presbyterian Global Fellowship Regional Gathering, Danville, VA, May 18, 2012.

understand how God is at work so that the church may join as co-workers. While Missional Church literature can help congregations recognize the first two points, those congregations must determine how to apply that recognition to the third. Indeed, churches and church leaders became so accustomed to models during the church growth movement of the late Twentieth Century that when the need for missional transformation became apparent, leaders immediately began seeking models that they could simply apply to their own contexts. Additionally, present-day critics of the ubiquity of the missional church movement—of whom Alan Roxburgh now may be considered one—lament that the movement is co-opted as a means of fixing the church rather than initiating new reality.<sup>16</sup>

With all of this being addressed, it is not the goal of this project to account for any real or perceived shortcomings of the missional church movement, but to introduce missional theology as an invigorating and identity-forming pursuit that can equip the church to interact with her local context and that is consistent with the church's own tradition. Rather than defend missional theology against criticism, this project draws from some non-Reformed resources that complement missional theology and close some of the gaps in its emphases. By incorporating other perspectives on church and culture, the project provides a broad perspective on the church's call to community engagement.

In the Reformed tradition, if missional theology is an appropriate vehicle for invigorating the congregation for her work in her local context, then common grace is the signage on that vehicle's road. If missional Christians acknowledge a God of mission who is already at work, then they must be equipped to see signs of that work. It follows,

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<sup>16</sup> Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World*, chap. 2, sec. 4.

then, that they must be willing to see God at work in a wide range of people, institutions, and phenomena.

Over the last 150 years, the doctrine of common grace has had a few distinct champions, notably Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper develops his own advocacy of common grace from the work of John Calvin. Kuyper states:

Calvinism takes its stand with a fundamental thought which is equally profound. It does not seek God in the creature, as Paganism; it does not isolate God from the creature, as Islamism; it posits no mediate communion between God and the creature, as does Romanism; but proclaims the exalted thought that, although standing in high majesty above the creature, God enters into immediate fellowship with the creature, as God the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

This “immediate fellowship with the creature” is of course embodied in Jesus, but that fellowship does not cease with Jesus’s ascension, and Kuyper locates its continuance in the Holy Spirit’s presence. Kuyper asserts:

Calvinism has wrought an entire change in the world of thoughts and conceptions. In this also, placing itself before the face of God, it has not only honored man for the sake of his likeness to the Divine image, but also the world as a Divine creation, and has at once placed to the front the great principle that there is a particular grace which works Salvation, and also a common grace by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator.<sup>18</sup>

Common grace, then, is a gift—a gift by which believers and nonbelievers alike are capable of contributing to the flourishing of the world.

While common grace literature is typically devoted to defending the doctrine itself, the semantics surrounding the themes of common grace require careful explanation. Otherwise, common grace could be interpreted simply as a way of

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<sup>17</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 13, Kindle.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.



expressing the doctrine of natural theology or a suggestion that the grace of Jesus is insufficient. In such a light, one of the greatest critics of some of the themes of common grace may well be Barth himself, who replies to Emil Brunner's consideration of natural theology with an essay simply titled, "No!"<sup>19</sup>

Thus, it is no surprise that common grace requires careful explanation as to its source and efficacy and its place among God's acts of self-revelation. From Brunner's perspective, the disagreement between Barth and himself over the concept of natural theology is an issue of semantics. Barth, meanwhile, hedged against any expression of theology that would suggest that true knowledge of God is obtainable in any way outside God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Mouw gives fair treatment to both Barth and more recent work on the subject of ethics and virtue by Alisdair MacIntyre. Mouw proposes that "If God cannot operate with more than one "ruling passion," then it would indeed be folly for Christians to attempt to do so; but if God is committed both to the election of individuals to eternal life and to a distinguishable program of providential dealings with the broader creation, then it is quite fitting for us to feature a similar multiplicity in our own theologies."<sup>21</sup> Mouw's position is operative for this project and serves as a response when faced with questions about common grace.

In recent years, both Reformed and Anglican writers have provided perspectives on church and culture that answer both the worship- and community-related concerns

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<sup>19</sup> Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>21</sup> Mouw, *He Shines in All that's Fair*, chap. 4, sec. 6.

regarding the missional church, and their answers can be closely tied to a Reformed perspective on common grace. Two such authors whose work informs this project are James K. A. Smith and Tish Harrison Warren, who each encourage followers of Jesus to take a liturgical approach to their lives in the world.<sup>22</sup>

Although they do not explicitly identify common grace in the works cited herein, these authors provide some vocabulary and some direction for putting the doctrine of common grace to work. Aside from personal liturgical practices, both Smith and Warren—Warren largely influenced by Smith—point to the proper way that followers of Jesus must train their “loves.”<sup>23</sup> By developing liturgical routines, followers of Jesus become attuned to God’s work in even the mundane practices in their lives, such as making their beds and brushing their teeth.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, much as the missional church must orient itself toward a proper understanding of God’s mission in order to appropriately engage its context, individual followers of Jesus are able to orient themselves through these practices.

While Smith and Warren focus on liturgy, they have a companion in N.T. Wright, who explores virtue and character formation in *After You Believe*. Wright states:

the point of this book is to suggest that the dynamic of “virtue,” in this sense—practicing the habits of heart and life that point toward the true goal of human existence—lies at the heart of the challenge of Christian behavior, as set out in the New Testament itself. This is what it means to develop “character.” This is what

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<sup>22</sup> Although Smith is the Gary & Henrietta Byker Chair in Applied Reformed Theology & Worldview at Calvin College and as such must self-identify as Reformed, and although he has published a number of reflections and critiques of the Reformed tradition, mutual friends describe him as a “closet Anglican.”

<sup>23</sup> James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 10, Kindle.

<sup>24</sup> Warren, Tish Harrison. *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 30, Kindle.

we need—and what the Christian faith offers—for the time, whether short or long, “after you believe.”<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, as noted in chapter two, Wright calls mission and worship “conjoined twins,” providing the connection between the cultivation of character and the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>26</sup> While Smith and Warren write for Christian audiences, believers would do well to consider Wright’s attempt to write from the perspective of a new believer, both for the sake of seeing God’s work anew and for the ability to empathize with and communicate to those who need to hear the gospel.

### **Doctrinal Roots in Scripture**

As suggested by its name, missional church theology is rooted in the Great Commission, or more precisely, commissions. Historically, the term “Great Commission” has referred to Matthew 28:18-20: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

The Matthean commission is both general— “Make disciples of all nations”—and specific— “baptizing . . . teaching . . .” (Mt 28:19-20). It is a command as much as a commission, as Jesus gives the disciples tasks to perform. Although Jesus assures his disciples that he is with them, they clearly have work to do and have the authority to discern the ways in which to perform that work. This sending and the reference to all

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<sup>25</sup> Wright, *After You Believe*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

nations echo Old Testament commands to Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and others.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Jesus reflects the character of God that is championed by missional theologians: that God is a sending God.

This, of course, is not the only commission that Jesus gave his disciples.

Missional Church proponents often focus on the Johannine Commission, not least because of the etymology of the word, “sent.” The Johannine Commission appears in John 20:19-23, after Jesus’s resurrection:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

The central verse is verse twenty-one, in which Jesus identifies both the Father and himself as senders. The word, “mission,” comes from the Latin word, *mitto/mittere/missum*, which means “to send,” and which is often used with a verb of motion in order to show purpose. Therefore, a *mission* is something on which people—including Jesus himself—are sent for a purpose. Thus, the mission of the church is what the church is sent to do for the sake of the gospel. Just as companies have mission statements, churches have missions. These are the things that the churches are sent to do, and each congregation’s mission exists only as part of the greater mission of Jesus to

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<sup>27</sup> Dale F. Bruner, *Matthew, a Commentary: Volume 2: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), chap. 28, sec. 3, Kindle.

redeem and reconcile the world to himself.<sup>28</sup> So not only is the church on a mission, but as missional theologians point out, God is on a mission.

While the Johannine Commission is light by comparison to Matthew in its instructions, it emphasizes knowledge of Jesus not simply in teaching, but also in identity. To emphasize the Johannine commission requires a fuller examination of Jesus's life, particularly his relationship with the Father who sent him and the purpose with which Jesus acted and taught. So, even though the Johannine Commission is vague in directions, it is very specific in its model: Jesus. The Matthean Commission is obviously based in Jesus's "authority in heaven and earth," but the Johannine Commission is based on the full picture of Jesus, of which the Christian and the church are analogs.

Another biblical commission appears in Acts 1:7-8, in which Jesus tells his disciples prior to his ascension that "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In terms of specificity, this commission falls between Matthew and John, identifying geography but only giving the instruction to "be my witnesses." The Greek word for witnesses is *martureo*, from which is derived the word, "martyr." Many of Jesus's disciples, of course, became precisely that.

The differences in the commissions may account for some of the variance in perspectives among scholars from different traditions with regard to proper cultural engagement. Reformed advocates focus on Jesus's election and agency, each of which are clearly affirmed in John. Matthew includes descriptive behavior of the community of

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<sup>28</sup> Allen Thompson, "Missional 101," *Presbyterian Global Fellowship* email newsletter (January 11, 2011).

believers, providing the distinguishing characteristic of baptism, suggesting a people marked and set apart who call others into their community by making disciples. Luke, in Acts, hints at the fate of the disciples as witnesses and martyrs, inviting sacrifice at those ends of the earth where they may not be accepted. Both Matthew and Luke include Jesus's reference to authority, emboldening the distinct community of believers to bear witness regardless of the cost.

