

6-2018

Sabbath, Community, and a New Imagination: Learning to Listen in Treynor, Iowa

Adam Magill
dmin-fpcoord@fuller.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Magill, Adam, "Sabbath, Community, and a New Imagination: Learning to Listen in Treynor, Iowa" (2018). *Doctor of Ministry Projects*. 324.
<https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/324>

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Theology at Digital Commons @ Fuller. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Fuller. For more information, please contact archives@fuller.edu.

Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

SABBATH, COMMUNITY, AND A NEW IMAGINATION:
LEARNING TO LISTEN IN TREYNOR, IOWA

Written by

ADAM MAGILL

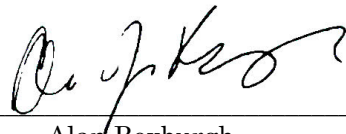
and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

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:



Alan Roxburgh



Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: June 26, 2018

SABBATH, COMMUNITY, AND A NEW IMAGINATION:
LEARNING TO LISTEN IN TREYNOR, IOWA

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

ADAM MAGILL
MAY 2018

ABSTRACT

Sabbath, Community, and a New Imagination: Learning to Listen in Treynor, Iowa

Adam Magill

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2018

In a world filled with idols vying for people's allegiance, communities can easily lose their capacity to listen to and care for each other. The purpose of this project is to explore the various forces attempting to dominate life in Treynor, Iowa, in order to help neighbors to examine their own priorities and discover together a new imagination of Sabbath life and practices.

Utilizing the frameworks of Appreciative Inquiry and the Missional Change Process, a small group of leaders from Zion Congregational Church led two-session interviews with their neighbors. These interviews asked questions about faith and life in the Treynor community and explored the relationship between neighbors and the potential idols of work, sports, and consumerism. These interviews found that when neighbors spent time listening to other neighbors, their captivity to life-stealing forces lessened as they become more aware of the competing claims for their allegiance and instead began dreaming about Sabbath life and practices together.

This project humbly attempts to remind the larger church that there is life beyond the supermarket of idols in which we find ourselves; an alternate imagination of life can be awakened, one that is rooted in Sabbath practices flowing out of a primary relationship with God. May God lead us all in discovering this new imagination, as neighbors listen to each other and challenge the status quo.

Content Reader: Alan Roxburgh, PhD

Words: 223

“Learn something!” -Tom Magill

To my beautiful wife and children:

Thank you for your love and support through this season of life.

I am looking forward to our next adventures together.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE: EXCELLENCE EXPECTED, EXCELLENCE ACHIEVED: THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES IN TREYNOR, IOWA

INTRODUCTION	2
Chapter 1. HISTORICAL IDENTITY	8
Chapter 2. HOW WORK, SPORTS, AND CONSUMERISM CAPTURED THE COMMUNITY'S ALLEGIANCE	15
Chapter 3. DESCRIBING THE TOOLS	30
PART TWO: AN INVITATION TO AN ALTERNATE IMAGINATION	
Chapter 4. GUIDING FRAMEWORKS	39
Chapter 5. SABBATH THEOLOGY	51
PART THREE: REFLECTIONS AND NEW IMAGINATIONS	
Chapter 6. REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIMENT	69
Chapter 7: REFLECTIONS AS A CHURCH	103
Chapter 8. NEXT STEPS AS A CHURCH AND COMMUNITY	124
APPENDICES	132
BIBLIOGRAPHY	140

PART ONE

EXCELLENCE EXPECTED, EXCELLENCE ACHIEVED: THE ADAPTIVE
CHALLENGES IN TREYNOR, IOWA

INTRODUCTION

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt 6:4-5).¹ While many Christians today in Western culture have read and studied these words, the daily implications that the sovereignty of God claims on our lives is often lost in a supermarket of idols, each competing for our allegiance. The single command found in this passage, however, suggests that there is indeed a primacy to God’s claim over our lives. Loving God with all of who we are (heart, soul, and might) implies that our hearts will not be lusting after anyone or anything else. Yet in practice, this is simply not the case; in a consumerist society, we have effectively given our allegiance away to any number of false gods, becoming captives to many life-stealing forces. This results in entire communities living with captive imaginations that cause people to turn inward and to lose the ability to listen for the Spirit of God in the neighborhood.

When imaginations are held hostage and people cease to seek God outside of their own cares and context, the community as a whole will suffer. Historically, people live in Treynor because they want and choose to be here. There are many other options for individual and family housing around this community; larger urban centers such as Council Bluffs, Iowa, or Omaha, Nebraska, are minutes away. Every housing option is available within a twenty-minute drive of Treynor. As McKnight and Block write in *The Abundant Community*, “when people do something voluntarily, it is because they care

¹ All scripture quoted is from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

about it or it wouldn't stick. There is no cohesion without care; there is no care without choosing freely to be there."²

The people who make up this community are here voluntarily. They live here because they are seeking a small-town atmosphere. The school system is also a draw for people to live in Treynor. And, following the logic of McKnight and Block, because those who live here do so voluntarily, the Treynor community should more naturally care about each other. The voluntary association of choosing to live in this community has a uniting effect on everyone in this place. The people in Treynor certainly do care for one another. However, the time, effort, energy, and life-giving practices available for others in community are often stolen as the demands of misplaced allegiances prevent neighbors from truly listening to each other. Imaginations are held captive as idols force neighbors to compete against neighbors, making competing claims for the loyalties of God's people in Treynor.

The reality of these battles for allegiance was brought to light during a leaders' retreat at Zion Congregational Church in 2013. Church leaders had spent time dwelling in Scripture, specifically studying passages in Luke chapters four and ten. Our group of church leaders spent time in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to allow us to discern those areas where we could join with God in our community. At that meeting I listened to a very diverse group of people share about their struggles to live faithfully to God and at the same time fulfill all the expectations placed on them by the community and culture around them.

² John McKnight & Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010), 77.

During that retreat, many of the church leaders expressed weariness over the frantic pace of daily life; they felt as if they worked non-stop to keep up with others, provide for their families, and shuttle kids to and from activities. When they communicated their time commitments during an average day, there was little time left to rest and reflect, much less listen for where God was at work in their neighborhood. Simply put, they were just hanging on. Similarly, the group also spoke of the challenges their kids faced each day at school and in the Treynor community, specifically naming the pressures which sports placed on their lives. They spoke of the fear of being responsible for missing practices or games and the consequences (whether real or imagined) they believed their kids would receive as a result.

This weary group of church leaders confessed how the day-to-day management of family scheduling required a total investment of their attention, which did not always allow them to reflect and see what God was up to around them. Within the context of study and prayer, the Holy Spirit began to help us to see through the façade and false promises of the life-stealing forces vying for our allegiance; the group began to be aware of how these forces were attempting to control all aspects of life. In that meeting, the veil was lifted and our eyes began to see what Branson described when he wrote, “converging social forces have successfully embedded an imagined ‘good life’ in our psyche and social formation. . . church is tagged onto the numerous commitments of all the members, and our relationships and imaginations are centered elsewhere.”³ As allegiances to life-stealing forces began to be named, the awareness grew of the need for our community to

³ Mark Lau Branson, “Forming God’s People,” *Congregations* (2003-01-01 Winter 203): Issue Number 1, 2.

begin to listen to each other, challenging the status quo in order that we might discover a new imagination of Sabbath life and practices with one another.

This paper attempts to describe the struggles and triumphs of a few community leaders as they work to develop the capacity to honestly listen to their neighbors. It tests the assumption that people in Treynor struggle with issues of allegiance, specifically in those arenas of work, sports, and consumerism. It is my hope that by developing a few church leaders who begin to honestly listen to their neighbors, a new imagination of Sabbath life and practices will begin to emerge in the Treynor community.

As a whole, this paper proposes three main tools to lead neighbors to join together in this counter-cultural task: Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Questions, the Missional Change Process, and a re-engagement with Sabbath theology. The Appreciative Inquiry questions are used in the neighborhood interviews to help neighbors develop the capacity to listen to one another and to raise an awareness of the captivity of our community to those competing claims for allegiance. The Missional Change Process is used throughout as a big-picture roadmap to directionally guide the overall process and to give encouragement along the way. The final tool in this paper is an invitation for neighbors to re-engage with Sabbath theology. This invitation to discover a new imagination of Sabbath life and practices is a work in progress; we are living this ongoing experiment real-time. The future is still yet to be written. As a whole, this paper documents how these three tools were put to work within the Treynor community and describes discoveries that took place as church leaders worked to develop the capacity to listen to their neighbors in this community context of changing and competing allegiances.

The first part of this paper examines the context of the community of Treynor, noting both current and historical trends. It utilizes exploratory interviews that I, as the senior pastor of one of the two churches in town, conducted with several community leaders. This first section defines the three main adaptive obstacles this community faces when embracing a new imagination of life together in allegiance to God: allegiances given to work, sports, and a consumer culture. It describes the community of Treynor, how Zion Congregational Church has engaged in the community, and the tools that will be used throughout the process.

The first section of this paper also identifies how the local culture in Treynor defines success, and how that definition is held captive by allegiances to work, sports, and consumerism. It shows how allegiances and priorities have been given away throughout history, and also looks at current community trends within Treynor. This section shows how life in this community is often unknowingly dominated the status quo of competing allegiances, preventing neighbors from sharing life and listening to each other. Finally, by utilizing the tools of Appreciative Inquiry, the Missional Change Process, and Sabbath theology, this section describes the need of this community to learn to listen rather than compete, re-imagining with a fresh imagination what the community could be together.

The second section of this paper focuses on the actual experiment of the neighborhood listening interviews. It explores the relevant theological context of Sabbath and allegiance. In addition, this section explores a generative use of Sabbath theology, which, along with Appreciative Inquiry and the Missional Change Process, serves as resources for a counter-cultural imagination of community life. Lastly, this section

describes a process design for shaping developing church leaders who have the capacity to listen, as they invite their neighbors to discover a new imagination of Sabbath life and practices together.

The third section of this paper explains the selection of the church leaders who gave the interviews, the content and findings of those interviews, as well as describes the post-experiment reflection process. A fourth section will also begin to imagine any next steps that might come into being. In this way, this paper will explore how these leaders from Zion Congregational Church in Treynor, Iowa, will engage in an experiment in which the Treynor community is invited into practicing a new imagination, one which celebrates life-giving stories dealing with examining priorities, questioning allegiances, and sharing grace together.

While this paper is at times critical of the status quo of a community whose imagination is held captive by a host of competing allegiances, it is important to note that any criticism is not directed in a negative way towards the people here. Things often exist or are done a certain way simply because that is historically how it has always been. As awareness and understanding of the many forces claiming people's allegiance begins to mature, people will be able to develop and live in an alternative imagination, one that sees every aspect of life flow through a relationship with God. The findings of this paper seek to be an aid to the community of Treynor as it begins to recognize the many forces vying for its allegiance. It is my hope that throughout this project, the people of Treynor, Iowa, would begin to discover a new imagination of Sabbath life and practices together. May God lead us all in discovering this new imagination and practices, as neighbors listen to each other and challenge the status quo.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL IDENTITY

Describing the Adaptive Work

In *Leadership on the Line*, adaptive challenges are defined as “problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures.”¹ Such adaptive problems cannot be easily solved with technical solutions, because adaptive challenges require that “people’s hearts and minds need to change, and not just their preferences or routine behaviors.”² As such, instead of allowing work, sports, and the consumer culture to define all areas of life, the main adaptive challenge for the community of Treynor is to join an alternative and counter-cultural imagination, one which begins and ends with allegiance to, and relationship with, God.

To further understand and begin to move beyond these adaptive challenges, the journey detailed in this paper seeks to be a genesis, of sorts, for the entire community of Treynor; it suggests an alternative way of ordering all of life, one which does not give allegiance away to the idols that currently are holding the community captive. At its most

¹ Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 13.

² *Ibid.*, 60.

basic level, this paper is about inviting neighbors into a new imagination and attempting to strip the idols of work, sports, and a consumerism from their current dominant identity in the local culture. The paper calls the people of Treynor to return allegiance in everyday life back to God. It is a daunting task, to be sure. Yet it is precisely the task in which author Barry Harvey challenges the Western church to engage, reclaiming this type of subversive leadership and calling the church to once again “live in the world for the sake of the world.”³

The Setting

The setting and context of this paper is found in the neighborhoods within the small community of Treynor, Iowa, as well as through the scope of work performed by leaders at Zion Congregational Church. Treynor is a rural community made up of around 1,000 people located about twelve miles east of Council Bluffs, Iowa and Omaha, Nebraska. There are currently only two churches within the city limits: Zion Congregational Church and St. Paul’s Lutheran Church.

An Iowa Identity

The origins of the name Iowa are often conflicting but generally can be traced back to its American Indian roots; in this area, the name is understood to mean that one is gazing upon something beautiful and can be interpreted as “this is the place.”⁴ Pottawattamie County in particular certainly lives up to the state’s definition. With its rolling hills, rivers and streams, its un-obscured view of the heavens, this is truly a beautiful place. Before the state’s founding, this area was one in which the famous

³ Barry Harvey, *Another City* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 15.

⁴ Treynor Town and Country Club, *History of the Community of Treynor, Iowa* (Malvern, IA: The Malvern Leader, 1961), 14.

explorers Lewis and Clark came through, holding council with American Indians along the banks of the Missouri River in 1804.⁵

In 1824, the American Fur Company established a trading post in the area, trading food, money, and other goods in exchange for fur-bearing animals.⁶ Although there were originally many different American Indian tribes who lived in the area, the Pottawattamie tribe was brought into this area by the government in 1838 and remained there until being resettled again during 1846-1847.⁷ Iowa became a territory in 1838, and was named as an official state on December 6, 1846, after failing to pass the vote for statehood both in 1842 and in 1844.⁸ The majority of residents of the new state of Iowa were against slavery; “in order satisfy the Southern Congressmen” who feared that a free state of Iowa would cause a national law abolishing slavery, “a bill was introduced to admit Florida as a slave state and Iowa as a free state.”⁹

Even after Iowa became a state, all of the large settlements and cities were found within the eastern part of the state; the western half of Iowa did not have many established communities. The main western outpost in the state was in the Pottawattamie area. The American Indians, traders, trappers, and government officials who had constituted the majority of this area’s population soon were not the only people to call this area home during. Followers of Brigham Young also established an official

⁵ Treynor Town and Country Club. *History of the Community of Treynor Iowa*, 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁸ “Stories of Iowa,” *Iowa History Project*, January 2017.
<http://iagenweb.org/history/soi/soi34.htm>, (accessed May 17, 2018).

⁹ *Ibid.*

settlement in this area; by 1850, there were 7,838 Mormon settlers who had relocated, although their population dropped to 3,060 when the official call for all “true believers” came to relocate to Salt Lake City in 1852.¹⁰

Many travelers came through this area, having one of the earliest stagecoach stations in the area, which was established prior to 1850; the East to West stagecoach route was simply known as the “stage coach road.”¹¹ This route was used by as many as sixty or seventy immigrant wagons each day during the gold rush of 1849.¹² It was during this time that people began to settle down in the area rather than continue west. At that time, it was a group of “stoic but very high standard immigrant Germans, [who] had high expectations of our community and of our school” who laid the foundations of the community now known as Treynor.¹³ Many of these immigrants held strong religious convictions; many arrived in the area bringing with them a Lutheran background from their homeland.¹⁴ These individuals and families were seeking the freedom that America had to offer, as evidenced by the name of their original congregation: “The Free Evangelical Lutheran Zion Gemine Church.”¹⁵ Up through the 1860s, the church worshipped without a dedicated minister; the people’s “religious needs were served by a

¹⁰ Treynor Town and Country Club. *History of the Community of Treynor Iowa*, 15.

¹¹ Ibid, 15.

¹² Ibid., 15.

¹³ Community Leader “F.” Interview by author. Tape recording. Treynor, IA, June 26, 2015.

¹⁴ Zion Congregational Church, “Walking with the Lord: 100 Years.” Centennial Celebration Book (Treynor, IA), 4.

¹⁵ Ibid. 4.

traveling missionary, who came from Des Moines once a month, staying with different families.”¹⁶

During the decade of the 1870s, worship services began to be held in the local one-room country schoolhouse; traveling pastors began to come each week, usually holding services in the afternoon.¹⁷ It was not until 1880 that a dedicated church building was constructed and a full time minister was called to serve the church.¹⁸ The city of Treynor itself was not founded until 1887, and was originally known as “Four Corners” or simply as “Town.”¹⁹ However, in 1893, a community leader promised to rename the town in honor of the regional Postmaster if a Post Office would be constructed in the Four Corners community; Postmaster Treynor agreed, and the city was thereafter known simply as “Treynor.”²⁰ The fellowship that began with these immigrant farming families joining together for worship with a traveling minister began to provide for the spiritual needs of the entire community with a church and full time minister.

The History of the Two Churches in Treynor

The history of Zion Congregational Church is tied to the history of these German immigrants who created their own fellowship of faith. The church that is now known simply as Zion was not a congregation started from outside experts coming in after doing demographic studies or by targeting a population of underserved people. The origins of

¹⁶ Zion Congregational Church, “Walking with the Lord: 100 Years”, 4.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁹ Treynor Town and Country Club. *History of the Community of Treynor Iowa*, 19.

²⁰ “City of Treynor, Iowa,” *City of Treynor*. <http://www.cityoftreynor.com> (accessed May 17, 2018).

Zion Congregational Church grew straight out of the neighborhood, being made up of the immigrants who formed that early gathering of believers known as the Free Evangelical Lutheran Zion Gemine Church. Sadly, like too many congregations, the birth of Zion as it is known today came out of tragedy and schism.

According to Zion's centennial celebration booklet, in 1901, the daughter of church members passed away, "and the pastor refused to allow her funeral service to be held in his church because she was not a confirmed member."²¹ The unofficial and unwritten history of this tragedy is that this young woman's death was self-inflicted, and there was such a strong stigma against suicide that the pastor and church refused to allow her to be buried in the church cemetery. Whatever the reason, this was problematic to the family of the deceased. Family members donated land east of Treynor (the original congregation was located on the western edge of the town) in order for a new cemetery and church to be constructed; thirty-eight friends of the family left the original church in order to begin this new fellowship that they named "The Free Evangelical Lutheran Zion Congregational Gemine Church."²²

At this time in the history of Treynor, these two churches shared the same story. The original settlement church became the Free Evangelical Lutheran Zion Gemine Church and was located west of the city's center; the Free Evangelical Lutheran Zion Congregational Gemine Church was located east of the heart of town and was made up of the grieving family, as well as their neighbors and friends. Those must have been interesting times, with very long signs to accommodate the names of these congregations.

²¹ Zion Congregational Church, "Walking with the Lord: 100 Years," 4.

²² Ibid., 5.

The two churches have never reunited, and at different points of history have been in sharp rivalry with each other. Currently, the relationship between the two churches is one of mutual support and respect. Each congregation affectionately makes reference to the “other” church, which will either mean St. Paul Lutheran Church or Zion Congregational Church, depending on where one belongs.

CHAPTER 2

HOW WORK, SPORTS, AND CONSUMERISM CAPTURED THE COMMUNITY'S ALLEGIANCE

Historical Background of the Allegiance to Work

Life proved difficult at the very beginning of the settling of the Treynor area; everyday tasks of necessity dominated the decisions and choices. Carving a farmstead out of the wilderness was incredibly difficult work. If a family was to survive, it required that everyone in the family work together; by necessity, that work consumed all of life. Many stories of hardship in this area are still told today. In those early years, when the cows were turned loose in the evening, there was no telling how far they would roam by the morning, as there were no fences on the prairie.¹ German immigrants continued to pour into the community from “the old country,” arriving by boat to New York City and then traveling by extraordinarily bare passenger trains (there was a wooden bench to sit on if you were lucky), first to Chicago and then on other train lines; these immigrants and their

¹ Treynor Town and Country Club, *History of the Community of Treynor Iowa*, 16.

families would finally walk or join other travelers and wagon parties in order to arrive in the Treynor area.²

Survival was difficult and required a fierce dedication to work and production. For those coming into the community, the harsh winters continued to wreak havoc on life; the wagon drivers had to regularly stop and order everyone to get out in order to walk and warm up their legs. One immigrant woman shared that she begged the driver to allow her to sit instead of getting out and walking again; she recalled that “if the all out call had come a little later, it would probably have been too late to save her life.”³ Sadly, this woman’s experience of the extreme cold was not unique; on April 20, 1874, a man named John Murphy passed away, along with his elderly father and six year old son, when they got lost in a blizzard outside of Treynor.⁴ Both rural and city life in the Treynor community during that time was difficult and required a complete focus on work and economic life in order to provide food and shelter for families and individuals. But despite the hardships, at the start of the twentieth century, the town of Treynor had a barber shop, a butchery, a smithy, a saloon, a town store, a newspaper called the *Sentinal*, as well as a hardware store, post office, creamery, church and a school.⁵ A commitment to work was a necessary part of everyday life. By the grace of God and the sheer determination of will, the town of Treynor and its surrounding farming families eventually began to thrive.

² Treynor Town and Country Club, *History of the Community of Treynor Iowa*, 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18-21.

