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# Tomorrow's Church: Transforming the Body of Christ for the Mission to Come

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# Dissertation Approval Sheet

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TRANSFORMING THE BODY OF CHRIST FOR THE MISSION TO COME

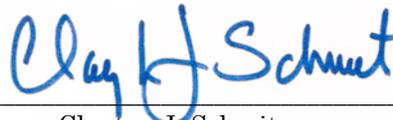
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Clayton J. Schmit



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TRANSFORMING THE BODY OF CHRIST FOR THE MISSION TO COME

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

BY

WESLEY C. TELYEA  
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## ABSTRACT

### **Tomorrow's Church: Transforming the Body of Christ for the Mission to Come**

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2018

Organizational transformation is unavoidable yet necessary for institutional health. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is at a crossroads today as it is coming to grips with this reality. The issue the ELCA will face in the coming decade concerns how it will be transformed to respond to the *missio dei*.

In this dissertation I will address this issue first by exploring the cultural landscape the ELCA occupies. By analyzing current religious trends from the Pew Research Center, self-reported numbers from the ELCA, and cultural commentaries from contemporary thinkers, I will argue the ELCA is in an unprecedented situation where it needs to be transformed.

Looking for a contemporary example from which the ELCA might be able to learn, I will argue the missional church movement is one area that offers the ELCA valuable insights. After a literary review, I will argue that an ecclesiology structured around the identity of being sent is the direction in which ELCA congregations should look to be transformed. This kind of transformation can be learned from Murray Bowen's concept of self-differentiation. At the heart of this section is the conviction that personal transformation leads to corporate transformation.

Following this exploration of self-differentiation for cultural transformation, I will then apply these insights to ministry practices. I will present three tools that pastors and leaders can use to increase their self-differentiated leadership capacity, grow in understanding of where God has worked in the past and is currently leading, and help make sense of the current cultural situation.

In the conclusion, I will propose an ecclesiology for the future of the ELCA. I will assert that even though organizational transformation is difficult, it is the key to helping congregations breath life back into the ELCA as it seeks to join in the *missio dei*.

Content Reader: Clayton J. Schmit, PhD

Words: 298

To my kids, Noah, Hannah and Micah -  
I hope this work may shape a church they want to be a part of someday

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PART ONE  
A NEW REALITY

## INTRODUCTION

Many of today's toughest challenges are so big and complex they don't fall neatly within the boundaries of existing organizations or traditional ways of structuring knowledge. Solving them requires the expertise and perspectives of multiple disciplines.<sup>1</sup>

Organizations, whether a Fortune 500 company or a small country church in rural North Dakota, might not be able to survive, much less thrive, if they do not attend to the work of transformation. The reason for this is simple. Organizations today live in a different society than they did yesterday and in which they will live tomorrow. For organizations to keep up with a rapidly changing society, they need to be equipped and structured for transformation. The consequences of building an organization not equipped to transform include the risk of becoming irrelevant, losing touch with the neighborhoods they occupy and the people they serve, and not surviving to serve another generation because they are not prepared to meet new challenges that arise.

Some might argue that applying this kind of logic to the church is inappropriate because the goal of the church should not be relevancy or even the number of people who attend church on Sunday morning. However, the notion of the incarnation, of Jesus taking on flesh and blood, and of God coming to dwell with humanity suggests God deeply cares about being relevant and gathering people.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, Scripture in its entirety tells one long story of God trying to make God known to a fallen people who refuse to recognize God time and time again. In spite of humanity's unwillingness to

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<sup>1</sup> Linda A. Hill et al., *Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press 2014), 197.

<sup>2</sup> See John 1:14 for an example of God choosing to dwell among humanity.

acknowledge God, God goes to extremes to be known. God wishes to be known so much that eventually Jesus is crucified and resurrected.

This notion that relevance and reverence are mutually exclusive terms needs to be forgotten. What should be kept in the forefront is the idea that long-term organizational health requires transformation and change because society is constantly creating new challenges. This idea seems to have been acknowledged by the leadership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) as recently as 2013 when in his final report to the ELCA churchwide assembly, outgoing Secretary David Swartling wrote,

... one cannot analyze what it means to be made new unless you know something about the past. Conceptually, something new replaces something old. Without knowing something about what went before, you cannot know what is truly new! In the case of the ELCA, this means that we must recognize that we are deeply rooted in the Gospel and that the context for mission and ministry is changing. Truly, we are deeply rooted in our faith but always being made new!<sup>3</sup>

Employing the ELCA's twenty-fifth anniversary theme, as well as the theological theme of new creation, Swartling acknowledges this necessity for organizations to transform as the world they live in evolves, grows, and creates anew.

Though some in the ELCA acknowledge the necessity of transformation, the ELCA struggles with how it will be transformed to best serve the *missio dei*, the mission of God. One result of this struggle can be seen when one looks at membership numbers in the ELCA. Since being established in 1988, the ELCA has become a denomination in decline. In a recent article examining membership decline in the ELCA, historian of American Lutheranism Mark Granquist notes a couple of telling observations regarding

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<sup>3</sup> David Swartling, "Report of the Secretary," accessed August 14, 2017, <http://www.elca.org/en/Resources/Churchwide-Assembly#2013>.

this decline. First, Granquist writes that from the time of the ELCA's formation in 1988 and up to the year 2014, the ELCA lost approximately 1.5 million members, or roughly 28 percent of its membership.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, of those 1.5 million members who left the ELCA, 57 percent left between the years of 2009 and 2014.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Granquist offers one explanation for the decline in ELCA membership. He suggests the decline could be rooted in theological disagreements that have occurred within the ELCA since its inception, including the most recent 2009 decision to ordain individuals who identify as GLBT and are in committed relationships. However, when Granquist examines the numbers of those who are leaving the ELCA, by and large he finds that they do not seem to be ending up in more conservative Lutheran Church bodies. His conclusion is that they are just leaving and going nowhere.<sup>6</sup>

If membership decline reveals the difficulty the ELCA has with transformation, then something needs to be done to help the ELCA and its leaders. This is especially true if leaders in the ELCA want to learn how to best move through the transformation process as the congregations seeks to respond and become part of the *missio dei*. A couple of issues will be key for the ELCA as it addresses this problem. The issues explore what has God done, where is God leading, and how congregations will meet God at this intersection. It is only when congregations have done the hard work of transformation that the ELCA as an institution will be transformed.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Granquist, "The ELCA by the Numbers," *Lutheran Forum* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 19.

The first issue, regarding what God done, asks the church and its leaders to look back into their past and identify all the ways God has been faithful to them as they have tried to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. This is an exercise of grounding that shapes the discussion about transformation by asking what God has done and not what humanity has done. This question anchors transformation in the church in the triune God of Scripture.

The second issue, regarding where God is leading, asks the church and its leaders to discern the *missio dei* in their context. This question is aimed at connecting the past and the present in order to discern the future. Like the first issue, this one grounds the discussion regarding transformation in God's action and not in humanity's.

The final issue, regarding how the church will arrive at where God is leading, is the action plan of the prior discernment about the *missio dei*. Knowing what God has done and where God is leading makes joining and following the *missio dei* clearer. The church cannot remain stagnant if it is to remain vital. It is simply not an option. God is calling the church to mission because God is a missionary God. If the church remains stagnant then it may become irrelevant, lose its prophetic voice, forfeit its vocation, and possibly die.<sup>7</sup> This reflection should produce clear and measurable goals, but its difficulty will be in how it is lived out. For example, if a congregation is noticing a changing demographic in the neighborhood they serve, then they need to find ways to meet the needs of the new demographic. Coming up with tasking like being friendly to neighbors cannot be measured and might not provide insights into how the congregation

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<sup>7</sup> In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promises that the gates of hell will not prevail over his church, and so the church itself will not die. However, it is important for pastors and ministry leaders to ask which forms of the church are dying and how they can help discern and lead God's people into the next iteration that Christ's church is being called to embody.

can serve. However, a task like meeting three new neighbors to learn their life story each week can be measured and provides vital feedback for ministry.

Tracking measurable outcomes in the church runs the risk of being too rigid or too open-ended. If the plan produced is too rigid, then the church could inadvertently leave out the Holy Spirit to do its work of rebirth and renewal. If the plan produced is too open-ended, then the church may never accomplish what God is calling it to do and to be due to lack of accountability.

To create a plan with the hope of finding a process that allows the ELCA and its congregations to be transformed, I suggest that leaders in the ELCA need to become self-differentiated leaders. Transformation will not begin with institutions, but with individuals who do the hard work of discerning God's call to mission. Future church leaders will become leaders who can separate who they are from those they serve. They will be leaders who understand basic systems theory and are able to separate themselves from the systems they work in, live, and serve. Using John 10 as a guide, pastors and congregational leaders need to learn to be good shepherds.

The missional church movement provides one example where this kind of transformation is evident. Leaders within the ELCA can look towards the missional church movement when thinking about building congregations that are ready to be transformed. Murray Bowen's concept of self-differentiation is crucial to helping church leaders in the ELCA navigate congregational transformation as they seek to faithfully respond to serve the *missio dei* in their ministry contexts. In a constantly changing world, the ability to discern the *missio dei* takes on a high level of significance. To meet this goal, church leaders can learn from the model of self-differentiation. This will help

congregations in the ELCA meet the new demands facing the church today and tomorrow.

Chapter 1 will explore the cultural landscape of the ELCA. Exploring this landscape will expose the kind of transformation that is needed given the makeup of the ELCA and the general religious landscape in the United States. This chapter analyzes the general religious landscape in the United States, the ELCA itself by the numbers, and includes a theological and philosophical examination of current trends present in the environment the ELCA occupies. This will include a brief look at three influential thinkers: Jean-François Lyotard, Leslie Newbigin, and Ted Peters. This chapter will reveal how the ELCA is facing an unparalleled challenge.

In chapter 2 I will provide a literary review that looks at ecclesiological identity and Bowen theory. This literature review will examine how scholars have made a shift in their thinking. It will note how traditional ecclesiological theologies understood ecclesiology in terms of what the church did. Contemporary ecclesiological theologies that have begun to emphasize a mission-based ecclesiology which understands ecclesiology in terms of who the church is. This chapter will also examine works that show how Bowen theory and its concept of self-differentiation can be used as a catalyst for organization transformation.

Based on recent ecclesiological developments, in chapter 3 I will suggest that one response to this unparalleled challenge facing congregations, and of particular interest for ELCA congregations, has come from the missional church movement. This movement has sought to place the *missio dei* in the forefront of its ministry. I will provide an introduction to the missional church movement. I will argue the missional church

movement offers a contemporary example of what faithful transformation should resemble and show how it is the option best suited for the ELCA. In this chapter, three missional church models will be explored from practitioners including David Fitch, Alan Roxburgh, and Cheryl Peterson. I will argue the ELCA needs to seek a transformation that structures its ecclesiology around the identity of being sent because it gives the ELCA the greatest ability to respond to God's mission.

In chapter 4 I will explore Murray Bowen's concept of self-differentiation. It is my contention that an individual's ability to self-differentiate is the critical means by which leaders can navigate this kind of radical transformation. After situating self-differentiation into the greater context of Bowen Theory, this chapter will explore self-differentiation in detail and analyze two examples of it in practice in the works of Edwin Freedman and Roberta Gilbert.

Chapter 5 will move from the theoretical to the practical. The question this chapter will seek to answer is how Bowen Theory can be used to create an action plan for leaders to employ in their ministry settings. By exploring and proposing three tools that help increase a leader's ability to self-differentiate, this dissertation offers leaders a flexible and clear action plan to help begin the process of leading transformation in congregations.

In the final chapter I will explore the implications of this project for the ecclesiology of the ELC. I will explain how this process of transformation might equip the ELCA for the challenges of tomorrow and how it reinforces the current ecclesiological notions key to Lutheranism and the ELCA. Furthermore, I will argue that this process of transformation is likely to breathe life back into a declining and exhausted

church. It will help the ELCA understand what role God is calling it to play and embody in the *mission dei*.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

The issue at the heart of this dissertation is rather simple. It concerns how the ELCA and its member congregations will go about the work of transformation as they seek to join in God's mission. The issue is a common issue that many denominations and congregations have recently been engaging. However, before proceeding further, this chapter addresses whether transformation is genuinely necessary. One might posit that the church is not in need of transformation because of the growth of the global church in the past century. This objection may suggest that because of global growth, religious life in North America is fine and that the call to transformation is alarmist because it neglects a worldview of Christianity in favor of a local view.

This chapter will explore the cultural landscape in the United States. In the first section, overall religious trends in the United States will be examined. These trends will not be restricted to the ELCA but will include other denominations as its aim is to paint a broad picture of the religious landscape in the United States. In the second section, three cultural trends will be examined that aim to highlight broad and influential trends. These

three trends will give insight into what is happening in American society. In the final section of this chapter I will explore the culture of the ELCA specifically. The section will explain how the ELCA come into existence, the natural ideas it formed around, and its purpose. Concluding this chapter, I will explore whether the ELCA is equipped to meet the current cultural needs based on the religious and cultural trends that have been identified.

### **Cultural Landscape of Christianity in the United States**

According to the Pew Research Center, Christians make up 70.6 percent of the population in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Within that 70.6 percent, 25.4 percent identified as Evangelical Protestants, 20.8 percent as Catholic, and 14.7 percent as Mainline Protestants.<sup>2</sup> Of those polled, the Pew Research Center found 22.8 percent identified as Unaffiliated or as “religious nones” and 15.8 percent identified with nothing in particular. These findings are interesting because given popular notions about religious life in North America, as well as the rise in popularity of the notion of post-Christendom, these numbers do not seem too dire.

On the surface, these numbers seem to indicate that most people in the United States are Christians and that those who do not identify as Christian make up a minority. While these numbers might be used to quiet individuals who claim Christianity has lost its influence in the United States, a closer look at the numbers is needed to fully understand the cultural landscape of Christianity in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, “Religious Landscape Study,” accessed August 14, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

In May of 2015 the Pew Research Center released a long-term religious landscape study examining religion in the United States. This study found that between the years 2007 and 2014 the number of people who identified as Christian decreased from 78.4 percent to 70.6 percent.<sup>3</sup> This is a decrease of 7.8 percent. Furthermore, it found the number of people who identified as unaffiliated increased 6.7 percent, from 16.1 percent in 2007 to 22.8 percent in 2014. Within the groups previously discussed, Evangelical Protestants decreased from 26.3 percent in 2007 to 25.4 percent in 2014, Mainline Protestants decreased from 18.1 percent in 2007 to 14.7 percent in 2014, and Catholics decreased from 23.9 percent in 2007 to 20.8 percent in 2014.<sup>4</sup> This long-term study also affirmed another study done by the Pew Research Center that examined religious belief and practice in the United States. The organization concluded that the United States is becoming less religious.<sup>5</sup>

While some of the statistics seem insignificant, the long-term trends reveal the severity of the steady decline and changing landscape in the United States. This raises questions about how individual Christians are reacting to this changing landscape, and what kind of change, if any, has this triggered in religious beliefs and practices among those who still identify as Christians. The Pew Research Center has some interesting findings that address these concerns.

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<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow,” May 12, 2015, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center, “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious: Modest Drop in Overall Rates of Belief, but Religiously Affiliated as Observant as Ever,” November 3, 2015, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.

The first finding of interest is that Christians are becoming younger and more diverse. Pew Research Center's data on age distribution found that the only age group that grew between the years 2007 and 2014 was the 30-39-year-old group. This group made up 33 percent of Christians in the United States in 2007 but 39 percent in 2014.<sup>6</sup> Gender composition among Christians stayed roughly the same between the years 2007 and 2014.<sup>7</sup> When the Pew Research Center looked at racial and ethnic composition among Christians, they found that the percentage of Black, Asian, Latino and Other/Mixed racial and ethnic groups increased while the percentage of White members decreased from 71 percent in 2007 to 66 percent in 2014.<sup>8</sup> These findings contradict conventional wisdom that says the mainline Protestant church is older, aging, and dying.

Another interesting finding from the Pew Research Center is that while the importance of religion in a person's life has slightly increased, weekly worship attendance has decreased.<sup>9</sup> In other words, religious devotion and how people live out their beliefs has begun to change. It also found that those who identified as Christian and held the belief with "absolute certainty" that there was a God decreased in from 80 percent in 2007 to 76 percent in 2014.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Finally, a 2016 report from the Pew Research Center found that 21 percent of US adults were raised in interfaith homes.<sup>11</sup> This number has increased rapidly within a few generations. According to the Pew Research Center, 13 percent of the Greatest Generation were raised in interfaith homes compared to 19 percent of the Boomer generation, 20 percent of the Generation X, and 27 percent of Millennials.<sup>12</sup> Taken as a whole, these numbers paint an interesting picture of a changing landscape in the United States. The number of religious people is shrinking, those who are religious are practicing their faith differently, and the religious are allowing for more uncertainty in their beliefs. The next question to be explored concerns what cultural trends are moving people in this direction.

### **Cultural Trends**

Cultural trends can articulate truth in a way that raw numbers cannot capture. In order to explain the changes in society broadly and accurately, this chapter examines three important cultural trends to place alongside of the statistics. This chapter will describe the work of three key thinkers, Ted Peters, Jean-François Lyotard, and Leslie Newbigin. It will then explain the implications that emerge from the cultural trends that these writers have examined. The work of each of these writers has significant cultural implications for the church today as it relates to science, meaning, and mission.

#### **Ted Peters**

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<sup>11</sup> Pew Research Center, “One-in-Five U.S. Adults Were Raised in Interfaith Homes,” October 26, 2016, accessed August, 14, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/10/26/one-in-five-u-s-adults-were-raised-in-interfaith-homes/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

In 2000 Ted Peters published the second edition of his popular systematic theology entitled *God-The Worlds Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*. In his book Peters defines faith as “believing and trusting in God” and defines theology as “the discipline of thinking about God in light of our faith.”<sup>13</sup> Using these definitions as his starting point, Peters goes on to identify the task of his systematic theology to “...examine the precritical symbols of Christian faith, to explicate them in light of critical and postcritical modes of thinking, and to suggest a coherent scheme for organizing Christian doctrine and theology.”<sup>14</sup> For Peters, the challenge of the twenty-first century lies in making the faith coherent and communicable for future generations.

