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A STRATEGY FOR STARTING MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES
IN SINGAPORE THROUGH BIVOCATIONAL MINISTRY

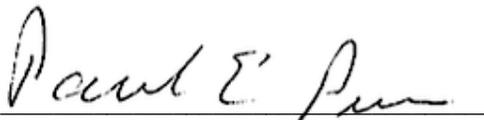
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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
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Date Received: July 19, 2019

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

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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BY

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MAY 2019

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ABSTRACT

A Strategy for Starting Missional Communities in Singapore through Bivocational Ministry

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2019

The purpose of this project is to develop a strategy for starting missional communities in Singapore through the work of bivocational personnel. To achieve this, a new work was started with the intention of reaching non-Christians, bringing them into community and discipleship, developing them as leaders and empowering and releasing them to form new missional communities. Special attention was made on spiritual formation, community life together and a transformative leadership process of developing leaders who replicate themselves.

The context of Singapore is one in which Christianity has enjoyed great success. Singapore churches generally embrace a missiological theology but this outlook is being eroded as churches grow and are becoming institutionalized. It is the intention of this project to reclaim the centrality of mission, remove any clergy-laity divisions and return the church to a form of team-based, egalitarian leadership structure with distributed authority.

While the goal of replicating the community was not successful and the community disbanded after two years, the insights gleaned are helpful for future efforts at starting missional communities. One key lesson learned was the need to pay attention to cultural and societal norms in Singapore. These include Singapore being a collective society, the influence of Confucianism, high power distance index and desire for structure, organization, and planning in the mentality of the people. In addition, the home setting may not be the most ideal place for maintaining and growing missional communities in Singapore. Now understanding community sizes and sustainability, the goal should be to aim for a size of fifty people within two years of community formation. On the other hand, to ensure the continuity of bivocational leadership in the community, it is recommended that the community not be allowed to grow beyond 150 people before multiplying.

Content Reader: Paul Pierson, PhD

Words: 290

To my wife, Amelynn who supported me through this program and always encourages me to pursue the things of God; and to my son, Declan whom I had the joy to be involved in his formative years during the course of this program

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who journeyed together in the formation and life of the missional community. Particularly, I am deeply appreciative of the commitment of Fuhnan, Cheryl and their three beautiful girls, Megan, Maisie and Mattea; Alvis, Andrea and their son, Zeph; James, Winston, Jeremy and Laura. I would also like to thank my mentors; George and Helen who have been such a blessing in my life. In addition, I would not have survived the corporate world without the support of my colleagues from Krauthammer International; my boss Jan van der Linden, my friend and elder brother, Motoaki Goto and Gary Chu, my dear brother in Christ who first connected me to this wonderful company. I would like to thank Ben Koh for helping me to get my professional coach credentials with the International Coaching Federation and Ronald Yow, who has always been such a dear friend.

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PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Christianity came to Singapore in the early nineteenth century with its founding as a British colony. Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches were concerned with social issues and started schools and hospitals to cater to the needs of society. The Church functioned largely as an “ecclesiastical receptacle”¹ for converts that were won. The main spurts of growth occurred from the late-1970s onwards. By 2010, government statistics showed Christianity has grown to almost 20 percent of the resident population.² From one-in-fifty in 1970 to one-in-five in 2010, the Singapore Church by any measure has been a great success. While Christians come predominately from the middle class and are English-speaking, many churches also run Mandarin and other dialect services to reach the working class and elderly. Others are ministering to transient migrant workers by starting social services or church services in the native languages of these workers. Most denominations and large churches have a social service arm to serve the community. Apart from the Malay community whose Muslim faith is entwined in their ethnicity, Christianity has made a significant impact on all segments of society.³

¹ This term was used by Darrell Guder to describe the gathering of souls into newly founded mission churches by earlier missionary movements. See Darrell L. Guder, “The Church as Missional Community,” in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 123.

² The proportion of Christians (including Catholics) stood at 18.3 per-cent of resident population aged 15 years and over in 2010. See Department of Statistics Singapore, “Statistics Singapore - Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 1 - Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion,” https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2010/census_2010_release1/cop2010sr1.pdf (accessed May 3, 2018).