It is perhaps relevant to share that even today, there is a culture in Treynor that has been described as one of stubbornness, or even “bullheadedness,” present within this immigrant farming community.⁶ The practical allegiance given daily to work, which ended up dominating all areas of life, was a necessity in the early history of the people in and around Treynor. If you did not work, your family would not have food. At that time the entire family joined in the work; children worked alongside their parents and contributed to the family’s survival. City records show that teenage girls would often be required by their parents to help out with keeping livestock together as they travelled through town; it is recorded that such work was “most embarrassing for a teen-age girl to help with this chore” and girls “would try to hide when they could see the town ahead.”⁷

In early farming, rural families were consumed by work together. Every hand in the family, as well as in the neighborhood, was needed to accomplish the work and challenges of farming life; whether it was caring for livestock, hauling goods to sell in town or in Council Bluffs, working together during the harvest, or even building homes, family members and neighbors worked side by side. However, as time advanced, less people were required for the same agricultural work. With the advancement of the railroad, “the corn, wheat, beef, and pork raised by Iowa's farmers could be shipped through Chicago, across the nation to eastern seaports, and from there, anywhere in the world.”⁸ As railroads gave way to automobiles and modern trucking, and horses transitioned into tractors and modern agribusiness, this area’s agricultural focus began to

⁶ Community Leader “F” Interview.

⁷ Treynor Town and Country Club, *History of the Community of Treynor Iowa*, 17.

⁸ “History of Iowa,” *Iowa Official Register*, <http://publications.iowa.gov/135/1/history/7-1.html> (accessed May 17, 2018).

increase exponentially away from the local (a farmer's need to provide for family) and into the global (a farmer's need to increase profitability). With this new agricultural technology, children were no longer as needed to help on the family farm and began to move into the cities seeking non-agricultural based jobs. Neighbors were no longer needed to help other neighbors, and fewer families remained on the farm; as modern agribusiness and farming technology expanded, small family farms became no longer economically viable. What once was a community industry became privatized, as neighbors competed with neighbors in the global market.

That privatization and inward focused persisted as the community continued to shift from a predominantly rural to a more suburban context. Throughout the area, however, the cultural allegiance to hard work remained in the people in this area, passed down from generation to generation. There are, however, many times when that cultural stubbornness is a blessing; people here refuse to quit until the job is completed. For example, when one is working on the farm, that stubbornness is certainly an admirable trait and even a necessity. The job will get done, and it will get completed the right way. When church or community challenges arise, a dedicated group of people will spontaneously work together until the task is done.

The cultural tendency to overemphasize the importance of work, when coupled with a self-serving economic marketplace, often pits neighbor against neighbor and becomes an unhealthy community trait. A higher priority and value is generally placed on work and economic productivity than on community relationships. It is an insatiable quest; despite all the time and effort spent to achieve excellence, it is never enough, nor will it ever be enough. And, as authors Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat explain, "there

is no word more offensive to a culture driven by unlimited economic growth than the word enough.”⁹ As the economic and technological changes have come, success has once again been privatized as neighbors compete to keep up or surpass the productivity of other neighbors (“Did you hear that Roger is now renting the Smith’s bottom farm-how many acres does he have now, and with that new combine too!”) instead of a communal success (“our community worked together to get the harvest in and now we will all survive another winter) that was present in the past.

In *Doing Local Theology*, Sedmack writes that “the way we order the world around us is influenced by our culture.”¹⁰ As was just explored, people in Treynor have historically been willing to work very hard. This character trait has been found within the community’s DNA and can be traced back to the very beginning with the arrival of the town’s founding immigrant families. Reflecting this cultural trait, the city of Treynor’s motto is: “Treynor Takes Pride in its People.”¹¹ The local school is also an important part of the community, and the motto of Treynor CSD also reflects this cultural trait: “Excellence Expected, Excellence Achieved.”

There are, however, times when such dedication to work to the point of excellence would not be helpful; while striving for excellence in all aspects of life may be an admirable quality, this motto is not without its challenges. For example, the definition of excellence may change based upon the perspective of a specific leader or group. In the

⁹ Brian Walsh, and Sylvia Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 161.

¹⁰ Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 46.

¹¹ “City of Treynor, Iowa,” *City of Treynor*.

same way, understanding the expectations of excellence or how and when it is properly achieved is also open to interpretation. Depending on how these words are used, there might be portions of the student population who do not achieve according to the normal definition who are simply left behind. As that motto is unpacked, another narrative can be seen: the belief that if a person only works hard enough, then that person will be able to rise above their peers in order to achieve success. This pursuit of excellence, if taken to the extreme, raises the stakes of the competition and divides rather than unites a community. Admitting that he probably worked too much, one early interview respondent said, “I’m a 24/7 guy at work. I always tell people that I’m always available. Even when I’m on vacation. I’m always available. Because I just think that’s the level of service that I have to give...”¹²

These changes and the privatization of success have affected community dynamics in many ways. Competition between neighbors and families is more prevalent. As generations of children who have been raised with the conditioning of serving the god of work (the majority of whom now have no family or farming work required of them) grow into adulthood, and as they attempt to navigate a conditioned version of success (interpreted as the ability to excel over their peers), the allegiance to work is often transferred to an allegiance into the world of sports, especially when they are raising their kids.

Historical Background of the Allegiance to Sports

Sports, like work, can be a wonderful and life-giving force for people of any age. Sports have the ability to teach teamwork, discipline, how to deal with success and

¹² Community Leader “A.” Interview by author. Tape recording. Treynor, IA, June 5, 2015.

failure, as well as providing numerous health benefits. But sports, like work, have the ability to become a powerful idol when a person begins to define their life through the activity rather than from God. Just like the love of money which Paul warned Timothy against, all kinds of problems will come if a person's entire life is ordered and valued based upon their success and involvement in sports (1 Tim. 6:10). If an individual's primary allegiance is to sports, then the value they place on themselves and others will also revolve around sports, leaving no space for God's grace to redeem the identity of humanity. The allegiance to sports is particularly deceptive because it has the potential to be a powerful life-giving force, especially in the lives of young people. But when all of life becomes ordered and prioritized around sports, then sports have the potential to take away the time, effort, and energy that could be given to other life-giving relationships and activities. If one's allegiance is given away to sports, then one cannot also give it to God.

For example, in 2013, the school system in Treynor added soccer as a new sport offered by the high school. While many positive experiences have come from this decision, it did not come without complications. One congregation member complained to me at the time: "soccer was getting set to take over the world." That individual saw the immediate effect that a new soccer program would have on the existing track program, among other sports. While the sport had the potential to be a blessing to the community and to the student athletes, the sport also was positioning itself to make as many students into soccer players as possible, to the detriment of all other sports teams. But it is more than just soccer that makes total claim for people's allegiance; when any sport (whether it be at the youth, high school, college, or professional level) makes claims of total

allegiance on an individual's life, allegiance is no longer going to be given to the true King.

In the context of Treynor, the town's close proximity to Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Omaha, Nebraska, compound this problem even more. Students will often participate in one or more seasonal sport practices through the local school, while simultaneously playing in various league and club teams in those larger cities (which participate the entire year). Such constant allegiance being given priority over the rest of life makes the idol of sports a significant adaptive challenge in this community.

Historical Background of Consumerism

*Well, who are you? (Who are you? Who, who, who, who?)
I really wanna know (Who are you? Who, who, who, who?)
Tell me, who are you? (Who are you? Who, who, who, who?)
'Cause I really wanna know (Who are you? Who, who, who, who?)¹³*

In the late 1970s a weary Pete Townshend was struggling with issues of identity and allegiance; as one of the leaders of the band "The Who," Townshend had been engaged in a long negotiation process with publisher Allen Klein.¹⁴ Leaving those negotiations, he went out drinking and the song "Who Are You" was born as a result.¹⁵ The context of the song and the lyrics suggest the confusion that Townshend was experiencing as he tried to navigate mainstream superstardom without losing his identity or selling out from his character and priorities. As author Benjamin Barber explains, "branded lifestyles are not merely superficial veneers on deeper identities but have to

¹³ The Who, "Who Are You," MCA Records, 1978.

¹⁴ SongFacts, "Who Are You by The Who," <http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=2394> (accessed May 17, 2018).

¹⁵ Ibid.

some degree become substitute identities—forms of acquired character that that have the potential to go all the way down to the core.”¹⁶ In the case of Townshend, a gifted artist was fighting to prevent his identity from being swallowed by a substitute identity, the consumer music industry, which was pressuring them to perform and sound a certain way. In the song, Townshend’s refrain names the struggle between life defined by these two separate and competing narratives: “Who are you?”

In our context today, those systems which serve the idols of productivity and economic growth are such dominant forces, it becomes hard to imagine any other reality. The status quo of individual success is a powerful thing. The question “Who are you?” is all-too-easily found within these colonizing voices, and any alternative is inconceivable. As Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann, and John McKnight explain in *An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture*, “economic systems based on competition, scarcity, and acquisitiveness have become more than a question of economics; they have become the kingdom within which we dwell.”¹⁷ Such a dominant system attempts to capture and control all of life, to the point where it becomes impossible to imagine other way of ordering the world. Like the demands of the music producer, the consumer culture has taken over in directing and shaping what an “acceptable” life will look like. Any alternate ways of ordering life will be discredited and seen as a threat to the whole.

In this area, geographic proximity to the urban settings of Council Bluffs and Omaha also make an interesting shift in the economic life of the people who live in and

¹⁶ Benjamin Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2007), 167.

¹⁷ Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann, and John McKnight, *An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2016), Kindle location 199.

around Treynor. As described earlier, the Treynor area has shifted from predominantly a rural farming community made up of German immigrants into a mixture of large farming families and a bedroom community of middle class professionals. In describing the city of Treynor, one community leader noted that “one of our greatest strengths is being twenty minutes from downtown Omaha. And one of our greatest curses is that we are twenty minutes from downtown Omaha.”¹⁸ Another community member bluntly stated that, “we’re not gonna be a business mecca by any chance or stretch of the imagination. We are a bedroom community, and I think we need to embrace that.”¹⁹

It is actually faster to live in Treynor and drive to downtown Omaha than it is to live in most of the affluent Omaha suburbs (which people here tend to desire). The faster commute, along with cheaper housing and a phenomenal school district attract many people to move into or around the Treynor community. These people who are moving into the area are often “in sales or middle management or upper management...with companies in Omaha or Council Bluffs.”²⁰ While the transition in our community has been slowly changing from a rural community to a town made up of mid-level management and professionals, cultural elements (such as the previously mentioned stubborn work ethic) of rural life still are common in the people here. In general, the economic success and independence found within the suburbs are viewed positively, as Treynor continues down the path of privatization to suburbia.

¹⁸ Community Leader “F” Interview.

¹⁹ Community Leader “A” Interview.

²⁰ Community Leader “F” Interview.

The majority of new housing developments around the Treynor area have taken place not in the town itself but outside of it; small clusters of houses have been developed along the highway between Treynor and Council Bluffs. As that shift takes place, “if the patterns of popular religion no longer give a symbolic unity to the rest of life, they can die.”²¹ Once having a rural understanding of life and religion, the Treynor community is experiencing a push towards the urban. As elements of the suburban universe blend with the rural, it is possible that tensions will arise surrounding how to worship and relate to God. “Religious universes crumble for a reason, and that reason is most often that they are no longer integrative of the rest of social relations.”²² Care must be taken as the community finds its religious center in this new dynamic of both suburban and rural, as the Treynor community attempts to navigate which identity and allegiances to follow.

As the community seeks to find that new identity in its changing demographic, the community is participating in “a cycle designed to maximize not the quality of life, but production and consumption.”²³ People are chasing the illusion of the good life and are sacrificing a priority on faith and relationships as a result. Most notably there has been a “disappearing care for the whole” as the people of Treynor trade their rural neighborly roots for a more progressive image of individual success.²⁴ People here generally work and play at a frenzied pace, sacrificing meaningful relationships with family and neighbors in a never-ending quest to be successful, whether at work, on a ball field, or in

²¹ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 140.

²² *Ibid.*, 140.

²³ McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community*, 47.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

the marketplace. The membership of the two churches in town numerically constitute a majority of the people in Treynor; yet in daily life, experience shows that relationships in our area are often not as valued as the god of economic productivity. In essence, “the market ideology says that neighborly relationships are no longer required.”²⁵ Yet, in a small town, it is precisely those neighborly relationships which compose a vital piece of that town’s identity.

In this context of identity crisis and allegiance-confusion, the local culture in Treynor promotes a monopolized belief of life being ordered by economics over the relational realm. Success and productivity are the gods that dominate life, claiming total allegiance over all who succumb to its economic narrative. Pursuing this singular imagination of a successful life leaves little time for family or neighbors; relationships are shelved as people rush to chase success and productivity in the marketplace. As a result, in Treynor, and within much of Western culture, success is most often viewed in economic terms.

The danger for market-focused communities like Treynor is that the community will eventually become a distanced group of individual consumers, attempting to better their own situation to achieve success with little regard for the other. As more and more people buy into the lies and status quo of scarcity, propped up by a consumer culture, the importance of relationships fades as the drive for domination over others to achieve success becomes insatiable. As McKnight and Block bluntly write in *The Abundant Community*, “becoming consumers, we have stopped being citizens, and as a result, the roles that the family and neighborhood play in our lives have atrophied and the

²⁵ Block, Peter, et al, *An Other Kingdom*, Location 257.

community has become incompetent.”²⁶ Worrying about the best return on investment and running an impossible quest for success and greater productivity, our community only will find even greater problems when “we undermine what is local and personal.”²⁷

In Summary: The Adaptive Challenges of Work, Sports, and Consumerism

In Treynor, the status quo has crushed any opposition to ordering life beyond the norm. Many of the struggles which the Treynor community faces is largely due to these forces of work, sports, and consumerism claiming total allegiance over the lives of people who live here. The many demands of those idols over the people here have now become the dominant narrative, making it very difficult to imagine life being any other way.

For many, that allegiance is given away innocently enough. Going back to the original immigrants who settled in this area, people were forced to work very hard. Their survival depended upon it. As time and technology changed, less people were needed for that life-sustaining work, so that allegiance to work can be seen morphing into an allegiance to sports, especially in the lives of area youth. And existing within the same context is an even larger consumer culture, which attempts to define all of life in economic terms, demanding that neighbor compete against neighbor and live into an allegiance based upon the lies of scarcity rather than of God’s blessings.

In their work *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship, and Community*, authors Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight Friesen attempt to show how “a simple switch of the imagination can produce a whole

²⁶ McKnight & Block, *The Abundant Community*, 54.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

new set of questions regarding the health of the church.”²⁸ While the context of their work is about reimagining the life of the church, the same principle applies in the life of neighborhoods and communities. My hope is that in some way the work and tools described in this paper will begin to reveal a new imagination, simply by having neighbors stop and listen to other neighbors. Through that tiny act, people will begin to remember that there is more to life than economics and status and productivity. By creating space for neighbors to breathe and listen to each other, my hope is that the larger community will discover a new imagination of Sabbath life and practices together, giving each other permission to imagine life beyond the status quo along the way.

The ability to listen to one another as neighbors is critical if communities are to move beyond a consumeristic or success-at-all-cost narrative of life. As Roxburgh states in *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, “we’ve lost the art of talking with one another...in fact, sometimes people feel threatened by our questions, thinking we are intruding on their privacy.”²⁹ Barriers must be broken down. Neighborhood discussions need to happen in a free, positive, and grace-giving way. As the various forces have stolen people’s allegiance, so to have they robbed neighbors the openness and unity that was once the norm in rural life and communities. As neighbors no longer depend on other neighbors for survival, as they did when Treynor first was founded, new tools are needed in order to help navigate the way. If a new imagination is to begin, the communication between neighbors must be practiced in the positive. These new tools must help

²⁸ Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight Friesen. *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship, and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 30.

²⁹ Alan Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 187.

neighbors give one another permission to speak and also assist neighbors in honestly listening without judgment. One such tool is called Appreciative Inquiry.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIBING THE TOOLS

On Appreciative Inquiry

In the latest edition of *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations*, Mark Branson writes: “we, as churches, are founded as people of stories, and gratefulness is essential to our faith and social well-being.”¹ As a people who are made in God’s image and built on the foundation of God’s great and redemptive story of Jesus, the sharing and hearing of stories are woven into the fabric of our DNA. As Branson describes, “AI provides an organization-wide mode for initiating and discerning narratives and practices that are generative.”² Instead of focusing on the problems facing a group or community, the process of using Appreciative Inquiry instead frames each question by focusing on what is good and life-giving. As Branson explains, “Appreciative Inquiry assumes that all organizations have significant life forces, and these forces are available in stories and imaginations.”³

¹ Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, 2 ed (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 23-24.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

It is exactly these generative and life-giving narratives which have the power to transform communities. Neighbors can be invited to unite together in the positive, listening to each other's stories, and developing deep and meaningful relationships with others. The Treynor community has the chance to discover a new imagination of community life together, in a way which draws out and teaches those life-giving stories already present in the neighborhood. The logic behind Appreciative Inquiry is that this re-imagining of life together will engage the community more effectively if approached from a life-giving and celebrating way rather than focusing on a "deficit model," where focusing on problems and working towards solutions to those problems leads to what Branson describes as creating "the wrong interpretive grid."⁴

Branson identifies the five "generic processes" of Appreciative Inquiry as:

1. Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry.
2. Inquire into stories of life-giving forces.
3. Locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry.
4. Create shared images for a preferred future.
5. Find innovative ways to create that future.⁵

While this project is not going to be specifically framed around Appreciative Inquiry as an overarching framework (the Missional Change Process is going to serve in that role) the commitment to positivist action and reflection will be a key tool in community interviews and gatherings. With Appreciative Inquiry, everyone is a valued contributor, even though everyone will see things differently. This will be especially helpful in a small community such as Treynor, as there are strong feelings held by

⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁵ Ibid., 35.

neighbors who may or may not agree with each other but will continue to live next to each other for years to come. By utilizing questions tailored through the action and reflection processes of Appreciative Inquiry, the participation and reflection in life-giving narratives becomes available to all. As Dwight Zscheile notes, “contemporary society is haunted by yearnings for community and connection that the shape of contemporary life continually frustrates.”⁶ Currently, that yearning and longing is visible within the Treynor community. Yet even though it is visible, there a new road map is needed, detailing how to navigate to that new space.

On the Missional Change Process

Cultural and community change transformation is an exceptionally difficult task. To have a chance at successfully navigating that process, a tool to keep a general directional heading is needed. Such a vehicle should not be manipulative, nor should experts who have no insider knowledge or stake in the outcome own the process. Instead, a community’s culture-change must come from within the ranks of the very ones who are doing the transforming. In other words, it is “the people of a local church” who are responsible to “discern and develop actions that come from among themselves rather than strategies and programs proposed by leadership.”⁷ And while those community leaders are engaging culture at the local level, they need a roadmap to help them along the way and ensure they are heading in a desired direction. Authors Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren lift up the Missional Change Process as one such vehicle for delivering cultural

⁶ Dwight Zscheile, *The Agile Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), Kindle Location 438.

⁷ Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 136-137.

change; the Missional Change Process is all about moving from one place to the next in order to “effectively negotiate a set of new realities they have not engaged before.”⁸

For the purposes of this community experiment, the Missional Change Process is going to serve as that vehicle to invite the Treynor community to live into that set of new realities and new imagination of life together. It will assist leaders on the ground in reading the terrain before them and help them navigate any next steps that should be taken. The Missional Change Process will also serve as an encouragement along the way, as the process itself is not linear; the process has no real beginning or end, but allows an assessment of community that gives permission to have not yet achieved completeness or interpreted success. Leaders at Zion Congregational Church in Treynor have been exploring the adaptive challenges in Treynor for the past seven years. There simply is not an easy solution for the challenges in the Treynor community and the tendency to give allegiance away to the idols of work, sports, and consumerism. But the Missional Change Process has been a helpful tool along the way and will continue to give an overall heading for this paper and the experiments it describes.

Roxburgh and Boren describe five basic levels of the Missional Change Process, which are simultaneously engaged throughout the community: “awareness, understanding, evaluate, experiment, and commitment.”⁹ Navigating through these different processes will eventually lead to community and cultural transformation. The first level of the Missional Change Process attempts “to understand this basic reality and

⁸ Ibid., 135.

⁹ Ibid., 136.

create the space where people feel safe to talk about what they are experiencing.”¹⁰ This is the awareness phase, when permission is granted to talk about things not normally discussed. It is a place of big and unanswered questions. “Awareness is about creating the space, giving the time, and creating the safe, welcoming table where these feeling scan be expressed as a first step in giving them language.”¹¹ Before transformation can begin, knowing the landscape of a given context is a critical first step.

Roxburgh and Boren’s next phase in the Missional Change Process is “Understanding.”¹² In this second step, listening is key; “listening and giving voice to the people is one of the ways we learn together to discover the Spirit.”¹³ It is during this time when the size and magnitude of the obstacles become apparent. As this stage of “understanding” processes, people will begin to “ask each other new kinds of questions that stimulate new forms of being.”¹⁴ The questions that come from the time of understanding will naturally translate into and “evaluation phase.”¹⁵ The evaluation phase is evident when “people are ready to risk dreaming a little about what God might be calling the church to be in their neighborhoods.”¹⁶ It is in the third stage where much grace will be required; breaking free and dreaming outside of the way that things always have been done requires courage and grace from all parties. It is also in this stage where

¹⁰ Ibid., 141.