That is not to suggest that those who gravitate toward the Johannine commission recoil at the costliness of their task, or even that a consensus of Reformed scholars gravitate toward the Johannine commission over the other two. Rather, the theological emphases of the Reformed tradition, which also favor a dialogue with culture, fit well with the impetus to explore precisely how Jesus sends and was sent. Discipleship is costly, but Jesus did not rush headlong into death. Instead, he lived in relationship with those around him and in conversation with the worldly and religious powers of his day. Some in the Reformed tradition even identify Jesus's life as an aspect of his atonement for sin, positing that Jesus suffered even in his unique comprehension of the full distance by which humankind and creation were separated from God by sin.<sup>29</sup> Such a perspective on Jesus's atonement compels believers to acknowledge that distance and seek restoration and flourishing. Being sent in the manner of Jesus with this perspective also corroborates John Calvin's emphasis on union with Christ: "Accepting our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; that, receiving our poverty unto himself, he has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself (which

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<sup>29</sup> John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock), 1996. See chapters five, "Retrospective Aspect of the Atonement," and six, "Prospective Aspect of the Atonement." Original publication of this book was through Cambridge, UK: MacMillan, 1856.

oppressed us), he has clothed us with his righteousness.”<sup>30</sup> Calvin refers here to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, so this union with Christ is not simply reserved for death, but is conferred to those who follow Jesus in life.

Beyond simply the relationship between the Latin word for “send” and the English word “mission,” the Johannine commission carries another advantage for missional church advocates. Whereas Matthew and Luke quote Jesus’s references to “all nations” and “the ends of the earth,” respectively, John includes no such geographic reference. For those who see the need for followers of Jesus to view their own contexts as mission fields, it is helpful to detach the concept of mission from its association with faraway places. The Johannine commission allows for this.

Moreover, because the Johannine commission is light on specifics, it draws the follower to find those examples in Jesus’s own ministry in which he sent his disciples for his own purposes. For an example, Alan Roxburgh points to Luke 10:1-12 because of its instruction and implications.<sup>31</sup> Luke writes:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to

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<sup>30</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), chap. 17, sec. 2, Kindle.

<sup>31</sup> Roxburgh, “Moving Back into the Neighborhood.”

you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."

Some highlights in this passage bear mentioning. First, Jesus sends his disciples in pairs, emphasizing that even out in the world, his followers remain tied to their community of faith. Second, Jesus emphasizes work as a component of the disciples' mission. In fact, because the central economic unit and locus of work in cities of the time was the household, the implication is that the disciples are working alongside the residents of the houses in which they are staying. They contribute to the productivity of those households, and their wages are their room and board.

Additionally, the communication of peace indicates the posture with which the disciples enter potentially hostile contexts. If that peace is rejected, then it returns to them, reminding them that it is not their own peace but Jesus's, and that it is not their own mission but his. They are not to be dissuaded or lose confidence if they are rejected, because it is Jesus whom the people are rejecting.

Moreover, the timing of their proclamation depends upon acceptance or rejection. If they are accepted, then they are to work alongside others, no doubt having conversations and developing relationships along the way. Then, when the opportunity arises, they demonstrate Jesus's power and proclaim his truth. If they are rejected, then they are still to proclaim the same thing upon that rejection. The proclamation remains the same and must happen, but acceptance of the disciples' cultural contributions allows for the proclamation to occur in the context of a productive relationship.

Finally, in establishing relationships and building trust, Jesus instructs the disciples not to go from house to house. They are to commit to and dwell with those who receive them, even embracing aspects of their culture such as eating the food that is



prepared for them. Jesus's instruction to eat with their hosts is a particularly provocative suggestion because it opens the door to potential disobedience of Jewish dietary regulations. By way of this command, Jesus allows the disciples to participate in and affirm the nourishing aspects of their hosts' culture, rather than to insist on their own.

For a congregation such as Fairview, whose members have a positive view of their context, these instructions provide affirmation and guidance in their work while reminding them of their sent purpose. This project identifies workplace theology as concomitant with missional theology, as work is clearly part of being sent. For that matter, work is a part of God's ordered creation before the Fall. Genesis 2 reads:

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Thus, God creates people for work. Not only that, God gives the people some creative authority, allowing them to tend God's royal garden.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 168.

Besides removing the notion that work is a burden and placing it properly as part of God's design, this passage also suggests God's intentions for humankind's role in culture. Andy Crouch describes this intention:

In order for humankind to flourish in their role as cultivators and creators, God will have to voluntarily withdraw, in certain ways, from his own creation. He makes space for the man to name the animals; he makes room for the man and the woman to know one another and explore the garden. He even gives them freedom, tragically but necessarily, to misuse their creative and cultivating capacities. God is always willing to be present, walking in the garden in the cool of the day, but he is also willing to grant humankind their own cultural presence. Without this gracious carving out of space, they would never be able to fulfill their destiny as divine image-bearers; without the gift of a garden protected from the full wild wonder of the teeming earth and waters, they would be overwhelmed. God's first and best gift to humanity is culture, the realm in which human beings themselves will be the cultivators and creators, ultimately contributing to the cosmic purposes of the Cultivator and Creator of the natural world.<sup>33</sup>

The humans tend the garden, name the animals, and have some amount of reign over creation themselves. Their full potential as God's image-bearers could not be realized if God did not give them some amount of freedom. Although people are sinful, Jesus's purposes of redemption and reconciliation lead people to pursue that flourishing, knowing that it reflects not only God's design, but also God's plan for restoration.

In light of this perspective on creation and work and given the impetus for restoration in participation with Jesus, common grace finds its place in creativity, resources, and signs of hope. While a number of Bible passages relate to common grace, this project employs James 1:16-18: "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

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<sup>33</sup> Crouch, *Culture Making*, chap. 4, sec. 2-3.

Not only does James affirm the source of good and perfect gifts, he also cautions against deception. This may be deception by gifts that are not from God—temptations and promises that lead away from God—or it may be deception that comes from shunning the goodness that God has placed in the world, labeling it as evil simply because it is worldly.

Additionally, James attributes the goodness of God's gifts to God's immutability, indicating that God's light is always present, even if there is also a shadow. The references to birth and firstfruits of creation connect rebirth in Christ to those original purposes of God's creation. Short of actually using the term, "common grace," James's assertions are not merely a proof-text, but a link to the whole of God's good purpose from creation to restoration. The good gifts present in the world are reminders of that goodness and of Jesus's purpose in restoring it.

PART THREE  
MINISTRY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER 4: INTRODUCING FAIRVIEW TO THE PASTOR'S PASSIONS

### **Theological Conclusions**

From this base of pertinent material, a number of core theological conclusions arise. First, while each congregation is unique and dwells within a unique context, Jesus's commissions to his followers remain the same. Whether the disciples were in Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Gaza, Thyatira, India, or elsewhere, Jesus sent them to the ends of the earth to make disciples. Even if one takes the position that the missional church movement distracts the believer from the primacy of worship, the church must still deal with Jesus's commission. In a changing and sometimes hostile world, it is tempting for the church to focus on her own programs of worship and fellowship, but the nature of the times calls for cultural engagement. Even those who favor more liturgical approaches to life promote engagement with the world and not removal from it or hostility toward it.

Second, the church needs resources for knowing how to interact with the world around her. Regardless of whether those resources are assigned the language of worship, mission, discipline, desire, gifts, grace, or any other theological term, they must be explored with emphases not only on personal discipleship but also on interpersonal engagement. The church is in community, but she is called to extend that community.

Thus, she must learn how to identify God's work around her. Third, much as disciples' commission into the world is an unavoidable truth of Scripture, their identity as working beings is an ontological reality that unites with God's original intent and provides the medium through which followers of Jesus interact with the world outside of homes, churches, and families.

### **Preferred Future**

This project's application at Fairview is the product of ten years of communicating and applying Missional Church principles in a mainline megachurch, a denominational parachurch organization, and a medium-sized small city congregation. These experiences identify central themes that resonate with laypeople while also challenging them to consider and apply their faith in their own personal contexts. The lessons and the sermons in this project provide the forums for communicating pastoral perspectives and theological predilections to a new congregation.

Besides the communication of cherished theological themes, the preferred outcome is an understanding of how the Fairview congregation receives these themes and applies them in her context. This understanding informs future communication, planning, and leadership, and may give rise to additional initiatives such as specifically-tailored devotional materials, prayer calendars, and small group studies. Pursuit of such ambitions necessitates awareness of Fairview's missional acumen.

In order to have a robust understanding of missional living and common grace, congregation members need to help one another look in the right places. An important goal of the project, then, is to identify some of the areas of flourishing, activity, and need in the CSRA. Preparation for the project requires exploring the opportunities and needs in

the North Augusta and Augusta area in order to identify potential discussion points and immersive experiences in which the participants may engage. Additionally, participants speak about their own experiences, preferences, and interests in the area. The project's initial discussions of missional thinking and common grace and the in-class and post-class conversations set those experiences in the proper theological context.