Peters grounds his systematic theology in the central theme of prolepsis, “...the central theme of this book is the concept of *prolepsis*, whereby the gospel is understood as announcing the preactualization of the future consummation of all things in Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup> Peters explains in greater detail that “By prolepsis here I mean anticipation of future reality in a concrete preactualization of it.... The good news of the gospel is that the kingdom of God has arrived ahead of time in Jesus of Nazareth and is the promised destiny of the whole creation.”<sup>16</sup>

Peters’ definitions of faith and theology as well as the central theme of his theology sets the stage for the context in which he writes. It also describes the context in which we live today. Peters writes, “In the twenty-first century, the island of safety has

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<sup>13</sup> Ted Peters, *God-The World’s Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), vii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

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

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

been sorely eroded. The tides of modern life are everywhere sweeping away traditional verities.<sup>17</sup>” With the changing cultural tide, it becomes difficult to explain the distance between where Christianity currently sits and where it will be next.

Peters calls this the hermeneutical question, asking “How can the Christian faith, first experienced and symbolically articulated in an ancient culture now long out-of-date, speak meaningfully to human existence today as we experience it amid a worldview dominated by natural science, secular self-understanding, and the worldwide cry for freedom.”<sup>18</sup> Peters’ hermeneutical question is important. As congregations in the ELCA seek to be transformed to best join in God’s mission, this hermeneutical question points out an important cultural obstacle that congregations will face. The culture’s dominant worldview is governed by natural science, a secular self-understanding, and the worldwide cry for freedom.

Peters goes onto explain this in an even more direct way, writing that “The modern mind poses a challenge to Christian theology because it makes assumptions that are essentially hostile to the symbols of the Christian faith. The most devastating is that Christian symbols are old-fashioned and out-of-date.<sup>19</sup>” His insights are helpful for examining ecclesiological transformation because they serve as a reminder that transformation efforts cannot rely on the ways in which the Christian faith has been expressed in the past. Transformation efforts must look to new ways to speak meaningfully to the human condition in a post-Christian world. Peters exposes how the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 8.

culture of the twenty-first century is dominated by elements hostile to the core tenants of the Christian faith. The ways that the next generation of church leaders engage in this dynamic will have significant ecclesiological implications.

### Jean-François Lyotard

In 1979 Jean-François Lyotard wrote a book entitled *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. In this book Lyotard analyzed postmodernism and highlighted what he believes is at stake as the world moves into a postmodern era. Lyotard defined postmodernism as "...incredulity towards metanarratives."<sup>20</sup> In other words, if one could define modernity as trust in a metanarrative and a search for the ultimate metanarrative in science, medicine, philosophy, democracy or theology, postmodernity has lost its faith that such a narrative exists.

Lyotard states his working hypothesis as "...the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age."<sup>21</sup> Lyotard writes that in a postmodern age, the issue at stake is how knowledge is legitimized. If there is no metanarrative, then Lyotard raises the question of how a person can come to know something. Pitting narrative knowledge against scientific, Lyotard shows how language games are used to legitimize each type of knowledge. This eventually leads him to the conclusion that there is a plurality of narratives through which people legitimize their knowledge instead of an overarching

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<sup>20</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, vol. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

metanarrative.<sup>22</sup> Lyotard points out several mini narratives that are used to legitimize knowledge in culture.<sup>23</sup> For example, when research universities apply for grants, it is not enough for researchers to give raw numbers because they cannot tell a story. A narrative is necessary to give meaning to raw numbers. Thus, multiple kinds of narratives are needed to legitimize a project in a grant request.

The implications of Lyotard's thinking when examining the culture in which the church finds itself today is far reaching. Many see Jesus and the story contained in Scripture as an ultimate metanarrative which gives meaning and purpose to those who are disciples of Jesus. However, if, as Lyotard has pointed out, our culture no longer believes in metanarratives, then the question is how the church will legitimize the story of Jesus as a source of knowledge. Lyotard does not suggest that metanarratives are bad, he merely explains that our culture today does not receive them as an adequate means to legitimize knowledge.

For congregations who seek to be transformed for the *missio dei*, Lyotard's cultural analysis serves in some respects as an invitation into what he calls language games. For Lyotard the goal of conversation is not to come to a consensus, but rather to expand knowledge. In other words, without a dominate metanarrative operating in the world, our culture seeks to expand its knowledge through other means. Congregations going through transformation should be aware of this cultural dynamic and the role that they are playing in it. Using Lyotard as a cultural indicator, one sees that the absolute hold on truth the Church has claimed recently no longer connects with a culture that

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 60.

seeks to expand knowledge through different means.

### Lesslie Newbigin

Lesslie Newbigin is a famous theologian and missiologist who spent much of his career as a missionary in India. Newbigin is best known for his insights gained upon his return from the mission field rather than what he learned while in the mission field itself.

In his book *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Newbigin notes that:

No doubt there are large parts of Christendom where the present tense would still be applicable. However, most thoughtful Christians are in the old, established Western churches can no longer use this kind of language. They recognize that, with the radical secularization of Western culture, the churches are in a missionary situation in what was once Christendom.<sup>24</sup>

The major insight Newbigin gained upon his return to England was how the mission field was no longer out in other nations. The mission field has migrated from third world countries into historically Christian strongholds.<sup>25</sup>

Newbigin arrives at the conclusion that the church today finds itself in a missionary situation. He writes that

We are forced to do something that the Western churches have never had to do since the days of their own birth – to discover the form and substance of a missionary church in terms that are valid in a world that has rejected the power and the influence of the Western nations. Missions will no longer world along the stream of expanding Western power. They have

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<sup>24</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Newbigin makes a similar point when talking about the new pluralistic culture he found upon his return in his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* where he writes, “It has become commonplace to say that we live in a pluralist society – not merely a society which is in place plural in the variety of cultures, religions, and life-styles which it embraces, but pluralistic in the sense that this plurality is celebrated as things to be approved and cherished.” Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 1.

to learn to go against the stream. And in this situation we shall find that the New Testament speaks to us much more directly than does the nineteenth century as we learn afresh what it means to bear witness to the gospel from a position not of strength but of weakness.<sup>26</sup>

For Newbigin the place of the church in the world has been turned upside down.

Newbigin idealizes the heroes from the early church, those who lived and worked from the resurrection of Jesus up until the legalization of Christianity by Constantine.

Newbigin suggests that the global nature of the church adds an additional level of complexity to the situation it faces today.<sup>27</sup>

Newbigin contends that the best way to defend the Christian faith is rooted in the retelling of the story of Jesus Christ and casting modern day people in that story as participants rather than as observers. “The Christian faith, I believe, is – I am convinced – primarily to be understood as an interpretation of the story – the human story set within the story of nature.”<sup>28</sup> Rather than trying to defend the faith in terms of proving the Bible’s reliability, Newbigin calls people to draw others into the biblical narrative in order to show them the divine truth.

Newbigin’s work and cultural insight is significant as this chapter examines the religious landscape of the modern day. In particular his insight that the mission field is no longer only across the ocean but rather in the church’s own neighborhood has profound implications for congregational transformation. Newbigin helpfully concludes that

The task of ministry is to lead the congregation as a whole in a mission to the community as a whole, to claim its whole public life, as well as the personal lives of all its people, for God’s rule. It means equipping all the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>28</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 13.

members of the congregation to understand and fulfill their several roles in this mission through their faithfulness in their daily work. It means training and equipping them to be active followers of Jesus in his assault on the principalities and powers which he has disarmed on his cross. And it means sustaining them in bearing the cost of that warfare.<sup>29</sup>

He boldly asserts that congregational transformation is not simply a realigning of priorities. Congregational transformation is the entry point to the mission field in the United States. Due to cultural trends in the western world, the new mission field requires congregational transformation. Thus, all believers are missionaries today.

In summarizing the implications of the works of these three authors for the future of the ELCA, three insights are particularly important. First, Peters' work shows that the ELCA needs to learn new ways to communicate ancient truths in a world being shaped by natural science, secularism, and a new understanding of freedom. Second, in learning from Lyotard, the church must learn how to speak to a culture that is no longer dominated by a metanarrative but rather by a plurality of narratives. Third and finally, from Newbigin, it must learn that the church of tomorrow needs to understand the mission field not as a far away location, but rather as the reality of its surrounding local communities.

### **The ELCA by the Numbers<sup>30</sup>**

Having surveyed the religious landscape and three important cultural trends shaping the church in the United States, this chapter now turns to understanding the ELCA. It is important to understand how the ELCA came into existence and the values it

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>30</sup> This section has been adapted from a paper I wrote for David E. Fitch's class TM 738 Shaping Communities for God's Kingdom, Summer 2015.

formed around because this helps place the ELCA in context and determines whether it needs to be better equipped for transformation. Edgar R. Trexler begins his important book *Anatomy of a Merger: People, Dynamics, and Decisions that Shaped the ELCA*, which provides a historical recounting of the formation of the ELCA, by stating

In spite of overwhelming grass root support, the merger that produced the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America did not come easily. During the formal negotiations from 1979 to 1987 there were theological arguments, scuttled compromises, changes of the church bringing its 'big guns' into play, the rise of one-issue negotiators, an unwillingness to make decisions, and disgruntled bishops.<sup>31</sup>

Transformation in congregations, much less denominations, is not easy but what arose from this merger and held it together was a rise in three unspoken values of unity, ecumenism, and inclusivity. These values enabled three church bodies to overcome many hurdles and form a new Lutheran church.

Unity took on a high level of importance in the creation of the ELCA. In 1971, before formal talks of a new Lutheran church had begun, both the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) had adopted a recommendation to study the possibility of Lutheran unity.<sup>32</sup> Lutherans as far back as the Reformation have sought the unity of Christendom. In fact, the Augsburg Confession can be considered the first modern ecumenical document that sought to bring unity to a church fractioned by conflict and disagreement. The ALC and LCA initially agreed that unity was a good and desired outcome. The issue that arose was what was considered unity and what it looked like in practice.

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<sup>31</sup> Edgar R. Trexler, *Anatomy of a Merger: People, Dynamics, and Decisions that shaped the ELCA* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, the doctrinal standard for Lutherans, states that the true unity of the church is if there is doctrinal agreement.<sup>33</sup> Both the ALC and the LCA agreed on this point but struggled to articulate what unity looked like in practice. Trexler notes that David Preus, vice president of the ALC from 1968-1973 and president from 1973-1987, believed the ALC and LCA should work together where possible but avoid union.<sup>34</sup> The LCA on the other hand wanted a more encompassing symbol of unity. These conversations continued between 1971 and 1978.

The situation changed in 1979 when the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) joined the conversation. As a break-away group from the fall out of the Seminex controversy in the Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod (LCMS), the AELC was looking for way to sustain itself.<sup>35</sup> Jean Caffey Lyles writes in the *Christian Century* that “In recent years, says one Lutheran ecumenist, the ALC and LCA have pursued differing approaches to Lutheran togetherness – the ALC seeking closer cooperation, the LCA ‘looking for ways to incarnate the unity of the church more fully.’ The catalyst was the tiny AELC, which for survival, issued the call to unity.”<sup>36</sup> While the definition of unity differed among the individual Lutheran church bodies, it played an important role in the merger of the churches and was a guiding principle in the formation of the ELCA.

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. eds. *Augsburg Confession in The Book of Concord* Translated by Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 42.

<sup>34</sup> Trexler, *Anatomy of a Merger*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> For a good overview of the Seminex controversy see the April 2011 issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission*.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Caffey Lyles, “A Taste of Unity: The Lutherans’ Big Burgoo,” *Christian Century* (September 29, 1982), 949.

With the introduction of the AELC into the conversation between the ALC and LCA, unity only became more important because no one wanted to see the church die. Trying to find unity in all cases would become a cornerstone of the ELCA's work.

The second value that surfaced during the merger talks and guided the conversation was ecumenism. This is perhaps most evident in how the new Lutheran church decided to define membership. The document *Report & Recommendations of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church* states that membership will be defined on the grounds of baptism.<sup>37</sup> Concerning this definition for membership, Kathryn W. Baerwald notes that it is a “radical departure from the predecessor three church bodies.”<sup>38</sup> One might summarize this radical departure as a move from membership on the grounds of confession to membership on the grounds of baptism. Baerwald talks about this change as a radical departure because since its beginning the Lutheran church has always defined itself on the basis of its confession. For Martin Luther and the first generation reformers, the Augsburg Confession was the necessary confession of faith. Later with the second-generation reformers, to the confession of faith was added *The Book of Concord*. The change in definition of membership opened the doors for a more ecumenical understanding of the church.

Interestingly, some saw this change and predicted that ecumenism would bring challenges which previous Lutheran church bodies had not faced. H. George Anderson, the second presiding bishop of the ELCA and president of Luther College at the time of

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<sup>37</sup> Commission for a New Lutheran Church, *Report & Recommendations of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church to The American Lutheran Church, The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, Lutheran Church in America*, (1989), 19.

<sup>38</sup> Kathryn W. Baelwald, “The Ministry of the Baptized in the Vision of a Renewed Church,” *Word and World* VII, no. 4 (1987), 382.

the merger, writes, "... there are a series of theological issues that remain to be addressed. The way we address these issues will have a profound effect on the new shape which our particular Lutheran family will assume. The first issue is our ecumenical direction."<sup>39</sup> Trexler notes that while all three Lutheran bodies were members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), only the ALC And LCA were members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and only the LCA belong to the National Council of Churches.<sup>40</sup> The new Lutheran church would have to decide how to align itself in these ecumenical relationships. Each church had previously been able to plot its own course in these organizations but would now have to rethink their collective position.

The merger talks concerning ecumenism brought to the surface two issues. First, ecumenism was deeply valued by all three church bodies. After all, the same value driving them to seek unity among Lutherans and also inspired them to seek the possibility of unity among all of Christendom. Second, there was a willingness among all parties to let this value shape the new Lutheran church. This value was highlighted when the LCA did not end talks of merging with the ALC despite their conflict with the ALC over its altar and pulpit fellowship agreements with the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA).<sup>41</sup> After the formation of the ELCA, work for ecumenism continued and continues to this day to be a guiding value. It began in the merger.

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<sup>39</sup> H. George Anderson, "The New Shape of American Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987), 34.

<sup>40</sup> Trexler, *Anatomy of a Merger*, 115.

<sup>41</sup> Robert J. Marshall, "Unity and Compromise for Lutheran Union," *Mid-Stream* 26 (1987), 90.

Finally, the third value that surfaced during the merger talks was inclusivity. Baerwald writes, "...it became evident early in the life of the commission that there was a strong commitment to the ministry of the whole people of God through the life of the new church."<sup>42</sup> The new Lutheran church made every effort to avoid the perception of having too many clergy and too much administration.

When the Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC) formed, great lengths were taken to make sure the commission was an accurate representation of the three church bodies. The beginning of the *Reports and Recommendations of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church* notes that the CNLC would be comprised of thirty-one members of the ALC, thirty-one members of the LCA, and eight members of the AELC. In this group of seventy-one, it strived for "adequate representation of clergy and laity, male and female persons, racial and ethnic groups, age groups, geographical areas, and various fields of experience and responsibility."<sup>43</sup> This is a significant step toward inclusivity for a church which is so homogeneous.

Furthermore, if the makeup of the CNLC did not sufficiently prove its value of inclusivity, *Reports and Recommendation* states in section 5.01b that "This church, in faithfulness to the Gospel, is committed to be an inclusive church in the midst of division in society. Therefore, in their organization and outreach, the congregations, synods, and churchwide units of this Church shall seek to exhibit the inclusive unity that is God's will for the church."<sup>44</sup> This section goes on to lay out what some have referred to as a quota system where at Churchwide assemblies 60 percent of members must be laity, and that

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<sup>42</sup> Baerwald, "The Ministry of the Baptized in the Vision of a Renewed Church," 380.

<sup>43</sup> Commission for a New Lutheran Church, *Report & Recommendations*, viii.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

that 60 percent must be comprised of 50 percent male and 50 percent female. If possible, the same percentages should be represented in clergy too. Furthermore, 10 percent of the assembly should be people of color and/or people whose first language is not English.<sup>45</sup> This demonstrates that from its very beginning the value of inclusivity has guided the ELCA so strongly that at Churchwide assemblies, where matters of doctrine can be voted on, the laity have a stronger voice than trained theologians.

The ELCA was formed around the values of unity, ecumenism and inclusivity, but it was also formed in opposition to some values. H. George Anderson explains that

The ELCA only makes visible what has long been the case: the theological lines on the historical-critical question have consistently put the ALC, LCA and American Evangelical Lutheran Churches on one side and the LC-MS on the other. The new church will not change that alignment. Nor will it change the fact that within its three predecessor bodies there are a variety of positions on the way the historical-critical method should be employed.<sup>46</sup>

Anderson hints that one element of what the ELCA formed against was theology of the LCMS, which rejected the historical-critical biblical interpretation method. What a group forms against reveals as much, if not more, than the values they employ and claim. It is worth noting that ELCA formed against the LCMS given its guiding values. It is possible that those guiding values were born out of this disagreement over biblical methods of interpretation.

Given the formational history and the values that the ELCA was built upon, it is easy to understand why the ELCA has not had time to focus on building congregations where transformation is part of the DNA. The ELCA was busy striving towards

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, "The New Shape of American Lutheranism," 34.

establishing itself as a new denomination. It is difficult for an organization build the ability to be transformed when they are beginning. Anxiety in the early days of the ELCA was high, as in any organization starting to emerge. Its history has shaped the ELCA in important ways.

### **Is the ELCA Equipped for Today?**

The original issue raised in this chapter was whether the ELCA is equipped to meet the current cultural needs facing the church today. Given the cultural trends pointed out by Peters, Lyotard, and Newbigin as well as the values of the ELCA, it appears that it is not well equipped for ministry today. The Church itself is shrinking and those who still attend are practicing their faith differently even though the ELCA formed around the principles of unity, ecumenism, and inclusivity. The problem is that the ELCA was formed for a world that has changed.

For example, the major cultural trends that seem to dominate society do not pair well with the values the ELCA formed around. While people understand the world as having a plurality of narratives, the ELCA wants to overcome these narratives in favor of unity. A unity that was originally focused on bringing together the different Lutheran denominations that occupied space in the religious landscape of the United States. While people are beginning to understand the need for evangelism at home, the ELCA wants to pursue ecumenism. This is not to say a denomination cannot focus on both evangelism and ecumenism, rather it is to suggest that the ELCA has historically been more focused on bringing together denominations separated by doctrinal differences than on bringing in new converts. Finally, while people in the world have questions about how their faith and

modern ideas relate or if they even do, the ELCA is focused on inclusivity. This area might be where the ELCA is best equipped to meet the current cultural needs. The ELCA's desire to be inclusive brings it into direct contact with a rich diversity of people and ideas.