¹¹ Ibid., 141.

¹² Ibid., 142.

¹³ Ibid., 142-143.

¹⁴ Ibid., 143.

¹⁵ Ibid., 143.

¹⁶ Ibid., 144.

new imagination begins to be evident on the horizon. This is the critical “decision-making” phase where the decision whether to “move toward or away from concrete actions of missional life” must be made.¹⁷ If the decision is made to continue down the rabbit hole, it will lead to a time of small, intentional learning experiments.

The fourth “experimentation” phase is the point in the Missional Change Process when “people themselves begin to own the change; they are shaping imaginations, taking risks, and discovering the Spirit at work in and among them.”¹⁸ During this phase, small experiments are created in the neighborhood and among the people in that context.¹⁹ It is worth mentioning that any result from these experiments is worthwhile; much can be learned from failed experiments. The culture at this phase begins to take on a new life. This phase of experimentation is not intended to solve any large problem. Rather by going through the process of taking small risks and dreaming about what could be, the Spirit begins to offer a new imagination away from the status quo of what always has been, revealing glimpses of what God might be up to in that context.

The final phase of the Missional Change Process is that of “commitment.”²⁰ This last phase comes when there has been a transformation of culture. This does not mean that all adaptive issues have been solved. But this phase marks an intentional shift in the habits, practices, and values of the lives of people in that particular context. In the case of a congregation at this “commitment” phase, “ordinary men and women... now begin to

¹⁷ Ibid., 144.

¹⁸ Ibid., 145.

¹⁹ Ibid., 144.

²⁰ Ibid., 145.

actively innovate mission-shaped life across the church because they have listened to each other...they have discovered that the Spirit of God really is present among them.”²¹ This phase is a point of no return; for churches and communities who embrace this phase of the Missional Change Process, there is no going back to how life was ordered previously. The people will be transformed into a new creation.

It should be noted that the Missional Change Process is not linear; Roxburgh and Boren describe the process as “like a set of spirals continually turning back on and interacting with one another rather than a straight-line process in which one moves from A to B to C and so on.”²² It is not a goal-oriented, step-by-step manual that will solve all worldly problems. It is a process where the journey itself is as valuable as the destination. The Missional Change Process creates space in which congregations and communities can open themselves to listening to the Holy Spirit. It is a vehicle by which a process of cultural and community change can begin. But that final stage of commitment in the Missional Change Process is ongoing. The action of commitment is never truly complete but rather serves as an invitation to dive back into the process and follow where the Spirit of God is leading; as the Treynor community begins to give itself permission to share life together in new ways and dream with a new imagination, the Missional Change Process will continue to serve as the big-picture guide to help people along the way.

On Sabbath Theology

In many ways, the leaders of Zion Congregational Church in Treynor, Iowa, have been taking this journey for the last eight years, albeit imperfectly. The congregation has

²¹ Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 145.

²² *Ibid.*, 135.

tried many experiments during this time, attempting to listen to the Treynor community as neighbors and not as objects. As Peter Block writes, “to listen is really to retreat from the commodity system, to retreat from productivity. A form of Sabbath.”²³ Utilizing a new Sabbath imagination is the third key tool that this paper and the experiment it describes will employ. Ultimately, Sabbath theology is about living out worship, allegiance, and the sharing of Godly grace in community. By using the language of a new Sabbath imagination, neighbors will be able to ensure that any new understanding and praxis of allegiance will be given to God, and not simply be transferred to yet another idol.

²³ Block, Peter, et al, *An Other Kingdom*, Kindle Location 1594.

PART TWO

AN INVITATION TO AN ALTERNATE IMAGINATION

CHAPTER 4

GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

Where We Have Been: Awareness

I have been privileged to serve as one of two senior pastors in the community of Treynor for the past seven years. The other pastor leads St. Paul's Lutheran Church, the ELCA congregation that has the same lineage as our own congregation at Zion Congregational Church. Together with the church now known as Zion, St. Paul's Lutheran Church was part of the original Free Evangelical Lutheran Zion Gemine Church. After the split in 1901, the congregation changed its name to eventually become St. Paul's Lutheran Church, with a location south of the center of town.

Leading in such a small community can be challenging; finding areas of common ground in order to create inroads into closed systems is often difficult in many communities where family relationships go back over one hundred years; Treynor is no exception to that rule. My own background lessened this difficulty; I was raised on a farm located about forty-five minutes away from the Treynor community. And while I did not know much about Treynor prior to living here (other than the fact that Treynor has a Casey's General Store), growing up in close geographic proximity to this place makes me feel like I am naturally part of the local culture.

In many ways, this proximity has made my role as a local leader much easier; people view me as an insider, even though I am relatively new to the community. At the same time, being an insider makes the task of “getting on the balcony” that much more difficult.¹ In *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, authors Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky describe the process of gaining a balcony perspective as “taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment. The only way you can gain both a clearer view of reality and gain some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself from the fray.”²

In the context of the Treynor community, rare are the times when I am seen as someone other than the pastor or a religious expert in the community. Not long after arriving in Treynor, I knew that I needed better ways to gain a balcony view of our community and the people who live here. It was during this time that my own need to better understand the people in this context and gain a balcony view of the people of Treynor was amplified. In 2014, a wave of suicides and suicide attempts hit the community; four people committed suicide, and there were at least two other attempted suicides I know of during that difficult time. Using the language of the Missional Change Process, I did not have an adequate awareness, much less an understanding, of the adaptive issues facing our community. These tragedies began to reveal the need that many people in Treynor were desperate for community and relationships. It was clear that I needed to pay more attention to all aspects of our community, especially given my role

¹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 51.

² Ibid., 53.

as a leader in our church. Aware of these issues, I needed to spend time listening in order to build an understanding of the realities of my neighbors.

Where We Have Been: Understanding

In *Structures for Mission-Shaped Formation*, Roxburgh argues that the church must begin to pay attention and listen to the “legitimizing narratives” in the world around us.³ He shows how “the source of our crisis is not a shortage of programs, strategies, and tactics; it’s a failure of theological imagination.”⁴ As the leaders of Zion church and I wrestled with the adaptive challenge of understanding the real life challenges in the world around us, especially as we tried to discern how best to respond to the wave of suicides in our community, God led us to begin to seriously question our intentions and motivations. During that time of reflection, church leaders began to understand that the church had fallen prey to a false legitimating narrative, believing that a successful church had full pews and overflowing coffers. While unintentional, our church had lived into the culture’s allegiance to consumerism and defining success through economics; this harmful narrative was a disrupting force and was preventing us from reclaiming what our narrative should be about—God’s agency in the world and the context of Treynor, and in the relationships between God’s people in this community.

Church leaders began to unpack the different ways that the Treynor community worshipped and how the people here connected with our community. They discovered that while the church believed and ascribed to a boundary-breaking and grace-giving missional vision for the church, in practice, the vast majority of the church still desired to

³ Alan Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission-Shaped Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

rest in a place that could be both comfortable and controllable. Faced with the undeniable horror of suicide and community grief, we soon realized that the congregation had lost its focus; the church's priorities, habits, practices, and values had transformed to match the culture instead of the church inviting the community to be shaped by what God is up to in our own neighborhoods. In arguing for what he calls doing "local theology," author Clemens Sedmak writes that Christian spiritual life "challenges local culture and has a counter-cultural force within any given culture."⁵ The church's leadership and I realized that the church's current praxis of faith reinforced, rather than challenged, these cultural beliefs in the Treynor community. We found that the church was reinforcing the culture of valuing numbers over neighbors. We also realized a deception within us; while we would use grand relational words to describe a successful church, in practice our definition was based around economic realities of attendance, growth percentages, and church finances.

As we worked to listen to the congregation and to the community in response to the suicides, the church participated in various surveys and questions in the style of Appreciative Inquiry. These questions were framed in a positive way and enabled the church to give permission to discuss some difficult realities; in daily life, the idols of work, sports, and consumerism ultimately pits neighbor against neighbor as people strive for success. As Zscheile describes, "such is the human story—created for community, yet prone to go our own ways, to seek our own ends rather than others', to turn inward rather

⁵ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 64.

than to live interdependently in trust with God and one another.”⁶ These false narratives had been drowning out the reality of God’s grace and abundance in our community. Up to that point, our church had done nothing to prevent that take-over of allegiance; worse still, we had in many ways actively promoted it by how we had been defining success and promoting church growth.

The response to the appreciative inquiry surveys and conversations resulted in the leaders retreat which was mentioned earlier in this paper. The responses were discussed in church and in monthly Deacons’ meeting. As awareness and understanding (the first two parts of the Missional Change Process) of the issues of allegiance grew throughout the congregation, a desire was felt to help others in our community come back to both God and neighbor. This was a confusing time however, as there were no formal programs or roadmaps to lead where we felt God was calling our church to go. We relied on the Holy Spirit and continued to utilize the Missional Change Process. Rather than declaring ourselves to be the expert, as church and community leaders we had to admit what we did not know and trust that God would lead us where and how to respond.

Where We Have Been: Evaluation

People need an appropriate space to process their own disorientation with the issues and world around them. Under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the church continued to engage the Missional Change Process; God brought both awareness and understanding to the reality of our community’s struggle and helped church leaders with the evaluation of those issues of allegiance. In daily habits, practices, and values, leaders realized the church and community largely did not have a relationship with God that was

⁶ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, Location 702.

ordering life; rather, the demands of these false gods were claiming authority over people. Those demands were constantly robbing people of time, effort, and energy to relate to one another in meaningful and life-giving ways.

As a bedroom community, neighbors in Treynor typically will see very little of each other; living in Iowa, which has an extended winter season where everyone remains indoors, there is a climate element involved in neighborliness. If neighbors are to gather together during the colder seasons, it will typically happen only through very intentional means. With the culture being held captive to work, sports, and consumerism, placing any amount of intentionality on investing in a non-monetary relationships with one's neighbors often does not make sense. At that time, however, there was a deep yearning felt that there is more to life than what the idols of work, sports, and consumerism had to offer. There was a sense among the people that there is life out there if only it could be reached.

In 2014, the leaders at Zion had to decide if they were going to continue to open themselves to changing the culture of the church or if the status quo would be maintained. Monthly Deacons meetings were devoted to discerning the answer. The entire church council was ultimately approached with the Deacons' recommendation for the direction of the church. As the church's eyes continued to be opened to the hunger of the community for real relationships, the leaders in the church council were faced with the third stage in the Missional Change Process. Actions and responses needed to be measured. These leaders decided that they could not sit on the sidelines and watch the community fall prey to these false narratives; the decision to continue down the process

of living missionally in the Treynor community led us all to ponder how God was calling us to engage our neighbors.

Where We Have Been: Experimentation

One of the early community experiments that was led by Zion Congregational Church was a series of block parties hosted at various neighborhood homes across town. The purpose of this experiment was to see what would happen if the space was created for neighbors to spend time with each other. The Holy Spirit was present at those block parties; as neighbors and families met each other in that space, people gave themselves permission to make life in the neighborhood a priority, if only for a couple of hours. People who had lived on the same street for a decade were meeting each other face to face for the first time. Common sentiments about neighbors talking about and desiring a gathering like this were heard at every block party event.

For that experiment, Zion Church purchased an event grill and agreed to supply the grill, hamburgers, hotdogs, as well as the appropriate buns and condiments. For the first block party, a family with a large yard, who was not a church member, was asked to be the host. Neighbors gathered at a specified time, bringing their own drinks and a dish to share. It was well received and we threw several other block parties that summer in different neighborhoods around Treynor. Each neighborhood block party experiment was a little different than the other. Several parties grilled. One host home chose to do ice cream sundaes for their block party. Another group of neighbors took the initiative and closed several streets and arranged for a fire hydrant to be opened for the neighborhood's children to play in. The common theme in every block party was a longing for a culture and reality where events like that party was not a once-a-decade experience but rather a

part of every-day life. People began to see the value in relationships—how simply being with neighbors and sharing life stories together was a normative, life-giving event. During those block party events, the chains of work, sports, and consumerism that too-often held the community captive were released, if only for a few hours. Those early block parties were life-giving to each neighborhood, as neighbors began to build awareness and understanding of an alternate imagination of life together.

A more formal tool for gaining access to Heifetz and Linksy’s balcony view was a series of interviews I conducted with local community leaders, which again utilized questions reflective of the Appreciative Inquiry process. Each interview lasted about two hours, and asked Appreciative Inquiry styled questions about the respondent’s practices of daily life, family, faith, work, sports, as well as their understanding of Sabbath theology. I learned a lot from these interviews, again building my own awareness and understanding of how others in our community prioritized and lived their lives. And through every interview, an internal struggle was revealed, which remains the adaptive challenge for our community. The allegiance of many people in our community is held captive by the forces of work, sports, and consumerism. Further evaluation was warranted, and the main project outlined in this paper was formed as a result.

Where We Have Been: Commitment

The work of inviting the community of Treynor into a new imagination of life together lived in allegiance to God is a marathon of a process. There is not a graduation or a completion as the guiding framework of the Missional Change Process is always ongoing. Even when a church or group reaches that commitment phase, it simultaneously will also involve every level of the Missional Change Process. Even when that

commitment phase is reached, there will still be both successes as well as failures. As a pastor and community leader I have seen this first-hand. As a church, the leaders and members at Zion decided to adopt the Missional Change Process as a roadmap for leading congregational and community change. That decision was not made lightly. It involved months of prayer and study by many different groups. At that time, the church abandoned a church-wide business plan which measured church health and success by growth percentages.

However, as a pastor I have struggled to lead in this new space. As a church we have leapt into the unknown and are trusting God to lead us to the Promised Land. Our hopes for our church and our community are high. The church leaders and I have seen the captivity of the community to the idols of work, sports, and consumerism; we have experienced each one first hand in our own lives. But we also know and are convinced that there is another way. God has offered a way of life that is not defined by idols; it is a way that restores value to both creation and humanity. As one church leader described, “now that our eyes are open, there is no going back.” And this is true. Through the process of working through the Missional Change Process, God has changed our congregation. We cannot go back; we have made a commitment to follow the Spirit of God no matter where the Spirit leads. This project is an invitation for neighbors in Treynor to begin to do the same.

Where We Have Been: Already and Not Yet

Beginning to name the different forces at work vying for people’s allegiance in the Treynor community has taken a period of several years to be able to identify. It is important to note that these adaptive challenges are not isolated in the community; the

implications of misplaced allegiances are felt within the congregations as well. For example, we do not take named attendance at Zion Congregational Church but instead gather a general number of people in worship each week. It has long been felt by the church leadership that allegiance to life-stealing forces was preventing people from attending church on Sunday mornings. And while the church's average attendance has grown the last many years, the people who attend Zion's worship service on any given week will vary greatly. It is very common for families to be absent for several Sunday worship services each month; in talking with people who had often been absent from church, the reasons given for their absences are generally tied to those same categories of work, sports, and consumerism, and with the resulting frantic pace of life. And while this trend had been present below the surface of the congregation, the numeric data available to the church leaders until this last year still displayed a growing congregation, both in the areas of numeric participation and in levels of giving.

However, in 2016, the leaders at Zion Congregational Church began to receive data demonstrating the busyness in people's lives. For the first time in four years, Zion's weekly worship attendance average was less than the previous year's average attendance. In 2016, attendance for Sunday morning's worship service dropped almost 4 percent.

<i>Average Attendance Growth Percentage from the Previous Year</i>	
<i>2014</i>	<i>+1.5%</i>
<i>2015</i>	<i>+7.9%</i>
<i>2016</i>	<i>-3.7%</i>

These numbers give some raw data that on the surface appear self-explanatory; yet under the surface, these numbers are confusing to church leaders. In 2016, church membership at Zion grew by just over 8 percent. If these new members attended at the

same time, they would constitute about 16 percent of an average worship service. With a lower church attendance average, the weekly offering which is taken during Sunday's worship service was also 12 percent lower in 2016 than it was in 2015. Zion significantly increased its membership in 2016, and yet there was an 11.6 percent deviation from growth in attendance during 2015 through 2016. And while people should never be reduced to a number, these attendance trends show some raw data in regards to the effects of misplaced allegiance and priorities.

These adaptive issues affect both the church and the larger community. It is in this disorienting space that the people are faced with the challenge of becoming aware of the battle raging for their allegiance and beginning to practice a new imagination where the idols of work, sports, and consumerism no longer define and control every aspect of life. In this way, our church is attempting to live into a space which is both the already and the not-yet. While we have come to a new imagination of life together, our church has not yet fully embraced all of the new habits, practices, and values that the new imagination offers. The chains of captivity to the old idols are indeed hard to let go. Elements of the congregation at Zion still exist at every platform of the Missional Change Process. As such, the work is ongoing.

The goal of this project is to begin to work towards a lasting transformation both within and beyond the church by creating space for neighbors to listen to each other, leading to the restoration of the Treynor community's allegiance to God. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5). In Scripture, it is the Sabbath that provides the lens by which the authority of God is measured against

all other claims by false gods and idols. This project proposes that a new imagination is needed; one which would begin to challenge the default narrative of work, sports, and consumerism. I have attempted to show how both Appreciative Inquiry questions and the Missional Change Process were used in helping church and community leaders build awareness and understanding. But such change would be meaningless unless it was rooted in God's missional activity and divine authority. To that end, the third and final tool this project will utilize is Sabbath theology.

CHAPTER 5

SABBATH THEOLOGY

Reclaiming the Sabbath to Help Build Awareness and Understanding

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work-- you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it (Ex. 20:6-11).

As Sedmak explains in *Doing Local Theology*, a true theology involves “reality, fidelity to the founder, and the practical consequences that follow from a particular theological ‘work.’”¹ Using Sedmak’s criterion, a good Sabbath theology includes the realness of the horrors that the Israelites faced under the oppression of Pharaoh. It will also address the realness of life today and honestly acknowledge the problems of living in a world that has given allegiance to work, sports, and a consumer society, and which is far removed from a unified understanding of Sabbath theology.

A theology of Sabbath based in reality will also honestly, and without judgment, acknowledge how people understand the Sabbath today. It would be unwise to attempt to help reimagine a Sabbath theology in a context without first understanding the reality of

¹ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 69.

how people in that context understand the Sabbath. As Treynor continues to transition from a community made up of early German settlers and now finds itself in a pluralistic society attempting to navigate through all the claims on its allegiance, a theology that was once rooted in the local has become a fragmented memory of a “thou shall not” command from a different age. The protestant cultural monopoly of Treynor’s founding no longer exists, with the reality of new and competing voices which are working towards different beliefs, goals, and priorities. There is not a singular understanding, if any understanding at all, of Sabbath life and practices.

To further demonstrate this fact, if you ask someone in Treynor to describe the Sabbath commandment found in Scripture, you will most likely get a wide range of responses, ranging from “I have no idea” to “you are not supposed to work on Sunday.” That problem has developed largely because there is no longer an assumed local understanding of the context of Sabbath. Originally, the Sabbath was about real people (the Israelites) wrestling with issues of identity and allegiance (life with God vs. life with Pharaoh) and then living out (rather imperfectly, I might add) the consequences of those struggles. Today, the Sabbath has been reduced to an outdated cultural mandate with no local basis for understanding the meaning behind its origins. Speaking generally, any Sabbath imagination in Treynor has been removed from real people, real place, and real issues. As a result, it is all but an empty theology in today’s local culture.

Sedmak’s first criterion for good theology is that it will be present in the reality of the local context and be an “aspect of human maturity.”² Data was needed, in order to

² Ibid., 70.

move past any assumptions and get concrete answers on how current residents of Treynor understand Sabbath theology. To that end, I included a question about Sabbath in a series of interviews which I conducted with several community leaders in Treynor. The question, “What does the word Sabbath mean to you?” elicited a variety of answers from all nine respondents. Four of the nine respondents mentioned some form of rest or relaxation. About half of the respondents communicated that they understood the word “Sabbath” as having something to do with God’s command to rest or keep that day holy or set apart. Two of the respondents did not have any understanding and did not even try to guess what the word Sabbath meant. To the majority of those interviewed, Sabbath was limited to some form of relaxation or ceasing work.

These honest answers provide key insight into the current level of Sabbath theology with very real people in this very real context. The responses show that Sabbath theology has no concrete bearing on the daily habits, practices, and values of people who live in Treynor. The answers provided by the interview respondents show that those who did connect Sabbath to a command given by God generally focused on the word “command” in some legalistic framework of their imagination. To those respondents, Sabbath is to “not be working” or to “keep it low on Sunday.”³ Another respondent answered that Sabbath is “just the day of rest, worship, [and] relaxation.”⁴

One respondent noted the tension that existed in navigating the family schedule with God’s command to rest on the Sabbath; there was a sense of guilt and frustration in this respondent’s voice, as the respondent described conversations with coaches in

³ Community Leader “B.” Interview by author. Tape recording. Treynor, IA, June 15, 2015.