### **The Ministry Plan**

My first official day at Fairview was January 22, 2018, but the first two weeks included the ECO National Gathering and relocation. During this transitional period, the pastoral search committee and associate pastor provided input on the optimal way to conduct a project based on the chosen theological themes in a new context. Additionally, the church calendar, teaching opportunities, and the typical rhythms of the congregation came into consideration. Because Fairview holds Wednesday night dinners and classes from September through May, it became apparent that these provide the best opportunity for introducing the project and gathering input.

With Fairview being on a fiscal year budget that runs from August 1 to July 31, the church's stewardship campaigns occur in the spring and require the appropriate preparation. Additionally, schools in the CSRA take their spring breaks during the week of The Masters golf tournament, and many people take vacation during that week, either to rent their houses to golf tournament patrons or to avoid the local crowds. The associate pastor and his son led a Wednesday night series on Western philosophy in February and March, so the most opportune time to initiate the first phase of the project was the remaining weeks of the Wednesday evening series in April and May. The class

discussions and conversations with class participants during and after the lesson series determine the core themes of the subsequent sermon series.

### **The Wednesday Lesson Series**

The following are the seven lessons within the Wednesday night teaching series, developed from the theological conclusions above and designed for the Fairview congregation. The homework assignments are critical to the process and progress of the lesson series, because they reveal how class participants respond to and apply the material. These synopses describe theme of each class session, the homework assignment, and the contextual significance of each.

The premise of lesson one is that a changing culture compels followers of Jesus to have a missional mindset. The initial lesson provides a review of many of the cultural changes addressed in missional church literature. Observations of receptivity and resistance to these theological themes in previous congregations indicate a need to convey how the class participants perceive the broader changes in the culture and whether the participants have significant experience in dealing with them. A goal of the lesson is to solicit stories from Fairview's and the participants' own experiences in order to grasp how cultural changes have affected the congregation.

The primary literary work for this first class is Newbigin's *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, although Newbigin's significant exploration of truth claims and relativism is reserved for a later lesson on communicating the faith. Newbigin's premise that late modern Western culture resembles the context he encountered in India offers an initial proposition for the class to consider. Because the Wednesday night classes are intergenerational, the discussion period is important as participants from different



generations are able to provide different responses to questions about how both the church and the culture have changed. Opportunities for discussion help to reveal how congregation members and participants understand one another as they discuss experiences that they may not have not had the opportunity to address theologically.

For homework, participants receive a road map of the CSRA and are instructed to map their individual mission fields. They identify where they live, work, and spend their free time. In other words, they map the places where God is sending them.

The second lesson is a video that proved a great success for Presbyterian Global Fellowship and which is cited in chapter three. At the 2007 PGF Conference in Houston, missional theologian Michael Frost gave a keynote address that has been viewed more than 56,000 times on YouTube and sold hundreds of DVD's and audio CD's through the PGF store from 2007 to 2011. These numbers are impressive, considering that PGF worked almost exclusively with a minority segment of one denomination: theologically conservative PC(USA) congregations.

In the video, Frost defines "missional" and its implications, providing stories and insight that illustrate how churches may act out their missional identity. The video's popularity is the result of Frost's clarity and the ability of lay leaders to grasp the concepts that he communicates. While there are many significant quotes in the video, an important one for the scope of this lesson series is Frost's definition of the missional church as "The church of Jesus Christ sent outwards, propelled into every nook and cranny of culture for the purpose of lifting up Jesus."<sup>1</sup> In particular, the "nook and

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<sup>1</sup> Frost, "Keynote Address."

cranny” language is helpful both for exploring the intricacies of culture and the doctrine of common grace.

The following reflection from a 2010 PGF email newsletter elaborates on Frost’s talk and is helpful when explaining the concept of culture to congregations:

What does it look like to be “propelled into every nook and cranny of culture?” Does this mean that we need to find Christian artists, Christian rock stars, Christian athletes, Christian politicians? Should we petition television executives to start a show called *Praying with the Stars*? Do we have to assign Christians to infiltrate every business and organization?

Well, maybe...if that’s all that we mean by “culture.”

But culture doesn’t have to be simply pop culture. Culture gets displayed in our behavior, our preferences, and our choices. Our relationships reflect culture. “Culture,” when properly considered, often has more to do with the things we don’t notice about ourselves and our world than the things we do notice.

Likewise, the nooks and crannies of culture are more than the spaces between buildings, TV shows, and Sundays. If you’ve ever looked at something through a microscope, you know just how many nooks and crannies there can be. What appears smooth becomes rough and broken. What appears solid is really made up of smaller parts woven together. The nooks and crannies also include the fibers, cell membranes, and weather stripping of our lives. To pile on one more metaphor, we are like sponges that soak up culture into every nook and cranny of our bodies.

But culture is absorbent, too. Facial expressions, catch phrases, and demeanor all catch on quickly. Affections are expressed in ways we observe from people around us. Reactions mirror those that we’ve seen before. Culture doesn’t just come to us; we’re in a relationship with culture. Culture can shape us by what it is, but we can transform culture by who we are, too.

This, in essence, is what Frost is saying. If we, as the church, can propel the Gospel of Jesus Christ into every nook and cranny of culture, then we will begin to see God transform the world around us in ways both remarkable and subtle.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Thompson, “Missional 101.”

This explanation demonstrates the project’s perspectives and teaching emphases, and the video presents significant outside advocacy for the lessons series themes.<sup>3</sup> The second lesson’s homework assignment is to process the video and return with responses.

The third lesson introduces the doctrine of common grace and explores how it expands understanding of God’s work and presence. Following the first two lessons that provide a cultural overview, describe the nature of pluralism, and assert that followers of Jesus are propelled into every nook and cranny of culture, the third lesson describes a Reformed doctrine that accounts for God’s presence and providence in culture’s nooks and crannies. Common grace is a complicated doctrine to explain, as indicated in the tensions mentioned in chapter three. That said, Fairview’s context—much like Peachtree’s and FPC Danville’s—is one in which Presbyterians embrace theological distinctives that differentiate them from their more numerous Baptist, Methodist, and Non-denominational neighbors.<sup>4</sup>

The common grace lesson begins with a question about goodness and godliness, asking “What makes a godly hamburger?” After discussion, the teacher—or perhaps an astute participant—posits that such a hamburger’s goodness is what makes it godly. From this discussion, the group enters a conversation about what constitutes grace, be it salvific or otherwise.

This lesson draws from the work of Richard Mouw, whose short books on common grace and related topics are more accessible and available than those by earlier

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<sup>3</sup> I wrote “Missional 101” without having read Crouch’s *Culture Making* but was greatly affirmed in these assertions after having read it and have continued to use these comments when expounding upon both Frost and Crouch.

<sup>4</sup> More people from both inside and outside of Fairview have commented on predestination in seven months than anyone at Peachtree or FPC Danville did in ten years.

advocates such as Abraham Kuyper and Cornelius Van Til. Although the infralapsarian-supralapsarian debate in *He Shines in All that's Fair* is not ideal for the lesson, teaching on common grace does require some discussion of saving grace and God's own design and intentions for the world, both in creation and in restoration. The question of any presence of God's goodness in the world naturally arises.

Following the prior weeks' discussion of changes in culture and common Christian responses to them, the following quote from John Calvin and reflection via Richard Mouw proves helpful: "The pagan philosopher's awareness of God's purposes, says Calvin, is like that of "a traveler passing through a field at night who in a momentary lightning flash sees far and wide, but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of the night before he can take even a step."<sup>5</sup> Mouw continues, "When we are told that our only choice is either to celebrate the darkness or to curse it, we would do well to think more deeply about a perspective in which lightning flashes provide giddy travelers in the night with occasional glimpses of long-forgotten pathways."<sup>6</sup> Mouw is here referring to the perspectives of philosophers, but his question is pertinent to those who go into the world with questions about how to interact with the tension of light and dark. In response to this quote, participants provide examples of those flashes of light that they see in their lives. The third lesson's homework requires participants to identify common grace in creation, in people's character or behavior, and in people's creativity. The question is "Where is Jesus revealing himself in your world?"

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<sup>5</sup> Mouw, *He Shines in All that's Fair*, chap. 4, sec. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Lesson four focuses on participants' comfort with speaking about their faith. Articulating the faith requires a tactful but confident approach. Rather than being proselytizers who simply provide answers, disciples engage people for Christ by leading them to ask questions, by identifying God's work, and by developing relationships.

Presbyterians are not known for being adept at evangelism. Presbyterian denominations that are more conservative than Fairview's prior denomination, the PC(USA), emphasize apologetics in their seminary requirements and training, but Fairview has not recently been in a denomination with such expectations.<sup>7</sup> While ECO is still developing its strengths and emphases, Fairview has not been in an environment that champions evangelism and personal sharing of the faith. A central part of missional sentness, however, is the ability to proclaim the good news about Jesus—to be his witnesses.

This lesson draws significantly from Os Guinness's book, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*.<sup>8</sup> Guinness makes the case that traditional approaches to apologetics tend to be rigid and rote, and that a more effective manner of persuasion based on relationships and listening is optimal in the current Western milieu. Guinness advocates leading people into conversations and questions through intentional but natural relationships.