³ The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) is a Singapore statute passed in 1990 to prevent social and political discord along racial-religious lines and to ensure religious harmony currently enjoyed in Singapore. Due to this act, it is a sensitive matter to actively proselytize other faiths. See Tsun Hang Tey, “Excluding Religion from Politics and Enforcing Religious Harmony – Singapore-Style,” *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* (2008): 129.

Generally, Singapore churches embrace the Great Commission and are active in winning the lost. This is played out through strong local outreach, evangelism and the mobilization of members for participation in foreign missions. The training and discipleship of members were keys to achieving the church's mission. Singapore has been prophesized numerous times as the Antioch of Asia.⁴ The oriental mindset of family and the value placed on community also enabled a theology of the church as the eschatological agent through its corporate witness. The ecumenical movement, LoveSingapore, seeks to unite the churches in Singapore and galvanize them for societal transformation.⁵

Singapore churches embrace missional theology due in part to their keen awareness of being a minority in a multi-religious setting. However, this missional outlook is eroding as churches grow and are being institutionalized. In the last twenty years, the wholesale importation of church growth models from the West with their slick secular marketing techniques and excessive focus on felt needs have seeded a whole new generation of consumerist Christians. The allure of the attractional model means that churches need to constantly reinvent themselves to cater to the consumption pattern of middle-class Christians who now make up a sizeable portion of the population. At the same time, the rise of a number of megachurches with wide media coverage, use of technologies and the intertwining of spirituality with materialism has become the

⁴ Billy Graham was the first to declare Singapore as the Antioch of Asia in his crusade in 1978. LoveSingapore, *Dare To Believe, The LoveSingapore Story* (Singapore: LoveSingapore, 2000).

⁵ Ibid., 12. There are five strategic goals of LoveSingapore: 1) Unite the Body, 2) Serve the Community, 3) Establish a Prayer Cell in Every Block by Year 2000, 3) Launch a Seven-Wave Harvest in 2001 and 5) Adopt Unreached People Group. For a criticism of the LoveSingapore movement, see MayLing Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-first Century Engaging with Multi-faith Singapore* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).

definitive brand of Christianity known to the general public. The “prosperity gospel” preached by what is now the largest church in Singapore further distorts biblical truth and what true biblical community is all about.⁶

The trends in which Christianity has grown can be viewed broadly: mainline denominational churches in the 1960s and 1970s, Pentecostal churches in the 1980s and 1990s and megachurches from 2000 onwards. The center of gravity has shifted to independent megachurches led by vibrant individuals. The expansionist vision of the leader usually comes through strongly. These churches have a deep ability to engage with contemporary culture and find theological meaning for the believer in a culturally unique setting. They have successfully reconciled spirituality and theology with wealth and mass consumption. Terence Chong sums up his observations on Pentecostal megachurches in this way:

In essence, shorn of traditional intellectualism and stripped bare of historical theology, megachurches are pushing the Gospel through the prism of consumerism and pop culture. The result of this is an aphorism-as-theology in which complex moral and ethical questions are explained through neat maxims and clichés. This bumper-sticker theology enjoys a reductionist approach to biblical exegesis that on the one hand, makes easy answers accessible to everyone, while, on the other, preserves the pseudo-mysterious and unknowable quality of God.⁷

This project is not a reaction to megachurches, prosperity gospels or even the hyper-grace gospel of Joseph Prince, Singapore’s export to the Christian world. As Paul writes, it does not matter; the important thing is that Christ is preached (Phil 1:18).

⁶ New Creation Church, “New Creation Church,” <https://www.newcreation.org.sg/about-us> (accessed August 14, 2018). New Creation has an average Sunday attendance of 33,000. It is still rapidly growing. Joseph Prince, the senior pastor preaches excessively on grace. He has a worldwide ministry with a large following in the United States. The church consistently refutes claims that it preaches a prosperity gospel.

⁷ Terence Chong, ed., *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia: Negotiating Class, Consumption and the Nation* (Singapore: Iseas-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018), 228.