⁴ Community Leader “A.” Interview.

attempting to keep kids free from practices and games on Sunday for family.⁵ And while God was involved in most of the answers given by the respondents, it was clear that as a group, Sabbath was about duty and obligation to rest. It was restrictive rather than liberating. For those interviewed, that Sabbath duty to rest may or may not have divine authority attached to it. With their imaginations held hostage by a “thou shalt not” understanding of the Sabbath commandment, none of the respondents could broaden their own imaginations past a Sabbath definition of rest. The captivity of language held to Branson’s “deficit model” was readily apparent, as descriptions and feelings of guilt were shared on how the respondents failed to observe the Sabbath.⁶

These interviews offered a snapshot of what real people thought about a real theology of Sabbath at that time within the community of Treynor. Continuing with Sedmak’s logic, a new Sabbath imagination will be grounded in the reality of where people are found in this particular place.⁷ And that reality is this: with the community leaders who were interviewed, Sabbath theology was shown to be largely rooted in a narrow and legalistic framework. The primary language of Sabbath was that of restrictive activity: a belief that God requires that people should rest on Sunday. While those that responded gave different descriptions of what activities were allowed, all voices came from an assumed position of guilt and restriction, the language house of “thou shalt not.”

With the help of Appreciative Inquiry and the Missional Change Process, it is my hope that the community of Treynor can be invited to discover a new and local

⁵ Community Leader “G.” Interview by author. Tape recording. Treynor, IA, June 30, 2015.

⁶ Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations*, 24.

⁷ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 70.

imagination of Sabbath life which is greater than a restrictive interpretation of the Sabbath command in scripture, one which instead leads to new life of freedom and devotion to God. A good Sabbath theology will understand the struggle, continually calling people to a place of deeper faith, or in Sedmak's language, an "aspect of human maturity."⁸ As this struggle is explored and unpacked, an invitation to rediscover the context of the original Sabbath theology is present. This invitation propels movement from a place of understanding within local life into the context found within next mark of good theology, "the criterion of fidelity to the founder."⁹

A key part of discovering new Sabbath life and practices is to understand that God's work at creation is doxological; that is, all of creation (and humanity with it) was created in order to worship God. Again, using Sedmak's rubric, just as good theology will always remain faithful to the founder, a good Sabbath theology will give God praise as the author and source of all things. No competing element or force vying for people's allegiance can make that claim: not work, not sports, not finances, a consumer culture, or anything else. Only God, "the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them-- the LORD, who remains faithful forever" (Ps 146:6).

At creation, God gave both identity and value to humanity as both men and women were created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). What is more, the creator of the cosmos did not need Adam's help in naming and ordering creation, but in doing so, God invited a relationship with Adam and with Eve (Gen. 2:19). That relationship was marked by a covenant life together, with stipulations, blessings, and curses (Gen. 2:16). Together,

⁸ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 70.

⁹ *Ibid*, 71.

Adam and Eve experienced God in Eden. Even after the fall recorded in Genesis chapter three, the call of Adam and Eve to fill the earth cannot be separated from their relationship with God. A good Sabbath theology will remain faithful to the true nature of God's creation, with God as the author and agent of life and humanity as the created ones made in God's own image.

If people attempt to find identity based on vocation, hobbies, or the markets, a diminished humanity will result, one that is in conflict with the sovereignty of God which is demonstrated in creation. Giving allegiances away to the idols of work, sports, and a consumer culture devalue the creative work that God began in Genesis with the unwarranted invitation to rule over creation together. And despite the fall recorded in Genesis chapter three, the identity of Adam and Eve carry on through the generations; the identity of humanity remained as those made in God's image. A new Sabbath imagination will always maintain its identity in the relationship between God and God's people. When people give their allegiance away to idols, they are essentially making the claim that they do not need God in their lives; a renewed Sabbath imagination is rooted in the claim that humanity's relationship with God is foundational, with all aspects of life flowing out of that relationship between the Creator and the created.

In writing *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, author John Walton concludes that the entire first chapter of Genesis should be read through a specific lens, which he calls the "cosmic temple inauguration."¹⁰ This lens sees the seven days of creation as God building and ultimately inaugurating God's

¹⁰ John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 162.

temple. Within this framework, the purpose and identity of all life flows from participation within God's temple (creation), living out worship and praise to God. In this way, humanity is invited to rule over creation as priests who lead the world in praise to God. The ordering of creation, and ultimately the Sabbath, is fundamentally tied with worship. As such, a good Sabbath theology leads directly into an invitation to worship God in every aspect of life.

In exploring Ephesians 4:1-16, authors George Lotter and Timothy van Aarde describe how the invitation to worship is actually an invitation to all people to unite and worship God together.¹¹ They write that “The priesthood of believers has the function and role in *missio Dei* of binding, building and moving people together.”¹² In this way, “the priesthood of believers provides an orientation for a biblical missional ecumenism.”¹³ While Lotter and van Aarde are arguing for a rediscovery of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in the church in every age, their logic applies at a creational level. The priestly role given to humanity since the creation is a central part of the identity of those made in the image of God. This role unites all people through all times together. Humanity was created to lead all of creation in worship. This was part of Adam and Eve's mandate in Genesis and it continues as part of the identity of the priesthood of all believers. Simply put, human beings were made to point all of creation to God and fulfill the priestly role of leading the entire world to worship together. In this way, all of

¹¹ G. Lotter & T. van Aarde, 2017, “A Rediscovery of the Priesthood of Believers in Ephesians 4:1–16 and its Relevance for the *Missio Dei* and a Biblical Missional Ecumenism,” *In die Skriflig* 51(2), a2251. <https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/article/view/2251/4706> (accessed May 17, 2018).

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

creation was made to worship, with people participating and leading that worship. At all times, the worship must be directed to God, lest more idols be created.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. (Gen. 2:1-3).

For the community of Treynor to realize a new Sabbath imagination, people must first recognize that from the moment of creation, humanity has been in relationship with a loving God, our Creator. A new imagination rooted in Sabbath theology must remain true to humanity's identity as ones who have been created and loved by God, for the purpose of leading creation into worship. For it is humanity's identity that is found at the core of the tensions between allegiances given to work, sports, and a consumer culture. These idols attempt to make foundational claims about identity, which undermine God's work in Genesis when God blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Gen. 2:3).

Walton argues that Sabbath theology is ultimately about God's kingship and authority because the "Sabbath is for recognizing that it is God who provides for us and who is the master of our lives and our world."¹⁴ In doing so, the authority of God is honored, and the Sedmak's second criterion of "fidelity to the founder" is maintained.¹⁵ The Sabbath command "...is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (Ex. 31:17). As the Creator and the maker of heaven and earth, God's claim for allegiance is unmatched and God's authority is unequalled. God alone is God. There

¹⁴ Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 147.

¹⁵ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 71.

is no other that can make such a claim, and the Sabbath is a sign to the nations that the Lord is God. The Sabbath command is an act of allegiance, visible to both those who follow God and those who would reject God's authority and commands. The Sabbath command requires faithfulness to God, as the following of the Sabbath command goes against the world's norm of endless economic production. This is why the idols of work, sports, and a consumer culture are so problematic; you cannot serve any of those idols and remain faithful to God.

This basic reality has always existed within Sabbath theology; similar counter-cultural imaginations are present in the context of Moses and the Israelites. Walter Brueggemann writes that in the context of the Exodus story, "all levels of social power—gods, Pharaoh, supervisors, taskmasters, slaves—are uniformly caught up in and committed to the grind of endless production."¹⁶ The Sabbath command in this context is more than simply resting for a day; it is a subversive proclamation that those who claim to be in power in the world are, in fact, powerless. The Sabbath command rejects any would-be pharaoh's claims of authority, rejecting the premise and purpose of life which that Pharaoh seeks to indoctrinate. The Sabbath is linked with the first commandments which announce God's authority over all people and all places and all who would declare themselves to be a god. The Sabbath command is allegiance to God, who "is not to be confused with or thought parallel to the insatiable gods of imperial productivity."¹⁷ God is God, and Pharaoh, or anyone who would claim to be Pharaoh, simply is not.

¹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

God's Sabbath command in Scripture flows out of the faithful relationship between God and God's people that began in Genesis. It has roots in the covenantal language of Scripture and is part of the identity of the Israelites. It propels all of creation into a posture of worship. The Sabbath command is also a central part of the identity of those who follow Jesus and make up the Church. And at every point, a good Sabbath theology involves real people in real times and spaces, as well as remains faithful to God the creator. And while being real and remaining faithful to God is a good thing, it will also place those who follow God on a crash course with the powers and principalities in that context. Because once allegiance to God is given, it immediately sets up competing claims in this world, as idols like work, sports, and a consumer culture vie for people's allegiance.

In every context, a good Sabbath theology must actively wrestle with these competing claims for the allegiance of humanity. In *Colossians Remixed*, Walsh and Keesmaat describe Paul's ministry to the Colossians, showing how, "in the face of the ubiquitous imagery of the empire, Paul proclaims Jesus as the true image of God and calls the Colossian Christians to bear the image of Jesus in shaping an alternative to empire."¹⁸ A new imagination with a foundation built upon Sabbath theology must do the same; such a theology must be able to be lived and practiced in context, shaping an alternative to the claims made by idols that are competing for people's allegiance.

¹⁸ Walsh and Keesmaat. *Colossians Remixed*, 63.

This act of “living into” theology is Sedmak’s last criterion for good theology; Sedmak has labeled this third requirement “the criterion of practical consequences.”¹⁹ A good Sabbath theology will involve praxis. It will involve living out an understanding of a real theology in a real place with real people that have real struggles with real issues. It will also involve understanding issues of identity and show that humanity’s identity is found in and with God and not with any idol. But a good Sabbath theology must also involve a response, putting that theology into practice in everyday life, and living counter-culturally to all other voices claiming for people’s allegiance.

Today, implementing a praxis of a Sabbath theology will have a profound impact on the daily habits, practices, and values we carry with us in the world. As Sedmak explains, “theology is a way of following Jesus.”²⁰ We must “do” theology “as if people matter.”²¹ Because as ones made in God’s image who are invited to serve as priests, working to invite all of the creation into worshipping God--they do matter. A good Sabbath theology will be rooted in praxis, otherwise such a theology would be rendered impotent and meaningless in the world. As author Michael Fishbane argues in *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*, “the Sabbath, as it is designated, may thus become for the worshipper nothing less than the spiritual act of giving ‘the world and all that is in it’ back to God, at all times.”²² Sabbath has everything to do with allegiance and how life is

¹⁹ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 71.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Michael Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), Location 1629.

lived every single day. The result of Sabbath observance, as Fishbane describes it, is to “cultivate a life of sustained God-mindedness in the everyday.”²³

Sabbath and the Covenant

It is that level of daily God-mindedness which will help break the status quo and the power of the allegiances being given to work, sports, and consumerism in the Treynor area. Historically, Jews and Christians alike have practiced a Sabbath theology in some form ever since God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. The giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses and the Israelites was a defining moment in the history of God’s people; those commands both established God’s authority over all the cosmos and also defined how God’s people should relate to each other. The Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath command, is rooted in practical consequences. The first three commandments are rooted in people’s relationship and allegiance to God. The last six commandments deal primarily with how people should relate to each other in light of the first three commandments. But it is the fourth commandment, the Sabbath command, which serves as a bridge between the two. However, before Moses had even delivered the commands to the Israelites, they returned to their old habits, practices, and values, crafting a golden calf as an idol to worship (Ex. 32:1).

Even after the covenant was broken by the Israelites while Moses was on the mountain with God, another covenant was offered; a new set of commands were offered as a part of this covenant (Ex. 34:11-16). In this second set of covenantal stipulations, one

²³ Ibid.

of the overlapping themes is Sabbath.²⁴ It is again the Sabbath command which calls God's people into a practice of living an allegiance to God over all others. In the case of this second reiteration of the commandments, God is challenging the idol of productivity and consumption. Instead of trusting that working more will save them, God offers a life-giving rest to the lust of endless production. It is a living practice that proclaims that Pharaoh's bricks are not more important than God's people. With such a practice of the Sabbath command as a foundation, the lies found within allegiances given to work, sports, and consumerism will not be allowed to continue any longer.

Sabbath Theology Invites Awareness of an Alternate Imagination

Today's context is one of insatiable consumption; the idols of work, sports, and consumerism hold people's allegiances and imaginations hostage. And yet, as has been proven time and time again, more is never enough. As McKnight and Block write, "despite the increases in productivity, we work more, and the work has increasingly invaded community and family space."²⁵ Those idols of work, sports, and consumerism attempt to define and control life. They attempt to be the center of people's schedules, finances, and even family life. In a context where the whims and desires of individuals reign supreme, there is little space left for care for the other in community. Everything is privatized and commoditized, even life itself.

The authors of *The New Parish* describe the unfortunate "relational shift" that happens when faith and spiritual life became privatized in today's Western culture; the spiritual life of individuals became the focus of church and worship, allowing religious

²⁴ Brueggemann. *Sabbath as Resistance*, 36.

²⁵ McKnight & Block, *The Abundant Community*, 49.

organizations to market the gospel message to a specific target group rather than live covenantally together in community.²⁶ It is the same shift which author Barry Harvey describes when he writes, “The question that concerned theologians and clergy was no longer ‘how can we survive and remain faithful Christians under Caesar?’ but instead has become, ‘How can we adjust the church’s expectations so that Caesar can consider himself a faithful Christian?’”²⁷ Drawing these arguments to their core, these authors are all articulating the same competition between allegiances and the effects that same struggle has on practicing faith and worship in the life of a church or Christian community. Currently, instead of challenging the empire of Caesar and his idols of work, sports, and consumerism, the church has largely lived into that same world of commodification.

But as bleak as the world appears, there is hope! While the idols of work, sports, and consumerism attempt to sway allegiances and drown out any alternative ordering of life, it is good to remember that it was Pharaoh who ended up at the bottom of the waters. In the Sabbath command, God spoke an alternative imagination to the Israelites; that same imagination is available to us today. In this way, a good Sabbath theology can be “an act of both resistance and alternative” and help to invite a new imagination of life with God and with others.²⁸ Sabbath theology stands as a resistance to the temptation of joining the race to succeed in ways which ultimately do not bring life; such actions enslave God’s people within the idols of work, sports, and consumerism. Such

²⁶ Sparks, et al., *The New Parish*, 45.

²⁷ Harvey, *Another City*, 87.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, xiii.

commodification and market strategy devalue God's people. It perpetuates the error of an imagination held captive by Pharaoh, in a system where people are valued only based on their usefulness to Pharaoh's empire. Sabbath theology brings awareness to an alternative imagination, counter to the consumer narrative, because the Sabbath offers life centered around worship of, and allegiance to, God.

An understanding of a generative Sabbath theology is a part of the conversation in re-imagining what life together can be in the Treynor community. "Sabbath-keeping is a way of making a statement of peculiar identity amid a larger public identity, of maintaining and enacting a counter-identity, of maintaining and enacting a counter-identity that refuses 'mainstream' identity, which itself entails anti-human practice and worship of anti-human gods."²⁹ As Brueggemann pointedly states, "as church monopoly in our culture has in many places waned or disappeared, the commitment to Sabbath discipline has likewise receded."³⁰ This project seeks to begin to offer new life to the community of Treynor, so that together, a better way can be discovered as a community.

Sabbath Theology in Treynor

Currently, within the Treynor community, the fullness of Sabbath theology has been largely left behind; only a basic command to cease work remains as a common understanding of the word "Sabbath."³¹ In today's world, the nature of God's Sabbath has

²⁹ Ibid., 21.

³⁰ Ibid., x.

³¹ In many conversations and interviews with people in Treynor, a common phrase of "what is done on Sunday is undone on Monday" was mentioned. Those that recognized the word identified it simply as Sunday or as a day that was supposed to be holy or a day of rest. The larger narrative of Sabbath theology as part of human identity which is counter-cultural to the idols of work, sports, and consumerism were completely foreign. The understanding of Sabbath was "duty-driven" rather than an understanding of how God ordered all of life.

been reduced to a pharisaic understanding of Sabbath Law as that which restricts instead of liberates and diminishes life rather than restoring it. Such is the paradox of a life defined by idols, which attempt to objectify and devalue the very people that the culture claims to benefit. These idols, which make promises of the good life, are the very same forces that enslave people. As Walter Brueggemann explains, “the system of commodity requires that we want more, have more, own more, use more, eat more, and drink more...when pursued vigorously enough, moreover, one is propelled to violence against the neighbor in eagerness for what properly belongs to the neighbor.”³² Sabbath is an alternative to this madness. When the world of commodity is insatiable, Sabbath proclaims God’s promise of abundance (Lk. 12:22f).

A good Sabbath theology must involve actively following Jesus and involve the praxis of living that life-giving relationship with God. In their wandering in the wilderness, the Old Testament Israelites were faced with a similar dichotomy; all that they had known was Pharaoh’s demands for work and productivity. In Jewish theology, “entrance into the forms of Sabbath rest thus entails a shift of consciousness, from the particular details of human life to the cosmic vastness of Divinity.”³³ The process of unlearning Pharaoh’s ordering of life and priority and instead receiving the abundance and freedom of God was a process of practicing a new allegiance. “Having lived for

³² Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, xii.

³³ Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement*, Location 1614.

generations in the structures, habits, and stories of slavery and empire, Israel must learn anew what it means to be God's people."³⁴

Describing this relearning process for the Israelites, Brueggemann writes that, "wherever YHWH governs as an alternative to Pharaoh, there the restfulness of YHWH effectively counters the restless anxiety of Pharaoh."³⁵ A new imagination rooted in God's Sabbath will involve practical ways in which real people who see their identity and allegiance rooted in relationship with God attempt to live counter-culturally to the world of pharaohs and idols around them. In the same way, the real people who live in the real context of Treynor must re-learn what it means to live in allegiance to God; this re-learning will involve new habits, practices, and values, and will propel people into worship and in the priestly functions of leading others to do the same.

For the purposes of this paper, I have been using an understanding of Sabbath theology that is generative and life-giving. I have used God's Sabbath command as a lens from which to build awareness and understanding of the many competing claims for our allegiance, as well as to reclaim God's primacy over our identity as the created ones who have been made in his image—made with the specific purpose of inviting all creation to worship God together. Such an understanding of Sabbath theology will influence how the people in Treynor will relate to each other, as neighbors embrace a new imagination that reclaims a practiced allegiance to God in daily life and new practices of sharing life together in worship begin to emerge.

³⁴ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, Location 747.

³⁵ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, xiii.

PART THREE

REFLECTIONS AND NEW IMAGINATIONS

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIMENT

Process Design

The main work of the project occurred when leaders from Zion Congregational Church relationally entered their own neighborhoods in Treynor to conduct listening interviews with their neighbors. By using Appreciative Inquiry, the Missional Change Process, and Sabbath Theology as a framework for those meetings, these leaders had the opportunity to deeply listen and deeply know their neighbors, helping to bring the generative stories of God working in the neighborhood to light along the way. Transcripts of each meeting were created along the way for further reference, reflection, and study.

As a whole, this project lasted for approximately eight months. The first three months contained time for training and preparing for the leadership team. Those months were followed by three months of experimentation, where the leadership team conducts listening interviews with their own neighbors. Finally, two months of reflection completed the project, leading the group to celebrate all that God has done and also to begin to imagine any next steps that might come into being. In this way, these neighbors in Treynor were a part of a small experiment in which the entire community was invited

to discover a new Sabbath imagination, one which celebrates life-giving stories dealing with examining priorities, questioning allegiances, and listening to one another.

The Timeline

The scope of this project intends to challenge the status quo of how people live in Treynor, Iowa. Specifically, it challenges the priorities and questions the allegiances which have been given to life-stealing forces, denying the time, resources, and effort from being given to new priorities and reclaiming a Sabbath relationship with God. As I entered this project and attempted to lead through this process, I began to realize just how much I struggle in the same areas which this project explores. Navigating the many competing claims for allegiance in this fast-past world is difficult. As such, the process of leading the church and community through this interview project did not go as I had originally intended.

As actual interview process began, I quickly realized that I did not adequately prepare for the hectic nature of people's schedules, especially when mapping out the process design.¹ Frankly, I was not as realistic as I should have been in regard to people's time and prior commitments. This project involved many people and different schedules, including myself and the church leaders who gave the interviews, as well as the community members and neighbors who agreed to be interviewed; finding time for large group training, completing two different interview sessions, and meeting twice to debrief after the interviews were finished proved to be very difficult from a time-management perspective.

¹ See Appendix A for the full process design.

What I had hoped would be a three-month timeframe in reality turned into a six-month interview process. The delays were all for valid reasons. Family members had health issues. Work schedules and demands took up weekends. Time was needed for caring for parents. Adult children and grandchildren needed help. Time was given to vacation and travel. The reach and commitment to youth sports was unending. The schedules of everyone involved, including my own as a husband and father of four children, resulted in a much longer experiment timeframe than I had intended.