As indicated in chapter one, the nature of the CSRA's major industries results in an amount of diversity that may be surprising for a Bible Belt city. The scientific, medical, technological, and military industries draw people from across the country and

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<sup>7</sup> The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), for example, requires apologetics classes for all seminary graduates entering the denomination. The PCA is strong in the Augusta area, most notably with First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, a large, thriving congregation who planted Fairview in 1946.

<sup>8</sup> Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015). Kindle.

the globe to the CSRA, and Fairview has historically been very active in relationships with the local international community, hosting English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and annual receptions for a network of immigrants and expatriates through International Link. Thus, the Fairview congregation has opportunities to develop the relationships that Guinness encourages. Lesson four's homework challenges participants to identify an opportunity that God has given them to draw someone deeper into understanding God's presence and work in their lives.

Lesson five explores gifts, calling, and the theology of work, but it begins with a further discussion of culture and participants' roles in it. Just as the participants have been introduced to the concept of having their own individual mission fields, they are challenged to consider that they have their own individual culture—or rather, cultures—where they live, work, and play. This lesson expounds upon the assertion that God equips individual Christians for their own missional tasks. At the root of this notion is Lesslie Newbigin's exploration of relationship and revelation, notably the assertion that because people are in relationship with God, they can only know about God what God has chosen to reveal.<sup>9</sup> In the same way, in interpersonal relationships humans are able to reveal the gifts that God has given us.

It follows, then, that followers of Jesus are capable of pointing out the ways that the Holy Spirit reveals God's goodness not only in good things present in the world, but also in good gifts in others and in themselves. Through the use of these gifts, they impact the culture around them on a small scale. This concept is at the heart of Andy Crouch's *Culture Making*, in which Crouch presents the case that people dwell in micro-cultures in

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<sup>9</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 61.

which they may have influence through gifts and relationships.<sup>10</sup> In those cultures, through work and creativity, they are able to nourish others' lives. Timothy Keller states:

As an extension of God's creative work, the Christian's labor has its orientation toward God himself, and we must ask how it can be done distinctively and for his glory. As an extension of God's providential work, our labor has its orientation toward our neighbor, and we must ask how it can be done excellently and for his or her good. This latter motivation is available to everyone. So a farmer or chef meets her neighbor's need for food; a mechanic meets his neighbor's need for technical help on a car. This aspect of work-as-provision is the reason that much work that Christians do is not done, at least not in its visible form, any differently from the way non-Christians do it.<sup>11</sup>

To this end, the fifth homework assignment is for participants to identify a unique characteristic of their weekly cultures and routines, and a gift that God has given them to use in that field—that is, why God has uniquely placed them there.

The sixth lesson is called, "Tasting and Seeing the City." This lesson is mostly discussion-based, as the participants talk about things that bring them joy. The notion behind this discussion is that God sends disciples to explore and appreciate how the Holy Spirit is at work in people, culture, restoration, etc. Disciples find points of connection that they share with others, and the Holy Spirit opens opportunities for relationships and conversations.

While gifts and calling relate to productivity, another aspect of discerning personal mission fields involves consumption of the gifts and goods around us. This lesson invites class participants to name some of their favorite places and features in the CSRA. Some of the possible topics are architecture, restaurants, parks, shops, and neighborhoods. After a discussion about these favorite things, the class reflects

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<sup>10</sup> Crouch, *Culture Making*, introduction.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012), 184-185, Kindle.

theologically upon the goodness in them and the ways that those places are testaments to God's glory.

Although this lesson begins with an exploration of the participants' favorite things, it also includes a review of the places and situations in the CSRA that are most in need of the light of God's glory. This lesson includes a discussion on restoration theology, notably in examples and motivations of Christians who pursue human flourishing in Gabe Lyons's *The Next Christians* and Timothy Keller's *Center Church*. The homework assignment is to explore a local business, park, restaurant, or other cultural institution that is new to participants, and to consider how God is at work in what occurs there.

The final lesson asks the participants to reflect on the prior week's homework and consider how they might articulate God's presence in their chosen cultural arena to another person. Reflecting on earlier lessons, the project leader asks the participants to consider the posture with which they might introduce such a conversation. In this final lesson, participants gain insight on being prepared to interact with others and on helping others to understand not only the presence of God around them but also the practice of following Jesus.

This lesson introduces the liturgy-oriented work of Smith and Warren and briefly reviews some spiritual disciplines that may help participants be prepared and confident to initiate or participate in the sorts of discussions proposed. Additionally, the participants consider hypothetical responses of people who may see the world and truth claims through different lenses. This aspect of the lesson returns participants to the beginning of the lesson series, when the discussion centered on changed culture. The lesson closes



with a discussion about participants' comfort level in engaging that changed culture, fortified with the material presented in the series.

### **Sermon Series**

Following the lesson series, the project develops a sermon series that focuses on missional theology, common grace, and the theology of work. Following discussions during the class sessions and conversations and feedback in the weeks afterward, the beginning of the fall program year provides an opportunity for a three-part series. The first sermon addresses the theology of work and coincides with Labor Day weekend. The second sermon provides an introduction to missional theology. The third sermon explores common grace.

The Bible passages for these sermons are those identified in chapter three, specifically the passages from Genesis 2 (theology of work), John 21 and other commissions (missional theology), and James 1 (common grace). The sermons are identical in both the 9:00 AM Morning Watch contemporary service and the 11:00 AM traditional sanctuary service. While staff and weekly worship leaders are apprised on the topics, the band and the music director are free to select music, with the exception of the hymn "This is My Father's World," which accompanies the sermon on common grace. The prayer of confession and assurance of pardon are tailored for each service.

### **Target Population**

While the central component of this project is a teaching series open to anyone who attends Fairview's Wednesday evening suppers, many of the elected leaders are regular attendees and the project is designed to promote conversation in the classes, in immersive homework assignments, and in follow-up conversations both in subsequent

classes and in personal meetings. The ongoing nature of these conversations allows the project leader to identify those congregational leaders who are most interested in missional transformation and in common grace as a connection point for identifying their personal role and Fairview's communal opportunities for mission and evangelism in North Augusta and the CSRA. Once identified, those congregational leaders are invited into further study and conversation about those opportunities.

In addition to the large group of Wednesday evening class members, there are some groups of leaders who can already be identified as being central to the project's success. These groups are the staff, the pastor nominating committee, and the session. There is some overlap among these groups, but each one has demonstrated interest in the project and its goals in particular ways.

Among the staff, the associate pastor, administrative assistant, contemporary worship director, and youth director play important roles in communicating the need for missional transformation. Although most of these staff members have commitments during the usual Wednesday evening time slot, the project leader—the senior pastor—has other opportunities to communicate with them about the project and its purposes, such as staff meetings and regular goal setting meetings.

### **Timeline**

The optimal venue for the execution of the project's first phase is the Wednesday supper series. Fairview's Wednesday night dinners and classes occur during the church program year between Labor Day and Memorial Day. While some Wednesday nights are dedicated to special projects and presentations—global missions partners and children's programs, for example—the lessons are typically led by one of the pastors. Dinner begins

at 6:00 PM, and there are usually between sixty and eighty attendees, including children. At 6:30 PM, the children's ministry coordinators begin programs for the children and some of the remaining adults—usually between twenty and thirty—attend the class. The lessons for all ages end at 7:30 PM.

The dinners attract a cross-section of the Fairview population, and class attendees range in age from parents in their thirties to senior adults in their eighties and nineties. This demographic diversity provides for a broad range of experiences and perspectives, as well as lively discussion. As such, the classes provide an excellent opportunity to introduce new theological concepts and receive a variety of responses to them. Although the Wednesday attendance typically dwindles after Easter, the project must make use of the time that is most readily available.

Given these dynamics, the class participants present a strategic group for introducing and receiving feedback on the project's theological concepts. Although a series with bi-weekly opportunities for completing homework is ideal for providing an opportunity for participants to engage the material, the size of the class ensures that at least some individuals are able to do the work and report back the following week. Additionally, the large group provides for a wide range of people from whom to solicit input in preparation for the subsequent sermon series. While it may also be ideal for a sermon series to follow shortly after the Wednesday night lessons, lower and inconsistent summer attendance lessens the reach of the sermons and the opportunities for feedback. Therefore, the summer provides an opportunity to have individual conversations with class participants and synthesize the most salient feedback into sermon preparation for the first three Sundays of September.

The seven lessons of the project occur over the course of seven weeks, with one session being a video presentation being the second session. The days of the lessons are April 18, April 25, May 2, May 9, May 16, May 23, and May 30. The dates of the sermon series are September 2, September 9, and September 16.

Fairview's session meets on September 17, and the session receives a survey designed for congregation leaders at that meeting. Later that week, the congregation receives a survey on SurveyMonkey that is available through the first week of October. Because this project is designed as an initial step in communicating theological perspectives to the congregation, assessment tools ask participants to both evaluate the relevance of the material to their lives and provide input necessary to the continued communication of those perspectives.