For the ELCA, this challenge is an unprecedented situation, a situation that all mainline Protestants face. Perhaps at no other point in its short existence has the ELCA struggled to speak to the ethos of the world around it. The ELCA is in need of transformation, but the issue is how it can best prioritize transformation to join in the *missio dei* in the most impactful ways in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The ELCA structure needs to equip existing and future congregations to have transformation built into their DNA as it contends with postmodernism. Finally, it needs to show congregational leaders how to start bringing about this kind of transformation. The following chapters will address these needs.

PART TWO  
EXAMING POSSIBILITIES

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this dissertation is to give ELCA congregations a framework from which they can discern the *missio dei* as they navigate the unprecedented task of transforming into the church of the twenty-first century. At the heart of this change is the issue of ecclesiological identity and transformation. Church must address questions concerning what it means to be the church today. This literature review will examine how scholars have made a shift from traditional ecclesiological theologies that understood ecclesiology in terms of what the church did to more recent ecclesiological theologies that have begun to emphasize a mission-based mindset which understands ecclesiology in terms of who the church is. In addition, this literature review will also examine works regarding Bowen theory because it is key in helping those who want to make this transition.

#### **Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, 1539**

Written toward the end of his life and at a point during the Reformation when reconciliation with Rome was out of the question, Luther takes up the challenge of

defining what the church is and how one can recognize it. This would have been an extremely important question for Luther to answer because at this point in history people would have been confused as to the difference between a true and a false church. Luther points out in part three of this work that the very word church is meaningless and obscure.<sup>1</sup> Therefore coming up with a clearly defined ecclesiology was paramount.

Luther approaches this question with the heart of a pastor,

Well then, the Children's Creed teaches us (as was said) that a Christian holy people is to be and to remain on earth until the end of the world. This is an article of faith that cannot be terminated until that which it believes comes, as Christ promises, "I am with you always, to the close of the age" [Matt. 28:20]. But how will or how can a poor confused person tell where such Christian holy people are to be found in this world?<sup>2</sup>

He then goes on to name seven marks of a church. These distinguishing features will help believers discern if an organization is a true church.

The first mark Luther identifies is that "the holy Christian people are recognized by their possession of the holy word of God."<sup>3</sup> Luther means the true church not only believes the word of God, but also professes it. God's word is what the church and its members build their life on. God's word is the foundation of all that exists. Luther writes, "...God's word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church, 1539," in *Luther's Works, American Edition* 55 vols., eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 41-144.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 150.

The second mark Luther identifies is “the holy sacrament of baptism, wherever it is taught, believed, and administered correctly according to Christ’s ordinance.”<sup>5</sup> This mark of the church is the way in which Christians are sanctified. It is also a public sign of one’s faith for others to see.

The third mark of the church Luther identifies is “the holy sacrament of the altar, wherever it is rightly administered, believed, and received, according to Christ’s institution.”<sup>6</sup> Again like the second mark of the church, this mark is one by which Luther believes a person is sanctified and is a public sign of the faith. As such this is an essential mark of the church.

The fourth mark of the church Luther identifies is, “the office of the keys exercised publicly.”<sup>7</sup> This mark breaks sharply with the medieval Roman Catholic Church and their understanding of the office of the pope. However, for Luther, forgiveness can only come from Christ and through Christ. Any church that believes or teaches otherwise must be a false church, according to Luther.

The fifth mark of the church Luther identifies is “the fact that it consecrates or calls ministers, or has offices that it is to administer.”<sup>8</sup> This mark of the church, for Luther, is the means by which the other marks of the church are enacted and administered. It is the mark that gives the church visible form.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 154.

The sixth mark of the church Luther identifies is “prayer, public praise, and thanksgiving to God.”<sup>9</sup> While public worship might seem like a basic way to recognize the church today, it was not always this way. During Luther’s life many relied on a monastic system to pray for them and carry out worship in their place. This mark also goes on to name Christian education as a part of the way in which Christians are to be recognized.<sup>10</sup>

The seventh and final mark Luther identifies is “the holy possession of the sacred cross.”<sup>11</sup> For Luther, this mark is about being a church that suffers, or as he writes, “They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh.”<sup>12</sup>

For Lutherans, Luther’s seven marks of the church begins a reshaping of their ecclesiological identity. A shift of this magnitude had not been made in the church since Constantine’s legalization of Christianity. Luther’s seven marks are prescriptive only in regard to what the Church teaches, not in organizational structure and form. In some respects that makes sense because the heart of the Reformation was originally about doctrine. However, form is of greater importance today.

**Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Marks of the Body of Christ*, 1999**

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Moving from the sixteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, Christian thinkers still discuss the ecclesiological significance of Luther's seven marks of the church. In *Marks of the Body of Christ* edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, a number of scholars from a variety of Christian denominations reflect on and analyze Luther's seven marks of the church. They answer the implicit questions of if these marks are still evident today five hundred years later, and if not, how they can be put back into practice.

The book is organized around Luther's seven marks of the church beginning with the proclamation of the Word of God and ending with catechesis. The ecclesiological landscape these authors paint is one of a church in a much different situation than that of the sixteenth century. Overall, it calls the current church to ask what the purpose of their activity is and how leaders go about fulfilling that purpose.

For example, when reflecting on the first mark of the church, Gerhard O. Forde writes that the goal of preaching

... is to attempt in our own way to do what the text once did. That being the case, we ought as much as possible, I believe, to lead from the text and its agenda rather than some catchy story or emotional personal experience of some sort. There seems to be a modern dogma about preaching that one has to begin with some kind of story that makes the text relevant. Indeed, we've gotten to the point where the story has taken over the whole sermon, which is dignified by the title of "narrative preaching." The story becomes the text.<sup>13</sup>

Forde's words issue a challenge to modern day preachers and teachers of the Bible.

Essentially what Forde argues that this mark of the church is absent in many

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<sup>13</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, "The Word That Kills and Makes Alive," in *Marks of the Body of Christ*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 9.

congregations. However, Forde does not abandon the reader with this bleak outlook. Instead he goes on to encourage preachers to recall Paul's famous passage from 2 Corinthians 3 concerning how the letter kills but the Spirit brings to life. Then he suggests that preachers use this model in their proclamation.<sup>14</sup>

Another example of an author calling into question the state of one of the seven marks of the church can be seen in the final chapter that examines catechesis. In this chapter the late Robert W. Jenson observes, "The church in the West can no longer suppose that the regular school or the organs of public opinion or the institutions of the arts or sciences instruct people in a way that is harmonious with the church's instruction. Indeed, we must assume the contrary."<sup>15</sup> Again, as with Forde's contribution, the picture Jenson paints is bleak. The church is accused of abdicating its catechismal reasonability. However, like Forde, Jenson does not end with this statement, but rather makes a suggestion on what congregations should be teaching to fulfill this mark today. Jenson's suggestion revolves around three primary elements: liturgy, morals and theology.<sup>16</sup>

This book shows how Luther's seven marks of the church are still an important component to current Lutheran ecclesiology. It also demonstrates why Luther's seven marks are still relevant. This book also thoroughly exposes where the current church has forgotten or moved away from these key marks. Its weakness lies in practical application. Most of the critiques are highly theoretical and fail to give ministry practitioners clear

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Robert W. Jenson, "Catechesis in Our Time," in *Marks of the Body of Christ*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 142.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 143.

steps to rectify its errors. Nevertheless, it shows how important Luther's seven marks are to Lutheran ecclesiology today.

**Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who Is The Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 2013**

While Braaten and Jenson's book lacks clear action steps, Cheryl M. Peterson's book *Who is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* provides a helpful and grounded analysis of the church today. Peterson points out that in light of the many denominations in existence today, the correct question is who the church is instead of what it is.<sup>17</sup> With this as the starting point, Peterson goes on to assert that her purpose "...is not to argue for one paradigm, but to offer a new approach to the question of the church's identity that not only integrates the strengths of these three major paradigms," that is the church is defined as a 'word-event,' as 'communion,' or in terms of mission.... but does so by specifically 'starting with the Spirit' and using a narrative method to do so."<sup>18</sup>

For Peterson the narrative method is "... one that draws upon literary theories employed in the modern analysis of narrative literature."<sup>19</sup> It invites participants into relationship with the God of Scripture. For Peterson this means starting with the Holy Spirit because "...the church receives its particular identity and purpose though the Holy

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<sup>17</sup> Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

Spirit, which in the Acts narrative is promised by Jesus after his resurrection and received at Pentecost.”<sup>20</sup>

Peterson’s book begins with a brief history of American mainline Protestant ecclesiology. It then analyzes two major ecclesiological paradigms: the church as a word-event and the church as a communion. Next Peterson explores the emerging missional church paradigm, and finally crafts her own ecclesiology for the twenty-first century based on a missional ecclesiology and a narrative methodology.<sup>21</sup> Peterson’s preference for using the missional paradigm for a twenty-first century ecclesiology is rooted in her conviction that the missional church movement is best suited for the post-Christian context in which many ministry practitioners find themselves today.<sup>22</sup>

Concluding her book, Peterson applies this method to the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, suggesting her method is in line with the ancient ecumenical creeds of the church. She provides readers with a vision for revival. One helpful suggestion Peterson gives to congregations seeking to apply this ecclesiology is to stop using the language of volunteers. This type of language fails to raise the identity question she believes an ecclesiology should seek to answer, and instead serves to reinforce the idea of the church as a voluntary association.<sup>23</sup> Peterson’s emphasis on identity rather than action proves to be a helpful way to explore ecclesiology in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 145.

**Darrell L. Guder, *A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 1998**

Peterson's book provides a helpful look into the issues that the church faces in a changing world. It also raises some questions as to the future shape and form of the church. Peterson raises an important question regarding the identity of the missional church. This new emerging ecclesiological paradigm has in some respects become an overused term and has lost its meaning. The history behind the term, and the subsequent movement by the same name, is interesting and is first defined in a book edited by Darrell L. Guder called *A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*.

Written in 1998, *A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* is in some respects a proposal for the direction churches in North America need to go. It begins by naming the situation in which Christians in North America find themselves:

... during the twentieth century Christianity has become a truly worldwide movement, with churches established on every continent and among every major cultural group. The great modern missionary movement has been, despite all the controversy and debate, a truly successful enterprise. On the other hand Christianity in North America has moved (or been moved) away from its position as it has experienced the loss not only of numbers but of power and influence within society.<sup>24</sup>

After describing the situation of Christians in North America, Guder and his colleagues go on to argue that the ecclesiological model needed in the future will be built upon the congregational identity which is given by God.<sup>25</sup> This leads to their thesis in which they

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<sup>24</sup> Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

write that "...mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation."<sup>26</sup>

Guder and his colleagues assert that this way of doing and being the church is missional ecclesiology. A missional ecclesiology has five main commitments. First, "A missional ecclesiology is biblical."<sup>27</sup> Following the Reformation's principle of *sola scriptura*, this commitment calls missional congregations to be rooted in Scripture and what it teaches. Second, "A missional ecclesiology is historical."<sup>28</sup> This commitment obliges missional congregations not only to be mindful of church history, but also intentional in the decisions they make. Doing something new simply for the sake of newness is not healthy. Missional communities need to make historically informed decisions. Third, "A missional ecclesiology is contextual."<sup>29</sup> This aspect necessitates that missional communities are mindful of their context. It seeks to balance being reverent with being relevant. Fourth, "A missional ecclesiology is eschatological."<sup>30</sup> This requires missional communities to witness to the reign of God as it moves in new ways at this specific time in history. Guder and his colleagues note that the church must be "...developmental and dynamic in nature."<sup>31</sup> Finally, "A missional ecclesiology can be

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 12.

practiced, that is, it can be translated into practice.”<sup>32</sup> This commitment requires missional communities to be more than theories. If any aspect of a missional community cannot be lived out or given a real life expression, then it is not missional.

After describing and naming the missional church, the rest of the book gives detail on how missional communities form and are run. Subsequent chapters focus on topics such as leadership, witness, community and vocations. The book provides an important point of view into what an ecclesiology can look like that is descriptive in form and prescriptive in function, key traits for a Lutheran ecclesiology.

**Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 2011**

The final book in this review is Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile’s *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. The previous resources show the development of Lutheran ecclesiology over the course of history from a mindset rooted in identity based on actions and now shifting toward deeper questions of identity based in character. They also demonstrate that transformation is possible. Van Gelders and Zscheile’s work takes the research further toward application because it shows the necessity for congregations to make this shift in ecclesiological self-understanding as well as highlights some of its difficulties.

Written in 2011, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* observes that though Darrell L. Guder’s book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* popularized the idea of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

the missional church, the phrase had been diluted to have a plurality of meanings as years passed.<sup>33</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile write this book to help people understand the history of the missional church as well as where it might extend to next.<sup>34</sup> Part one of the book delivers a history of the missional church and its key concepts and part two of the book extends the missional conversation.

Van Gelder and Zscheile describe how the missional church, unlike other twentieth century church movements, is theological in nature and is "...a fundamental change in perspective."<sup>35</sup> Regarding this change in perspective they write, "This different way of thinking helps many of these leaders beyond the primacy of human agency, which is so deeply embedded in the DNA of these earlier movements, and to shift their focus to the primacy of God's agency."<sup>36</sup> The missional church is a new ecclesiology hermeneutic.

With this in mind Van Gelder and Zscheile show how Guder's book brought together six theological concepts (church and missions/mission, Trinitarian missiology, *missio dei*, reign of God, church's missionary nature, missional hermenutic) and extended out in four ways (discovering, utilizing, engaging, and extending) using the image of a tree.<sup>37</sup> They also name how different theologians, denominations, and parachurch

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<sup>33</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

organizations fit into this metaphor. This tree shows the diversity, depth, and variety of missional conversations that have happened.

Part two of their book discusses how missional practices shape congregations themselves, and particularly the areas of discipleship and congregational renewal. When discussing discipleship, they write, “Today the culture can no longer be assumed to contribute constructively to Christian formation, and few families are equipped to do so. Thus, Christian identity must be cultivated intentionally, patiently, and comprehensively by congregations and other Christian communities.”<sup>38</sup> This challenge for congregations and Christian communities has at its heart an ecclesiology based not on what the church is but rather on who the church is. Fulfilling the great commission that Jesus gives in Matthew 28 requires a transformed church.

Van Gelder and Zscheile address congregational renewal and write, “Missional theology begins from a different starting point: the Triune God’s mission in the world. Beginning with a focus on the church’s identity and purpose as found in participation in God’s mission leads in different, deeper directions.”<sup>39</sup> Again Van Gelder agrees with what other books suggest, that the church in the twenty-first century will need an ecclesiology based on who the church is, and that is the challenge this dissertation seeks to address for Lutherans.

**Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 1978**

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 163.

The resources explored thus far show how the nature of the church has recently begun to change. During Luther's time and until today, the church was viewed as an institution that carried out certain tasks. Hence Lutherans have often defined the church in terms of what the institution does. The church is the institution that preaches, teaches, and administers the sacraments. However, recently that has begun to change, and this change is reflected in the work of scholars such as Cheryl Peterson who phrases the ecclesiological question not as "what" is the church, but rather as "who" is the church. This is a significant shift and raises the question of congregational and institutional transition. For this dissertation that focuses on how to make this transition, Bowen theory is quite useful.

In 1978 Murray Bowen put together a book of his major articles and presentations entitled *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. This book maps out the development of his famous Bowen theory, also popularly known as family systems theory. Chapter twenty-one spells out his concept of self-differentiation. According to Bowen, his theory gets its start during his work with schizophrenics as he sought to make psychotherapy more scientific.<sup>40</sup> In his attempt to do so, Bowen noticed a few patterns that helped his patients get better sooner. Bowen writes, "Once it was possible to 'see' the patterns in families with schizophrenia, it was possible to see the same pattern in a less intense form in all people with less emotional impairment."<sup>41</sup> These patterns led to defining the concepts of differentiation of self scale, nuclear family emotional system,

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<sup>40</sup> Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2004), 470.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

multigenerational transmission process, sibling position profiles, and triangles.<sup>42</sup> In total, Bowen describes a system in which people live and process the world around them. Key to this system is a person's ability to self-differentiate because it helps the person define reality and interact with it in a healthy manner.

Bowen found that people with a higher level of self-differentiation are, “operationally clear about the difference between feeling and thinking, and it is a routine for them to make decisions on the basis of thinking as it is for low-level people to operate on feelings.”<sup>43</sup> This led Bowen to make an interesting observation:

The process of being able to observe is the slow beginning toward moving one small step toward getting one's self “outside” an emotional system. It is only when one can get a little outside that it is possible to begin to observe and to begin to modify an emotional system. When there is finally one who can control his emotional responsiveness and not take sides with either of the other two, and stay constantly in contact with the other two, the emotional intensity within the twosome will decrease and both will move to a higher level of differentiation.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, the more one increases the level of self-differentiation, the higher the chances are for system transformation. Because Bowen takes a systems point of view and not simply an individualistic point of view, his theory has many implications for a variety of organizations, including congregations. The most important implication is that a clear pathway for system transformation begins with the individual.

**Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*,**

**2007**

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 472-478.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 475.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 480.