Megachurches will continue to grow and have a following. They have done well to navigate the local conditions and come up with contextual theologies for believers to make sense of this fast-changing world. They will also continue to attract non-believers who otherwise would not be open to Christianity.

The concern has been for those mainline denominations and Pentecostal churches that had done well in the past. For many of them, growth has stagnated and they are increasingly finding it difficult to stay relevant especially to the digital generation. They are caught in a quandary, torn between the need to be more attractive yet do not have the resources and know-how to pull off the multi-sensory worship experiences of megachurches. Unable to significantly attract non-believers and new converts, they focus on maintenance ministry and as Darrell Guder says, maintenance leaders rarely equip the saints for missional vocation.⁸ Anecdotal evidence suggests that they are also losing younger generations.⁹ Whereas in the past, most members were converts, they are now grappling with ministry to the second and third generation of Christians. The needs and aspirations of these younger generations are quite different. They may not have the first-hand conversion experiences of their parents, yet they are cognizant between the form and the content of their faith. They are able to look past the Sunday service and long for authentic community and true discipleship.

⁸ Darrell L. Guder, "Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership after Christendom," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 28:3 (2007): 277.

⁹ For example, I served for many years in a large Assemblies of God church, which experienced significant attrition whenever youths and youth adults transited to adult church services. As a result, we were missing certain age groups in the church. I am also aware of the same phenomenon happening in mainline churches. While most of these young adults still keep their Christian faith, they stop or are less regular in attending Sunday church services. Instead, they may choose to focus on their career and family or spend their energy on an issue of social concern and generally prefer smaller communities for authentic sharing.

A new imagination for the Church is needed. This doctoral project seeks to start a missional community within a bivocational context that reaches non-believers and models a process of making disciple-making disciples. It is an experiment to complement the old ecology by looking at organic structures. The inhabitants of Singapore face a space-time compression that is detrimental for the cultivation of spirituality and community. The result is that attending Sunday services becomes “the church” and the consuming masses are happy to let the professionals dispense the spiritual goods. In a bivocational set-up, there is no paid staff or professional clergy. It seeks to break the clergy-laity divide and special attention will be made on spiritual formation, participation in the community life together and a transformative leadership process of developing leaders who replicate themselves.

Chapter 1 explores the growth and success story of Singapore and the life of its inhabitants. The pursuit of excellence and efficiency is translated into the operating of churches. While Singapore churches have been successful, there are a number of key challenges ahead. What ills the Western Church is beginning to take root as the Singapore Church matures. The zeal of first-generation converts is being replaced by an inward focus of ministry to self as the Church prospers. This chapter concludes with an assessment of the challenges and opportunities facing the Singapore Church.

Chapter 2 is a literature survey that traces the trajectory of the missional conversation pertaining to this project. Engagement with the larger culture is necessary and discipleship and leadership development are key building blocks for the missional community. Spiritual formation in a fast-paced, stress-filled society and a counter-cultural yet biblical type of discipleship will be examined. An understanding of organic

ecclesial structures is also necessary. This will enable the empowerment and release of members to form replicating missional communities.

Chapter 3 presents a theology for starting missional communities. It discusses the topics that formed the foundations for the missional conversation. Discipleship and leadership considerations are studied, such as the relationship within the three persons of the Trinity and examples of Jesus and Paul on how they made disciples. Theological implications are inferred by integrating key principles with the culture and context.

Chapter 4 develops a ministry plan for the starting of a new missional community within a bivocational context. It presents three key theological implications and states four goals for the project. The strategies are also laid out. These include the vision for the new community, its ethos and processes necessary for it to engage with non-Christians, disciple new Christians and develop them into future leaders. The ministry plan calls for a transformative discipleship and leadership development process that is centered on mentoring and coaching relationships.

Chapter 5 describes the implementation process and evaluation of the project. The implementation timeline, the gathering of a core team, the engagement with non-believers, the community life together and the multiplication process are given. It also looks into the resources required and reports on the results achieved by the project. The chapter concludes with an assessment and evaluation of the project. Recommendations in five areas; namely bivocational challenges, egalitarian leadership, outreach and discipleship, house church communities and community size and sustainability are given. It is the hope that these recommendations will aid future efforts of starting missional communities in Singapore.