## CHAPTER 5: RELEVANCE AND REVIEW

### **Preparation**

As indicated in the introduction, the project at Fairview is informed by efforts to introduce missional theology to two other congregations: Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia, and First Presbyterian Church of Danville, Virginia. At Peachtree in particular, it was part of my job description to study the missional church movement and assist both the congregation and PGF in studying and communicating it. The job also involved assisting the senior pastor at Peachtree in researching sermons on common grace and the pastoral staff at Peachtree in producing resources on the theology of work. Peachtree's context in a dynamic metropolitan area and her identity as a leading congregation both in Atlanta and in the PC(USA) provided a natural environment for an enthusiastic reception to new initiatives and ideas.

FPC Danville exists in a dramatically different context. There, the responses to missional theology are tepid, with some hostility due to the staid congregation's resistance to change and Danville's stagnant economic and religious environment. Introducing new theological concepts in such an organizational culture is a significant challenge, as the lack of social and economic change in the context limits the

congregation's receptivity to new ideas. FPC Danville is, however, very open to both common grace and the theology of work, suggesting that these ideas may be a more suitable introduction to missional theology. Even if the congregation does not identify with changes in the world, members still must strive to see God's presence in work and in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the project's implementation at Fairview, members of the pastoral search committee offered impressions of the feasibility of such a project and series of lessons. Some of these conversations occurred in pastoral candidate interviews, as the committee specifically asked about the project leader's experience with missional church resources. Other conversations occurred before and soon after pastoral transition in North Augusta. Universally, the members of the search team concur the lessons would be constructive and well received.

Because personal experience is also important in order to appropriately speak about topics such as missional theology and common grace, my independent personal exploration of the areas of the community in which Fairview members spend much of their time also informs the lessons and sermons. This exploration includes restaurants, parks, leisure activities, and local businesses that provide familiarity with the area. Recommendations from staff and local clergy also provide insight into the community

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<sup>1</sup> Because missional theology arose as a response to secularism and pluralism, its introduction requires that the congregation have some experience with those phenomena in their daily lives. Due to the relative lack of religious diversity and the slower effects of secularism and pluralism in Danville, a small but significant portion of the congregation was skeptical as to its relevance. This is one reason that the initial proposal for this project deigned to introduce a select group of leaders at FPC Danville to the local changes being introduced by people and organizations who operated from a secular or pluralistic worldview. It is also a reason why the current project maintains the central lesson structure from the FPC Danville project, which includes a study on societal change. Because Fairview is in many ways a congregation whose context falls between those of FPC Danville and Peachtree, the receptivity to that lesson helps the project leader to ascertain Fairview's own experience with broader cultural realities.

organizations and missions that are significant in Fairview's ministry. These experiences allow the project to communicate firsthand knowledge of the places and pursuits that are relevant to the congregation's experience.

Regarding the field testing of the project itself, the homework assignments and discussion periods built into the Wednesday night lessons provide real-time input on the willingness of participants to engage with and apply the class material. Surveys that follow the sermon series allow for input on the relevance and clarity of the themes and provide additional geographic and life interest information of the respondents. These interactive tools also help identify the participants who were most enthusiastic about the topics and assignments.

### **Project Leadership**

The project leader oversees and implements the execution of the project, teaching the lessons, soliciting input, preaching sermons, and designing the survey. Fairview's administrative assistant provides support via communications, printing, and distribution of survey materials. Given the focus on preaching and teaching, training of leaders other than the project leader is not necessary. Materials used in prior congregations and organizations inform the project, as do the resources identified in chapters two and three.

There is not an extensive process for identifying people to implement the project and assist in training, due to unfamiliarity after the recent pastoral transition. The members of the pastoral search committee and the Fairview session provide input when consulted about the project and its goals, generally approving of the materials and the purposes of the project. The associate pastor provides input on best practices in leading the Wednesday night series, as he has led many teaching series in the past. Additionally,

the contemporary worship band, music director, and choir assist in worship on the Sundays that the project leader preaches each sermon. Because a portion of the project's implementation is the execution of the Wednesday homework assignments, the class participants receive instruction and guidance in carrying out the assignments.

### **Resources**

The teaching and preaching portions of the project are implemented in three different locations on the Fairview Campus. Wednesday night lessons occur in the multipurpose meeting room and Fellowship Hall, while sermons occur in the fellowship hall and sanctuary. The following are descriptions of each setting and event.

The multipurpose room is a classroom on the bottom level of the new wing of the building. It contains three long tables in a U-shape with 20-25 chairs. The class leader teaches from the open end of the U, and there are chairs along the periphery of the room. The first three classes occur in this room, with the second making use of a wall-mounted large screen television to show the Michael Frost video. This room can easily become crowded and hot due to the configuration and the popularity of the Wednesday night lessons, but the arrangement allows for good discussion between the class leader and participants and among participants themselves.

In the event of overflow attendance, the project leader is able to move the class to the Fellowship Hall because it offers more seating and better ventilation. The Fellowship Hall has twelve round tables with seven seats each, as well as three sections of row seating totaling fifty-five chairs. These classes occur immediately after Wednesday supper, allowing most people to remain at their tables in this setting. This allows for productive table discussions, but also makes it difficult for participants to hear one



another when each table shares its discussion points. Given the importance of discussion in the final two classes, the multipurpose room is a better venue for the final lessons of the project.

The Fellowship Hall is also the location for the 9:00 AM “Morning Watch” contemporary service. It contains a stage with two screens, and the worship services maintain the same hybrid seating arrangement as the Wednesday evening classes. There is a full audio-visual system for the band and any preachers and speakers in this service, and the project leader is able to use slides to illustrate points and display Bible passages during the sermons.

The sanctuary is a traditional sanctuary with a pulpit at stage left and lectern at stage right. The choir loft and organ are located centrally behind the pulpit and lectern, with the choir facing the congregation and organist/music leader facing the choir. The sanctuary has eighteen rows of pews on each side of a center aisle, three in a choir loft behind the pulpit and lectern, and four pews in a balcony, which also holds the audio-visual equipment. There are large screen televisions elevated above the doorways at the extremities of stage left and right, and another mounted on the wall of the balcony facing the choir and worship leaders. The sanctuary also has five stained glass windows on each side, with another at the top of the balcony, each depicting an event from Jesus’s life and earthly ministry.

Some classes include handouts at the start of class, but other classes require discussion to determine the direction of the class. In the previous series of Wednesday lessons in which the associate pastor and his son presented handouts, class participants occasionally read ahead in the handouts and drew conclusions rather than participating in discussion. Thus, when the goal is for the class to come to the desired conclusions

through discussion, rather than through a list of points and objectives, handouts are provided at the end of class.

### **Evaluation**

Because the ultimate goal of the project is not simply to introduce theological concepts but also to determine their relevance and the congregation's interest in them, conversations with congregation members and surveys help assess the quality of communication and the congregation's receptivity.<sup>2</sup> The follow-up conversations from the initial lessons serve as evaluation tools for the Wednesday series and its topics, and they also help determine the content of the sermons and the specific focus of the third sermon.<sup>3</sup> The surveys gauge the relevance of the sermon topics and gather data about the ways in which Fairview members might apply them. The conversations are solicited but open-ended, while one survey is written, and another is conducted via Survey Monkey.

The follow-up conversations include elders who attend the teaching series and who are briefed on the goals of the project in advance of the series. The project leader develops two surveys: one for the congregation at large (congregational survey), and one for the members of the Fairview session (session survey). While the congregational survey provides basic answer fields with some options for comments, the session survey requests additional subjective responses regarding the content of each of the lessons and sermons and provides space for the elders to comment on the material and any insights that they gain.

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<sup>2</sup> The term "conversation" is used here instead of "interview" because these interactions are not only intended to accumulate data or opinions, but also to receive input, advice, and questions regarding the themes and teaching approaches.

<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, these conversations determined the third sermon in the series should focus on the theology of work,

The surveys seek to assess the subjective values of familiarity and relevance of the theology of work, missional theology, and common grace to the worship participants' lives. They also include questions designed to gauge the frequency with which Fairview members have faith-related conversations with people of varying faith backgrounds and the members' own assessment of their ability to do so. With regard to common grace, the surveys question members' ability to see God's presence and work in various cultural arenas of the community.

Additionally, the congregational survey yields basic objective data such as types of employment, locations of residence, and areas of the community where Fairview members spend leisure time. These data reveal the congregation's interests and influence future materials, sermons, and classes that may be tailored to those interests and needs. Other objective questions include membership status, length of time at Fairview, sex, and worship attendance preferences. While helpful to the project, those data also assist the staff, and lay leadership in future endeavors.

Following the sermon series, the session receives its survey at the September meeting and the congregation receives links to the congregational survey via email, *The Fair View* weekly newsletter, and weekly bulletins. The administrative assistant provides hard copies of the congregational survey and makes them available at the church office. Responses to the hard copies are tabulated manually, while the results of the online survey are provided in a standard report by Survey Monkey.

## **Results**

After the Wednesday lesson series, the first conversation partner is a longtime congregation leader who attended six of the seven Wednesday lessons and provided input

on the theological ideas presented in the lessons. During the lessons, he was skeptical of the doctrine of common grace, echoing some of the sentiments of Karl Barth addressed in chapter three. Being a retired CEO and chemical engineer, the elder expressed enthusiasm about God's presence in scientific fields but was hesitant to categorize earthly experiences as common grace, seeing the doctrine as tangential at best to the primary responsibility of proclaiming the gospel.