The implications of Bowen's work for organizations in general and congregations in particular is taken up by a disciple of Murray Bowen named Edwin H. Friedman. In his book *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, Friedman shows how Bowen theory, and especially its concept of self-differentiation, is not only applicable to psychology or in counseling, but also has important implications for all organizations going through transition. Friedman begins his book by making the claim that there is a major leadership problem in America:

I believe there exists throughout America today a rampant sabotaging of leaders who try to stand tall amid the raging anxiety storm of our time. It is a highly reactive atmosphere pervading all the institutions of our society – a regressive mood that contaminates the decision-making processes of government and corporations at the highest level, and, on the local level, seeps down into deliberations of neighborhood church, synagogue, hospital, library, and school boards.<sup>45</sup>

At the core of this leadership problem is leaders who are reactive and not self-differentiated.<sup>46</sup> For Friedman, this means someone who is able to maintain a non-anxious presence amid an anxious system.<sup>47</sup>

The diagnosis of an anxious society leads to Friedman's thesis for what is needed at this time in history more than ever:

My thesis is that the climate of contemporary America has become so chronically anxious that our society has gone into an emotional regression that is toxic to well-defined leadership. This regression, despite the plethora of self-help literature and the many well-intentioned human right

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<sup>45</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing, 2007), 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

movements, is characterized principally by a devaluing and denigration of the well-differentiated self.<sup>48</sup>

While Friedman defines a self-differentiated leader early on as one who can maintain a non-anxious presence in the midst of an anxious system, he does not elaborate on what this looks like in practice until the end of the book. He then lists five aspects of how a self-differentiated leader functions. They have “a capacity to get outside the emotional climate of the day,” “a willingness to be exposed and vulnerable,” “persistence in the face of resistance and downright rejection,” “stamina in the face of sabotage along the way,” and finally, they act in such a way that they are “being ‘headstrong’ and ‘ruthless.’”<sup>49</sup>

Friedman’s book makes an important contribution to a number of different fields, but a key contribution to this project is its connection of Bowen theory with organizational leadership. The author shows how important self-differentiated leaders are to healthy systems. He then gives concrete examples for how aspiring and veteran leaders can better self-differentiate themselves.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 189.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MISSIONAL CHURCH

The end of chapter one explains how the ELCA, a quarter century after its inception, is struggling to speak in impactful ways to the ethos of the world around it. Stephen P. Bouman, Executive Director of Domestic Mission in the ELCA, suggests,

The decline of institutional religion is calling us into ministry in a new context here in North America. Yet the United States remains unique in the world when it comes to spirituality. Eighty percent of the US population is still convinced that God is real. So here is our context: institutional forms of religion are collapsing while most people still believe in God. We are awash in spiritual hunger. In this in-between place, we do not yet know what forms will emerge. All things are possible.<sup>1</sup>

This raises a couple of questions such as what is next and whether the congregations of the ELCA should dissolve and join other denominations. Furthermore, the ELCA must decide whether to start the long process of restructuring with the hope that it would be able to create a church that meets the future needs of the world or to take up the work of transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen P. Bouman, *The Mission Table: Renewing Congregation & Community* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013), 71.

The answer proposed in this project is that congregations should take up the challenging work of transformation. Dissolving and joining another denomination calls into question the sincerity of one's theological beliefs and convictions. Starting over with the long process of restructuring is time consuming, unnecessary, and may not lead to any kind of long term growth because it stalls an organization already struggling to speak in meaningful ways with the mission field. Transformation, however, allows congregations to stay intact while also acknowledging they are not stagnant entities. The work of transformation opens the possibility that when the world changes, then congregations who have done the work of transformation will be ready to meet changing needs. In other words, congregations who go through transformation will be ready to meet the needs of an ever-changing world, as transformation will become part of their core identity and DNA. Furthermore, in taking up the work of transformation, these congregations will become better equipped to fulfill the *missio dei*.

The first step in this process for the ELCA should be to find examples of this kind of congregational transformation already happening. The missional church movement provides one example where transformation is currently occurring and it provides an example that can be particularly helpful to the ELCA. While the ELCA finds itself struggling to speak meaningfully to the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the missional church movement intentionally attempts to be missionaries to the current culture. Therefore, the missional church movement is ripe with lessons from which the ELCA can learn. Furthermore, the missional church movement is already being embraced in some parts of the ELCA, which means the missional church movement is situated in a strategic spot with the ability to teach the ELCA lessons about transformation.

## A Contemporary Example of Transformation

As mentioned in the previous chapter the missional church movement gained its current popularity in 1998 when Darrell L. Guder edited a book entitled *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. In this book Guder and others argue that the church today will have to make an important paradigm shift. This paradigm shift will move from viewing missionary work as something a person who is part of the church is sent to do, to seeing the church itself as sent on mission already. Guder writes,

...it has taken us decades to realize that mission is not just a program of the church. It defines the church as God's sent people. Either we are defined by mission, or we reduce the scope of the gospel and the mandate of the church. Thus our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church.<sup>2</sup>

With this shift in thinking and ministry approach comes a new ecclesiological identity. The chasm is quite large between thinking about the church as an organization that sends missionaries to thinking of the church as being sent itself. The missional church movement attempts to jump this chasm and redefine modern ecclesiological notions. This ecclesiological refinement points directly to the importance of the task of transformation the church faces, and the promise the missional church movement has for congregations looking to jump the chasm.

Before explaining the traits and characteristics of a missional church and their potential impact on the ELCA and ecclesiological transformation, the following sections will briefly explore the historical, biblical, and theological developments that made the

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<sup>2</sup> Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 6.

missional paradigm shift possible. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile note that a person can approach the evolution of the missional conversation in one of three ways. First, they can approach it by looking at the development of two key terms, church and mission, as they evolved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Second, one can approach it by looking at the development of biblical and theological concepts. Finally, one can approach it by looking at the writings of Lesslie Newbigin which have been especially influential in the missional church conversation.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will explore the first two approaches.

Starting with the development of the terms church and mission, Van Gelder and Zscheile explain that during the Protestant Reformation the church took the form of a state church. Different territories claimed different faiths depending on the ruling party. With each territory claiming a different church association, the newly formed churches developed confessions to prove and explain their legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> The growth of these different confessions in different territories led to an understanding that the church was responsible for the world by providing it with a moral and ethical compass. The authors note, “It was assumed that the church was responsible for the world, with the church’s direct involvement defined primarily in terms of the magistrate’s obligations to carry out Christian duties on behalf of the church in the world.”<sup>5</sup> The church helped rulers and officials keep and maintain order in society.

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<sup>3</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Mission, on the other hand, was understood differently. “It is important to note, however,” the authors continue, “that what became known as the modern missions movement emerged largely from *outside*, and to some extent *alongside*, the established churches.”<sup>6</sup> Mission societies were the groups who took responsibility for missionary work during this time period. They were the group tasked with making sure the gospel was spread throughout the world. Churches were tasked with keeping social order and mission societies were tasked with spreading the faith into lands Christianity had not yet been. Examples of the mission societies include groups such as the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London Missionary Society, and the Christian Missionary Society.<sup>7</sup> With denominations caring for congregations and parachurch organizations overseeing missionary work, the two groups did not necessarily talk to one another. In this fragmented situation, churches took root in confessional understandings of their ecclesiology and parachurch organizations pragmatically focused on the spread of the gospel.<sup>8</sup>

The missional church movement seeks to overcome the distinction between church and mission, seeking to see them parts of a greater whole. Guder notes, “We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purpose to restore and heal creation.”<sup>9</sup> Important to note here is how the missional church movement contains a transformative

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 4.

element in its DNA. It is this transformative element the ELCA can gain to learn valuable lessons.

While structurally the church was being changed as a result of the Reformation and the political unrest that resulted, there were also new biblical and theological developments during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that add to the missional conversation. Van Gelder and Zscheile explore three developments that are particularly important. The first was the birth of Trinitarian missiology. Prior to this time, much of the conversation was focused on a theology of mission, however, a shift occurred where conversation began to focus on mission theology.<sup>10</sup> The shift occurred alongside a renewed interest in the Trinity during twentieth century. Van Gelder and Zscheile write that Karl Barth understood mission to be rooted within the Trinity that resulted in God being understood as a sending God.<sup>11</sup> Understanding God as a sender led to understanding the church as the result of God's mission.<sup>12</sup> The final outcome of this development is that mission work is not an extension of ecclesiology or Christology, rather it is part of God's nature and thus was born Trinitarian missiology.

The second development Guder and Zscheile write about is the emphasis placed on the concept of the reign of God. Guder and Zscheile state that from the birth of the neo-orthodox movement a field known as biblical theology emerged. Biblical theology highlighted the concept of the reign of God as talked about in Scripture and came to form

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<sup>10</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

the basis of mission work.<sup>13</sup> Guder and Zscheile note two implications came about because of the new focus on the reign of God. First, one should focus on the entire biblical story when talking about the reign of God, and second, missionaries need to understand God's mission in relation to the reign of God.<sup>14</sup>

The final development Guder and Zscheile explain is an understanding of mission as *missio dei*. Originally this term was used at the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council. It was meant to highlight how mission does not proceed from the church, but rather proceeds from the Trinitarian God.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it emphasizes how individuals and the church are all participants in the mission of God.

Understanding the historical, biblical, and theological developments that brought about the missional church movement show that it has been an attempt over years of study to locate the identity of the church in the Trinitarian God. The church is missional because God is a missionary God. Guder and Zscheile write, "the missional church conversation presents an alternative way to think about the church, one that focuses on God's mission as determinative for understanding the mission of the church."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is identity and not purpose that takes the primary role in shaping a church and defining an ecclesiological perspective. Guder and his colleagues originally brought this all together and provided the paradigm used today.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 9.

Besides describing this ecclesiological paradigm shift, Guder also lists five key characteristics that missional ecclesiologies possess. First, “A missional ecclesiology is biblical.”<sup>17</sup> Missional churches are rooted in Scripture and believe that Scripture is the basis for all decision-making and action. Second, “A missional ecclesiology is historical.”<sup>18</sup> According to Guder, missional churches are based on the Bible but they are also designed to live in particular cultures with particular histories. Third, “A missional ecclesiology is contextual.”<sup>19</sup> Guder means that missional churches develop within specific cultures. This makes missional ecclesiology flexible as it engages in a new place. Fourth, “A missional ecclesiology is eschatological.”<sup>20</sup> Missional churches are not an end in themselves but are a part of God’s mission moving toward the final consummation. Finally, “A missional ecclesiology can be practiced, that is, it can be translated into practice.”<sup>21</sup> Guder ends his list of characteristics of missional churches by emphasizing that missional churches are not theoretical. They are alive and evolving, they are incarnational, and they have concrete actions that reflect internal beliefs.

The missional church movement is a contemporary example of transformation from which the ELCA can learn important lessons. The movement is based on the premise that God is a missionary God and therefore transformation is inevitable. This is a premise the ELCA should find compelling since it finds itself disconnected from the

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<sup>17</sup> Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 11.

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

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

world which it seeks to serve. The missional church movement says that if God is constantly coming to meet humanity wherever we are, and there are continually new situations humanity finds itself in, then God is taking shape in new ways. This is radical for Lutherans. Lutherans tend to think that right thinking leads to right practice, and so concepts such as Trinitarian missiology fundamentally change the way people see their vocation. The concepts emphasized by the missional church movement have the possibility of changing entire denominations like the ELCA because it calls them to personify their beliefs. It is not enough to theoretically believe in something if it cannot be practiced. This is the current situation of the ELCA. The missional church movement challenges this type of thinking and pushes the ELCA to consider an ecclesiology that is possible to live out.

The solution provided by the missional church movement seems helpful in theory. The ELCA is struggling to connect with the world it wants to engage. It is a church body that so desperately wants to serve its community that its motto is “God’s Work, Our Hands.” A missional motto that the ELCA would like to more deeply embody. Yet while it wants to be engaged, it does not know how to practice its beliefs because it struggles to connect with the world and the local context its congregations live. The missional church movement emerges and seems to have a lot of insights that the ELCA would find helpful. It is a movement not based on best practices or trends, but rooted in the identity of God. One might suggest that this movement seems too broad in nature and impossible to implement in practice, and they could be correct. However, the way in which the missional church movement has identified ecclesiological paradigm shifts, and allowed themselves to be transformed, makes it a critical example from which the ELCA

can learn. The next section addresses this concern and describes the missional church movement in practice.

### **Missional Church Models**

Finding congregations that consider themselves missional is not difficult. Many churches claim this title. As Van Gelder and Zscheile note, the title itself has lost its value and original meaning.<sup>22</sup> The difficulty in finding missional church models is in identifying ones that align theory and practice. The three positive models this chapter explores can be found in the writings of David E. Fitch, Alan J. Roxburgh, and Cheryl M. Peterson.

#### **Three Circles Model**

The first missional church model this chapter will examine is the model put forward by David E. Fitch and what I call the three circles model. Fitch has long been involved in the missional church movement and conversation. His book *The Great Giveaway* appropriately describes the task of the church as being a “people called out to live under Christ’s lordship in anticipation of the final consummation of his reign over all the earth. In this sense the church is a missional people.”<sup>23</sup> Fitch writes that for the church to be a missional people, its individual members and congregations must find a way for their beliefs and actions to align in order that their witness will be clear.

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<sup>22</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> David E. Fitch, *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, and Other Modern Maladies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 19.

This also means the church must intentionally encounter people who are not part of it, and even might be hostile toward it. Fitch writes,

For most Christians in the West, God is an individual belief, a personal relationship, a private experience, something we fit in between all the other things in our lives. The notion that we can be present to God, and he to us, is not on the horizon of our awareness. We do not imagine that God is present outside of me or between me and the other person I'm with, that he will confront me in the middle of my world if I will open myself to him.<sup>24</sup>

Fitch proposes a missional church model based on three circles, with each circle moving the church from an inward focus to an outward focus and disposition.

Fitch calls the first circle the close circle. This circle is composed of the Sunday gathering where worship happens and the sacraments are administered and celebrated. Jesus is the host in this circle.<sup>25</sup> Fitch calls this the close circle because “this circle does not exclude people from the circle” like a closed circle would, but “Rather, because all are committed Christians carefully discerning their submission to Christ and to one another under his reign, there is a social closeness that is supernatural.”<sup>26</sup> One way to understand this circle is to see it as the place where God has chosen to work with his people in their discernment concerning where God is calling them to engage in mission with the world. This circle is a place of intimacy, encouragement, and care for those engaging in the *missio dei*.

This circle then leads to the second circle that Fitch calls the dotted circle. Fitch argues that in this model, Christ does not only occupy the close circle, but that Christ also

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<sup>24</sup> David E. Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines that Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press 2016), 19.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

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

goes with his disciples into the places they live. The places where Christ's disciples live make up the dotted circle. Fitch writes that "even though this space is still defined by a circle of committed followers of Jesus, there is space for neighbors and strangers to enter in and watch what God is doing in this circle. Here, the Christian disciple is the host."<sup>27</sup> Fitch sees the home and neighborhood playing vital roles in the mission work of Christ's disciples. If all there is to the faith is showing up on Sunday and listening to a sermon, then there must not be much to the faith. Fitch states that disciples must extend the presence of Christ into the world, and so this second circle moves the church from the sanctuary into the home.

Fitch's third circle extends from the home to the world. He calls this the half circle. Fitch writes, "Christ's presence *goes with us* into the many places we inhabit with the hurting and broken world. This space is a half circle because here the Christian goes among the world as a guest."<sup>28</sup> The half circle could be McDonalds, the local neighborhood dive bar, or even someone's place of employment. In this circle Christ's presence completes its incarnational journey. Christ is completely in the world and able to once again draw the world back into himself.

Guder's five characteristics of missional ecclesiology can be applied to Fitch's three circles model to show how it is missional. It is biblically based around worship and the Scriptures. It is historically based around the practices handed down from Jesus to the disciples. It is contextual, taking into account where followers of Christ live and dwell. It is eschatological in looking toward the coming of Christ. Finally, it can be easily put into

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

practice because every church can identify the three circles for its members. Fitch's model states that mission moves from God, to the church, and then to the world. The next missional church model has many similarities with Fitch's model but a different trajectory. It is the model put forward by Alan J. Roxbough.

### Joining the Neighborhood

Roxbough was one of the original contributors to Guder's book which became so popular and influential in the missional church movement. I refer to Roxbough's model as the joining in the neighborhood model. In the years since publishing *Missional Church*, Roxbough's thoughts have evolved and he has become somewhat frustrated at how the term missional is being used:

The word *missional* entered into our vocabulary some twenty years ago, and it was originally an effort to point us back to God's mission as the primary force driving Christian life and community. Over time, missional has been completely identified with ecclesiology (or the study and theology of church); it has become an adjectival modifier for all kinds of proposals for making the church work again. Even when the hope was to reverse the tendency towards ecclesiocentrism, the power of that impulse was too entrenched for Eurotribal churches to resist.<sup>29</sup>

For Roxbough, the heart of the missional church movement has less to say about ecclesiological claims and more to say about what the church is being called to do in and for the world.

This brings up a key difference with the missional church model that Fitch proposed. Whereas Fitch's missional model went from God to the church and finally to the world, Roxbough feels that this practice is too ecclesiocentric and Eurotribal.

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<sup>29</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), 32.

Roxbough wants to emphasize that the world is the place where God encounters his people. Roxbough's model moves from God to the world and the ends with the church. In Fitch's model, God gives the church its direction as it engages in the world, whereas for Roxbough the world gives the church its direction as it engages.

The driving issue in Roxbough's model is how the church can join in God's mission in the world. It is an issue of participation. "What the church does is discern how and where it is called to participate *with* God in the world. Participation with God," writes Roxbough, "reframes agency from the church and back to God. The church comes to know its concrete identity through the act of discerning and participating, not the other way around."<sup>30</sup> A key difference between the models purposed by Fitch and Roxbough is in how each understand what the church and world can learn from and bring to one another. Fitch argues the church brings God into the neighborhood by carrying Christ's presence. Roxbough contends the world can show the church God's mission work that is already happening.

After Roxbough establishes his epistemological framework, he then proposes that it happens through leaders taking congregations through the following five practices: listening, discerning, testing, reflecting, and deciding.<sup>31</sup> Roxbough states that listening is "attending to God, one another, and our neighborhood."<sup>32</sup> Discerning is the act of learning where God is calling congregations to be involved in the neighborhood. Testing is where ministry experiments happen. Reflecting is the process of assessing if the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

experiments were fruitful. Deciding is where congregations choose where they will spend their time in the neighborhood.

Roxbough's model is highly participatory and places a significant value in what the world can show the church about God's mission. When using Guder's five characteristics of missional ecclesiology, Roxbough model meets each one. It is biblically based because Roxbough bases the call on the sent-ness of God. It is historically based on the house church model of the early church. It is contextual as it is structured around how it can join God in the local neighborhood. It is eschatological as it looks to join God's reign in the neighborhood, and it is easily practiced because it takes place in places that people already occupy. The final missional church model described below is entirely different from those of Fitch and Roxbough. It is the model of Cheryl M. Peterson.

#### Starting with the Spirit

Unlike Fitch and Roxbough, Peterson approaches a missional church model as a Lutheran bound to a fairly ridged ecclesiological structure that has been around for five hundred years. Peterson's work is incredibly insightful, and helpful in showing how the missional church model helps structure congregations to be prepared to deal with transformation. Furthermore, Peterson's work shows how my proposal for transformation in the ELCA is not out of line with one of the ELCA's own teaching theologians.