During that time, as a leader working with a group of volunteers, I found it hard to put too much pressure on the dedicated church leaders who were generously giving great amounts of their own limited time and energy to be a part of this project. These men and women agreed to be placed far outside of their comfort zones. They were doing the church and me a favor by participating. As a leader, I could not bring myself to pressure them too strongly during those six months because they, too, were dealing with the same issues. Once these leaders' neighbors agreed to be interviewed, the leaders had to find not one, but two occasions, when their neighbors would be able to meet for an hour or more. These neighbors were also volunteering their time; they also had schedules to keep, along with their own work and prior commitments. They had also agreed to open themselves and be vulnerable in order to participate in the interviews. The leaders giving the interviews could not push their neighbors too hard and force a faster timeframe; if they did, they might risk losing the interview--or even more importantly, potentially damage any future relationship with their neighbors.

The expanded timeline in my project proves how much all of us are fully ingrained in the status quo of the culture around us. I am certainly no exception to that.

Finding the priorities and balance in life is hard. Seeing just how ingrained the captivity to idols such as work, sports, and consumerism is a difficult task; shifting habits, practices, and values of one's daily routine is even harder. All of the difficulty in scheduling the training, interviews, and debriefing sessions after the experiment are further proof that all of us (myself included) continually need to expand our own awareness and understanding when it comes to our priorities and allegiance.

Selecting the Right Church Leaders

Finding the right people to invite their neighbors to participate in a two-session interview was of the utmost importance when beginning this experiment. Of all the church boards, the board of Deacons have been the most invested in this doctoral program. The Deacons have been the volunteers throughout this journey that have spent time each month in Bible study and Lectio, praying for our church and our community. They received regular updates and were involved with the entire Doctoral program; they were involved in all of the preparation leading into this project of developing church leaders with the capacity to listen to their neighbors. The people who have served as our church's Deacons over the years have deeply influenced me, perhaps more than I have had an opportunity to help them grow. They are amazing people, and the stories and faith they have shared over the years has been inspiring and life-giving, both to the church and to me personally.

Because the Deacons were already aware of the experiments and work that had led to the beginning of this project, it was only natural to seek out the Deacons' help as I looked for volunteers to lead the community interviews that are a part of this project and

paper. Initially, there were many Deacons who expressed interest. But when a better understanding of the time commitment that the job would require, as well as the openness and vulnerability that it would take to successfully enter into the world of their neighbors, many began to rethink their participation. As a leader, this was discouraging, and made me question if there would have been a better way to ask them to participate. I tried to be up-front, giving all of the information that I had as to what would be required, including possible timeframes. However, it is entirely possible that I gave them too much information. I may have made it seem too important or too big of a commitment. This openness might have made people afraid to volunteer. The formal nature of the project, along with all that was required, seemed to intimidate many people who I thought would have done a fantastic job talking with, and listening to, their neighbors. However, when the dust settled and the interviewer list was finalized, I ended up with four very dependable church leaders who were willing to participate, one couples and two individuals.

Introducing the Interviewers

The first person who agreed to lead these neighborhood interviews was a woman named Jodi. Jodi has a very demanding job in a health care network as a lead nurse, overseeing hundreds of other nurses across multiple hospitals. Jodi and her husband have three grown children and two grandchildren. They live on the south side of Treynor's Main Street, on the east end of town. Over the years, the city of Treynor has grown and developed around their family's Century Farm. With her husband, Jodi is a part of a multi-generational family who has deep Treynor roots going back to the town's founding. As such, their family has a strong voice and presence in the Treynor community.

Jodi and her family have always been extremely active in our church, serving in leadership roles for many church boards and groups. Jodi recently served as a deacon and now is serving as our church's moderator (the "highest" oversight position in the church). She also helps lead the adult Sunday School class on Sunday mornings. For as long as I remember, Jodi has been a foundational part of our church's congregation and leadership. She is brutally honest and has a heart of deep spiritual maturity. Her gifts of compassion and communication have served her well in her position as a nurse; those skills have also proven to be of great value during the listening interviews that were a part of this project.

The next person who agreed to help in this project is a man named Tom. When he was a young and skinny teenager, Tom picked up the nickname "Blade" (i.e. a blade of grass), which has stuck ever since. In our community, more people know him as Blade than as Tom. Sports have always been a huge part of Blade's life. He has spent the majority of his adult life serving the High School Athletic Association as an official and referee for various sports. He loves the connection with all of the kids that sports enable him to have. He and his wife have a special relationship with the kids in Treynor. His wife is bit of a coaching legend and is well known throughout the state of Iowa. Together they have three adult children and recently moved from the country onto Main Street in Treynor, just a few houses away from Jodi and her family.

Both Blade and his wife have been very active in our church and are people who are also looked to as leaders within the Treynor community. They are some of the strongest people of character and integrity that I know. They have different sets of gifts, and certainly have different personalities than the other. Blade is much more outgoing

than his wife and finds it easier to talk with others. As the old axiom goes, Blade has never met a stranger. He has a boisterous and outgoing attitude which seems make even strangers feel more at ease. A man of deep faith, Blade was raised in a devout Catholic home, attending the Catholic schools in Omaha, Nebraska. His honest and blunt manner of speaking is something which I value in our church; with his sense of humor and outgoing personality, Blade was a natural choice to help lead these community interviews. Blade just completed a four-year term serving as one of the Deacons at Zion, and has been heavily involved in the experiments and training leading up to these interviews. I both trust and rely on his voice and perspective.

The final additions to the listening experiment were a husband and wife team; Troy and Tami volunteered as a couple to help with the neighborhood interviews. I had originally hoped that Jodi's husband and Blade's wife would also join the project, but they are both are much more introverted than their spouses. As such, they were not very comfortable participating this project. They also had not served as Deacons before. Jodi, Blade, and Troy had all experienced years of training when they served on the board of Deacons, which made it much easier to agree to join the experiment. Tami is the only non-Deacon to participate in the community interviews.

Troy and Tami have two adult children and two grandchildren. Tami was a sixth-grade teacher for many years; she recently retired early so that she would be able to watch her grandson during the day while her daughter works. Troy works for an insurance company in Omaha. They live on the other side of town from Jodi and Blade. Troy and Tami are both very honest and reliable people. They are longtime members of Zion Church and come from families who have been leaders at Zion for generations.

Troy has a blunt honesty and a gift of being able to see through the chaos and pull out the important details. Although he'd probably say differently, Troy is a gifted listener and a communicator. He is able to speak plainly and is not afraid to ask questions when needed. He recently served a four-year term as one of our church's Deacons and was involved in the ground work leading up to the time of these community experiments. Like Troy, Tami is also a gifted people person. She is heavily involved with our Sunday School and youth ministry programs. Even though she retired early in order to focus on being a grandmother full-time, she has applied her talent for teaching and her love of middle school youth through teaching Sunday School as well as leading Zion's Middle Ministry program on Wednesday evenings for middle school students. Tami has a servant's heart, and a passion for the kids in Treynor. She and Troy are a powerful team and are well respected in the church and community.

Pre-Interview Preparation

Time was spent preparing the appreciative-inquiry-style interview questions so that the interviews would serve to bring out those life-giving stories of God in our community. The questions line up with much of the work the Deacons do each month in Bible study, prayer, and reading Scripture through Lectio Divina. The Deacons talked through many of the questions and offered feedback. They were instrumental in going over the results of my earlier interviews with many community leaders; these interviews formed the backdrop from which this current experiment in developing leaders with the capacity to listen to their neighbors came.

The group of church leaders were asked to spend time prayerfully discerning which neighbors to approach. As one of the main purposes in these experiments were to

help those church leaders listen, it was not necessary for the church leaders to intimately know those they were interviewing. Church attendance was not a pre-requisite. They did not have to be people of faith in order to be interviewed. Being a church-led experiment and coming from their pastor, several of the church leaders who were giving the interviews questioned what type of person we were looking for to answer the interview questions. My response was simply, “a neighbor who will say, ‘Yes.’”

These interviews were to paint an honest picture of where the people being interviewed were at in that moment in time. For the purpose of these interviews, it was acceptable if the neighbors were not coming from a place of deep faith, or any faith at all. The church leaders needed to come to their neighbors and honestly listen in the interviews, without any agendas or ulterior motives. In this way, the interview process could hopefully deepen the relationship between church leaders and their neighbors to the degree where an honest invitation to faith and the church could be made at some point later in time. If the neighbors being interviewed were lifelong disciples of Jesus, perhaps this interview process would somehow challenge them to grow even more in their faith and see their neighborhood with God’s eyes with a new Sabbath imagination. By drawing out those life-giving stories of real people and real life in the neighborhood, our church leaders had the opportunity to unite with neighbors that they perhaps did not know well or with whom they did not previously have much in common.

As the group of church leaders prayerfully considered who they would ask to be interviewed, we met for interview training sessions. We spent time in prayer, talked through Lectio in Luke 10, looked again at the Missional Change Process, and discussed all of the assumptions we brought to this experiment. During those sessions, we discussed

the needed setting of the interviews and how the church leaders could make their neighbors feel at ease and welcome in their homes. We discussed how they should not pass judgment or argue with any answer that was given. The church leaders were there to ask questions, digging deeper to clarify when needed, and simply to listen to others in their neighborhood and report back what they had heard.

During those training sessions we covered issues of confidentiality and completing the seminary waivers each participant would need to sign. Each interview was to be audio recorded; even though I was not present at each interview, the audio helped me to better interpret what went on. Perhaps even more importantly, having the church leaders record each interview also allowed them to better engage their neighbors. Because they were recording, these leaders did not have to take notes and constantly be looking down instead of engaging their neighbors face to face with good eye contact and visual cues. In this way the church leaders were able to be more present with their neighbors, and people soon forgot that the recorder was there as they spoke freely about their thoughts and experiences in the Treynor community.

On Those Being Interviewed

Jodi chose to interview two different couples in her neighborhood. The first couple lives across the street from her and have been lifelong Treynor natives, with the man being born in 1938 and the woman born in 1937.² Each widowed earlier in life, this

² Interview 1a, interviewed by Jodi Volkens., audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, August 21, 2017

couple married only a few years ago. They have very large and active families, both in the Treynor area and scattered throughout the country. This couple brought a seasoned voice to the interviews; being mature people of faith, they have seen the Treynor community as it has developed and changed over many decades. It was a valuable voice to have.

It was also a safe interview for Jodi to give. Jodi has known this couple for decades. They attend our church at Zion. For Jodi, it was both a good first practice session as she could almost guess how this couple would answer the interview questions.³ In many ways it was a confidence interview, a safe space in which to prepare for perhaps the more challenging or unknown interview which was to come. As we will discuss later, even though Jodi knew this couple well, she learned so much by listening to them through these first interviews.⁴ Their relationship matured, and the mutual respect for one another deepened greatly through this process.

Jodi also chose to interview her newer neighbors who live directly next door: a young couple with one child.⁵ They have been living in Treynor for under two years.⁶ During that time, Jodi and her husband have gotten to know them, but they admittedly did not know them well.⁷ As such, Jodi's second interviews were much more challenging,

³ Debriefing Session One, interviewed by author, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, January 7, 2018

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Interview 2a, interviewed by Jodi Volkens, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, August 24, 2017.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

because she did not have any idea how couple would respond to the questions. Neither the man nor the woman is originally from Treynor.⁸ The man grew up in the small community of Hastings, Iowa.⁹ His wife, on the other hand, grew up in Bellevue, a city just outside of Omaha, Nebraska, that is home to Offutt Air Force Base.¹⁰ Bellevue is located in an urban setting, while Hastings would be much more similar to the community of Treynor. Compared to the first couple whom Jodi interviewed, this young family offered a fresh perspective on the community and neighborhood.¹¹ Being relatively new, they did not know all of the ins and outs of the community or of the people in Treynor.¹² As noted earlier, the Treynor Schools plays an enormous role in the community's life together. With a young child who does not yet attend school, this couple was not well connected and had not yet experienced the connectiveness which the school creates.

This couple also gave a different perspective, as the wife is Korean-American.¹³ Historically, Treynor has not been known for its racial diversity. I have never personally experienced nor have I heard of any problems relating to racism in Treynor. As a small town founded by a group of immigrants from Germany, whose families continued to live and work in the area, much of the average population of Treynor shares a parallel ethnic

⁸ Volkens, Interview 2a.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

background. The simple reality is that people in this area tend to look similar to one another. As one of Treynor's few racial-minority residents, her voice and perspective was valuable. During her first interview, she laughed as she described that, "You know, I don't necessarily look like the type of person that maybe would live in Treynor. Being half Korean and I've got tattoos and things. But nobody's ever really looked down upon me for that."¹⁴ Her experience of feeling welcomed in this community gives me hope that our town embraces healthy practices of hospitality.

Like Jodi, Blade chose a safe first interview to use as a warm-up to the second. He interviewed a couple that he and his wife have known for many years and who are approximately the same age. They have many things in common, including a love of sports and working with school-aged youth. Together their families have shared many life experiences over the years, which made talking and listening to them very natural for Blade.¹⁵ This couple came to in Treynor in 2003; they moved because the man took a position as a school counselor in the Treynor School District.¹⁶ Both of the neighbors grew up in a rural or small-town setting, so the adjustment to life in Treynor was a natural one.¹⁷ This couple has been married for forty-one years and have two adult children and two grandchildren.¹⁸ Neither of the neighbor's children live in the Treynor area.¹⁹ These

¹⁴ Volkens, Interview 2a.

¹⁵ Debriefing Session One.

¹⁶ Interview 1a, interviewed by Tom Hartigan, audio recording, Treynor, IA, August 26, 2017.

¹⁷ Hartigan, Interview 1a.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Hartigan, Interview 1a.

neighbors are people of deep faith and members of a church in Omaha, where they are very active in the ministry programs.²⁰

Blade later shared that the interviews with this couple served as a needed confidence-boost; he noted that had he started with his second interview, the interviews would not have gone as well as they did.²¹ With the first interview completed, Blade chose to interview another household of neighbors. These interviews placed him in a state of vulnerability as he listened to people whom he did not know well. While he was more familiar with the woman through her interaction with school and community events, Blade had only spoken with her husband a few times and always only in passing. The couple also had a unique experience with the Treynor community; the man was originally from Oklahoma, while his wife was a Treynor native.²² They have three children, all are either in middle school or high school. Their children are very active in sports and other school activities, which keeps their family constantly on the go.²³ Both the man and the woman work; he recently retired after twenty-six years in the army and is now working as a contractor for a private security firm based out of Omaha, Nebraska, while she is a speech pathologist who works in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Troy and Tami chose to focus on one household in their neighborhood, located off a corner of their backyard. Like each of the other interviews, this interview was unique in

²⁰ Hartigan, Interview 1a.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interview 2b, interviewed by Tom Hartigan, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, December 20, 2017.

²³ Hartigan, Interview 2b.

its own way; Troy and Tami interviewed two sisters, who share a house in their adulthood. One of the sisters has never been married.²⁴ The other is divorced and has adult children and grandchildren.²⁵ Both sisters are longtime Treynor residents and have roots that go back many generations in the community.²⁶ One sister works as a janitor at the school and finds great joy in being around the kids each day.²⁷ The other sister works at a local insurance office.²⁸ Both sisters are plugged into different groups of people in Treynor; each has varied perspectives on issues regarding the community of Treynor.

The Interview Setting

Originally, I had envisioned each church leader inviting their neighbors into their own homes to share some neighborly hospitality. Every interview, however, worked the opposite as I had intended; although the interviews were instigated by leaders from Zion inviting their neighbors to participate, it was the leaders themselves who were invited into the lives and stories of the neighbors whom they interviewed. Every interview took place inside the house of the neighbor, and not the house of the church leader as I had intended. In this way, church leaders were instantly more vulnerable as they listened to their neighbors share the stories of their lives in a setting that was not their own. Meeting in their neighbors' homes meant that the church leaders were no longer in control. In some of the interviews, both the church leaders and their neighbors knew each other well. In

²⁴ Interview 1a, interviewed by Troy and Tami King, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, October 22, 2017.

²⁵ King, Interview 1a.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

other interviews, however, the church leaders did not know their neighbors at all. As we will explore in more detail later, holding these listening interviews in the homes of the neighbors made the entire experiment much more successful; in looking back, I should have anticipated this reality, although for reasons of simple manners, it would have been improper to suggest that the church leaders invite themselves over to their neighbors' homes.

The First Interview: Content and Notable Responses²⁹

Remembering the five processes of Appreciative Inquiry which Branson references, the specific interview questions were listed in “the positive” and were designed to bring out the stories of “life-giving forces” in the neighborhood.³⁰ They were designed to invite neighbors to begin to reflect about their lives in the Treynor community on a broad scope. As the interview progressed, the questions became more specific as they attempted to draw out those life-giving stories. By allowing those stories to be shared, the church leaders giving the interview practiced a gracious listening. To help break the ice, the first set of questions did not require any pre-requisite knowledge or understanding, but simply were designed to allow the neighbors to begin to tell their story. In listening to, and experiencing the telling of these stories firsthand, church leaders were invited into the world of their own neighbors. As author Skye Jethani explains, “it is easy to disagree with a person’s ideas, but it’s very difficult to disagree

²⁹ See Appendix B for a list of the questions used in the first interview.

³⁰ Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversation*, 35.

with a person's story."³¹ This first interview was intended to unite neighbors and neighborhoods, celebrating diversity while at the same time realizing how similar all of our stories truly are.

As the church leaders began the interview, they asked each neighbor to describe their own history in the Treynor community. The questions were designed to establish a context for each neighbor's responses, as well as to help draw out those stories of how each neighbor came to live in Treynor. Neighbors were also invited to reflect why they have chosen to remain in the community. While it is perhaps possible to answer these questions on the surface, most of the neighbors gave considerable time and thought to answering the questions in this section.

Troy and Tami interviewed a pair of sisters who were fourth-generation Treynor residents.³² The sisters' great-grandfather had come to the Treynor area directly from Germany; he left to start his new life in America when he was only thirteen years old.³³ During the start of their interview, the sisters told a story of how their great-grandfather's brother also left the family to come to America.³⁴ They speculated what that must have been like, as the sisters' great-grandfather and great-uncle never saw their own parents again.³⁵ Eventually their great-grandfather and his brother ended up working for a

³¹ Skye Jethani. "Re: Acts 22: The Power of Telling Stories." Message to Adam Magill. January 30, 2018. Email.

³² Interview 1a, interviewed by Troy and Tami King, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, October 22, 2017.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ King, Interview 1a.

³⁵ Ibid.

grocery store owner in New York City; this owner had a family member who ran a grocery store in Iowa and was looking for workers.³⁶ The brothers followed the work to Iowa.³⁷ There were others in this area who came from Germany who worked in that grocery store as well who the sisters could name.³⁸ They marveled at how all of those early immigrants came to America at a very young age with very little money or possessions.³⁹ The sisters described how their great-grandfather did not have anything to his name and somehow, he created an entire life in this new world, and a family legacy that now stretches for six generations in Treynor.⁴⁰ Neither Troy nor Tami knew any of these stories and were amazed to hear the family history of people whom they had known, and lived in the neighborhood with, for a very long time.⁴¹

During their interview with Troy and Tami, the sisters also shared that when they were growing up, there were only three hundred people living in Treynor.⁴² In that close-knit community, everyone knew everyone else.⁴³ They have seen the town more than triple in size during their lifetime.⁴⁴ One of the sisters shared that she always loved the sense of belonging that she felt while living in Treynor; she liked knowing everybody,

³⁶ King, Interview 1a.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Debriefing Session One.

⁴² King, Interview 1a.

⁴³ King, Interview 1a.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

although she acknowledged that she didn't feel like she knew as many people as she used to.⁴⁵ This other sister, who is employed at the Treynor School District as a janitor, shared stories of how she did not know as many of the kids as she did in the past; now, kids and parents will come up to her to say, "hello," and she will often not know the names of those who had just greeted her.⁴⁶ During the interview, the neighbor explained that the school played an important role in bringing people together, even with the town changing and growing as it has; she pointed out in the interview that she would not feel as connected to the people and community were it not for her employment at the school.⁴⁷

One common thread between the beginning of all of the interviews is how the school district has brought people together over the years; in his first interview, Blade visited with a couple whose school employment brought their family to Treynor.⁴⁸ Jodi talked with neighbors who recently had moved into the community. This young couple had no ties to the community; the school was the primary reason they had moved into town.⁴⁹ The interviews often took either one form or the other: either the neighbor's family has historically been located in or around the Treynor community, or people have moved to Treynor because of the school, either as an employee or parents who want their kids to attend school at Treynor. The interviews demonstrated that from the early days of

⁴⁵ King, Interview 1a.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Hartigan, Interview 1a.

⁴⁹ Volkens, Interview 2a.

Treynor, the school has played an important role in shaping the community and the people who made up its neighborhoods.

But while the draw of the school has remained constant, the community has certainly changed over the years. Two of Blade's neighbors commented that although Treynor is a small community, it is not the typical rural community in Iowa; while many other towns are experiencing decline, Treynor is seeing new life and growing.⁵⁰ The close proximity to the cities of Council Bluffs and Omaha are largely behind this reality. As Treynor has shifted from a predominantly rural to a more suburban reality, less of its residents have a farming background. More people are working in the city and commuting from their homes in Treynor. Of the eight neighbors who were interviewed and still working full time, only two both lived and worked within the community of Treynor. The other six worked either in Omaha or Council Bluffs. All three of the church leaders who were working full time worked in those cities as well. It should be noted that Tami certainly works hard caring for her grandson during the day (and could perhaps be counted as working within Treynor), but she is not employed outside the home in a traditional sense. The two neighbors who were retired came from families who farmed in the area.