This particular elder has been a leader in Fairview's global missions efforts and his wife is very involved in Fairview's ESL classes, so his interests in evangelism are more cross-cultural and direct than the subtle techniques introduced in the lessons. From his executive management experience, however, he does appreciate the work-related aspects of the lessons. The theology of work appeals to him as an engineer—as it likely would to the many engineers in the congregation—in being more defined and functional than the open-ended emphases of missional theology and common grace, which seem nebulous and propositional by comparison.

The second conversation partner, an elder who joined Fairview within the last ten years, reflected on the efficacy of the lessons, their structure, and their presentation. As a member of the personnel committee at the time of the lessons, he provided feedback from a staff evaluation perspective. From his own experience and conversations with others, this elder communicated that while the progression of the lessons was clear, the individual lessons appeared disjointed.

After elaboration, it became apparent that Fairview members are accustomed to lecture-based teaching rather than discussion-oriented seminars in the Wednesday night forum. Additionally, the two classes that did not begin with handouts and instead used class discussion to lead to the main points were identified as the ones that received

negative feedback as to their organization and preparation. Given the occupations and temperament of much of the congregation, this is not a surprise, and is a characteristic of the participants that was not considered in lesson preparation.

The third conversation partner is an elder who attended each of the lessons and did the homework assignments each week. In contrast to the first elder, this elder is very excited about the doctrine of common grace and uses his work relationships to apply the lessons. While this particular elder is an enthusiastic person by nature, he was eager to delve into the lessons pertaining to articulating the gospel through relationships and drawing people to ask questions. For a naturally extroverted person like himself, these approaches encourage him to be patient and prayerful, particularly with young men in their teens and twenties whom he supervises at work.

This elder is representative of a group of men in the congregation in their thirties and forties who have developed strong bonds with one another and who have recently taken on the mantle of congregational leadership from the men in the Baby Boomer and Silent generations. Many women in that age range also provide leadership, although it appears to be a characteristic of Fairview's culture that women assist during congregational events and programs on Sundays and Wednesdays while men participate in meetings on other weeknights. While this is a cultural characteristic to explore further, and while it limits the voices in congregational decision-making, it is a phenomenon that this project is not able to directly address.

Hence, an obvious shortcoming in these conversations with elders is the lack of women's voices. At the time of the lessons, there were only two women on session. One attended the first lesson, but had medical issues arise with her mother and had a son who was a senior in high school nearing graduation, so she was unable to attend more lessons

and provide substantial feedback. The senior pastor's wife did contribute input as the lessons were progressing, as she participated in group discussions and had heard many of the lessons' themes in prior congregations. She did note that the class participants were much more receptive than participants had been for similar presentations at FPC Danville and in other contexts.

In the month that the surveys were made available, ten of fourteen elders responded to the session survey. Thirty-eight worship participants responded to the online survey. This is a low number, given the average total attendance of 227 during the weeks of the sermon series, but it was not unexpected by the project leader or the administrative assistant, who has assisted in such data collection efforts on prior occasions and reports that the numbers of respondents are typical.

The congregational survey produced a number of interesting results. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents were Fairview members, with the largest groups of respondents having been active more than twenty-five years and between five and fifteen years. This means that most of the respondents—eighty-one percent—came to Fairview during either the prior senior pastor's tenure or before the next most recent senior pastor's tenure. Forty-one percent of respondents were over the age of sixty-five, forty percent between forty-five and sixty-four, and nineteen percent between twenty-five and forty-four. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents were female and forty-one percent male.

Regarding the additional objective data, fifty-nine percent live in North Augusta, twenty-seven percent elsewhere in South Carolina, and fourteen percent in Georgia. Fifty-five percent are currently retired or work in the home, while twenty-six percent work in Augusta and sixteen percent in South Carolina outside of North Augusta. Only three percent of respondents actually work in North Augusta. These data reveal that for

Fairview members, North Augusta is even more of a suburb or bedroom community—and at least in the case of the respondent population, a retirement community—than originally expected.

That said, only twenty-four percent of respondents said that they spend their leisure and recreation time on the Georgia side of the Savannah River, despite the significantly greater opportunities for dining and shopping in Augusta and Columbia County. A mere eight percent regularly spend non-work time in downtown Augusta, which also came as a surprise. Given that the original motivations for this project at FPC Danville were based on an affinity for urban renewal and a desire for the church to affirm the work of those who contributed to that renewal, this result may produce a point of tension and opportunity in the future.

The subjective responses—those in reference to the Wednesday lessons and the September sermon series—yielded results that are favorable to the project’s goal of introducing important theological themes. On the topic of the theology of work, forty-four percent of respondents had their first introduction to it during either the classes or the sermons, while only twenty-two percent had done prior study on the topic. Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that they had not heard much about it, probably owing to the lower attendance on September 2 due to the holiday weekend. When asked about the relevance of workplace theology on a one-to-five scale, eighty-seven percent of respondents gave it a value of four (“very relevant/I can use this”) or five (“extremely relevant/I want to know more”). Despite the high percentage of retired respondents, none replied that the theology of work was not relevant to their lives. This last data point is especially encouraging and quells apprehension about presenting additional lessons, sermons, and materials on the topic of work.

Regarding missional church theology, thirty-four percent of respondents had previous engagement with the topic. This is not surprising, as missional theology has been part of the Presbyterian lexicon for over a decade, particularly in churches with theological perspectives similar to Fairview's. Still, fifty-five percent of respondents said that the Wednesday lessons and September 9 sermon were their first introductions to missional theology. Sixty-nine percent of respondents rated missional theology as a four or a five on the relevance scale, while six percent said that it was not relevant to them. The survey did not provide a comment option on the question of relevance, so the reasons for the "not relevant" responses are unknown. In previous contexts, those who make such an evaluation often fall at the extremes of either seeing missional emphases as superfluous to their existing outreach efforts or believing that Christians should resist or withdraw from culture. While the "not relevant" position is a statistically small response, it does indicate the need for more probing into Fairview members' receptivity toward a missional identity for the church.

Responses to the congregation's exposure to the doctrine of common grace were nearly identical to those of missional theology, with one fewer person learning about it on Wednesdays and one more person learning about it via the September 16 sermon. The relevance responses were significantly different, however, with ninety-two percent of respondents identifying common grace as a four or five value and none identifying common grace as irrelevant. That the respondents view common grace as significantly more relevant than missional theology would seem to affirm the premise that the doctrine of common grace is a theological avenue for a congregation's ability to engage with her local context, but it is also possible that such bias was communicated during the lessons and sermons. Regardless, the intent of the project is not to evaluate the comparative



relevance of common grace and missional theology, but to assess Fairview’s receptivity toward each of them.

To that end, the congregational survey also included questions that explore more detailed aspects of both missional theology and common grace. In terms of missional engagement and cultural comfort, nineteen percent had had a recent (previous two weeks) conversation about their faith with a non-Christian, twenty-four percent had heard a person of another faith talk about their religion, thirty-eight percent had been in a situation that they felt was in conflict with their faith, and thirty-two percent had felt challenged in their faith. Fifty-four percent stated that the most difficult aspect of sharing their faith is knowing how to start a conversation—a result that affirms the decision to include lessons on articulating faith and developing relationships. The congregational survey also included a question about the respondents’ feelings when other Christians talk about their faith—an attempt to gauge the respondents’ comfort with others’ expression of their shared faith—and a majority reported that they “usually” or “always” feel excited, affirmed, or both, in such situations. This indicates some comfort level with having faith-related discussions that are not necessarily private or withdrawn. Only three percent indicated that they never feel excited in such situations, while sixty-five percent indicated that they never feel skeptical and seventy-two percent said that they never feel intimidated in these situations.

On questions that would help determine the cultural loci of respondents’ interests in common grace, the most popular arenas in which respondents said that it is easy for them to explain God’s presence and activity are nature (eighty-seven percent), another person’s life (fifty-six percent), music (thirty-seven percent), and art and design (thirty-two percent). When asked if they are interested in a study on God’s presence and activity

in a variety of cultural arenas, respondents most frequently identified sports (forty-seven percent), nature (forty-four percent), exercise (thirty-eight percent), and art and design, food, and music (each thirty-four percent). When presented with a list of cultural items about which they might be excited if a new one came to the area, the most common response was restaurant (sixty percent), followed by concert and entertainment venue (each thirty-four percent), grocery store (thirty-one percent), and industry or business and park (each twenty-nine percent). These responses provide information about the congregation's interests, to which future lessons, sermons, and other materials can be crafted and presented.

The session survey asked questions similar to the congregational survey but allowed for more input on the lessons and sermons and prioritization of the individual lessons' topics in the life of Fairview. The elders' evaluations of the doctrines were not significantly different from the results of the congregational survey. When asked to prioritize the importance of the Wednesday lessons for Fairview's future, the elders provided few consistencies, although "being missional" and "understanding common grace" each received two responses as the top priority. Again, this could be a case of an echo effect from the lessons' and sermons' emphases. One interesting result of the prioritization question is that community participation in civic leadership registered as a lower priority for most of the respondents. Congregation members often lament that Fairview members are not as involved in city leadership as they once were, but this small sample may indicate that civic participation is not viewed as a priority or a responsibility.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### **Reflections**

The project provides the opportunity for a senior pastor who has just begun a new call to communicate some of his theological interests and assess the receptivity of the congregation to them. Additionally, the project enables experimentation with teaching methods and yields feedback on the congregation's comfort with those methods. The project material, congregational participation, and evaluation tools also enable the leader to gain insight into Fairview members' participation in and comfort with their shared ministry context.