Peterson's model, referred to in this section as the starting with the Spirit model, begins with understanding the most pressing ecclesiological issue of today as a question of identity. Peterson believes the church is going through an identity crisis. From this

situation, Peterson argues, comes the question of ecclesiological purpose.<sup>33</sup> Who a church believes themselves to be manifests itself in its practices. Like Fitch, Peterson's model moves from God to the church and then into the world.

Peterson writes that both identity and purpose can be found in the biblical narrative. Her missional model starts with what has been revealed by the Spirit in the biblical narrative.<sup>34</sup> "The church is called to witness to Jesus (Acts 1:8) and to offer forgiveness of sins in his name, thereby becoming a certain kind of community, a *koinonia*, as part of this witness.... In Acts," Peterson writes, "we see these two themes – the *people of God* called to be *witnesses to Jesus* – come together in a distinctive way to give the church its particular Spirit-breathed identity and purpose."<sup>35</sup> These themes are the heart of Peterson's missional model. It is always reflecting on the narrative in Scripture and asking how this narrative is empowering the community to be witnesses to Jesus. This can occur in many dimensions such as pragmatically, liturgically, and in service and outreach.

Peterson's missional model is much more flexible than either Fitch's or Roxburgh's in that it calls for a less defined direction. This model can be very attractive to liturgically based denominations because it argues that being missional is a question of identity that leads to actions. Using Guder's five characteristics of missional ecclesiology, Peterson's model fulfills all of them. It is biblically based; the biblical narrative serves as its guide. It is historical in its emphasis on the *koinonia*. It is

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<sup>33</sup> Peterson, *Who Is the Church?*, 99.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

contextual as the Holy Spirit guides its actions, rather than actions forming identity. It is eschatological as the community embodies God in the world and seeks to witness to God's actions in Jesus Christ. Finally, it is easily practiced as it appeals to denominations which are more liturgically based. However, it is less easily practiced than the models put forward by Fitch and Roxburgh.

### **Ecclesiology Grounded in Sent-ness**

The ELCA is facing a difficult situation. Having been built around certain core values that do not speak directly to ethos of the dominant culture, the ELCA must figure out how it will respond and speak meaningfully in the changing landscape. The most logical response is for the ELCA to take up the work of organizational transformation. While organizational transformation is difficult work, it is the best option given the ELCA's declining numbers and disengaged membership. The missional church movement provides the ELCA with an example where transformation is currently taking place to better serve the *missio dei*, and the community. The missional church movement can encourage the ELCA that transformation is possible.

When the ELCA looks toward the missional church movement as an example of transformation, it can learn three key lessons. First, what the ELCA lacks, the missional church movement has in abundance. The ELCA built a church for a world that has changed. It is formed around the values of unity, ecumenism, and inclusivity but the mission field is focused on a plurality of narratives, the need for local mission, and the integration of meaning in postmodernity. While these values are not necessarily at odds with the world they do not speak as clearly as they once did. The strength of the

missional church is in its quest to be God's missionary people in the world. Due to its conviction that God is a missionary God, people in these congregations seek to be missional. It is not a movement seeking some type of ultimate ecclesiological form. It is simply a movement concerned with representing God in the world. Constant evaluation of the organization, and transformation based on learnings gleaned from evaluation that aim at meeting mission needs, are core components of the missional church. If the ELCA can transform to see the world as something it can be in partnership with, rather than a means to an end, an amazing amount of faithfulness would be possible.

The second gift the missional church movement gives to the ELCA is its flexibility in terms of the methods of church. For five hundred years, Lutherans and the ELCA have defined how the church functions based on the what the church is. Therefore, because the reason for the church, for Lutherans, is to faithfully preach the Word of God and properly administer the sacraments, they have settled on certain liturgies within their particular congregations. The missional church roots its identity in the divine Godhead. It begins not with the questions of how or what, but with questions of who. Such questions include asking about the identity of God and how is it manifested in the church. From the identity question flows questions about how and what. This allows the church to address the needs of the community and culture in which it lives and breathes. The ELCA has congregations all over the United States. This kind of flexibility in terms of application allows the ELCA to maintain unity in the midst of cultural diversity.

Finally, the last gift the missional church movement gives to the ELCA is how it facilitates healthy behaviors. Like a river that becomes polluted when the water becomes stagnant, so too does the church become polluted when it becomes stagnant. In Matthew

28 Jesus commissions the disciples to go to all nations, make more disciples, baptize them, and teach about Jesus. The church cannot remain still. The church cannot hide in an upper room and hope the world does not find it (John 20:19-23). The church must continually be transformed. If the ELCA can learn how to be transformed, it will grow a healthier culture that keeps its eyes on Jesus. Since the missional church movement understands itself as missionary in nature and sent in terms of action, it encourages healthier turnover and self-assessment. In other words, the missional church is consistently asking if the practices and methods they are employing are faithful to the mission God has given them. If the practices and methods are not faithful to the mission, then the missional church finds new ways to approach the mission God has commissioned them. The ELCA would be different church if these behaviors were practiced widely and not only in small corners.

The good news is that these practices, and the gifts that follow these practices, are starting to be embraced in some corners of the ELCA. For example, in 2013 Stephen P. Bouman wrote a book entitled *The Mission Table: Renewing Congregations & Community* where he names a number of communities employing these practices and encourages other ELCA congregations to adopt such practices. While wide spread adoption is less evident; Bouman's book provides a hopeful path for congregations and leaders looking to move in a missional direction.

In conclusion, as the ELCA look towards the missional church movement as a model where transformation is taking place, it should further seek a transformation that structures its emerging ecclesiology around the missional emphasis of sent-ness. This emphasis would root the ecclesiology of the ELCA in Scripture and its historical

confessions. It would also engage its membership in the *missio dei*. The next chapter addresses how this transformation could happen and what paradigm could help drive such significant change.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

The previous chapters outline why the ELCA needs to undertake the work of ecclesiological transformation and why the ELCA should base its ecclesiological transformation on a missional understanding of being sent. This chapter explains how the ELCA should go about the work of transformation and how the ELCA can be transformed to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world. As discussed in the introduction, my thesis is that Murray Bowen's concept of self-differentiation is crucial to helping church leaders in the ELCA navigate congregational transformation as they seek to faithfully respond to the *missio dei* in their ministry contexts. Like the missional church movement, Bowen's concept of self-differentiation is flexible enough to take into account a changing world but structured enough to provide guidance that is practical for congregations and leaders doing the work of transformation. Should the leaders in the ELCA decide forgo the work of self-differentiation, any kind of systematic and lasting transformation may be difficult. However, should leaders in the ELCA embark upon this work, the transformation possible has the potential be far reaching and life changing for generations to come.

## An Introduction to Bowen Theory

Understanding the concept of self-differentiation depends on situating it within the larger framework of Bowen Theory. Bowen Theory is “a theory of human behavior that views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit.”<sup>1</sup> Bowen Theory, developed in the second half of the twentieth century, emerged from the work of Murray Bowen. It is composed of eight interlocking concepts that explain why people act and react in certain ways, especially when anxiety is introduced into a system. To gain a deeper appreciation of this comparatively new theory, this chapter will first explain how Bowen Theory evolved using Murray Bowen’s own words and then explain its eight interlocking concepts.

### The Birth of Bowen Theory

In 1978 Bowen accumulated twenty-two of his papers and lectures from the past twenty years and published his book *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. This monumental work was one of the Bowen’s first attempts to explain not only the foundation of his theory, but also how it evolved over time. He writes,

The development of this theory has paralleled most evolutionary processes. It began slowly when several key ideas began to coalesce into a different way of understanding the human phenomenon. The ideas quickly led into so many new areas it become a busy balancing act to follow all at the same time; it would have been conceptually inaccurate to try and stay on one without conceptual violence to the whole. The rapid evolution of the theory is largely responsible for the fact I have gone twenty years and have not yet written a book.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael E. Kerr, *One Family’s Story: A Primer on Bowen Theory* (Washington, DC: Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2016), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, xiii.

As Bowen mentions, prior to the publication of this work, he did not have time to put together a book because he was busy developing the theory and doing clinical research. *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* is his first attempt at such a goal.

In the introduction, Bowen breaks down the evolution of his theory into three phases. The first phase occurred between 1954 and 1959. After working with schizophrenic patients at the Menninger Clinic between 1946 and 1954, Bowen moved to the National Institute of Mental Health. However, while at the Menninger Clinic, Bowen conducted a study where families lived on the ward with their schizophrenic family member. This study laid the ground work for a method of family theory.<sup>3</sup> “When it had become possible to see the relationship patterns in families with schizophrenia, it was then possible also to see less intense versions of the same pattern in milder forms of emotional illness, as well in normal people. It was the comparison,” writes Bowen, “of the intense patterns in schizophrenia with the less intense patterns in others that eventually become the basis for the theory.”<sup>4</sup> This then compelled Bowen to conduct another study between 1954 and 1959 focused on what he had observed with the less severe forms of emotional illness.<sup>5</sup> While a few presentations were given during this time period, nothing was published.

The second phase Bowen identifies occurs between the years 1960 and 1965. Bowen describes this as the period where he focused on the theory, “I gave up the use of clinical description in writing, which is more popular with professional audiences, and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

shifted toward the use of theoretical concepts.”<sup>6</sup> Bowen did this for two reasons. Firstly, he wanted to learn about “less severe emotional problems” and wanted to develop his therapy in conjunction with the theory.<sup>7</sup> Bowen spent time researching families, observing how those families interacted with one another, what those interactions meant for his patients, and how his findings might help patients get better sooner. In order to spend more time on developing the theoretical concepts, Bowen left the National Institute of Mental Health and joined the faculty at Georgetown University Medical Center.<sup>8</sup> He became the founder of the Georgetown Family Center, where to this day his theory is taught and expanded.

It was during this time when Bowen had a breakthrough with his theory. He writes, “by 1960 it was clear that all families were pretty much alike. I decided that my own family would provide as much detail as any and would be more accessible.”<sup>9</sup> The time and effort that went into clinical studies and research was enormous. Once Bowen came to understand that all families were similar, he was able to make some large strides by exclusively studying his own family. Reflecting on the progress made during this time Bowen writes,

During the five years to 1965 the six interlocking concepts of Family Systems Theory were developed in detail. Then came the problem of conceptualizing the concepts as parts of a unified theory and presenting it

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The Bowen Center for the Study of Family, “About Murray Bowen,” accessed August 18, 2017, <https://thebowncenter.org/theory/murray-bowen/>.

<sup>9</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, xv.

in writing. This writing was done in 1965-1966 and was one of the most difficult, frustrating, and satisfying experiences of my life.<sup>10</sup>

Developing his findings, which formed the first six concepts of Bowen Theory, was a significant accomplishment. Bowen had a position from which he could promote his theory for practice.

This led to another major breakthrough for Bowen and his ever-evolving theory.

In 1967 while he was presenting his findings and talking about the work he had done with his own family, his ideas began to become quite popular:

I had for some years encouraged young mental health professionals to work out their own personal problems in family therapy with their spouses, instead of in personal psychotherapy or psychoanalysis, and had accumulated years of personal experience conducting family therapy with such people. Within a year I discovered that the training conference members, none of whom were in any kind of psychotherapy, and none of whom had more than thirty minutes a month for discussion of their own families in conference, were making as much or more progress in dealing with their spouses and children as were comparable professionals in weekly formal family therapy with their spouses.<sup>11</sup>

Bowen was learning how powerful his concepts were for those taking the time to learn about them and apply them to their lives.

This led to the third phase of Bowen's development of his theory. In this phase, which occurred roughly between the years 1966 to 1974, Bowen "began the development of a special method of multiple family therapy designed to keep the focus on the emotional process within a family and to prevent group process between families."<sup>12</sup> By

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

1974 Bowen officially named his theory the Bowen Family System Theory or in short Bowen Theory.<sup>13</sup>

### Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory

Bowen Theory is a technique of looking at systems to understand how and why they function in certain ways. It is a technique that does not come naturally, but rather is learned. Roberta M. Gilbert, a student of Bowen's, writes,

*“Thinking systems,”* for most people, is a very difficult way of thinking. The brain must literally be retrained. Rather than thinking “cause and effect,” so automatic to most of us (both by nature and education), one looks for the interrelations of the group. Rather than noticing only how the individual is impinged, one tries always for a bigger picture. Systems thinking strives to look at the emotional process going on among people, while never losing sight of the facts of a given situation. Rather than trying for control or blaming the other, one tries always to better manage oneself and one's own contribution to the situation.<sup>14</sup>

As a technique for understanding systems, Bowen Theory is comprised of eight interlocking concepts which together make up Bowen Theory.<sup>15</sup>

This chapter will begin by explaining the eighth concept in Bowen Theory and then move to the first. The eight concept shows how Bowen Theory does not exclusively apply to individuals, but also has implications for organizations. Because this dissertation addresses organizational transformation, it is important to begin with the eight concept in

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group* (Pompano Beach, FL: Leading Systems Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>15</sup> The Bowen Center for the Study of Family at the Georgetown Family Center is a wealth of information. Much of the information in the following section is gleaned from the center and its free resources.

order to see how applicable Bowen Theory can be for the ELCA as it faces an unknown future.

The eighth concept of Bowen Theory is the concept of societal emotional process. This concept was the final one that Bowen added, and it was added in 1972 following his work with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). During this work, Bowen realized that his theory did not just apply to families, but also to society at large.<sup>16</sup> In making this observation Bowen writes,

The societal concept postulates that the same process is evolving in society; that we are in a period of increasing chronic societal anxiety; that society responds to this with emotionally determined decisions to allay the anxiety of the moment; that this results in symptoms of dysfunction; that the efforts to relieve the symptoms result in more emotional band-aid legislation, which increased the problem; and that the cycle keep repeating, just as the family goes through similar cycles to the states we call emotional illness.<sup>17</sup>

This concept makes Bowen Theory widely applicable. Not only can families use it as a lens to understand themselves, but so too can organizations.

The first concept in Bowen Theory is the concept of triangles. “The theory states that the triangle, a three-person emotional configuration, is the building block or the basic building block of any emotional system,” writes Bowen, “whether it is in the family or any other group. The triangle is the smallest relationship system. A two-person system may be stable as long as it is calm, but when anxiety increases, it immediately involves the most vulnerable other person to become a triangle.”<sup>18</sup> Triangles can be seen in a variety of situations as anxiety is increased and lessened. For example, a husband, a wife,

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<sup>16</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 386.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 373.

and a child can form a triangle. That triangle might function well in times of low anxiety, but if the husband yells at his wife, the result would be a higher level of anxiety for the wife. The wife would want to transfer her anxiety, and so the next time she encounters her child she might be upset with him. The wife's temper with the child could be her way of dealing with the anxiety between herself and her husband. The wife lowers her anxiety by placing it onto the most vulnerable person in the triangle.

The second concept in Bowen theory is the concept of differentiation of self or self-differentiation. Bowen understood people to have a basic self and a pseudo-self. The basic self is comprised of non-negotiable traits that make someone who they are; the pseudo-self is comprised of negotiable traits that make someone who they were.<sup>19</sup> The more one can function out of deep convictions and beliefs, rather than on imposed ones, the higher the differentiation of self will be. In the example above, this concept is at work in the child. Depending on the child's ability to self-differentiate, he will either understand his mother's short fuse as a result of an event happening in the system or believe his mother is justifiably mad at him. The child's level of self-differentiation will highly affect how the child will respond to the anxiety the mother is attempting to pass on. With a higher level of differentiation, the child might recognize the reason for the mother's behavior and dismiss it. With a low level of differentiation, the child might take on the anxiety and look to pass it along to another person in another triangle.

The third concept in Bowen theory is the concept of nuclear family emotional systems. This concept "describes four basic patterns that govern where problems develop in a family. People's attitudes and beliefs about relationships play a role in the patterns,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 473.

but the forces primarily driving them are part of the emotional system.”<sup>20</sup> The four patterns are marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children, and emotional distance.<sup>21</sup>

Marital conflict happens when anxiety increases in the family and each spouse has to decide how they will control their anxiety. Dysfunction in a spouse occurs when one spouse demands the other spouse act in a certain way. Impairment of one or more of the children transpires when the spouses, trying to live with tension and control their anxiety, focus their anxiety on a child or children. Finally, emotional distance occurs when the tension and anxiety become too much and someone distances themselves from the situation.<sup>22</sup> Kerr notes the implications of the process, “This means that some family members maintain their functioning at the expense of others.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, families may unknowingly have an emotional scapegoat as a means of maintaining a preferred level of anxiety.

The fourth concept of Bowen Theory is the concept of the family projection process. Bowen writes, “This is the process by which parents project part of their immaturity to one or more children.”<sup>24</sup> A person’s maturity can be passed down as well.<sup>25</sup> This concept shows how many traits people pick up from their family of origin.

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<sup>20</sup> Kerr, *One Family’s Story*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

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

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Bowen, 477.

<sup>25</sup> Kerr, *One Family’s Story*, 19.

Returning to the previous example of the husband, wife, and child, one can see the concept at work in how the child functioned in the marriage.

The fifth concept of Bowen Theory is the concept of multigenerational transmission process. This concept is an extension of the fourth concept and describes what happens in families over multiple generations. Bowen writes, “When a child emerges with a lower level of self than the parents and marries a spouse with an equal differentiation of self, and this marriage produces a child with a lower level who marries another with an equal level.”<sup>26</sup> Based on a person’s ability to self-differentiate, an entire family can become more or less mature within a couple of generations.

The sixth concept of Bowen Theory is the concept of emotional cutoff. This concept “describes people managing their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings, and other family members by reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them.”<sup>27</sup> As anxiety and tension increase in systems, people have to choose how to handle the increased emotional pressure. Emotional cutoff is one way a person can resolve unaddressed tension and anxiety. An example would be if a child whose mother passed down the father’s anxiety to them decides to cut his parents out of his life.

The seventh concept in Bowen Theory is the concept of sibling position. This concept is indebted to the psychologist Walter Toman and states that “people who grow up in the same sibling position predictably have important common characteristics.”<sup>28</sup> These characteristics can provide insights into how people behave in certain systems.

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<sup>26</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 477.