Those proportions of people working outside of Treynor rather than within, along with the noted shift from the rural to the suburban, demonstrate that there is massive change underway within the Treynor community. As new people continue to be drawn into the community because of the school or small-town atmosphere, the town's diversity

⁵⁰ Hartigan, Interview 1a.

will continue to grow; because of this, developing an awareness and understanding of all of the forces competing for life-defining allegiance will become even more important if the town is going to be able to maintain its unity.

For the church leaders, prioritizing the time to simply stop and listen to their neighbors was life-giving. During this first interview, neighbors told stories of history, work, and family life. As those responding became more comfortable sharing, their responses became longer and more thoughtful. The interviews tried to remain within the scope of Appreciative Inquiry, remaining positive and drawing out only life-giving stories that all of the neighbors had to share. Troy and Tami later noted that practically everyone loves talking about their family, and the first interview really helped their neighbors be willing to easily share.⁵¹ And as the church leaders were invited to listen to their neighbors talk about that which is most important to them, they were naturally drawn further into their world. As neighbors listened to neighbors talking about family, they shared that common bond of compassion.

The first round of interviews challenged each neighbor to describe their life in Treynor. The questions attempted to draw out the stories which connected each person to the positives of living in the Treynor community, and how the Treynor community itself shaped and influenced people in the neighborhood. Strangely enough, in this portion of the interviews, several neighbors pointed to tragedy; many neighbors explained that the community of Treynor was at its best when something terrible had happened, whether it was an accident, medical emergency, or when a community member was suddenly killed.

⁵¹ Debriefing Session One.

Several neighbors saw life coming out of those dark moments. It is not uncommon to have large benefit dinners for those who are experiencing need. For example, in our own congregation at Zion, a teenager was diagnosed with Leukemia and had a bone marrow transplant. A fundraising dinner was organized, and the majority of the town's population attended; together the people in Treynor raised over sixty thousand dollars to help this young woman's family. Although no one wants bad things to happen to anyone, historically the people in Treynor have responded in major ways. As one church member once shared with me, that same tragedy could easily happen to any of our families. Because of this awareness and understanding, a natural empathy exists in the Treynor community when accidents or difficulties arise.

As the interview questions transitioned from family and focused more on the community individual neighborhoods, Blade's neighbors shared that while they have very nice people who live around them, they do not see some of the people who live near them very often because those individuals are never home.⁵² The commuting population within the city of Treynor presents unique challenges to developing deep relationships within neighborhoods. The significant number of activities for school-aged children often keep young families out of town many evenings during each week.⁵³ Finding time to spend with others in the neighborhood, and making it a priority, is a significant hurdle. As one of Blade's neighbors noted, the weather in Iowa also poses a serious hindrance.⁵⁴ In the winter people want to stay inside. In the summer, the comforts of air conditioning

⁵² Hartigan, Interview 1a.

⁵³ King, Interview 1a.

⁵⁴ Hartigan, Interview 1a.

decrease the number of people who are outside and interacting with each other as well. These neighbors celebrated that the block parties that Zion has thrown around town have continued and are a great opportunity for people to share life together.⁵⁵ Often, even people who commute to work and are gone most of the week will make an annual weekend block party a priority to attend.

In every interview, those being interviewed communicated that they felt like they did have neighbors who are able and willing to help if needed. These neighbors shared simple stories of when others had provided assistance, whether it was needing a food item, moving a grill, cutting down trees, or needing prayer; every person interviewed felt like they had at least one neighbor to which to turn for help. In many cases, the neighbors who would be asked for help were the church leaders giving the interviews. The questions in this section challenged each person interviewed to reflect about their neighbors and how well they actually knew them.

The questions in these first interviews concluded by asking each neighbor what three wishes they would make for the Treynor Community. This was an open-ended question, given in light of all of the stories and reflections that had just been shared. When looking at all the questions as a whole, this final question seemed to make a logical breaking point for the end of the first interview before the beginning of the second. It followed the processes of Appreciative Inquiry, leaving things positive throughout, as well as focusing on the stories that were deemed valuable and life-giving by the neighbor

⁵⁵ Hartigan, Interview 1a.

being interviewed. And the answers that were given were shared a common theme: community.

Jodi's neighbors in her first interview shared that they would like to see the proposed athletic complex and swimming pool become a reality.⁵⁶ They would also like to see better sidewalks throughout Treynor.⁵⁷ Blade's neighbors stated that they would like to see a steady and continued growth for the school, as well as for the community as a whole.⁵⁸ They described that growth as meaning more amenities to offer kids and families in the community, such as the proposed athletic complex, as well as more new housing developments.⁵⁹ Troy and Tami's neighbors also said that they would wish for the funding and completion of the athletic complex so that the community would stay be able to stay in Treynor.⁶⁰ The sisters wished that more people would volunteer and help with community projects.⁶¹ They also stated a desire for people to communicate more effectively within the town, and for more people to make going to church a priority.⁶² Jodi's younger neighbors wished that the community would continue to thrive, but never lose its caring and small-town atmosphere.⁶³ Sometimes it is the simplest of things which often get overlooked; within all of the neighbors' first interviews, a deep longing for

⁵⁶ Volkens, Interview 1a.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Hartigan, Interview 1a.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ King, Interview 1a.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Volkens, Interview 2a.

community was expressed. An awareness of that need, as well as some of the challenges preventing it, began to develop from the stories shared in the first interview.

The Second Interview: Moving into Evaluation⁶⁴

Continuing to use the language of the Missional Change Process, the second interview invited church leaders and neighbors to begin to evaluate the competing claims of the forces vying for their allegiance. While the status quo of the cultural “rat race” encourages all people attempt to dominate each other in a world of insatiable wants and desires, a life filled with God’s Sabbath life and practices seeks to expose the false claims of idols. Again, using the Missional Change Process, it is the hope of this experiment that while the first session began to raise an awareness and understanding of these competing claims, the second interview session would help neighbors evaluate these claims and begin to reflect on changes (experiments) they would like to make and eventually move toward a decision (commitment). The process of raising awareness, gaining an understanding, and then moving to evaluate all of those forces are important steps for neighbors in Treynor discovering Sabbath life and practices together.

The questions in the second interview were crafted to hopefully help people begin to evaluate these competing claims by using the positive framework of Appreciative Inquiry. In this second session, extra care was needed by those giving the interviews; the church leaders had the challenge of inviting their neighbors to share about deeply

⁶⁴ See Appendix C for the list of interview questions used for the second interview.

personal issues, while at the same time refrain from passing judgment. The interviewers giving session two had to communicate grace with their demeanor, as this second session asked some very difficult and reflective questions about issues of allegiance in both faith and life. The diversity that was present in the first interview was magnified with the more thought-provoking questions in the second.

This second interview asked more specific questions about each neighbor's life and faith. Not knowing what faith tradition, if any, the neighbors that would be interviewed were coming from made crafting these questions challenging. In practicality, much of the wording had to be adapted by those asking the questions based up on the responses that they were given at the time of the interview. This second interview asked the neighbors if they had a faith and, if they were comfortable, to share about their faith. As expected, the responses to these questions varied.

All of the ten neighbors who were interviewed professed a faith or spirituality. Some, who regularly attended church and would describe themselves as having a strong faith, struggled with how to answer this question. The wording of the question confused them, as some of the people being interviewed did not have any tradition of faith outside of their own Christian beliefs come to mind. Jodi's neighbor, who attends our church, began to share many memories of being in the church over her lifetime.⁶⁵ Both of Jodi's neighbors, who have a strong faith and have attended church all of their lives, struggled in articulating what it was that they believed.⁶⁶ Troy and Tami experienced similar results; each of the sisters attends different churches, but both of the sisters interpreted

⁶⁵ Interview 1b, interviewed by Jodi Volkens, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, November 27, 2017.

⁶⁶ Volkens, Interview 1b.

the question to mean rituals or celebrations within the Christian tradition, such as baptism, communion, and confirmation.⁶⁷

Other neighbors had no hesitation in sharing what they believed. Blade's neighbor shared about his orthodox faith, including a faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; he had no problem or hesitation in sharing about who God was or what he believed about Jesus.⁶⁸ Blade's other neighbors were also able to articulate their faith without difficulty. They quickly shared about what they believe about Jesus.⁶⁹ It is possible that there is a cultural or generational element to having an ability to articulate faith. Those that struggled in communicating what they believed were more mature in years. Those neighbors that found it hard to describe their faith were also Treynor natives. At least in the interviews, those who did not hesitate to share what they believed grew up outside of Treynor. It is at least possible to assume that the stoic, highly privatized faith of the early German immigrants has been passed down, at least in part, through the generations.

Throughout all the interviews there was a variety of answers and beliefs present. While everyone who was interviewed claimed a belief in God, there were a range of church participation, from those neighbors who never missed a church service to those neighbors who rarely, if ever, attended church. While Jodi's younger neighbors shared that they believed in God, they do not actively attend church or claim any faith tradition

⁶⁷ Interview 1b, interviewed by Troy and Tami King, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, November 28, 2017.

⁶⁸ Interview 1b, interviewed by Tom Hartigan, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, December 22, 2017.

⁶⁹ Hartigan, Interview 2b.

other than a “faith-based family lifestyle.”⁷⁰ One of Jodi’s neighbors was very firm in his belief that you do not need the church in order to have faith in God.⁷¹ Worshipping with the body of Christ at church is very important to Jodi, who later expressed how difficult it was to listen to this neighbor talk about the church being irrelevant without trying to counter it with her own opinion.⁷² She commented later that if she had interjected, her neighbor would most likely have gotten defensive and the interview would have ended.⁷³

The interview questions moved on in order to explore the areas of work, sports, and consumerism. These three areas of life were again singled out because of the results of the earlier interviews that I did with leaders in the Treynor community, and were also named in the leaders’ retreat held at Zion. These three areas, when given God-level authority, can create havoc; however, these areas area can also be great sources of life. In this part of the interviews, neighbors were asked to tell their stories within each of those categories. And the questions got more reflective, asking neighbors how God was active in how each neighbor related to the areas of work, sports, and the consumer culture in which they live.

During the interviews, neighbors shared stories of how the areas of work, sports, and consumerism made following God difficult, but also shared many stories of how those areas were a benefit and brought life to others. Applying the principles of

⁷⁰ Interview 2b, interviewed by Jodi Volkens, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, December 22, 2017.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Debriefing Session Two, interviewed by author, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, January 14, 2018.

⁷³ Debriefing Session Two.

Appreciative Inquiry, the questions in this portion of the interview were designed to challenge the practices, habits, and values of those being interviewed. Through their stories, church leaders got to hear how their neighbors struggled, but also how they found life through God working in those areas. The interview invited reflection of how work, sports, and consumerism can lead to practices that are life-giving rather than life-stealing.

Neighbors were asked to describe their work life and to share what they found most fulfilling about their job. They were asked to reflect upon their life at work, exploring how their vocation influenced and shaped their life and relationships in positive ways. These questions also invited to begin to see the ways in which God might be at work in the neighbor's workplace. Troy and Tami's neighbor who works at the school quickly described how the kids bring her joy; this neighbor loves helping others and finds interacting with the kids as they grow up to be very exciting.⁷⁴ One of Blade's neighbors has the opportunity to work in many different schools over a period of several decades and now works with a non-profit organization which helps with college planning and financial aid; he immediately named helping people as the most life-giving and fulfilling aspect of his job.⁷⁵ He particularly loves helping people who are coming from a disadvantage and are needing a little help in order to gain access to education; this neighbor shared many personal stories of people he had helped get accepted into and pay for higher education.⁷⁶ Jodi's neighbor who farmed shared about how fulfilling the farm life was; he loved seeing the growth in the crops but also in the lives of his children who

⁷⁴ Interview 1b, interviewed by Troy and Tami King, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, November 28, 2017.

⁷⁵ Hartigan, Interview 1b.

⁷⁶ Hartigan, Interview 1b.

grew up helping him.⁷⁷ Many neighbors saw God being active in the workplace, especially by helping others and family life. Once again, it was the stories of real people and the relationships with others that brought life to these community members.

The interview questions then shifted to discuss the neighbors' understanding of success. Each neighbor was asked to define success and to describe someone whom each neighbor would describe as being successful. One of Jodi's neighbors commented that unfortunately, most people equate success as having power and money.⁷⁸ But for those who were interviewed, success was never defined by finances. Family, health, safety, happiness, and living honestly were all named. At least for those neighbors who were interviewed for this project, success was seen more in relational terms than economic; neighbors agreed that a successful person lives and does right by others. Jodi's younger neighbors were particularly vocal on this topic, as they have relationships with many other people who define success by how high up the corporate ladder someone can climb or how much money is in the bank.⁷⁹

The relational aspect was also described within the arena of the world of sports. Sports is a significant part of life in Treynor; even though Treynor is numerically a small community, there are many people who currently live in Treynor who had the opportunity to participate in sports at the collegiate and even the professional level. High school sporting events are important community rituals and bring much of the town together to cheer on local youth. As noted earlier, sports can be a source of great life and

⁷⁷ Volkens, Interview 1b.

⁷⁸ Volkens, Interview 2b.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

energy. In this second interview, questions were asked in order to draw out the reflections of each neighbor on their relationship with sports, as well as to explore how sports has impacted their life and routine. This part of the interview also continued to invite neighbors to consider how God was involved in the sports arena.

Blade's neighbors talked about their experiences with sports; with school-aged kids who are very active, sports are currently a big part of their lives.⁸⁰ With multiple children and multiple sports and activities, sports play a large role in defining their family's schedule.⁸¹ However, this was not necessarily true for all the people who were interviewed. For example, sports did not play as big of a role in defining the schedule of Jodi's neighbors, who have one infant son. Troy and Tami's neighbors enjoy sports, especially how exciting they can be; one neighbor commented on how much fun being a part of, and cheering for, a team can be.⁸² One person who was interviewed immediately described the top floor of the children's hospital at Iowa City and the new ritual at the University of Iowa home football games to wave and cheer for the cancer patients there.⁸³ The experiences and stories of the neighbors describing their interaction with the world of sports often did not see God playing a significant role. However, there were many mentions of the value of the team and community aspects to sports and the ways that sports can bring life to others. Similar to how the neighbors described the relationships they had at work, the world of sports can be tremendously positive. The positive stories

⁸⁰ Hartigan, Interview 2b.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² King, Interview 1b.

⁸³ Ibid.

that came out of the interviews involved real people and real relationships. Trouble occurs when you take the relational aspects out of sports and turn it into a self-serving idol. Blade's neighbor lamented that as positive as an experience that sports can be, not enough parents and coaches actually take the time to develop the team so that the team can play and grow together.⁸⁴ The gift of time and priority to others is a key element to the life-giving possibilities in the world of sports.

The interview questions turned to the realm of scheduling and finances. Neighbors were asked questions about the role and priority of money in their lives, and if they ever felt pressure to "keep up with the Jones" in their own neighborhood. All of the neighbors who were interviewed communicated that they did not feel much pressure to keep up or impress others; however many recognized that the pressure was real and did exist. As one neighbor exclaimed, "the bank isn't going to take all your money and attach it to your hearse...the eternal things of life is what the real riches are."⁸⁵

The final section of the second interview focused on community, Sabbath, and leadership. These questions were intended to help neighbors share their own stories and experiences of leadership. It asked the neighbors to identify people who they saw acting as leaders in the Treynor community, as well as if each neighbor viewed themselves as a leader. One person who was interviewed adamantly defined leadership as "someone who was willing to get their hands dirty and not just order others to do everything and take all the glory."⁸⁶ One of Jodi's neighbors described that especially in her corporate world,

⁸⁴ Hartigan, Interview 2b.

⁸⁵ Hartigan, Interview 1b.

⁸⁶ King, Interview 1b.

leading by setting the example is a really important to her.⁸⁷ Another neighbor said that “justified confidence, not arrogance” is what made a good leader.⁸⁸ In every case, leadership was seen in relational terms, when the leader takes time to work alongside of, and with, those whom he or she is leading.

Not many of the neighbors who were interviewed had a larger understanding of Sabbath other than the literal command of taking a day of rest. None of the neighbors connected God’s Sabbath command with allegiance or faith or any priestly function of God’s people in creation. Sabbath is generally seen as a day of rest or a day of family. This is certainly an area for further awareness, understanding, and experimentation.

The second interview was completed by asking how the church leaders could pray for their neighbors and attempted to catch any final stories and areas which brought life to the neighbors and community. All of the questions contained within this second interview invited neighbors to reflect and share stories of how God was active in many different parts of their own lives. This was done in the hopes that as neighbors reflected on the questions, and as church leaders listened to the responses, a deeper imagination of life would begin to be discovered—one based upon God’s Sabbath life and practices. As neighbors and church leaders went through the interview, sharing and hearing stories of how God was participating in all of these different areas of life, it was hoped that the relationship between all present would be deepened, and future communication more meaningful than simply discussing the weather in passing. Through the interviews, church leaders and neighbors were invited to share that common experience of

⁸⁷ Volkens, Interview 2b.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

discovering new life in their own neighborhood, seeing together how God was acting in their lives and in the Treynor community, as well as planting some seeds for future growth.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS AS A CHURCH

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' ¹² I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

Luke 10:1-12 NRSV

For the past seven years, the leaders and congregation at Zion have been studying the above passage of Luke 10:1-12. The Deacons of the church have spent countless hours prayerfully reading those verses. And although these words have become very familiar, new discoveries still happen. In my own experience, I have been walking with this passage since it became a focal text in my seminary studies began in 2006. And still,

the Spirit of God is revealing new dimensions in my own heart and in the lives of the people who make up the churches I have had the privilege of serving.

In 2014, the church made the switch from following a strategic business plan to a commitment to following the Holy Spirit through framework of the Missional Change Process. This was a marked decision, one in which church leaders agreed to let go of control and trust God to lead us where we needed to go as a congregation. This was a shift in language house in how we as a church defined success. Church leaders made the conscious decision to move away from a numeric model of success and instead embrace the unknown of God's future. A major discipline that began prior to that decision and has continued afterwards is spending time practicing Lectio Divina, or Dwelling in the Word. Luke 10:1-12 has been one of the primary texts which the Deacons and the entire congregation has engaged in Lectio. As Deacons, Jodi, Blade, and Troy all spent time resting and wrestling with this passage from Luke 10. Tami has not served as a deacon but was introduced to Lectio in Luke 10 in the interview training and debriefing sessions.

One of the major themes from Luke 10 that has stood out to the people in our church over time is the vulnerability of the seventy which Jesus sent ahead of him. That group of early believers were sent out to every place Jesus was about to go. Interestingly enough, they were sent out in vulnerability, totally dependent on God for their safety and provision; "See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals" (Lk. 10:3-4). One of the major struggles for people in our church has been the idea of going for a journey ill-equipped. Being dependent on others is a largely foreign concept in this place. This is a majority middle-class community. True needs are

few and far-between. The pride and work ethic that was mentioned in the first section of this paper is still strongly woven into the fabric of this community's DNA.

Being sent out dependent upon others is counter-intuitive and instantly causes anxiety to many leaders in our church. The people in the Treynor community are extraordinarily generous of their time and resources. They are more than willing to help anyone in need. And if you would ask any church goer when the church is at its best, there are very good odds that they will respond with something similar to: "when someone is in need." As the interviews also showed, that answer is the same when the question is posed to those outside the church. As a whole, our church and community are very comfortable in a role of providing help to others. Conversely, as a whole, our church and community does not always intuitively know how to graciously receive assistance or hospitality from others. As shown consistently through studying Luke 10 with a large number of people in our congregation, going out into the world and being dependent on the hospitality of others, as the disciples were in Luke 10, is hard to imagine in our context today.

The purpose of this project was to develop church leaders with the capacity to listen to others so that together with their neighbors, they might discover new habits and practices of sharing life together that reflects a new or rediscovered Sabbath imagination. As discussed earlier, the status quo of our context is rooted in life often being defined by allegiances to areas such as work, sports, and consumerism. While not necessarily evil, if given such life-defining and life-ordering power, these areas have the negative ability to quickly turn into idols and work to strip the community's allegiance away from the Lord. As noted earlier, the Sabbath command is about allegiance to God in a world which is

constantly chasing these false gods and other idols. Using the language of the Missional Change Process, the hope in this project is by inviting church leaders to listen to the stories of their neighbors, together they would develop an awareness and understanding of the many forces vying for people's allegiance, evaluating these idol's claims against the authority of God; these discoveries would encourage future experimentation to continue to develop a new way of life together, and ultimately, if God wills it, a commitment to new habits and practices based upon a new Sabbath imagination. After all of the interviews were completed, the church leaders and I met for two debriefing sessions. These sessions were designed to allow us all to process the experiment together, to share what was learned, and begin to discern some next steps for our church and community.