Informed by prior experiences of introducing the missional church conversation at three very different churches, the project began with few preconceived notions about Fairview's receptivity. Even though the pastor nominating committee had expressed a desire that the new pastor be acquainted with missional theology and had that prior experience in its decision, such committees are typically composed of very active members with high theological acumen. Moreover, pastor nominating committees receive training in the goals and emphases of the denomination, which in the case of ECO align with many of this project's emphases. The committee's congregation at large does not

always share the same theological and organizational aspirations—an incongruity that had been particularly stark at FPC Danville.

While some survey questions pertaining to the purpose of the church or the role of the church in respondents' lives may have provided even more insight into the congregation's priorities for the church—such as worship, education, pastoral care, and the presence of community—the project's purpose is to assess the congregation's interest in particular doctrines rather than the role of the church in their lives. An attempt to determine Fairview members' estimation of the church's purpose would have been contrary to the project's attempt to communicate personal pastoral convictions and gauge members' receptivity to them. Thus, while the responses of the session and congregation indicate a substantial amount of interest in missional theology and common grace, those responses do not necessarily reflect the members' chief understanding of the purpose of the church.

That, of course, is a primary goal of the missional church movement: to communicate the church's identity as the “sent” people of Jesus, with mission as the organizing principle of the church. While the project agrees with this assertion, that it reflects the pattern of God's interaction with God's people throughout Scripture, and that it is the appropriate identity for the church to adopt in the present-day West, a reorientation of purpose cannot be instantly communicated and adopted. It must be cultivated. While the survey results reveal very positive interest in missional theology and its corollary theology of work, only thirty-four percent of survey respondents were acquainted with missional theology and common grace prior to the project, and only twenty-two percent of respondents were familiar with the theology of work. If one can assume that a survey respondent is likely to be a more active member of a congregation

than a non-respondent—and especially so in the case of the session survey—then the results mean that most of the Fairview community is still at an introductory level with these concepts.

Still, it appears that the ground is fertile for deeper exploration of missional theology, as the surveys show that respondents are neither averse to being open about their faith nor intimidated by their context. This is especially encouraging, as the continued growth of the CSRA in general and the areas close to Fairview in particular present opportunities and challenges for the coming years. The amenability of the congregation to interacting with new people and new institutions should allow for more exploration of missional church emphases in the future.

Looking into that future, the interest of the congregation in the theology of work is of great help in maintaining members' constant awareness of God's presence and gifts in their lives and amidst any coming changes. Because retirees' responses to the theology of work were no less positive than the responses of those who are still employed, there is evidence that the older members of the congregation do not feel disengaged from efforts to emphasize the importance of work as both a God-given purpose and a mission field. This also was a tension at FPC Danville, so the redeveloped project took care to emphasize in teaching and preaching that there is much God-ordained work even in retirement. The evaluation tools used in the project helped to dissuade this concern.

Because the project posits common grace to be both a theological tool for equipping people to live missionally and an entry point for finding common ground in the task of evangelism, Fairview's response to the introduction and communication of common grace is especially affirming. Following the September 16 sermon, one congregation member excitedly came through the handshake line and said that it was the

most excited he had ever been during a sermon in his twenty years at Fairview. While that was the most impressive comment, a number of other worshipers expressed intrigue and interest in common grace. Surprisingly, the congregational survey respondents identified sports as the topic in which they are most interested in hearing more about God's involvement.

One collateral benefit of the project is the understanding of the preferred teaching and learning methods of the congregation, revealed mostly through the Wednesday night lesson series and conversations that followed. I have an extemporaneous communication style, which has often been appreciated in prior congregations but which has also occasionally been interpreted as glibness or unpreparedness. Any communication style is going to resonate with some while being less comfortable with others, and the communicator must take steps to be sure that the style does not overshadow the substance in any case. While I am aware of my stylistic strengths and weaknesses, the project provides constructive feedback that people are not always willing to offer, particularly if that feedback is perceived as complaints about and dissatisfaction with a new pastor.

The project also ascertains the congregation's range of involvement in diverse aspects of the local community. The concern that North Augusta's status as a bedroom community might lead to disengagement from issues of need in the CSRA beyond local missions organizations was unfounded, as a sense of the community's needs was clear among class participants. Although this project does not delve deeply into issues regarding poverty, justice, racism, or immigration, the opportunity remains to pursue those issues in the future. Just as missional theology and common grace are invitations to see God's work in the positive aspects of the community, they are also avenues for discerning God's call to restoration and reconciliation in the community. While Fairview

certainly has work to do in these areas, the Wednesday lesson discussions in particular revealed awareness of these issues and a clear sense that Fairview and North Augusta are part of the larger community and not simply safe enclaves from it.

### **Looking Ahead**

On the latter note, the project have included a specific homework assignment regarding restoration theology to accompany the lesson on “Tasting and Seeing the City,” and perhaps some survey questions asking about the greatest needs in the community. The original project proposal that was directed toward FPC Danville was designed for participants who were well aware of the negative aspects of their community, and the goal was to help them acknowledge and embrace areas of flourishing. In its redesign for Fairview, the project retained the basic theological premises and the topics of the lessons, only changing the implementation format and goals. While the lessons did include some discussion of community needs, they were directed more toward identifying and embracing positive characteristics of the community. Still, Fairview members’ lack of participation in downtown Augusta itself is an area for further exploration.

Given the project’s genesis in a community that has a very negative self-perception and the desire to avoid a critical spirit toward the church’s context, the project avoided some topics that Fairview should consider. In the project’s new context, the need to establish positive rapport with the congregation also discouraged solicitation of negative perspectives. Such concerns may be unnecessarily political, but with the goal of the lessons and sermons being the introduction of new concepts, I was reluctant to initiate conversations that merited their own attention and perhaps a more intentionally selected audience. As time at Fairview and familiarity with her people increase, a survey and

focus group on the ways that missional theology and common grace compel congregants to seek restoration, reconciliation, and justice may prove worthwhile.

The feedback from the lessons and sermons continues to inform sermon series and teaching plans, especially on the topics about which the respondents indicated that they would like to hear more. The responses have also led to more questions about the areas and opportunities in the region, and reasons for congregation members' interests in them. Some responses also help Fairview's ministry teams to have an idea of worship preferences, missions interests, and fellowship opportunities.

In cooperation with the Fairview prayer team, the project has led to the idea of a prayer calendar that would guide the congregation to pray for and participate in different areas of the community. This is an ambitious undertaking that may not be a reasonable goal for the beginning of 2019, but it is possible for Lent or as a summer devotional companion. The vision for an annual calendar would identify twelve local arenas of cultural engagement and then weekly subcategories within those arenas, or seven arenas and fifty-two unique examples, allowing for each day of the week to have its own consistent prayer focus.

Similarly, while this project focuses on missional theology and common grace, the exploration of materials such as those from James K. A. Smith and Tish Harrison Warren has sparked an interest in liturgy and discipline. There is a clear segment in the Fairview community that is very interested in thoughtful perspectives on personal and family worship, and those resources provide helpful starting points that affirm those interests while being consistent with missional themes. Future studies and series on these topics should be well received.



## Broader Possibilities

In 2016, I took a Doctor of Ministry class called “The Gospel and Cultural Renewal” with Richard Mouw and David Kim as part of my studies at Fuller. Already well acquainted with the doctrine of common grace, I used a portion of the paper from that class to explore the possibility of common grace as an entry point for contextualization and evangelism, a connection point that I had not previously seen explored. Dr. Mouw responded with the following:

I enjoyed reading your paper, and learned some things from it. I have been thinking lately about how to do more by way of linking our Kuyperian perspective to the “missional church” discussions. Some of the missional folks draw inspiration from Newbigin, of course, and that is a good area to explore, since Newbigin shared some key emphases with Kuyper. But others—I have just been reading a lot of Guder—don’t seem to know what to do with equipping laypeople for cultural engagement... Anyway, I got some good clues from you along the way.

While this comment was the source of much joy and encouragement, on a broader scale it affirms that there is some benefit to further exploration of the connection between common grace and missional living. That, of course, is the impetus for including common grace as part of this project: not only to introduce it as a doctrine, but also to posit it as tool for equipping the saints. As indicated in chapter three, missional church advocacy has evolved over the last two decades as “missional” has changed from a new concept to a buzzword to a subcategory of the Church’s broader efforts to wrestle with changes in culture. Regardless of the nomenclature, however, the importance of the Church’s sent identity remains. Along with movements such as the recovery of spiritual disciplines and the exploration of liturgical living, common grace can be a significant aid in building that identity.