<sup>27</sup> Kerr, *One Family’s Story*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

With a foundation in the eight concepts of Bowen Theory, the specific concept of self-differentiation emerges with significant impact on the main issue in this project. The concept of self-differentiation is an important concept in Bowen Theory. Roberta M. Gilbert notes that it is the only concept that looks at the individual rather than the system. Understanding the role of the individual is key to this project because the individual is the key to institutional transformation.

### **Self-Differentiation**

Self-differentiation is the concept in Bowen Theory where an assessment can be made as to how much a person is functioning out of their basic self rather than their pseudo self. Kerr notes, “Families and other social groups tremendously affect how people think, feel, and act, but individuals in their susceptibility to a groupthink and groups vary in the amount of pressure they exert for conformity. These differences between individuals and between groups reflect differences in people’s levels of differentiation of self.”<sup>29</sup> This is the only concept in Bowen theory that alone addresses the individual. Furthermore, because Bowen Theory looks to understand how systems work, and because self-differentiation is the only concept that addresses the individual, when one works on their level of differentiation they can transform an entire system.

At the heart of Bowen’s concept of differentiation of self is what he calls the differentiation of self scale. Bowen writes, “This scale is an effort to classify all levels of human functioning, from the lowest possible levels to the highest potential level, on a

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<sup>29</sup> Kerr, *One Family’s Story*, 7.

single dimension.”<sup>30</sup> This scale has a unique ability to be nonjudgmental. Bowen writes that the scale does not try and define normal, but rather measures the degree of individual’s basic self and their pseudo self.<sup>31</sup> The scale itself is indifferent.

Bowen defines the basic self as a “definite quality illustrated by such ‘I positions’ stances as: ‘These are my beliefs and convictions. This is what I am, and who I am, and what I do, or not do.’ The basic self may be changed from *within* self on the basis of new knowledge and experience.”<sup>32</sup> He defines the pseudo self as being “made up of a mass of heterogeneous facts, beliefs, and principles acquired through the relationship system in the prevailing emotion. . . . *The pseudo-self, acquired under the influence of the relationship system, is negotiable in the relationship system.*”<sup>33</sup> Understanding the difference between the basic self and the pseudo self is central to understanding why someone would want to raise their level of self-differentiation.

In her book *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking about the Individual and the Group*, Gilbert provides a helpful illustration that compares the difference between basic self and pseudo self to being able to separate emotions from thinking. She also goes much deeper into the differences between the two, noting, “At the lowest levels, there is more ambient anxiety within people, leading to more life problems, poorer decisions and more relationship trouble. Lower level people are more fused into

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<sup>30</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 472.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 473.

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

relationships.”<sup>34</sup> The lower one is on the self-differentiation scale, the more a person is affected by anxiety and the problems that come with increased anxiety.

Gilbert writes that when a person is higher on the scale, “there is less relationship fusion, making relationships better-functioning. There are fewer life problems because people have fewer relationship difficulties and also because basing decisions more in fact than feeling makes for better long-term outcomes.”<sup>35</sup> This is a better and healthier place for individuals, organizations, and systems to be because they function not out of reaction to anxiety but from thoughtful convictions.

Bowen defines the importance of this scale as “a theoretical concept for understanding the total human phenomenon.”<sup>36</sup> It is not instantaneously trackable like an individual’s heart rate, it is something that can only be tracked over a life time or stages of an individual’s life.<sup>37</sup> However, tracking it can have many benefits as one comes to see who and what motivates them to make the decisions they make out of a sense of anxiety.

The benefits that come with having a higher level of self-differentiation are tremendous. Kerr notes,

The more intense the interdependence, the less a group’s capacity to adapt to potentially stressful events without a marked escalation of chronic anxiety. Everyone is subject to problems in his work and personal life, but the greater vulnerability of less differentiated people and families to periods of heightened chronic anxiety contributes to their having a

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<sup>34</sup> Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>36</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 475.

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

disproportionate share of society's most serious clinical and other life problems.<sup>38</sup>

Higher levels of self-differentiation can lead to healthier and higher functioning organizations.

### **Applying Self-Differentiation to Organizations**

The idea that an individual's higher level of self-differentiation can lead to healthier organizations is not a new idea. Edwin H. Friedman and Roberta M. Gilbert have championed this idea in their work. Friedman applies this idea broadly, having worked with a wide range of organizations from religious organizations to non-profits and for profits as well as government agencies. Gilbert applies this idea clinically since she has a background in medicine.

#### Edwin H. Friedman

Edwin H. Friedman died in 1996 after having been a rabbi, family therapist, and consultant. At the time of his death, he was working on his book *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. In this book, he addresses the kind of leadership he believed was necessary in the United States in the mid 1990's. While he did not finish the book before his death, it was eventually completed and published. The book serves as an example for how a self-differentiated leader can be the catalysis for organizational transformation.

At the beginning of the book Friedman defines the problem he believed existed in the United States in the mid-1990's:

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<sup>38</sup> Kerr, *One Family's Story*, 8.

I believe there exists throughout America today a rampant sabotaging of leaders who try to stand tall amid the raging anxiety – storms of our time. It is a highly reactive atmosphere pervading all the institutions of our society – a regressive mood that contaminates the decision-making process of government and corporations at the highest level, and, on the local level seeps down into the deliberations of neighborhood church, synagogue, hospital, library, and school boards.<sup>39</sup>

According to Friedman anxiety was at an all time high. Leaders were being sabotaged because of this anxiety and their inability to deal with it.

Friedman did not believe that the way to fix anxiety was to implement a social program or new method. He did not give credence to the underlying assumption that it was a methodology problem. “Our constant failure to change families and institutions has fundamentally less to do with finding the right methods,” writes Friedman, “than with misleading emotional and conceptual factors that reside within society itself.”<sup>40</sup> Friedman asserts that addressing the problem of anxiety in society would only happen when leaders addressed it systematically or from a systems point of view.

From Friedman’s point of view as a family therapist, that meant leaders who faced adversity from the anxiety present in society needed to become more self-differentiated in order to survive the sabotage. Friedman did not think that the right kind of leaders were ones who told others what to do and did not care about what happened, or even those who believed they had the correct answers. Friedman writes that leaders need to be “someone who has clarity about his or her own life goals, and, therefore, someone

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<sup>39</sup> Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional process swirling about.”<sup>41</sup>

Friedman called these types of leaders well-differentiated.

At the core of Friedman’s conviction was that society did not need was another leader with an arsenal of new tools and methods. “What counts is the leader’s presence and being, not technique and know-how. It is precisely these systemic aspects of an institution’s emotional process,” writes Friedman, “that explains why a leader does not have to know personally those who are being sabotaged or those who are the saboteurs in order for the leader’s own functioning to contribute to the nefarious process.”<sup>42</sup> Calming presence is a characteristic that emanates from someone who is self-differentiated.

These convictions lead Friedman to his thesis that “contemporary America has become so chronically anxious that our society has gone into an emotional regression that is toxic to well-defined leadership. This regression... is characterized principally by a devaluing and denigration of the well-differentiated self.”<sup>43</sup> With an increase in the number of well-defined leaders, Friedman believed the anxiety problem in America could be solved. Key to his task was growing the number of self-differentiated leaders. Friedman serves as the first example of how self-differentiation can lead to transformation. This is an important example because it shows the framework for how Bowen Theory is widely applicable, not just to individuals or families, but also to large organizations.

Roberta M. Gilbert

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 53.

Roberta M. Gilbert is a doctor and psychiatrist who has worked with individuals and families. She has also been a member of the faculty at The Bowen Center for a couple of decades. Gilbert's work is interesting when looking at organizational transformation in churches because she has done a lot of work with clergy. In her book *Extraordinary Leadership: Thinking Systems, Making a Difference*, Gilbert examines how clergy can lead congregations to be healthier by learning and applying Bowen Theory.

She begins her book by noting how Bowen Theory is about leadership and about leading oneself as well as others.<sup>44</sup> This conviction leads Gilbert to focus on clergy because she believes clergy occupy a unique role in society and they are able to lead society "out of the quagmire it now finds itself in."<sup>45</sup> If clergy are better leaders, then congregations can help society become a better and healthier place for future generations.

Gilbert makes one qualification in this claim. She notes that congregations and families are not the same. Gilbert argues congregations and organizations are much more complex than families, with "emotional units within emotional units."<sup>46</sup> However, families and organizations essentially function in the same ways. The same patterns are evident if leaders know what to look for.

Not only does Gilbert believe families and organizations or congregations have the same patterns on different size scales, but an individual leader's ability to self-differentiate has the same effects on organizations as it does on families. She writes that

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<sup>44</sup> Roberta M. Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership: Thinking Systems, Making a Difference* (Pompano Beach, FL: Leading Systems Press, 2006), xii.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

“It is also accurate that groups change for the better when leaders work on themselves. But, *the primary effort goes to self and to relate better – not to changing the group.* A higher functioning leader will automatically spawn a higher functioning (and even grateful) group.”<sup>47</sup> When an individual has a higher level of self-differentiation, the group benefits and transformation occurs.

Gilbert demonstrates that transformation happens with higher functioning leaders because the anxiety that once controlled the organization no longer has the same influence. Self-differentiated organizations are guided by principles and purpose. “Like anxiety, calm is infectious too (though it is a slower process). When even one person in a group,” writes Gilbert, “especially the leader, can determine his or her own emotional state – stay ‘apart’ emotionally from the group – the whole group steps up and does better, both at the time, and over time.”<sup>48</sup> Self-differentiated leaders lead to more self-differentiated people. Over time the anxiety that use to control a group begins to die, and organizations and congregations are transformed.

These examples from Friedman and Gilbert show how the concept of self-differentiation found in Bowen Theory helps leaders change organizations. In the situation of the ELCA, leaders and organizations with higher levels of self-differentiation could be helpful because they would could best identify the direction in which God is calling the church to go. The only way to begin organizational transformation is with congregations and leaders making efforts to become more self-differentiated. Self-differentiated individuals lead to self-differentiated organizations, and self-differentiated

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 102.

organizations birth transformed systems. This is the task this dissertation turns to in part three.

PART THREE

A PROPOSAL FOR TOMORROW'S CHURCH

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MOVING FROM SELF-DIFFERENTIATION TO CONGREGATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

This chapter moves from the theoretical to the practical. Previous chapters focus on the unprecedented situation the ELCA finds itself in, the example the missional church movement provides the ELCA in its crisis, and the application that Bowen Theory and the concept of self-differentiation could have for organizational transformation. Bowen Theory shows how self-differentiated individuals lead to self-differentiated organizations, and self-differentiated organizations can birth transformed systems. This chapter examines how to use Bowen's concept of self-differentiation to move congregations toward organizational transformation.

This chapter will be broken down into two parts. The first part of this chapter will introduce three tools that increase congregations' leaderships' ability to self-differentiate and as a result increase congregations' ability to self-differentiate. The kind of self-differentiation that will emerge from these three tools will lead to clarity within individuals as they discern their vocation. For congregations it will clarify how they can join the *missio dei* that God is calling them to join. It will also discuss implementing each

of the three tools for the greatest possible impact for leaders and for congregations. The second section of the chapter will present a brief case study of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Issaquah, Washington where this process has been implemented and will discuss the results that have emerged.

### **Three Tools and Implementation**

The three tools presented in this section are not ground-breaking. It is the combination of these three tools that have an amazing effect on congregations. These tools are the Post-it Note Timeline, Cultural Awareness Sermon Series, and V2MOM. The combination of these tools should be presented and get employed in a unique way. One of the major concepts in Bowen Theory is triangles. It is the concept where groups of three are seen and understood as the building blocks of systems. If any person in the group is transformed, it has a ripple effect on the rest of the triangle and possibly on other triangles as well. In other words, a transformation in the individual can create a transformation in the group and system.

Noting this dynamic as identified in Bowen Theory, the power inherent in the combination of these three tools is clear. The tools start with the Post-it Note Timeline, a tool focused on the individual, then moves to the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series, a tool focused on the culture which the individuals inhabit, and then anchors a response and action in a discernment and visioning tool. These tools are rooted in the conviction that transformation in an individual can bring about transformation in a system. This chapter explores each tool in greater detail.

Once each tool is explored this chapter will address how each of the three tools can be implemented for the greatest amount of impact. Simply putting one of these tools in place might not yield the desired results. For the greatest impact, leaders taking their congregations through this process will benefit from a few hints that enhance the tools. These hints could also spur ideas for the facilitators of each tool to further enhance the tool's effectiveness.

### Post-it Note Timeline

The first tool this chapter will present is the Post-it Note Timeline. This tool focuses on the individual and part of the methodology is beginning with the individual and working outward to the group system. Yet, not only is it a tool focused on the individual, but it is also a tool which asks three important questions: What has God done in my life, and why? What is God currently doing in my life, and why? Based on the answer of the previous two questions, what is God calling me to do with my life now? These questions are important because they raise the level of an individual's self-differentiation by asking people to discern their core beliefs. As previously defined, self-differentiation is an individual's level of basic self compared to pseudo-self. The higher an individual's level of self-differentiation, the more they act out of their basic self and core convictions. For Christians, this is a process of discernment where an individual asks questions concerning their vocation.

It is also a process rooted in the story of Scripture. For example, the Apostle Paul, when reflecting on his conversion, notes that after God called him he went away to Arabia before going to Jerusalem to officially start his new ministry (Gal 1:17). One can

only assume that during the time, following his conversion, Paul was discerning where and what God was calling him to do. Jesus is another example of this pattern. Numerous times in the gospel accounts Jesus goes up on a mountain to pray (Mt 13:23, Mk 4:46, Lk 6:12, Lk 9:28). When Jesus withdraws to pray, these are times of discernment about where God is calling him and why God is calling him to certain tasks. Most famously this occurs when Jesus prays right before he is arrested. During this account, Jesus prays the famous words, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). This process of discernment leads to a time where an individual gains a deeper understanding of who they are before God and how God is calling them to act. The more an individual discerns, the higher the individual’s level of self-differentiation becomes. The Post-it Note Timeline is a tool that facilitates this process.

This tool itself originates from Terry Walling and his website provides a thorough introduction.<sup>1</sup> It begins by bringing an individual or group to a quiet space and giving them a large piece of cardstock and a pad of yellow post-it notes. The facilitator begins with a prayer and then asks participants to write down all the people, events, and circumstances that have had a significant impact in his or her life. The first part of the exercise lasts for five to ten minutes or whenever the participants begin to slow down in recording people, events, and circumstances. Then the leader gives participants red post-it notes and asks them to look over their notes. If they identify any of the yellow post-it notes as negative in nature, then they are to swap out the yellow post-it note for a red

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<sup>1</sup> Leader Breakthru, “Create Your Post-it Note Timeline,” accessed August 17, 2017, <https://www.leaderbreakthru.com/transitions/post-it-note-timeline.php>.

post-it note. This leaves positive people, events, and circumstances on the yellow post-it notes and puts the negative ones on the red post-it notes. The leader then gives participants another five to ten minutes to continue working on their post-it notes.

When the leader feels that participants have had enough time, they give instructions for the next step. In this step the leader asks the participants to organize their yellow and red post-it notes onto their piece of cardstock in chronological order, leaving enough room at the top and bottom of their cardstock for a row of post-it notes. The way the post-it notes should be ordered is from left to right and top to bottom. This order will help participants visualize their life.

Next, the leader hands out blue post-it notes. On these notes the leader will ask participants to reflect on their lives and to divide their life into four to six chapters. They can title these chapters any way they desire. The key in this step is for the leader to get the participants to think about their life in terms of an unfolding process where God is leading them to something. Once these chapter titles are written on the blue post-it notes, they are placed on the space that has been reserved at the top of the cardstock, over the people, events, and circumstances that fall into that chapter.

Next the leader asks participants to look over their yellow and red post-it notes to identify key turning points. These are people, events, and circumstances that changed the course of participant's life. They can be good or bad. When participants have identified turning points, they should mark them with an X.

When this is finished participants proceed to the final step. In this final step leaders hand out green post-it notes. On these post-its, participants reflect on what the timeline is revealing to them and write down lessons they have learned throughout their

lives. These post-it notes go in the space on the bottom of the cardstock and under the time period where the participant learned that particular lesson. As this exercise concludes, the leader asks participants if they notice any patterns concerning how God works in their lives, as well as what has stood out to them as important lessons. This type of conclusion helps participants further process the lessons.

By the end of this exercise the participants should be able to answer the three questions noted earlier: What has God done in my life, and why? What is God currently doing in my life, and why? Based on the answer of the previous two questions, what is God calling me to do with my life now? With this new information, participants have increased their level of self-differentiation and are now more able to critically examine the world in which they do ministry.

Leaders who plan to use this tool to increase the level of self-differentiation among individuals in their ministry setting are encouraged to do three things to maximize the impact of this tool. First, leaders need to make a Post-it Note Timeline for themselves before they help others make one. If the leader has not experienced how the process works or what it is like to gain insights from the tool, then it will be hard for the leader to help others do the same. Whether leaders do it alone or have someone guide them through the process, all leaders need to construct their own before they help others.

Second, as a leader takes a group through the process of making a their own Post-it Note Timeline, there will most likely be a few people who are skeptical. Most skeptics are doubtful about creating a timeline because they do not understand the insights that can be gained at the end of the process. When leaders are using this tool, they should consistently point to the benefits that participants will take away from using this tool and

going through the process. Using personal examples can help skeptics move past their doubt and open them to the possibility of seeing God's work in their lives. Big speeches are not the key to reaching skeptics. Small side comments tend to be most effective. For example, while administering the tool leaders may say phrases like "You may notice that..." after finishing one section or part and before moving on to the next section in the Post-it Note Timeline.

Finally, when leaders use this tool, they need to manage time wisely. One of the benefits of the Post-it Note Timeline is how it can be used in a variety of situations. It can be used in a retreat where there are hours to complete it, but it can also be used at a council or board meeting with thirty to forty minutes dedicated to the task. Due to its flexibility, it can be hard for a leader who uses this tool often to remember to budget time for reflection at the end of the process. Time for reflection is as important as creating the timeline itself. It is during the reflection where insights are absorbed. Without a time of guided reflection, the tool can become almost ineffective. Leaders need to ensure that there is sufficient time for participants to own what they learn.