CHAPTER 1

CHRISTIANITY IN THE SINGAPORE CONTEXT

The Singapore Story

Modern Singapore is unique in that she was founded in 1819 on the initiative of one individual, Sir Stamford Raffles amidst almost universal opposition.¹ Raffles, then the Lieutenant-Governor of British Bencoolen in Sumatra, wanted to counteract the influence of the Dutch who had established a monopoly over trade in the Malay Archipelago. When the opium trade with China was instituted, a new port along the Straits of Malacca would be vital to British interests. When Raffles first arrived, he soon recognized Singapore as the natural choice for its location, its naturally sheltered harbor and its abundance of drinking water. On 6 February 1819, Raffles signed a formal treaty with the local chieftain and Sultan Hussein of Johor to grant the British the rights to establish a trading post. A second treaty in 1824 ceded Singapore in perpetuity to the British East India Company.²

¹ C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore: 1819-2005*, Revised edition (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), xvii.

² *Ibid.*, 29, 45.

After signing the first treaty, Raffles returned to Bencoolen and left Major William Farquhar in charge of the new settlement. Soon, news about the free port spread bringing traders such as the Bugis, Peranakan Chinese and Arabs to Singapore keen on circumventing the Dutch trade restrictions. The population rose from 1,000 at the time of Raffles' founding to 5,000 in 1821 and 10,000 by 1825. Trade volumes correspondingly rose from \$400,000 in 1819 to \$5 million in 1821 and \$22 million in 1825, surpassing the established port of Penang.³

In the subsequent decades that followed, Singapore's fortunes grew as trade between Europe and East Asia flourished. It became an important port of call in the region and with the development of rubber and tin production in Malaya, also became a major export center. Its free port status gave it comparative advantages over other colonial ports in the region where tariffs were levied. By 1869, Singapore's population reached 100,000. This was fueled by the migration of workers from China, India and the Malay Archipelago seeking work at the port and various plantations whose descendants would constitute the future of Singapore's population.⁴

Despite its rapid growth, the administration was understaffed and ineffectual. It was unconcerned with the welfare of the populace as long as British trade was not affected. Society was rather lawless and chaotic with prostitution, gambling and drug abuse especially of opium widespread. The population was predominately male and uneducated and Chinese criminal societies were extremely powerful. The deficiencies in Straits Settlement government became increasingly apparent and Singapore's merchant

³ Ibid., 46.

⁴ Saw Swee-Hock, "Population Trends in Singapore, 1819-1967," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10:1 (1969): 38, 39.

community began to agitate for a separate colony under British rule. The Straits Settlements was made a Crown Colony on 1 April 1867 and ruled by a governor based in Singapore assisted by executive and legislative councils.⁵

At the turn of the twentieth century, much of Europe was at war but the conflict did not spread to South East Asia. By the start of World War II, the theatre of action had shifted to the Pacific with the growing ambition of the Japanese Empire. The British built a large naval base in Singapore at a cost of £63 million, a staggering amount at that time. Singapore was deemed as an impregnable island fortress and touted as the Gibraltar of the East.⁶ In December 1941, the Pacific War began with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the invasion of Kota Bharu in northern Malaya. A series of British military miscalculations and blunders allowed the Japanese to gain the upper hand. Within a short span of fifty-five days, Japan had conquered the entire Malay Peninsula and subjected Singapore to daily air raids. The Battle of Singapore began when Japanese forces landed on its north-western shore. After a week of ferocious fighting, the British forces under Lieutenant General Arthur Percival capitulated and surrendered on 15 February 1942. It was a “bluff” that worked for Japanese Lieutenant General Tomoyuki Yamashita who demanded the immediate and unconditional surrender at a time when his supplies were running low and before the British could discover his numerical weakness of being outnumbered by more than three-to-one. Winston Churchill called this the “worst disaster

⁵ Barbara Leitch Lepoer, “Singapore, A Country Study,” *Library of Congress, Country Studies*, 1989, <http://countrystudies.us/singapore/> (assessed March 25, 2019).