APPENDIX A: CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

**Fairview Engagement Survey  
(for Rev. Thompson's doctoral project)**

**1. What is your status at Fairview?**

- Covenant Partner (member)  
 Longtime visitor (more than 2 years)  
 Regular visitor (between 6 months and 2 years)  
 Recent visitor (less than 6 months)

**2. How long have you been active at Fairview?**

- Less than one year  
 1-5 years  
 5-15 years  
 15-25 years  
 more than 25 years

**3. What is your age?**

- |                                   |                                |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55-64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18-24    | <input type="checkbox"/> 65-74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34    | <input type="checkbox"/> 75-84 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35-44    | <input type="checkbox"/> 85+   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 45-54    |                                |

**4. Are you female or male?**

- Female       Male

**5. Which worship service do you attend?**

- 9:00 AM only       Usually 9:00 AM but occasionally 11:00 AM  
 11:00 AM only       Usually 11:00 AM but occasionally 9:00 AM

**6. Which is more important to you?**

- Time of worship service       Style of worship service

**7. Do you attend Sunday school?**

- Yes       No       Occasionally

**8. Where do you live?**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> North Augusta                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Augusta         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aiken County outside North Augusta     | <input type="checkbox"/> Columbia County |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Edgefield County outside North Augusta | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Georgia) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (South Carolina)                 |  |

**9. Where do you work?**

- North Augusta
- Aiken County outside North Augusta (including SRS)
- Edgefield County outside North Augusta
- Other (South Carolina)
- Augusta
- Columbia County
- Other (Georgia)
- Work in home
- Retired

**10. What is (or was) your line of work, or most closely describes your employer(s)?  
Check all that apply.**

- Art/Design/Music
- Clerical/Administrative
- Construction/Facilities Management (including contractor/subcontractor work)
- Education (including administration)
- Finance
- Government (other than military and SRS)
- Healthcare (including administration)
- Homemaking
- Insurance
- Law
- Military
- Natural Resources (including agriculture, livestock, etc.)
- Real Estate
- Recreation
- Sciences (other than SRS)
- SRS
- Technology
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

**11. Are you a "regular" at any of the following?**

- A particular "sit down" restaurant (large chain)
- A particular "sit down" restaurant (locally owned or small chain franchise)
- A particular coffee shop
- A particular retail business
- A particular park or outdoor place
- A particular exercise facility (gym, yoga studio, etc.)
- A particular bar, brewery, or music venue
- Other

Please specify, if you wish:\_\_\_\_\_

**12. Of the following, where do you spend the most leisure time?**

- Greenway
- Local Park
- Downtown Augusta
- Downtown North Augusta
- Mall area or Walton Way Extension shopping area
- Washington Rd./Berckmans Rd. commercial areas
- Martinez or Evans
- Aiken
- Edgefield County
- South Carolina other than the above
- Georgia other than the above
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Regarding the most recent sermon series and last Spring's Wednesday night series, what is your acquaintance with the theology of work?**

- I had studied it prior to the Wednesday lesson series
- I heard about it at the Wednesday series
- I heard about it in the September 2 sermon (from Genesis 2, "Faith and Work")
- I have not heard much about it

**14. Regarding the most recent sermon series and last Spring's Wednesday night series, what is your acquaintance with "missional church" theology?**

- I had studied it prior to the Wednesday lesson series
- I heard about it at the Wednesday series
- I heard about it in the September 9 sermon (from John 21:19-23, "Missional")
- I have not heard much about it

**15. Regarding the most recent sermon series and last Spring's Wednesday night series, what is your acquaintance with the doctrine of common grace?**

- I had studied it prior to the Wednesday lesson series
- I heard about it at the Wednesday series
- I heard about it in the September 16 sermon (from James 1:16-27, "Common Grace/Common Ground")
- I have not heard much about it

**16. How relevant are the following to your life?**

	Not relevant- Difficult to connect with my life	Slightly relevant- at least good to know	Moderately relevant- some applicability	Very relevant- I can use this	Extremely relevant- I want to know more!
Theology of Work- God's purpose in any kind of work (vocation, hobbies, homemaking, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Missional Living- Being "sent" by Jesus into the mission field of our own lives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Common Grace- Recognizing God's goodness in everyday things	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**17. Outside of church activities, in the past two weeks, have you**

- Had a conversation about your faith with another Christian?
- Had a conversation about your faith with a non-Christian?
- Heard a person of another faith speak about their religion?
- Been in a situation that you felt was in conflict with your faith?
- Prayed about how to interact with someone at work, school, or in the community?
- Felt that you were challenged in your faith?
- Please comment if you wish: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**18. When other Christians talk about their faith to you or someone else, do you feel**

	Never or almost never	Sometimes	Usually or always
Apprehensive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intimidated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Excited	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Curious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skeptical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Affirmed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**19. The most difficult aspect of sharing faith is**

Finding common ground with someone else  
 Knowing the right way to start a conversation or articulate things  
 Apprehension about being asked questions  
 Apprehension about getting in trouble  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**20. It would be easiest for me to explain how God is present and active in (check all that apply)**

Architecture     Art and Design     Exercise     Fashion     Food  
 Music     Nature     Sports     Someone Else's Life

**21. I would be interested in a study of how God is active in**

Architecture     Art and Design     Exercise     Fashion     Food  
 Music     Nature     Sports

**22. I get excited when I find out about a new**

Restaurant     Coffee shop or bar     Park  
 Concert     Industry or business     Boutique  
 Large retail store     Gym     Entertainment venue  
 Bank     Grocery store     Traffic option  
 School     Movie     TV show  
 Church  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**23. When did you become a Christian? Check all that apply.**

Childhood  
 Adolescence  
 College  
 20's  
 30's  
 After 30's  
 Before marriage

- After marriage
- Before having children
- After having children
- After a traumatic experience in my life or a loved one's life
- After someone invited me to church
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**24. Do you have a regular devotional life?**

- Yes     No     I try but am inconsistent

**25. Do you regularly pray for...**

- Your family
- Your friends
- Your colleagues
- Your clients or customers
- Your neighbors
- Your neighborhood
- Your community
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: SESSION SURVEY

Please fill out and return in the provided envelope. Additional comments can be made on reverse sides:

1. Did you attend Rev. Thompson's Wednesday Night lessons in April and May?  
 No (skip to question 6)  
 Yes (some)  
 Yes (most)  
 Yes (all)
  
2. If yes, do you recall a lesson or lessons having a particular impact on your thinking?  
 April 18: Being Missional Christians, part 1 (changes in culture and church)  
 April 25: Being Missional Christians, part 2 (video)  
 May 2: Saving Grace and Common Grace  
 May 9: Articulating the Faith (through relationships, leading people to ask)  
 May 16: Our Gifts and Our Calling (our individual "cultures")  
 May 23: Tasting and Seeing the City (what are our favorite things?)  
 May 30: Leading Others to See (spiritual practices, mystical vs. prophetic religion)
  
3. Did you do any of the "homework" assignments?  
 Mapping your mission field  
 Find an example of Common Grace in your everyday life (person, place, thing)  
 Identify an opportunity that God provides you for deeper conversation  
 Identify a unique gift that God has given you for engaging your personal "mission field"  
 Explore a local business, park, etc., that is new to you. How is God at work there?
  
4. On a scale of 1-5 (low to high), how applicable were the concepts in the lessons to your life?  
 changing culture  
 missional church  
 common grace  
 faith conversations through relationships  
 personal gifts and calling  
 personal mission field  
 Spiritual practices/Spiritual disciplines



5. On a scale of 1-5 (low to high), how important are the following concepts for Fairview's future?

- changing culture
- missional church
- common grace
- faith conversations through relationships
- personal gifts and calling
- personal mission field
- Spiritual practices/Spiritual disciplines

6. Have you been present for Rev. Thompson's September sermons?

- No
- Yes (one or two)
- Yes (all three)

7. If yes, do you recall a lesson or lessons having a particular impact on your thinking?

- September 2: Faith and Work (Genesis 2, work as part of creation)
- September 9: Missional (John 20:19-23, being "sent")
- September 16: Common Grace/Common Ground (James 1:16-27, God's goodness)

8. Did any of the sermons present concepts or understandings that were new to you?

- September 2: Faith and Work (Genesis 2, work as part of creation)

Example:

- September 9: Missional (John 20:19-23, being "sent")

Example:

- September 16: Common Grace/Common Ground (James 1:16-27, God's goodness)

Example:

9. On a scale of 1-5 (low to high), how applicable were the concepts in the sermons to your life?

- September 2: Faith and Work (Genesis 2, work as part of creation)
- September 9: Missional (John 20:19-23, being "sent")
- September 16: Common Grace/Common Ground (James 1:16-27, God's goodness)

10. On a scale of 1-5 (low to high), how relevant are the sermons' concepts for the Fairview congregation?

\_\_\_\_\_ September 2: Faith and Work (Genesis 2, work as part of creation)

\_\_\_\_\_ September 9: Missional (John 20:19-23, being "sent")

\_\_\_\_\_ September 16: Common Grace/Common Ground (James 1:16-27, God's goodness)

11. For Fairview's life as a church, which of the following concepts from the lessons and sermons are most important for our growth as disciples of Jesus? Rate from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important).

\_\_\_\_\_ Being "missional"

\_\_\_\_\_ Understanding Common Grace

\_\_\_\_\_ Understanding work as mission and service

\_\_\_\_\_ Community participation in traditional missions

\_\_\_\_\_ Community participation in business, leisure, leadership, civic organizations, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ Spiritual Disciplines and practices

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