#### Cultural Awareness Sermon Series

The Cultural Awareness Sermon Series takes insights gained from the Post-it Note Timeline and asks how one's call, or what God is doing in one's life, meets the needs of the community where an individual is serving. This is an important step because if self-differentiation leads to organizational differentiation, then what still needs to be explored after the individual raises their level of self-differentiation is why God has brought all these highly self-differentiated people together. According to Bowen Theory,

individuals can be the catalysts for system transformation. From this perspective it means individuals can also drive organizational transformation, because the organizations will either rise with their leaders or leaders will leave the organization. In either case, this results in is a transformed system.

The Cultural Awareness Sermon Series is a five-week sermon series that serves as a time of discernment for the congregation as an organization. The sermon series begins with a simple pair of questions: What is the God narrative in your life? And what is the God narrative in the life of this congregation? In answering these questions, the five pillars of congregational life are explored which are worship, discipleship, service, local community, and future.

Week one, worship, is focused on the gifts that God gives in the Sunday gathering. It focuses on how the God narrative has shaped people and congregations. Week two, discipleship, goes beyond Sunday worship and into the lives of members of the church. This week focuses on how the God narrative has shaped people and congregations to follow Jesus. Week three, service, moves from the lives of disciples to their gifts that can be used to serve others. This week is about identifying what disciples are uniquely qualified to do. Week four, local community, examines the local community and its needs. This week is focused on identifying the demographic trends for the local community in which the congregations serve. The final week, future, seeks to put all the different God stories into action. This week is all about taking what the congregation has learned about its own gifts and the needs of the community and fleshing out where God is calling the community to be God's presence in the world.

In preparing for the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series the leader, or team of leaders responsible for designing it, can do a number of things to help craft a meaningful worship experience that fits well in their community. First, when considering the scripture readings that may work well given the themes for each week, the leader or leaders should prayerfully ponder the congregation's story and the story found within the biblical narrative to see if they can find a common story. For example, a congregation experiencing a pastoral transition following a long-term pastorate might find readings about the transition between Moses and Joshua especially meaningful. Therefore, picking readings from the end of Deuteronomy or the beginning of Joshua would be contextually appropriate.

Second, when preparing for the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series, leaders should consider how the reading, hymns, liturgical banners and paraments, and bulletin art all emphasize the main theme. Going back to the previous example of pastoral transition following a long-term pastorate leaders may want to pick hymns that emphasize God's faithfulness in the midst of change. They would also be wise to think about how they can express this theme through the liturgical banners and paraments that adorn the sanctuary. Tying this all together with some kind of art work on a bulletin cover will let people take the theme home with them to ponder and pray about throughout the week. Important for leaders in this consideration is that they provide the gathered assembly a number of different ways to hear, see, and think about the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series.

Finally when preparing for the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series, leaders should take advantage census data available for their community. Almost every city provides

information about their population, housing cost, number of schools, age demographics, and long-term strategic plans that can be found on their city webpage. The United States Census Bureau also provides helpful information about national and regional trends, as well as economic information that are helpful for leaders trying to understand their community. For religious trends and information Pew Research Center provides in-depth analysis for national and regional trends. Using a combination of these resources leaders can present congregations with a realistic picture of the community they live.

By the end of the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series, the congregational life and system is orientated around a new paradigm, one that is uniquely suited for transformation. In order for an organization to be transformed, it needs a reason to be transformed. This sermon series gives meaning to congregations and a reason for transformation in the future. It provides them the background for the necessity of transformation and most importantly, it grounds the transformation not in one leader's desire, but in the biblical narrative.

As with the post-it note timeline, there are three things leaders should be aware of when using the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series. First, leaders need to use Scriptures that speak to their specific congregation for each topic. These should emerge as a result of what the leader learned in the process of becoming more self-differentiated. A preset list of Scriptures will not work for all leaders or congregations. The Scripture passages that work best not only depend on the leader themselves, but also on the situation leaders find themselves in.

Second, this tool is meant to be part of a communal discernment process. While leaders have worked hard to raise their level of self-differentiation, congregations need to

do the same. Partnering this sermon series with town hall style meetings that follow the services will increase the level of discernment and allow the congregation to take ownership. Furthermore, they provide the leader with a way to engage in a holistic discernment process. Leaders can gain insight into what the congregation has heard and how it changed the way they think or understand God's work in their community. It will also allow the leader to consider how to approach the following week's sermon.

One possible structure for the town hall meetings would be for them to begin by inviting parishioners, at the end of the worship service, into a new space. Connecting the end of the service with a traveling hymn into a new space could serve as a transitional piece. Allow time for people to get refreshments, and then invite everyone gathered into prayer. Following the prayer, which marks the beginning of the town hall meeting, the leader should ask a simple question: Where did you hear God speak to you as we pondered this week's theme? Allow people who answer enough time to tell stories. Ask follow up questions about the God narrative in their life and the life of the congregation. Make sure you as the leader spend most of your time listening. Finally, after 45 minutes, or if energy runs out sooner, ask a concluding question. This question should ask the group to consider how God is calling them to something new. A good concluding question would be: What have we learned about where God is calling us as a congregation to serve in our community? This type of concluding question challenges people to see their congregation in a new light.

Finally, the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series works best if a theological image is used to hold it together. Western Christianity can be very passive. Most Christians are encouraged to read the Bible and listen to sermons, although participation is rarely

encouraged. Eastern Christianity, on the other hand, with its use of icons, is more active. Icons and other art forms engage people and draw them into a new world. Using an image on a bulletin cover or a projected screen that has some sort of theological connection can give the sermon series a more participatory nature and help people to reflect on it throughout the week.

## V2MOM

V2MOM stands for vision, values, method, obstacles and measures. It is a tool created by Marc Benioff, the CEO and founder of Salesforce. In 2017, Salesforce was ranked by Forbes as the most innovative company in the world.<sup>2</sup> This is a position Salesforce has held for five of the last seven years. In the years it was not ranked in the number one spot, it was ranked as the second most innovative company in the world. Benioff attributes part of its success to their vision tool called the V2MOM. Benioff writes, “I’ve always thought that the biggest secret of salesforce.com is *how* we’ve achieved a high level of organizational alignment and communication at break neck speeds.”<sup>3</sup> The V2MOM is the tool that allows for this kind of alignment.

The V2MOM is designed in such a way that organizations can clearly communicate their vision and the way in which they are going to work towards their vision in a concise way. In reflecting in how the V2MOM has helped Salesforce, Benioff writes,

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<sup>2</sup> Forbes, “The World’s Most Innovative Companies,” accessed January 10, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/innovative-companies/list/#tab:rank>.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Benioff and Carlye Adler, *Behind the Could: The Untold Story of How Salesforce.com Went from Idea to Billion-Dollar Company and Revolutionized an Industry* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 225.

The *vision* helped us define what we wanted to do. The *values* established what was most important about that vision; it set the principles and beliefs that guided it (in priority). The *methods* illustrated how we would get the job done by outlining the actions and the steps that everyone needed to take. The *obstacles* identified the challenges, problems, and issues we would have to overcome to achieve our vision. Finally, the *measures* specified the actual result we aimed to achieve....<sup>4</sup>

Taken as a whole, the V2MOM creates a pathway for vision implementation. It gives all groups within an organization an understanding of what they need to do and why. In addition to helping create alignment for groups in an organization, Benioff also notes that the V2MOM fosters the habit of continual transformation.<sup>5</sup>

Meeting with congregation leadership and putting together a V2MOM is the final step in creating an environment where transformation is possible. When leadership takes what is learned in the Post-it Note Timeline exercise, what emerges out of the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series, and creates a V2MOM, congregations increase their ability to be transformed. When congregations begin to transform, entire denominations can follow, and all this is made possible by an increased number of self-differentiated leaders.

When leaders use the V2MOM they need to follow two key guidelines. First, once the V2MOM is created and the leadership agrees to use it, senior leaders in the congregation need to follow through with it. Most congregations have never heard of a V2MOM or any sort of rigorous goal setting process in the context of the church. Therefore, it might require extra effort to explain its validity and impact to the congregation, which may cause leaders to be tempted to set it aside after they report on it. Leaders must be persistent if it is to become an effective tool that sets priorities and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 230.

directs actions and investments. Without continually pointing to the V2MOM, people will forget about, and the V2MOM will not drive action.

Second, to help congregations commit to their V2MOM, it is helpful for congregational leadership to use it as a framework for how to report progress, measure success, and reprioritize the congregation's ministry activities. For example, it can be used as a form for end of year reporting or it can be used with staff for yearly evaluations. Leaders could post it in monthly communications as a way of keeping the congregation apprised about how activities are lining up with the congregational vision. Finally, it can be used when creating and reporting on budget decisions. Whenever a decision is made or justified to the congregation, leaders should point to the V2MOM as the explanation for the outcome of the decision.

When leaders prepare to make, and update, their V2MOM they can do a number of things to create the best possible V2MOM. First, if this is a congregation's first time creating a V2MOM they should explore the tutorial Salesforce provides for how to create a V2MOM on their Trailhead platform.<sup>6</sup> This tutorial takes individuals and organizations through the process and provides helpful tips along the way. If this not a congregation's first time creating a V2MOM, rather they are updating their previous V2MOM, leaders would be wise check out the tutorial about managing their V2MOM. These tutorials helps leaders be good facilitators of the V2MOM process.

Second, leaders who are making, or updating, their V2MOM's should do so as a group. The V2MOM will help bring alignment across an organization, and if the

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<sup>6</sup> This tutorial can be found at [https://trailhead.salesforce.com/trails/manage\\_the\\_salesforce\\_way/modules/manage\\_the\\_sfdc\\_organizational\\_alignment\\_v2mom](https://trailhead.salesforce.com/trails/manage_the_salesforce_way/modules/manage_the_sfdc_organizational_alignment_v2mom)

V2MOM is only the creation of one person there is a good chance it will not bring alignment. Having a diversity of voices will be important to successfully implementing the V2MOM, and getting buy in from constituent groups. Leaders might consider crafting and updating their V2MOM as part of a council or board retreat, and then present it to the congregation at an annual or semi-annual meeting.

Finally, leaders who use a V2MOM will need to update it yearly. The V2MOM is a great tool for addressing current needs, and for looking towards the future. However, if is not updated it can quickly become out of date. Congregational leaders would be smart to hold a council or board retreat in early summer where they evaluate the previous program year, and explore hopes for the coming program year. During this retreat update the V2MOM would be a logical task. It would also allow other groups in the congregation to align with the updated V2MOM and further the congregational vision.

### **Case Study: Our Savior Lutheran Church, Issaquah, WA**

This short case study shows how the concept of self-differentiation in Bowen Theory developed in these three tools can help leaders in the ELCA navigate congregational transformation during a time of intense cultural change. Furthermore, it also shows how the transformation that emerges out of this process reforms ELCA congregations around cultural trends that are more in line with what the world needs, while simultaneously fostering congregational alignment with the *missio dei*. This case study will begin with my personal increase in level of self-differentiation and move to

how it triggered a series of events which have culminated in a renewed vision at Our Savior Lutheran Church as well as a new vision for ministry among Lutherans on the east side of Seattle, Washington.

During the spring of 2015, I took a Doctor of Ministry seminar entitled Organic Leadership Development: Shaping Leaders who Shape Culture with Dr. Terry Walling and Mark Sayers. The goal of the seminar was two-fold and practical in nature. First, it was to gain a deeper understanding of how leaders are developed and formed over time. Second, it was to show how leaders can shape the culture where they are living. It was at this seminar where I was introduced to Walling's post-it note timeline.

As I created my first post-it note timeline, I was quite skeptical. I did not understand how the exercise would reveal anything that could not happen just as well during the course of a simple conversation. However, I was surprised at how much I gained from the process of creating the timeline and reflecting on it with Walling. Prior to making my timeline, I knew that God had called me into ministry as opposed to academic work. But I did not have a clear understanding about why God had called me into parish ministry. Furthermore, I lacked understanding about how my call into parish ministry connected to greater themes in my life.

Upon completing my time line, I understood the nature of my call differently. Two things stood out and provided me with greater clarity. First, I realized that major turning points in my life were marked by challenges to my faith. Second, it was evident that those major turning points, when my faith was being challenged the most, signaled that one phase was coming to an end and another was beginning. I found it fascinating that this pattern emerged not just in relation to my call as a parish pastor, but as

something God was doing throughout my entire life. Not only was this pattern consistent with my life overall, but upon deeper examination I began to realize I exerted certain behaviors during these turning points that would sometimes increase anxiety and at other times decrease it. The longer I studied my timeline the more I began to see and take ownership of the difference between my basic self and my pseudo self.

Furthermore, I began to see that I was currently in a turning point. The frustrations I was experiencing as the associate pastor at Saint Andrew's Lutheran Church were not coincidence. I was experiencing frustration with my call because I was being asked to act out of my pseudo self instead of my basic self. I was being asked to fill a call that was not genuinely mine. Saint Andrew's Lutheran Church was a programmatic congregation looking to maintain its long history of successful programs. I was being called to examine how the church might look in the future and to help the congregation cross the chasm from what church was to what the church will be. To continue to work at a church and in a role that did not want to explore new ways of doing ministry caused me anxiety, so when I was approached about interviewing at a neighboring congregation I gladly accepted.

In the spring of 2016, I accepted the call to be lead pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church (OSLC) in Issaquah, Washington. OSLC was eight miles away from Saint Andrew's Lutheran Church. This was an unusual situation because generally when a pastor in the ELCA takes a new call, they leave the area or at least do not take a position at a neighboring church. Furthermore, six years prior I had spent six months at OSLC working with their youth, so I was keenly aware of both the positive and negative aspects of their ministry.

Prior to my arrival, OSLC had been a mid-sized west coast ELCA congregation. They had an average worship attendance of approximately 250 people per week and a staff of six including two full time pastors. The lead pastor had served the congregation for twenty-two years and the associate pastor had served for seven. Eight years prior to my acceptance of the call to be OSLC's next lead pastor, the community went through a major conflict. The bishop had to get involved and as a result, the youth minister was fired. The conflict was extremely taxing on the congregation and trust between the pastoral staff and congregation had eroded. The lead pastor was able to stay and over time brought stability back to the congregation.

Once the situation was restored, the lead pastor decided to retire and in November of 2014 he did so. Shortly afterward, the associate pastor accepted a new call and he left OSLC in the spring of 2015. The back-to-back departures of both pastors shocked the congregation and created a leadership vacuum. The council became very involved in the leadership of the congregation, and while trying to create stability, alienated some members. The biggest concern among members was the need for a clear vision. When I arrived in July of 2016, the average weekly worship attendance was approximately 130 per week and there was a financial deficit of about \$30,000.

Upon my arrival at OSLC, I immediately launched into a Cultural Awareness Sermon Series. I had worked to increase my level of self-differentiation and OSLC also had a higher than normal level of self-awareness after the process of hiring a new lead pastor. With an understanding of my personal call as rooted in the task of growing passionate and articulate followers of Jesus Christ, as well as OSLC's readiness to clarify its vision, all parties were ready to survey the local community needs.

The sermon series itself was entitled “Listen: God is Calling” and was described with the following advertisement in all church publications:

What’s the God narrative in your life? What's the God narrative at OSLC? When is the last time you took time to think about these questions? These questions are critical for ministry. As we mark the beginning of our partnership together join us to discern the God narrative in our lives and at OSLC as we look to discover where God is leading. As described above the series was five weeks long and followed the format of the five pillars of parish ministry.

The image on the bulletin cover was of baptismal waters. The series carried with it the theological themes that emerge out of baptism within the Lutheran theological tradition, namely those of rebirth and renewal.

In addition to the Sunday sermon, town hall events were held in the parish hall following worship. At these events the members were asked to consider how the God story in the sermon applies to them personally and how it applies to OSLC. The responses to these meetings were extremely positive. People talked openly about how it had been years since they considered what God was doing in their lives and in the life of OSLC because they always assumed leadership was discerning these things for them. People also talked about the history of the congregation and community, told stories about successes and failures, talked about their fears of living in a city that would change drastically in the coming years, and named the important traits that all my predecessors had possessed. When my insights from the post-it note timeline were combined with the outcomes from the sermon series, I walked away with a clear understanding of my gifts and calling as well as the community’s needs.

After this sermon series, I had gathered everything I needed to begin working on a vision for OSLC. In September of 2016, I asked the council to attend a half-day retreat at

the home of our council president. The retreat began with prayer and with each member asked to reflect upon why God called him or her to serve on the council. After posing this question, we launched into the post-it note timeline for the council. I wanted the council to have an understanding, or at least a curiosity, about what God might be doing in their lives by placing them on the council during this time of transition. After they finished their timelines we spent time debriefing. Many people began to realize that they were bringing gifts to the group they did not previously realize. These gifts that made the council wise and included experiences and opinions needed at this particular time in the life of OSLC.

After finishing the debriefing, we went over the feedback from the sermon series and town hall. We found themes in the feedback that had not been previously expressed. For the first time the gifts of the council and the communal needs, both at OSLC and in the Issaquah community, were seen in alignment. The council saw how they had gifts needed in the community and there began to be an urgency to serve.

After the level of self-differentiation was increased and a deeper understanding of the culture OSLC was living in developed, we began the process of creating OSLC's first V2MOM. The initial V2MOM was created at the September retreat, reflected upon during the month of October, and at the November council meeting it was approved as OSLC vision. This is OSLC's first V2MOM:

**Vision**

Be a community that fearlessly follows Jesus to love God's people

**Values**

- Be accessible
- Be faithful to God's word
- Be responsive to God's call

- Be open to and inconvenienced by the Holy Spirit
- Trusting relationships

### **Methods**

- Worship based opportunities
- Service based opportunities
- Fellowship based opportunities

### **Obstacles**

- Fear
- Apathy
- Budget
- Church culture
- Culture of society
- Geographic location/traffic

### **Measures**

- Push back
- Enthusiasm
- End of program year survey
- How busy the church calendar is
- New groups and relationships forming
- Increased interactions among church members
- How many people take advantage of learning opportunities

Since that evening in November when the V2MOM was approved, all decisions have been made by asking whether or not the topic at hand furthers the vision, upholds the values, and uses the methods on the V2MOM. As OSLC has employed the V2MOM, some obstacles have been overcome and other unknown obstacles have been identified. The V2MOM is a living document, so it gets updated once a year to help keep it relevant.

The results of this process have been substantial. At OSLC there has been an approximately 12 percent increase in worship attendance and participation, the budget has gone from operating at a deficit to working with a surplus, and the number of volunteers has increased. Furthermore, members of OSLC are beginning to ask how they

can fearlessly follow Jesus and live out the congregation's vision. There are discussions currently going on about how the church's building space can be used to be more in line with the vision. The council is considering how the congregation's budget reflects its vision.