Showing Appreciation

The church leaders were not required or forced to give large portions of their spare time to complete these listening experiment interviews. But they chose to do so, out of their desire to help our church, to help me, to grow in their own faith, and to deepen their relationship with their neighbors. All of the church leaders who gave interviews were glad that they had participated in this experiment; they also expressed that it was not an easy thing to accomplish. Similarly, each neighbor who was interviewed did not agree to participate because of any material gain or personal benefit. Those neighbors also made room in their own schedules to answer some very difficult questions. In order to show appreciation to the neighbors and the church leaders for all of their time, effort, and thoughtfulness, I sent a note of thanks to each person who participated. Those who agreed to be interviewed also received a Casey's General Store gift card. The church leaders

who led the interviews received a filet mignon gift basket from Omaha Steaks. Although the church leaders protested at this token gift, it helped them feel appreciated for all the work that they had done. The church leaders and the neighbors they interviewed are wonderful people, and I hope and pray that their relationships and neighborhoods will be blessed through this experience.

The First Debriefing Session

As we gathered for the first debriefing session, all of us were a bit nervous and excited to share. I was nervous that I would forget to ask something important; the church leaders were nervous if they had done everything right. After we prayed, I tried to put all of us to ease and invited them to share their stories. This broke the ice and as they began to talk, the church leaders began to reflect on how powerful the interview experience was for them personally.

One of the things which all of our church leaders commented on initially was how each neighbor's experience and background was surprisingly very different than the others. Blade noted that only one of the four people that he interviewed had Treynor roots. That is not the usual perception within Treynor. Generally, people still remember Treynor as the town of 300 people that the sisters described in their interview with Troy and Tami.¹ In fact, of the ten individuals who were interviewed, half of them did not grow up in Treynor. This is yet another example of the shifting demographics within the city of Treynor, and yet another reason to actively listen to the voices in the neighborhood. It can no longer be assumed that people share a common ethnic or cultural

¹ King, Interview 1a.

background. As more people move into Treynor, the town itself will become even more diverse in every way.

That diversity was matched within the stages of life of the neighbors who were interviewed as well. Jodi interviewed a couple who has lived in, and been a part of, the Treynor community for over seventy-five years.² This couple now has several great-grandchildren.³ Jodi's second interview was on the opposite side of that spectrum, as she met with a young couple with one infant son; they have been living in Treynor for less than two years.⁴ During the first debriefing session, Jodi was struck with how these neighbors were experiencing completely different stages of life.⁵ Prior to starting these neighborhood interviews, I had not given any instructions about seeking a target demographic. One age group was not favored over any other, and one stage of life was not preferred. The hope was that these church leaders would simply go and talk to some of their neighbors, the people who actually lived next door in the neighborhood. And whatever diversity that sample provided would be perfect. What none of us expected was just how diverse that sample would be. Looking strictly at age and stage of life, these leaders interviewed people who were in their thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies. This was not an intentional goal on my part, although the results of the diversity in age and life experiences was fascinating to listen to and from which to learn.

² Volkens, Interview 1a.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Volkens, Interview 1b.

⁵ Debriefing Session One.

One of the regrets which the church leaders communicated in the first debriefing session was that no one had interviewed anyone who was in their twenties.⁶ They very much would have liked to have listened to the thoughts of a young adult who was out of high school but had not yet started a family. As they reflected farther, there were not people in that age range who lived in their own neighborhoods. During that first debriefing session, I could see the church leaders begin to dream and expanding this last experiment to include more of the Treynor community. The desire to listen to the voices of young adults are a foundation for next steps that our church could take.

The day after she and Troy gave their first interview, Tami came to church and visited with me about her experience the night before. Full of excitement, she exclaimed that the interview that they had done was so much fun. She communicated that every person in church needs to do this with a neighbor; her experience was so powerful that it led her to the conclusion that spending time with, and listening to, neighbors was a life-giving practice that everyone needed to try. During our first debriefing session, Troy echoed that sentiment. As we began that first session, Troy commented immediately about how he had thought that he and Tami knew the sisters whom they interviewed; after all, he has known them his entire life and has been neighbors with them for decades.⁷ But he realized after sitting down for only an hour with them how little he really knew them and found their stories and history to be fascinating.⁸ Tami talked about how much more she knew them now, about how her relationship with them was much

⁶ Debriefing Session One.

⁷ King, Interview 1a.

⁸ Debriefing Session One.

deeper than before, and all this after sitting down with them for a relatively short amount of time.⁹ It was surprising to everyone the return on such a small investment in time.

During the first debriefing session, Blade commented how he did not know one of his neighbors prior to the interview.¹⁰ In-between Blade's house and his neighbors' there is a driveway that leads to the elementary school; their properties do not connect in any way. It is enough of a distance that effort, however minimal, would have to be taken to even to have a conversation with his neighbors. While Blade knew this man's wife, who was a Treynor native, he did not know his neighbor.¹¹ Blade described that their relationship prior to the interview as sharing an occasional greeting from a distance or waving at each other from across the fence and driveway.¹² In the first session, Blade noted the marked change in their relationship after they have done the interviews; he noted how much that his neighbor had opened up to him and was sharing about his life.¹³ Blade pointed out that his relationship with his neighbor had deepened to where they could now easily discuss even very personal topics such as raising kids.¹⁴

The church leaders reflected on how powerful the experience of the interviews were, both personally and for those who answered the questions. Troy commented that he was surprised how emotional the conversation became at times for his neighbors who were being interview; especially when communicating about family, there were several

⁹ Debriefing Session One.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

moments when one of the sisters would begin to become emotional.¹⁵ During her first interview, Jodi commented how moved she was in her experience in listening to a story describing a time of great transition for one of her neighbors.¹⁶ This neighbor shared very candidly about being remarried later in life and how each family celebrated and embraced that second marriage.¹⁷ Being received into a new family, and having her own family embrace her new husband was not a given; in sharing about the grace offered to her by others, this neighbor left a great impression on Jodi.¹⁸ As the neighbor told the story of how God had given her a new life and purpose, Jodi was clearly affected.¹⁹ The neighbor felt like that story could be shared with Jodi and that Jodi was someone with whom she could be completely honest. That left a large impression on Jodi; that relationship now functions in a much different way, having gone deeper and left any superficial ways behind.

During the first debriefing session, all of the church leaders agreed that the second interview, which involved more questions on faith and seeing God at work in different aspects of life, was much more challenging to deliver.²⁰ They commented on several occasions that they struggled to know how to answer these questions themselves.²¹ This was interesting to me, as part of the training leading up to the interview was studying

¹⁵ Debriefing Session One.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Volkens, Interview 1b.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Debriefing Session One.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

every question that would be asked. The reality that this seasoned group of church leaders were questioning themselves after the fact shows how seriously they were taking these interviews, but also how much they were reflecting on them after they had been completed. Blade shared on how personal those questions were in the second interview.²² Tami described how one of her neighbors also noticed the change and asked her why it was so difficult to talk about her faith.²³

The leaders agreed that for the most part, people who live in Treynor would generally say that they believe in God.²⁴ Tami noted that there were many people in the community who she could go to and feel comfortable sharing her need for prayers and be honest about what was going on in her life.²⁵ But even with the church leaders agreeing that they, too, had people they could turn to for spiritual support and guidance, there was still an expressed hesitancy in regard to actually talking about their faith with others. Blade explained that he experienced no hesitation in asking those faith question when he knew his neighbors well.²⁶ With those neighbors he did not know, however, Blade shared that asking those questions became very hard.²⁷

²² Debriefing Session One.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Jodi interpreted the hesitancy about talking about faith in the community less about an issue of being bold and more of an issue of public perception.²⁸ She raised the issue of the importance of how people are known in the community.²⁹ In a small town such as Treynor, relationships last a very long time, as do people's reputations. Jodi shared how she did not want to come across as a self-righteous person or that she was better than anyone else.³⁰ She described the struggle between sharing her faith and not pushing so hard that it turns people off to God.³¹ Jodi declared that the questions, especially in the second interview, were uncomfortable to deliver, because they were intensely reflective and not at all superficial.³² As a listening interview there were no right or wrong answers; church leaders did not have to attempt to grade or correct anything said by their neighbors. But even asking the questions at times became a struggle, simply because the church leaders feared that they would be perceived as self-righteous.³³ These concerns primarily occurred when the neighbors were not well-known by the church leaders. In the second interview, the leaders felt vulnerable. They felt insecure. They did not feel like they were in control. Blade called it nerve-racking.³⁴

The questions brought discomfort because they were very real and very personal. And being the one doing the interview, each of the church leaders described how as they

²⁸ Debriefing Session One.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

listened to their neighbors, they were also reflecting on their own lives and how they would answer the questions if they were asked themselves.³⁵ One observation that Tami realized after the interviews were over was that she rarely thinks as deeply about her faith as some of the questions demanded.³⁶ Troy confessed that he had never really considered God being active in his place of work.³⁷ He expressed that even after the interviews were over, he was still reflecting on the interview questions, especially the ones which explored the activity of God in his daily life.³⁸

Jodi laughed as she examined the interview question: “how do you define success?”³⁹ She noted how on the surface that seems like a simple question. But in light of all of the interview questions, adding an awareness and understanding of the various forces vying for peoples’ allegiance, attempting to evaluate a definition of success is anything but simple. It is a tremendously challenging question to answer, and it involves much more than work or finances.

Troy also described the ways in which his work completely dictates his schedule and he wrestled with the life-defining role which his work schedule played.⁴⁰ This was an especially powerful revelation, given that he did not usually understand God as being active in the workplace. Blade shared that he felt the same way twenty years prior.⁴¹ He

³⁵ Debriefing Session One.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

shared that while work does dictate the schedule, he no longer sees it as defining life.⁴² At the point that work begins controlling or consuming all of life, allegiance has been given away. Work can be life-giving in many ways, as Jodi noted; her vocation in the healthcare field sees God in action on a daily basis.⁴³ But for those church leaders who did not have a clear vision of how God was moving in the workplace, this was a challenging question to consider. The neighbors who were interviewed also wrestled with this question.

Throughout the first debriefing session, the church leaders shared stories of what they heard from their neighbors; they also reflected on the questions and experiences in their own lives.⁴⁴ Each church leader felt like they had grown personally through this experience.⁴⁵ Each church leader expressed that they had a deeper relationship with their neighbors than they had previously known.⁴⁶ Some, like Blade and Jodi, were invited into the lives of their neighbors in completely new ways.⁴⁷ In this way, the interviews served to facilitate a new discover of life together in the neighborhood. And, as was expressed in the first debriefing session, the more vulnerable leaders and neighbors could be with each other, the more that they could see God at work around them. As the walls of privacy and safety were lowered, glimpses of new life through a new Sabbath imagination began to

⁴¹ Debriefing Session One.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

come into view. Listening to neighbors had started, even if only in the smallest of ways, to transform the neighborhood.

The Second Debriefing Session

I began the second debriefing session with the church leaders by asking each church leader what they would have liked to ask their neighbors now that the interview process was completed.⁴⁸ Troy immediately communicated an issue which was raised during his interviews: why are there so many people who profess faith in Christ and yet do not attend church?⁴⁹ As the group reflected on this, more questions were raised: Why do people not attend church? Is church attendance really necessary for Christian growth? Do the people who do not go to church feel that Christ is the center of their life? Are people in this category truly fulfilled in their spiritual lives?⁵⁰

Jodi recalled how one of her neighbors has very strong reactions against people who are “wishy-washy” or “fake.”⁵¹ And along the way, this neighbor shared his experiences which led to this perception.⁵² He explained that he believed in God but didn’t have any need of a church to connect with the Lord.⁵³ Jodi recalled how she desperately wanted in that moment to interject and argue the importance of worshipping

⁴⁸ Debriefing Session Two.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Volkens, Interview 2b.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

God in a worshipping community.⁵⁴ But the project was to listen to the stories from her neighbors. Getting into an argument would not have fulfilled the parameters of Appreciative Inquiry. In reflecting on her interview, Jodi wished she could now go back and ask her neighbor what it was that was keeping them away from the church or religion in general.⁵⁵ Challenging her neighbor at the time would have damaged the relationship and put him on the defensive. However, the interviews created an ongoing invitation and basis for future conversations with her neighbors on this topic.

Blade thought about the how the landscape of youth sports has changed over the years.⁵⁶ He mentioned that part of his conversation with his neighbors who have middle school and high school aged kids was about how to balance the commitment to teams with the importance of going to church.⁵⁷ Blade revealed how both of the parents really struggled with the expectations placed on their kids and for now, even though they were not happy about it, there were days where there just was not time to go to church.⁵⁸ These neighbors often divided and alternated who attended church and who took their kids to their activities.⁵⁹ Blade also wrestled on how much to interject and push back on his neighbors as he listened. As the church leaders continued to reflect on the lack of church attendance throughout the community, Troy noted that there seemed to be two different attitudes in Treynor; there are those who simply feel that church is not important, and

⁵⁴ Debriefing Session Two.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Hartigan, Interview 2b.

there are others who feel that it is important, but because of work or sports there just isn't time to attend.⁶⁰

The group that Jodi labeled as a "big miss" that did not get interviewed within this project is young people after they have graduated high school as they move into their twenties.⁶¹ Troy noticed that it started even earlier and that many students disappear from church after they are confirmed after their eighth-grade year.⁶² Jodi has a daughter who is currently in her twenties; during the debriefing session, she shared that at home her daughter had been asking why church attendance was so low for people her daughter's age.⁶³ Jodi's daughter is a regular churchgoer and often will help lead worship by singing at our church. She attends almost every Sunday. During that discussion, she commented to Jodi that most of the people her age were not attending church anywhere. At the debriefing session that evening, Jodi lamented all of the difficulties in communicating Christ to these young men and women; church is not an important part of life to many within this age demographic.⁶⁴ Within our small group of church leaders, we did not have an answer. It was discussed that often these young people would start attending church again after they were older and started having kids. At the same time, the group wrestled with the reality that even though these young people were back, their kids often had activities on Sunday mornings, which took priority over Sunday School and church. None

⁶⁰ Debriefing Session Two.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

of us had the answers or solutions to this adaptive challenge; the church leaders suggested that if not formally interviewing, at least making a greater effort to listen to young people in this age demographic would be a very beneficial future step for our church to explore. We all agreed that this is definitely an area in which further study is warranted.

As a leader I wanted to help develop these church leader's capacity to see their neighborhood even more clearly from Heifetz and Linsky's "balcony view" framework.⁶⁵ While the first debriefing session invited the church leaders to reflect not only on the neighbor's response, as well as their own reflections, this second interview was more grounded in the framework of what the experiment achieved. We did this by focusing on the now-familiar passage of Luke 10:1-12. Together, during the second debriefing session with the church leaders who gave the interviews, we spent a significant amount of time practicing Lectio Divina in Luke 10. It was during that time of study and prayer that the balcony-view of the project finally came into being for all of us.

One leader after the other shared a word or phrase that God had used to speak to them. The leaders focused a large portion of their time on the word go. In the text, the seventy disciples were sent out into the world to live with others and announce the coming Kingdom of God. Tami noted the humility that came with those who were announcing the Kingdom, as they were sent out without provisions and supplies.⁶⁶ The group realized just how uncomfortable that must have been, or at least how uncomfortable it would be for us today. The seventy disciples were commissioned by Jesus and sent out in a needy and vulnerable position, fully reliant on the hospitality of

⁶⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 53.

⁶⁶ Debriefing Session Two.

others. As the church leaders dwelled in Luke 10 and began to consider the view from the balcony, the parallels between Luke 10 and the neighborhood interviews became more apparent.

Troy noted that Luke 10 was exactly what they, as church leaders, did in the neighborhood interviews.⁶⁷ In the structure of this experiment, the church leaders did not insist that their neighbors come to them. The church leaders did not force the neighbors to act or look or think like them. Rather, it was the church leaders who were welcomed into the homes of their neighbors. And they listened. They did not pass judgement or get defensive. They did not argue. They listened. And their eyes began to be opened to how God was working in people who were not necessarily like them, and in some cases, very different from them. And they began to see God at work in the Treynor community in ways they had not considered before. All because they spent time listening to their neighbors.

As this time of prayerful reflection continued, the church leaders noticed how there were invitations to meet Jesus in the lives of the people living around them in the neighborhood. Jodi stated just how much you can learn about someone by listening to them, and also noted that a person's actions as well as words can speak to others.⁶⁸ As the group considered how people listen to actions as well as words, Troy wondered how he and Tami appeared to their neighbors.⁶⁹ If their neighbors were listening to their words

⁶⁷ Debriefing Session Two.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

and their actions, he began to wonder what those neighbors might think as they looked at him.⁷⁰

Jodi realized the impact of our actions and the business of our schedules; she declared how sad it was that the church leaders did not know their neighbors.⁷¹ The group again were reminded of just how much they had learned about their neighbors by giving a relatively small amount of time. To Jodi, it was sad that some in our group of church leaders (she included herself in this) had gone decades without taking that time to be with, and enter into, the world of a neighbor.⁷² Tami shared that she felt like that door had been finally opened, and opened wider, from that point on.⁷³ She felt that the relationship which she had with her neighbors had changed dramatically, simply because she was honestly listening and responding to what God was doing in the lives of her neighbors.⁷⁴ For Tami, there was no going back. A decision had been reached.

Utilizing the framework of the Missional Change Process, the group of church leaders had gained a perspective which allowed them to commit to new habits and practices. As a whole, the group recognized the need to develop meaningful relationships with their neighbors. They had developed an awareness of all of the forces claiming allegiance over them. They began to understand how the authority of God placed a claim on their lives that was above any other claim. The different areas vying for their time and

⁷⁰ Debriefing Session Two.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

allegiance were weighed and evaluated, and an experiment to develop the ability to honestly take time and listen to what God was doing in their neighborhood and in the lives of their neighbors was created. After reflecting and spending time with God in Scripture, a decision was made. These leaders cannot go back to any old habits of neighbors settling for a shallow or superficial relationship. A change has taken place.

That change has been received in the neighborhood as well. A large part of the debriefing sessions focused on church leaders talking about how the relationship with their neighbors has changed. As Tami described, those relationships are now “more real and more meaningful.”⁷⁵ Hopefully this simple experiment will create a spark in each person who participated, creating a new awareness and understanding of the life God is offering in the neighborhood, as people begin to see past the false promises of idols and seek out Sabbath life and practices together in allegiance to God.

Debriefing the Church

After the two debriefing sessions with the church leaders were held, they were invited to help share their experience during the following Sunday’s worship service. While I had hoped to have them effectively communicate what they did and how it changed how they relate to their neighbors, I was not prepared for the depth of their responses. By nature, people who live in Treynor are typically very private people. And for the most part, the church leaders could be described as the same. These church leaders were each well known by the congregation. So when they described the profound experience that they had in very personal ways, the entire church was moved. Much of

⁷⁵ Debriefing Session Two.

what they described had been shared in the debriefing sessions. But within the context of leading worship in that moment, they spoke with a newfound authority as the link between the experiment and their priestly roles became clear. Also clear was the challenge which the church leaders issued to the church: go and do likewise.

CHAPTER 8

NEXT STEPS AS A CHURCH AND AS A COMMUNITY

Growing Awareness and Understanding

The neighborhood listening interviews have shown how the community of Treynor has changed since its beginning. Founded as a German-Lutheran immigrant community, issues of faith and church once dominated community life. Based on the interview responses, it is clear today that there is no longer an assumed Protestant or even a majority Christian ethic which serves as the norm in Treynor culture. Just as the community of Treynor is growing and shaping a new identity (i.e. the tensions between rural and suburban identities) the people who live in Treynor's neighborhoods can no longer be assumed to have a strong or mature background in Christian faith. In this way, it cannot simply be assumed that church will take priority in people's lives. Nor can it be assumed that people will know how to navigate issues of faith and allegiance, or have any basis for understanding of Sabbath life, worship, or the priestly function of God's people in creation.

Many of those who interviewed lamented how that norm has changed over the years and how the foundation of faith in Christ is no longer assumed or practiced. The priorities and allegiances have shifted away from a church or faith-centered community

to one that is now largely pluralistic. And with that pluralism has come the additional cultural element of life focused on one's self. New elements vying for people's allegiance and priorities continue to nudge God's authority to the wayside, to the point where they dominate and have largely become the norm, specifically when it comes to the dominance in areas like work, sports, and the consumer culture. Listening to neighbors brought these struggles to life, and in talking with church leaders and the congregation (as well as reflecting on my own life) there is an agreement in our awareness of the challenge of living Sabbath practices and values in the world and culture today.

Looking back historically, the people of Treynor have always worked hard. And in looking at the people today, that cultural trait is still present. With the increased number of voices challenging God's authority, the community tends to buy into the false legitimating narrative of success being defined as dominance over others. Excellence is pursued, but that excellence is often grounded in the economic rather than the relational. Working hard at one's job or working hard on the ball field is not always as visible or outwardly praised as working hard as a spouse, parent, or neighbor. When idols of work, sports, and consumerism are the dominant voices in culture, it perpetuates the sin of Adam and Eve in Eden; people continue to try to rule alone, and in spite of God's authority. When living for such idols, Sabbath life is not possible because ultimately, Sabbath is about God's authority over creation. And as we noted before, creation is doxological; as the created ones, humans respond to our Creator through worship and in performing the priestly mandate of inviting all of creation into a relationship with God.