Perhaps most notably, OSLC's understanding of church is changing. Founded in 1960, OSLC is one of the longest standing institutions in Issaquah. Since its foundation, one organist has played for the congregation. This organist symbolizes many of the things that have made OSLC a great congregation. The organist symbolizes stability and tradition, two unspoken yet important local and communal values. After going through this process, the organist of fifty-seven years expressed to me his renewed sense of call and notified me of his retirement as parish organist. The process of finding a new organist was amazingly smooth and without conflict. Upon hearing the news, the council did not lament the new era that would soon start, but rather they celebrated the long tenure of the parish organist. They also asked key question concerning how the position could be filled in alignment with the V2MOM. I attribute this success to OSLC's clear sense of vision, its understanding of how God had work in the past and what God was doing presently, and their increased level of self-differentiation.

Beyond the transformation that has happened at OSLC, there has been a transformation among Lutheran congregations on the eastside of Seattle. One of the realizations that surfaced among the council at OSLC was that if they wanted to fearlessly follow Jesus, they had to recognize their limitations. If they wanted to meet the needs of the community, they needed to rethink their current ministry habits. The council then decided to talk to other congregations and find out how it made sense to partner.

The partnerships that have emerged have been interesting. OSLC began by engaging two other congregations to host education events. These educational events included topics such as juvenile justice and spiritual practices. Hosted among three congregations, they brought together members of about ten congregations spanning most of the Seattle metro area. From these events grew a shared Advent devotional among four congregations that created a resource produced by locals and for locals. This devotional then developed into a collaborative Vacation Bible School with three congregations.

These small events have also been the starting point for more substantial conversations. Maybe most significant has been conversations between four congregations about what the ELCA on the east side of Seattle will look like in a few years. A number of the ELCA congregations are facing shrinking numbers and increasing budgets. The idea of shared staff has been mentioned, and is happening in one instance, but also the idea of a merger between two congregations is currently being discussed. Such a merger would reshape the ministry dynamic for the ELCA in the area.

The concept of self-differentiation has helped transformed OSLC and has better equipped OSLC to respond to the *missio dei* in a changing world. As noted at the beginning of this dissertation, the ELCA was built for a world that no longer exists. The ELCA valued unity over a plurality of narratives, ecumenism over evangelism, and inclusivity over trying to understand how faith connected to modern ideas. Yet as OSLC and its leadership have become more self-differentiated, the needle has shifted in a different direction. OSLC is less concerned about unity and more at peace with having a plurality of narratives under one roof. It is now focused on mission rather than ecumenism and wants to live out its faith in the world as an expression of its core beliefs.

OSLC is more in tune with its mission field in part because it knows who it is and who it is not. Bowen's concept of self-differentiation and the three tools made this possible.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A SELF-DIFFERENTIATED ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE ELCA

Having demonstrated how Bowen's concept of self-differentiation can be used for congregational transformation, the final task of this dissertation is to explore the effects that this process has had on the ecclesiology of the ELCA. The issue that must be addressed as the church is transformed is how a self-differentiated ecclesiology will shape the church. In other words, the issue is how this transformation changes the nature of the church as expressed by the ELCA. This is especially important because this dissertation has argued that individual self-differentiation leads to organizational self-differentiation, and organizational self-differentiation births transformation. This topic will be explored by examining the traditional marks of the church found in the Nicene Creed as well as the marks of the church found in the Lutheran Confessions. Then this chapter will propose seven new marks for a self-differentiated church in the twenty-first century that link the emerging *missio dei* with congregational transformation.

#### **The Marks of the Church in the Nicene Creed and the Lutheran Confessions**

Prior to the Council of Nicea in 325 and the Council of Constantinople in 381, Christianity had been illegal. Christians would meet for worship in homes, but because of persecution, the church itself was kept underground. Given this situation, Christians for the first few hundred years did not have time to debate the nature of the church in philosophical or theological terms. Such a debate would have been evidence of privilege that the early church did not have. However, following the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople and the legalization of Christianity by Emperor Constantine, circumstances began to change and for the first time the church, freed from persecution, was able to intentionally develop its ecclesiology.

The process the early church undertook to develop ecclesiology was creedal, based on general belief statements, and debated at councils. Craig Van Gelder notes,

Building on the work of the Council of Nicea in 325, the 150 bishops who convened in 381 as the Council of Constantinople gave final definition to what has become known as the Nicene Creed. In this foundational statement that focused primarily on the Christological controversy, the bishops named four attributes of the church with the phrase, “We believe... one holy catholic and apostolic Church.” These four attributes represented what they believed to be the essential characteristics of the church in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Since this time, it has been understood that the original marks of the Church are that it is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

That the church was one meant it was unified and not fractured. The church is a reflection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 12:12). The church as holy referred to the church and its members being set apart (Mt 5:14-6, Rom 12:2, 2 Cor 5:17, 1 Pt 2:9). The church was called catholic in reference to its universal nature which is supported by the care and

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 50.

emphasis placed on teaching in the New Testament (Mt 28:20; Eph 4:11-6; Ti 2:7-8; 1 Tm 4:12; 2 Tm 2:24, 3:16; Heb 5:12, 6:1). To be apostolic meant that the church's foundational work was done by the apostles as they formed the church and its structure. Beyond that Van Gelder notes, "Its inclusion confirmed that the church's authority and teaching were based on the work of the original founders of the church."<sup>2</sup> It was in some respects the affirmation of tradition. The church was not a side project invented by man. The church has a history and traditions that inform its being.

Notice in these four original marks of the church nothing is said about how the church should be organized and structured. Ecclesiological structure is left out of the original marks, however, that does not mean there are not hints at what a structure might include. Van Gelder writes,

For the church to be one, it must organize itself in ways that promote unity, coordination of purpose, and cooperation of effort. For the church to be holy, it must seek to appropriate the redemptive power of God in its midst. For the church to be catholic, it must organize itself to be flexible and adaptive to new context. For the church to be apostolic, it must organize itself to be missional within all its ministry functions and through all its structures.<sup>3</sup>

While the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople do not give a prescriptive ecclesiological structure, there are certainly descriptive hints.

While the empire and the church were united, these four marks of the church served it very well. However, these marks would not remain relevant forever. Hans Küng notes that the nature of the church "...must be constantly realized anew and given new form in history by our personal decision of faith. The historical Church cannot do without

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 52.

this constant renewal of its form.”<sup>4</sup> After writing this, Küng radically states, “It is impossible simply to preserve the Church for all time in the original form it enjoyed as the primitive Church. Changing times demand changing forms.”<sup>5</sup> This is exactly what happened during the Protestant Reformation.

According to the Protestant reformers, the four marks of the church found in the Nicene Creed did not provide enough guidance to prevent abuse by church leadership. There was abuse happening in the church and people were being misled as to where they could find the true church. Ted Peters notes how from this upheaval a distinction is made between the visible and invisible church.<sup>6</sup> Such a distinction was at first an innocent attempt to explain the difference between the ideal church and the reality of what was happening, but it soon grew into a means through which people come to identify orthodox and heretical churches.

It was during this period of history that Lutherans added two more marks to their ecclesiological understanding. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession reads, “It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments administered according to the gospel.”<sup>7</sup> So in addition to the four marks found in the Nicene Creed, early Lutherans, in response to the abuse occurring in the Roman Catholic Church, add the marks of proper preaching and right sacramental distribution.

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<sup>4</sup> Küng, Hans. *The Church* (1968, reprint, New York: Burns and Oates, 2001), 263.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Peters, *God-The World's Future*, 274.

<sup>7</sup> Kolb and Wengert, eds. *Augsburg Confession*, 42.

Article VII of the Augsburg Confession takes another step stating, “For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word.”<sup>8</sup> In some respects the additional marks of the church that the Lutheran Confessions add to the four marks found in the Nicene Creed clarify what they believe is meant by the phrase one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. This idea is certainly not out of the realm of possibility. The Book of Concord itself begins with the three ecumenical creeds symbolically suggesting that the reformation is not a new or heretical movement, but rather is itself a continuation of the early church.

Upon adding these two marks to the original four marks of the church, the Augsburg Confession then defines the church in Article VIII as “... properly speaking, nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints.”<sup>9</sup> Articles VII and VIII taken together define the true church as the place where the people assemble to hear the gospel properly preached and receive sacraments that are rightly administered, and in doing so they are one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Since its birth in the sixteenth century, this has been the core Lutheran ecclesiological position.

In the midst of Christendom, this ecclesiology served Lutherans quite well. Certainly there have been questions regarding who gets to decide what qualifies as proper gospel preaching and sacramental administration. Yet overall, it served the church satisfactorily. The issue the church is faced with today is whether it continues to serve the church well. To build on Küng’s point, the issue is whether these marks still serve the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

church today in a post-Christian world or whether new marks need to be considered. Given the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom I believe new forms are needed and the key to this transformation is Bowen's concept of self-differentiation.

### **Self-Differentiation and Embodying Christ**

One of the key tasks given in the work of self-differentiation for individuals is sorting the basic self from the pseudo self. This is the task of figuring out what an individual truly believes and then how they act in accordance with those beliefs. It means not taking on someone else's opinion and anxiety while acting from their own point of view. It means being at peace with not necessarily going along with the majority if one's true self differs from it. The task that individuals take on when they work to raise their level of self-differentiation is the same task the church today must take on.

The church finds itself at a key moment in history. Stuart Murray writes, "The shift from Christendom to post-Christendom may be the most challenging since the fourth-century shift from pre-Christendom to Christendom."<sup>10</sup> If the assembly of believers who make up the church want to be the church into the future, they will need to have a self-differentiated understanding about who they are and must act from a self-differentiated posture. For this reason, this chapter proposes seven marks of a self-differentiated ecclesiology for the twenty first century. These marks are meant to guide leaders who wish to transform the church by increasing its level of self-differentiation.

The first mark of a self-differentiated ecclesiology for the twenty-first century begins with the confessed belief that the church is one. Scripture talks about the church as

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster Press, 2004), 98.

the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-4, Eph 4:1-16). It is a body that is unified in Jesus and yet has many different parts. In John 10:30 Jesus states that “The Father and I are one.” Because Scripture teaches that the church is the body of Christ, and that Jesus and God are one, then oneness must be the first mark of the church.

This oneness gives the church a unique identity. It is an identity found in unity, but that unity does not mean it has to be of one mind. The church as it is seen and experienced on earth may have different opinions, different ways of expressing itself, and different forms that it follows. In spite of these differences, it is rooted in the unique identity and oneness of Christ.

For the twenty-first century this means that the church should not use denominations as a primary identity marker, but rather look to use Christ’s body as the primary identity marker. With the decrease in importance of denominations, members of the body of Christ will have to learn to look at one another as sisters and brothers. The church as a whole is called to be God’s people and to partner with God’s mission in the world. This type of unity makes room for a plurality of narratives, which speaks directly to the prevailing attitude present in the world today. This is different than the unity talked about in chapter one when addressing the values the ELCA formed around. That unity sought to bring one narrative to all Lutherans in the United States. The unity talked about here, that marks the church, seeks a unity within diversity in Christ.

The second mark of a self-differentiated ecclesiology for the twenty-first century is the confessed belief that the church is holy. In John’s Gospel, before Jesus is betrayed and arrested, he prays for his disciples in what is known as the high priestly prayer. In that prayer he prays,

But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth (Jn 17:13-9).

Jesus describes his disciples as those who do not belong to this world and as those who are sent into the world as bearers of truth. The second mark of the church is rooted in the understanding that disciples of Jesus, who have unity with Jesus in the body of Christ, are people who are set apart to live in the world but not be of the world.

As people who are called to live in the world but are not of the world, the church is set apart and sent to proclaim the message of the kingdom of God. It is a message that is rooted in God's truth and yet lived with an acknowledgment that the final consummation has not yet occurred. Sin still cripples humanity, yet the promise of grace and forgiveness remains. It is a glimpse into the kingdom and God still makes his people holy.

The third mark of a self-differentiated ecclesiology for the twenty-first century is the confessed belief that the church is catholic. Paul reminds his audience in Romans 3:23 that "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" and Jesus proclaims in Mark 2:17 that "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." This is good news because it is a reminder that the church is universal. The church is for all people. The third mark of the church is a reminder that it is not a fortress built to keep sinful people out and well-behaved people inside. The church is good news for all people.

For the church in the twenty-first century, this means the church must embrace its core message of the gospel. It is Jesus as its center that makes the church universal and not a code of conduct. For too long the church has been associated primarily with its actions rather than its identity. For the church to be self-differentiated it must understand its catholicity and act from this place. Jesus came for all with a universal message of hope because all have fallen short of the glory of God. It is as a result of this universal message that the church responds to the world. Whereas the mark of unity calls the church to oneness in Christ, this mark of the church confesses that the message of Jesus is universal for the diversity present in the body of Christ.

The fourth mark self-differentiated ecclesiology for the twenty-first century is the confessed belief that the church is apostolic. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus proclaims to Peter, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” There has been quite a bit of confusion as to whether Jesus was referring to Peter the disciple as the rock upon which he would build his church or if it was upon Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ that Jesus would build his church. Jeffrey A. Gibbs in his commentary on Matthew writes that both positions oversimplify what Jesus is doing. He concludes that Jesus is building the church on Peter’s confession as a christological confession on behalf of the other apostles.<sup>11</sup> This helps clarify the fourth mark of a self-differentiated church because it points to the importance of the tradition that has been passed down. It is not Peter per se that is

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<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture, Matthew 11:2–20:34* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2010), 819.

necessarily important, but it is what Peter and the other apostles teach future Christians that is important.

Today this means the church must be mindful of tradition. It must know the form the church has taken at other times in history and understand why it needs to change or to stay the same. Decisions about the church and what it does cannot be made in a vacuum. One might argue that the church is prescriptive in what it teaches, but it is descriptive in terms of the forms it embodies.

The fifth mark of a self-differentiated ecclesiology for the twenty-first century is the confessed belief that the church is regionally expressed. Acts 15 contains the account of the Jerusalem Council. At the heart of council was the question concerning whether Gentile believers in Antioch needed to be circumcised. The conclusion reached by those in Jerusalem was that the Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised, rather they should only abstain from idol sacrifices, blood, and fornication (Acts 15:28-9). In a letter from those in Jerusalem sent to the believers in Antioch telling them of their conclusion, they also tell them that they are sending Paul, Barnabas, Barabbas, and Silas to aid their ministry. The conclusion reached by those in Jerusalem is that the church in Antioch is different than the church in Jerusalem.

For the church in the twenty-first century, this means an important mark of the church occurs as it is regionally expressed. Self-differentiation means having the ability to know what one is as well as what one is not. Organizationally this means the church in Seattle will look different than the church in Minneapolis. Each church should have some regional expression and characteristics. A single form for the church is not crucial. Since its beginning, the church has had regional expressions.

The sixth mark of a self-differentiated ecclesiology for the twenty-first century is the confessed belief that the church is locally lived. James writes, “Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (Jas 2:17). The church must express its faith and its beliefs or they are non-existent. To be the church, the members of the body of Christ must live out their convictions in their local communities. The church must be locally lived. The church must be mission minded. The church must look at where God has placed it and be the body of Christ for that place.

Today that means the church cannot see itself as only a Sunday event. Church extends beyond places of worship. The idea of a commuter church needs to be placed aside in favor of the neighborhood church. It must see the mission field as the places where its people inhabit each day and it must do so without exploiting people.

The final mark of self-differentiated ecclesiology for the twenty-first century is the confessed belief that the church is scripturally grounded. In 2 Timothy the author writes, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-7). Scripture has been recently used to justify the oppression of many groups. It has been misused and as a result, some have been hesitant to call upon it. As a result, biblical literacy has steadily decreased over the past few decades. Yet a core mark of the church is its use of Scripture as its foundation. It is a gift that shapes the identity of the church. To understand our basic self as the church, the church must ground itself in Scripture.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation shows how the ELCA, and its leaders, is faced with an unprecedented situation. It is a church struggling to speak to the world around it and many of its values do not pair well with the values found in society. As Stephen P. Bouman noted, “The church’s mission needs leaders infused with the presence of God, confident in the promises of God, and filled with the hope that comes with being humble before God.<sup>12</sup>” This situation calls for the church to be transformed. The missional church movement provides the ELCA with an example for change that can be life giving for the ELCA because it allows the ELCA to retain its identity while becoming better equipped for the *missio dei*.

In order to bridge the chasm between where the ELCA is and where it needs to be, the ELCA needs help learning how to be transformed. Bowen’s concept of self-differentiation provides this help by guiding leaders in the ELCA to assess their gifts and the needs of their communities. The starting point for transformation in the ELCA should not be with the institution itself, but with the leaders within the institution. Historian Mark Granquist, when considering the future of Lutherans in the United States, noted, “If the questions of Lutheranism’s future in the United States are to be determined, it will be through the leadership of those who work on this diverse, local level.<sup>13</sup>” Institutions will not be transformed on their own. It will take courageous leaders who can see what God is doing to lead lasting transformation efforts that align with the *missio dei*.

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<sup>12</sup> Bouman, *The Mission Table: Reclaiming Congregation & Community*, 72.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Granquist, *A New History Lutherans in America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 350.

Leaders in the ELCA can use three tools to increase their level of self-differentiation and start the process of transformation in the ELCA. The Post-it Note timeline, the Cultural Awareness Sermon Series, and the V2MOM are tools aimed at identifying God's unique call in the life of a leader and a congregation. Then they equip leaders and congregations to develop an action plan to bring this unique call into reality.

The case study involving Our Savior Lutheran Church in Issaquah, Washington provides one example where the fruits of self-differentiation can be seen. By using the three transformation tools, OSLC gained clarity within their leadership and congregation as to what God was doing and they were able to revitalize their ministry. In doing so, they also transformed ministry on the east side of Seattle. If all congregations in the ELCA undertook this process, the ELCA would no longer be a church disconnected from the world. It would be a church deeply engaged in the *missio dei*.

In the last section, this paper examines the ecclesiological implication of this work. In doing so, it proposed that a self-differentiated ecclesiology for the twenty-first century was a church with seven marks. The church is one, holy, catholic, apostolic, regionally expressed, locally lived, and scripturally grounded. With these marks, the church has been transformed and is ready to be the church of tomorrow.

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