These are very relevant issues to people living in the Treynor community today. How people spend their time and what forces are ordering and dictating life and

schedules. Currently, the shared experience from those who were interviewed is the description of life which perpetually is struggling to find balance; as people in the Treynor community attempt to navigate daily life and schedules, what forces are going to define the multitude of decisions that guide habits, practices, and values? Complaints about the lack of time and feeling overwhelmed with the demands of work, sports, and consumer culture were common in the interviews. Also shared was the desire for something to make sense of it all. Based on the interviews, there was a perceived need to re-order and re-prioritize life. The reasons behind that perceived feeling was not always identified. The interviews found that when neighbors spent time listening to other neighbors, their captivity to life-stealing forces lessened as they become more aware of the competing claims for their allegiance and instead began dreaming about Sabbath life and practices together.

These listening experiments allowed neighbors to prioritize life and willingly choose, even for a small moment, to spend time in relationship with one another. It was intentional. It was scheduled. It formally gave an important enough reason for neighbors to choose set aside other items on their to do list and simply be with, and listen to, the people they live near. Every single interview, neighbors lamented how they had wanted to get together for a long time but had simply never found the time. Perhaps more pointedly, the awareness of the importance of listening to each other had not, up to that point, outweighed the other possible gains brought forth by other possible uses of that same time. It was a reminder to everyone that we are made in community. Although somewhat formalized, the time spent with neighbors gave them a brief taste of a Sabbath

life together; after the neighbors had concluded the interviews, all expressed that it would not take that long for them to come together again.

This project humbly attempted to remind neighbors, as well as the larger church, that there is life beyond the supermarket of idols in which we find ourselves; an alternate imagination of life can be awakened, one that is rooted in Sabbath practices flowing out of a primary relationship with God. May God lead us all in discovering this new imagination, as neighbors listen to each other and challenge the status quo together.

Future Experimentation

As the church celebrated the completion of the experiments and continued to process what was learned, it was the Deacons that ended up taking over the leadership of any future experiments for the church. It was clear to all that small, new experiments were needed, as the church as a whole continues to work within the Missional Change Process. As people join in the conversation, building awareness and understanding, these new experiments will continue to unfold. The challenge before the deacons, and for the community as a whole, is continuing to build on the relational gains in the neighborhood, working towards introducing and inviting that new Sabbath understanding.

Part of that work has already begun in the neighborhoods in which the interviews have taken place. Neighbors who did not know each other well are now relating to each other at a much deeper level. Instead of simply waving and going about their own business, church leaders have reported much more intentionality about time spent in the neighborhoods. Church leaders have also reported that their neighborhoods have become closer as a result of the interviews. Families have been brought together. In one case, a

very private household in the neighborhood has now opened themselves to their neighbors and even invited other neighbors to come into very personal times, such as birthday parties and celebrating family and cultural traditions. Other church leaders have reported that discussions of faith and life have begun to be frequent in the neighborhood.

Each of these gains would not have happened at this time were it not for the intentionality of neighbors in choosing to spend time with, and listen to, each other. These neighbors would not be experiencing the life they are today had they not intentionally went against the status quo of a culture which promotes success by dominance over others and is held captive to idols such as work, sports, and consumerism. As church and neighborhood leaders look to the future, they must continue to build an increased awareness and understanding of the various forces vying for allegiance in the lives of the people in the Treynor community.

Even with helpful frameworks and tools such as the Missional Change Process, it is simply not possible to take a neighborhood from a place of imaginative captivity to a place of Sabbath practices and habits overnight. Over and over again, those being interviewed brought out the relational elements of life as being the most meaningful. And this should be no surprise. By design, God's creation is relational. Inviting God's creation into a relational understanding between creature and created is, by definition, relational work. And as such, inviting an awareness and understanding of a doxological creation lived out in the relationship between neighbors takes time. A new Sabbath imagination, complete with new habits, practices, and values will be a marathon of a process. But despite that challenge, the interviews consistently drew out the reality that it was the relational stories that brought life to those being interviewed. It was not work. It was not

sports. It was not economic or consumeristic gains. It was the relational space of neighbors sharing their story and listening to the stories of others.

What was very clear in every interview that happened was that the life-giving power of shared stories was not surprising to the neighbors. They knew that they needed the space and relationship in community. They knew that there was life in the neighborhood. But like the family member who knows they are sick but refuses to make time to go to see a doctor, the interviews demonstrated that while each neighborhood had an awareness of the life that was possible apart from the status quo, they also had not intentionally re-prioritized their own habits, practices, and values to reflect that which they knew. Neighbors expressed that they knew what they needed to do, but the demands of daily life prevented that new imagination from becoming a practiced reality. In other words, the captivity to the dominant cultural narrative and allegiance given to work, sports, and consumerism still reigns when it comes to how people choose to spend their time.

From the experience gained from the listening interviews, having a taste of an alternate imagination, even if it is not fully understood as a glimpse into new Sabbath life and practices, can be a helpful first step in challenging the captivity of Treynor's neighborhoods to idols. The reality that was expressed in this project is that people (especially those who have not yet had a foretaste) struggle to choose this new imagination for themselves. They need some guidance and need a glimpse of what could be a new reality in their neighborhood. In many ways, offering such a foretaste is what the church is all about. As disciples of Jesus, we are to offer all people a foretaste of God's Kingdom. This includes the doxological invitation given to all of creation to

worship God. The challenge which now rests before church leaders is how to invite neighborhoods in Treynor to glimpse

To that end, the church leaders who led this first round of interviews have given the challenge to the rest of the church. They felt very strongly that interviewing their neighbors was worth doing. Each came away from the experience changed in profound ways, as they too received a foretaste of new imagination of Sabbath life and practices through the interview process. The church leaders all spoke of their experience during a church service celebrating the completion of the community interviews. As the church leaders spoke, you could hear and see how impacted they had been from the experience. Several became emotional thinking back to their time spent with their neighbors. Every single church leader recommended that others in the church replicate their experiments in their own neighborhoods. The leaders reflected on the relationship with their neighbors before the interviews and then shared how much deeper that relationship was now. They linked the work described in Luke 10, and saw themselves as those who had been sent out into their neighborhoods. As the challenge has been issued, new experiments have sprung up as people have engaged their neighbors, choosing relationship over the status quo of life run ragged.

The second small experiment that is currently underway is a re-focusing of the church block party ministry. Previously, the block parties were somewhat random; parties were held whenever and wherever as schedules allowed. The plan for this summer is to schedule parties in the neighborhoods where the listening experiments took place, building upon the gains which are already being experienced. In the past, the church intentionally maintained a minimal presence at each block party. The block party

ministry was not used as a method of encouraging church growth but rather for neighbors simply being able to spend time with each other. Currently, as neighbors begin to choose the neighborhood, an increased presence of the church will be helpful, as the foretaste to new life together is interpreted in light of Sabbath habits, practices, and values. These block parties will give church leaders and neighbors the opportunity to begin to show that there is more to life than the endless production for pharaoh and his idols. They will have a chance to demonstrate that there is a fuller and more abundant life waiting to be grasped, a new imagination of what life in Treynor can be. They can start to teach others how this new life is rooted in relationship and worship to God, and how a Sabbath imagination offers freedom where the false promises of idols will never satisfy.

Coming away from the listening interviews, the church congregation, church leaders, and I ongoing reflection and work to do. As neighbors begin to experience a new imagination, we will need to ground those experiences in Sabbath theology. We will have to remember that moving a community through all five steps of the Missional Change Process will not happen overnight. There is obviously much more to be done. But the congregation at Zion Church, as well as the church leaders and their neighbors, have gotten a taste of a new Sabbath imagination together. And that is a start. Please pray for the Treynor community as we continue to live this journey in real-time. May God be glorified by this and all future actions as we seek to discover a new Sabbath imagination together.

Appendix A

Project Process Design

April

- Pray
 - Involve Deacons
- Research
 - Review Community Interviews
- Sabbath research
 - Study Appreciative Inquiry (Branson Manuscript)
- Create Training Materials
 - Team Leader Invitation Summary Handout
 - State Purpose
 - State Timeframe
 - State Expectations
- Appreciative Inquiry
 - Appreciative Questions
 - Luke 10, Luke 4
 - Dwelling in the Word
 - Missional Change Process
 - Interview Questions
- Leadership Team Invitations and Selection
 - Church members will be the team leaders
 - Looking for around 4 couples/individuals
 - Preference Given to Deacons or Past-Deacons Who Live in Town
 - Invitations Given in Person
 - Summary Handout given at time of invitation
 - Gather Group and Pray With at Church—Commissioning by Deacons?

May

- Pray
 - Involve Deacons
- Finalize Leadership Group
- Gather Group and Pray With at Church
- Continue Research
 - Review Community Interviews
- Sabbath research
 - Study Appreciative Inquiry (Branson Manuscript)
- Refine Training Materials
- Appreciative Inquiry
 - Appreciative Questions
 - Luke 10, Luke 4
 - Dwelling in the Word
 - Missional Change Process
 - Interview Questions

June

- Pray
 - Involve Deacons
- Continue Research
 - Review Community Interviews
- Sabbath research
 - Study Appreciative Inquiry (Branson Manuscript)
- Refine Training Materials
- Appreciative Inquiry
 - Appreciative Questions
 - Luke 10, Luke 4
 - Dwelling in the Word
 - Missional Change Process
 - Interview Questions
 - Create Other Materials as Needed
- Leaders' Meeting
- Lectio in Mark 8:1-21
- Go through all Interview Questions
- Leaders Describe Sabbath Imagination
- Group Testing of Described Listening Interviews
 - Final Check on Neighbors Who are Invited
 - Set up Listening Experiment Schedule
 - 3 Listening Events, 1 per month in July, August, and September
 - Nail down dates
- Work on Invitation Process
 - Personal Invitation –face to face
 - Postcards/Vistaprint
 - Phone/Email reminders
 - Homework: Begin to do invitations

July-September

- Leadership Team hosts 2 Listening Events with Their Own Neighbors
- Audio Recording taken at Each Event
- Waivers are Signed and Collected at Each Event
- Interviews culminate with all-neighborhood block party

October-November

- Celebrate the Work Completed During Sunday Worship
- Bring Data Before the Deacons
- Team Debriefing Meetings
 - Audio Record each Session
- Lectio in Luke 10
- Time Spent in Group Reflection
 - Sharing the Stories of the Experiments
- Engaging the Missional Change Process
- Group Reflections/New Imagination

Personal Reflections
Church Interactions—Sharing the Story
Imagine Next Steps

December-January and Beyond

Celebrate the Work Completed During Sunday Worship Service
Group Reflections/New Imagination
 Personal Reflections
 Church Interactions—Sharing the Story
 Imagine Next Steps
 “Thank You” cards/gifts to all involved
 Caseys Gift Cards to all who were interviewed
 Omaha Steaks baskets to all interviewers
Implement Next Steps to develop more leaders in the congregation with the capacity to listen to their neighbors
 Finish Doctoral Project Paper

Appendix B

Questions Used in the First Interview

PART ONE: Context

Please describe your history in the Treynor community.

When did you first come to Treynor?

If not Treynor, where did you grow up? How did you end up in Treynor?

If you chose to move to Treynor...

When did you move to Treynor?

What was it that drew you to this community?

Why have you stayed in the community?

Describe your family?

Are you married? For how long?

Family names/ages

Do you have any family in the Treynor area?

Are they still at home/Do any of them live in the area?

Why do you think they have chosen to live in Treynor?

What is it about Treynor that allows them to be the kind of family they are wanting to become?

How would you describe your life here in Treynor?

What is it about Treynor that makes it feel like home? What is so special about living where you do? What makes it different from other places that you have lived?

Thinking about to when you were/are raising your children, what made that time special? How did the Treynor Community play a role in making that time life-giving for you and your family?

PART Two: Community

How would you describe the word “Community”?

How would you describe the “community” of Treynor? Is it a community as you just described?

When would you say that the entire community of Treynor is at its best?

What would you say are the most valuable aspects of our community?

What have been your best experiences of living in Treynor? What have you found to be life-giving?

Describe your neighborhood

What drew you to that specific part of Treynor? Why do you live where you do?

Talk a little bit about the neighborhood and the people around you

How would you describe your neighbors (not just the ones giving the interview)?

What is the best thing about your neighbors (not just the ones giving the interview)

Talk a little bit about your friends and social lives

Where do your friends live? How often do you get to see them? What sorts of things do you do together?

Do any of your friends live in your neighborhood?

If you had three wishes for the community, what would they be?

Appendix C

Questions Used in the Second Interview

PART ONE: Reflections

Thinking back to our first interview, is there anything that you would like to add about your family background or our town here in Treynor?

Have your thoughts or ideas about our community changed at all? If so, how and why? What changed?

PART TWO: Faith (please take extra care in this section to come across as patient, understanding, and full of God's grace—especially not knowing where people might land in this section)

Do you consider yourself to be a person of faith? What faith traditions, if any, do you belong to?

If you are comfortable, please share what you believe.

Do you find it easy or difficult to talk about your faith? Why is that?

What churches do you know about in this area?

Any information is helpful—what is your impression or attitude towards the churches in Treynor?

How do you see them at work in the community? How is God working through the churches in Treynor?

Do you go to church? How many times a month would you say you attend?

IF YES: How do you see God at work in your church?

What is the most life-giving aspect of the church you attend? What brings you energy and joy?

What is the best thing about your church?

PART THREE: Work, Sports, and Consumerism

What was/is your career? What did/do you do for a living? Do you work with others or by yourself?

What do/did you find most fulfilling about your job? Why is/was that?

What are some of the benefits of working where you do/did? How has your work life positively influenced your life and relationships?

Do you feel connected with God in your work? How do you see your work allow you to deepen your relationship with God?

What is God currently doing in and through the people where you work? Or in and through you if you work by yourself?

How would you define success? If you looked at someone who you would describe as being successful, what would make them that way?

Do you consider yourself to be a sports fan? What sports or teams do you follow?

What do you find exciting or life giving about sports?

Did you/Do you actively participate in sports now? Have you ever? Did you/do you have children who play/played sports?

In what ways have your involvement with sports deepened your relationship with God? How have you seen God be present in the sports arena?

Take a mental picture of your calendar for the next week—how filled in is that schedule? Would you say that it is very open, somewhat open, or not open at all?

In practicality, what is the number one thing you would say that dictates your schedule? What is it that you order your life around?

How big of a role does money or economics play in your daily life?

How often do you think about money?

Do you ever feel pressure to “keep up with the Jones’?” Do you feel like you have to have new material things or look or behave a certain way in order to be accepted in your neighborhood?

In what ways has that necessary relationship with money deepened your faith and relationship with God? How have you seen God present and active in your finances?

PART FOUR: Community, Sabbath, and Leadership

What makes a good leader? Who do you see functioning as leaders in the Treynor community?

Do you see yourself as a leader? In what ways?

What does the word Sabbath mean to you? How does the Sabbath commandment deepen the relationship between God and His people?

Where do you currently see God at work in the Treynor community?

Where would you like to see God show up in our town? What sorts of things should believers in Treynor be praying for?

Narrowing the focus a bit, what specifically would you like to see God do in your own neighborhood and the people in it?

PART FIVE: Final Questions

How can we pray for you? Is there anything specific that you would like our church to be talking to God about on your behalf?

What is the single best thing about your neighborhood?

What is the single best thing about the community of Treynor?

How has living in Treynor allowed you to become the person/family that you want to be? How has being here helped you fulfill your goals/dreams?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "Flag Code." The American Legion, <https://www.legion.org/flag/code> (accessed January 28, 2018).
- Barber, Benjamin. *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2007.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Consuming Life*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012.
- _____. *Liquid Modernity*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012.
- Block, Peter, Walter Brueggemann, and John McKnight. *An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. New York: Harper, 1954.
- Branson, Mark Lau. *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004.
- Branson, Mark Lau and Juan Martinez. *Churches, Cultures & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.
- Branson, Mark Lau, and Nicolas Warnes. *Starting Missional Churches: Life With God in the Neighborhood*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993.
- _____. *Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.
- _____. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014
- "City of Treynor, Iowa," *City of Treynor*, <http://www.cityoftreynor.com> (accessed June 1, 2016).
- Community Leader "A." Interview by author. Tape recording, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, June 5, 2015.
- Community Leader "B." Interview by author. Tape recording, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, June 15, 2015.

- Community Leader “F.” Interview by author. Tape recording, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, June 26, 2015.
- Community Leader “G.” Interview by author. Tape recording, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, June 30, 2015.
- Debriefing Session One. Interview by author. Tape recording, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, January 7, 2018.
- Debriefing Session Two. Interview by author. Tape recording, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, January 14, 2018.
- Dulles, Avery. *Models of the Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1974.
- Fishbane, Michael. *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Freire, Paulo. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1974.
- Greenberg, Ken. *Walking Home: The Life and Lessons of a City Builder*. Toronto, Ontario: Random House Canada, 2011.
- Guder, Darrell. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- _____. *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.
- Harvey, Barry. *Another City*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999.
- Hauerwas, Stanley, and William Willimon. *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People who Know Something is Wrong*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989.
- Heifetz, Ronald. *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1994.
- Heifetz, Ronald, and Marty Linsky. *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002.
- Heschel, Abraham. *The Sabbath*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1951.
- Hopes, Kim, Howard Lawrence, and John McKnight, “Asset Based Neighborhood Organizing: The Method of the Abundant Community Initiative in Edmonton,

Canada” (working paper, Asset Based Community Development Institute, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. 2015).

Hunter, George, III. *How to Reach Secular People*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992.

Interview 1a. Interviewed by Jodi Volkens, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, August 21, 2017.

Interview 1b. Interviewed by Jodi Volkens, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, November 27, 2017.

Interview 2a. Interviewed by Jodi Volkens, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, August 24, 2017.

Interview 2b. Interviewed by Jodi Volkens, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, December 22, 2017.

Interview 1a. Interviewed by Tom Hartigan, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, August 26, 2017.

Interview 1b. Interviewed by Tom Hartigan, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, December 22, 2017.

Interview 2b. Interviewed by Tom Hartigan, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, December 20, 2017.

Interview 1a. Interviewed by Troy and Tami King, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, October 22, 2017.

Interview 1b. Interviewed by Troy and Tami King, audio recording, Zion Congregational Church, Treynor, IA, November 28, 2017.

Iowa Official Register. “History of Iowa,”
<http://publications.iowa.gov/135/1/history/7-1.html> (accessed January 1, 2017).

Iowa History Project. “Stories of Iowa,”
<http://iagenweb.org/history/soi/soi34.htm> (accessed January 1, 2017).

Jethani, Skye. “Re: Acts 22: The Power of Telling Stories.” Message to Adam Magill. January 30, 2018. Email.

Laband, David, and Deborah Heinbuch. *Blue Laws: The History, Economics, and Politics of Sunday-Closing Laws*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987.

- G. Lotter & T. van Aarde. "A Rediscovery of the Priesthood of Believers in Ephesians 4:1–16 and its Relevance for the *Missio Dei* and a Biblical Missional Ecumenism," *In die Skriflig* 51(2), a2251.
<https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/article/view/2251/4706> (accessed May 17, 2018).
- McKnight, John and Peter Block. *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2012.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986.
- _____. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989.
- _____. *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995.
- Pathak, Jay, and Dave Runyon. *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012.
- Pascale, Richard, Linda Gioja, and Mark Milleman. *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000.
- Rogers, Everett. *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: Free Press, 2003.
- Roxburgh, Alan. *Joining God, Remaking Church, and Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015.
- _____. *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011.
- _____. *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.
- _____. *The Missionary, Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality*. Harrisburg, PN: Trinity Press International, 1997.
- _____. *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- _____. *The Sky is Falling!?! Leaders Lost in Transition*. Eagle, ID: ACI

- Publishing, 2005.
- Roxburgh, Alan, and M. Scott Boren. *Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it Matters, How to Become One*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009.
- Roxburgh, Alan, and Fred Romanuk. *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- Salvatierra, Alexia, and Peter Heltzel. *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.
- Sedmak, Clemens. *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Thesis*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011.
- Schein, Edgar. *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2013.
- Schreiter, Robert. *Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.
- SongFacts. "Who Are You by The Who,"
<http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=2394> (accessed May 17, 2018).
- Sparks, Paul, Dwight Friesen, and Tim Soerens. *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship, and Community*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.
- Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- The Who, "Who Are You," MCA Records, 1978
- Treynor Town and Country Club. *History of the Community of Treynor Iowa*, Malvern, IA: The Malvern Leader, 1961.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin, Charles Anderson, and Michal Sleasman, eds. *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Van Gelder, Craig, ed. *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007.
- Van Gelder, Craig, and Dwight Zscheile. *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping*

- Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Wadell, Paul. *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002.
- Walsh, Brian, and Sylvia Keesmaat. *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Walton, John. *The Lost World of Genesis One*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.
- Weiss, Robert. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press, 1994.
- Yoder, John. *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992.
- Zion Congregational Church, "Walking with the Lord: 100 Years." Centennial Celebration Book, Treynor, IA.
- Zscheile, Dwight. *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2014.