⁶ Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn, *Did Singapore Have to Fall? Churchill and the Impregnable Fortress* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 19–23.

and largest capitulation” in British history where 80,000 troops became prisoners of war joining the 50,000 already taken by the Japanese during the Malayan campaign.⁷

Singapore was renamed Syonan-to and began three-and-a-half years of Japanese occupation. Japanese rule was much hated and firmly etched in the memory of the population amidst widespread atrocities and indiscriminate killings. It is estimated that some 50,000 Chinese civilians were killed in Malaya and Singapore in Japan’s effort to weed out support for the war in China.⁸ The war ended when Japan surrendered to the Allies in August 1945. Singapore was reverted back to its colonial master, Britain.

The inability to defend Singapore destroyed Britain’s credibility as Singapore’s infallible ruler. The people wanted a bigger say in charting their destinies and the next decade saw the rise of anti-colonial and nationalist sentiments. Britain was prepared to gradually increase self-governance. In 1948 and 1951, limited Legislative Council elections were held. In 1955, the Legislative Council was replaced by the Legislative Assembly and a wider election held to form the first partial self-government. David Marshall from the Labor Front was elected to become the first Chief Minister of Singapore. He presided over a shaky government at a time of much social unrest, receiving little support from the colonial government. He resigned within a year following his failure to exact self-rule from Britain. He was succeeded by Lim Yew Hock, who promptly cracked down on communist and leftist elements, thus gaining trust from

⁷ Kelly McLaughlin, “The Surrender of Singapore,” *Mail Online*, February 20, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/~/article-4241644/index.html>.

⁸ The Sook Ching massacre was a systematic purge by the Japanese *Kempetai* in which Chinese civilians were rounded up and killed. See Infopedia - National Library Board Singapore “Operation Sook Ching,” http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_40_2005-01-24.html?s=sook%20ching (accessed March 25, 2019).

the British. This helped to restart negotiation for full internal self-rule and an agreement was reached in which the State of Singapore was created and the Legislative Assembly expanded, to be entirely chosen by popular election.⁹

The 1959 election for the new Legislative Assembly saw the People Action Party (PAP) sweeping to a landslide victory winning 43 of the 51 seats.¹⁰ The PAP was shrewd to court the Chinese-speaking majority especially those who were the subjects of the leftist purge under the Lim Yew Hock's government. On 3 June 1959, its leader, Lee Kuan Yew, a Cambridge educated lawyer was installed as Singapore's first Prime Minister at the age of 35.

The new government quickly got to work on many of Singapore's economic and social problems. Foreign investments were courted, the education system revamped and English promoted as the main language. To eliminate social unrest, labor unions were consolidated, sometimes forcibly and an aggressive housing program started to meet the challenges of providing affordable public housing for the growing masses. There was a sense of optimism, yet many of the PAP leaders felt that Singapore's future was best served by being part of Malaya. The strong historical bond, Singapore's lack of natural resources and the need for jobs with a growing population were all pragmatic reasons for economic survival. On 16 September 1963, the Federation of Malaysia was formed with

⁹ Lepoer, "Singapore, A Country Study."

¹⁰ Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 271.

the merger of Singapore, the Federation of Malaya, North Borneo (present-day Sabah) and Sarawak.¹¹

The marriage was rocky from the start. There were deep disagreements over politics and economics between the ruling parties of Singapore and Malaysia. The gross imbalance Malay-Chinese population between both countries led to communal prejudices which were played up by leaders of both sides. Malays were granted special privileges by federal policies much to the disdain of the Chinese majority in Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew and others fought against race discrimination bringing them into direct conflict with the political masters in Kuala Lumpur. Numerous racial riots erupted in Singapore with fatalities and curfews had to be imposed to restore order.¹² The external environment was also tense. Indonesian President Sukarno objected to the formation of Malaysia and declared a state of *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation). Indonesian military operatives infiltrated into Singapore to carry out several bombings and seek to incite racial riots.¹³

The relations between the centers of powers in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur broke down irreparably. The situation was tense with politicians on both sides attacking each other. Unable to resolve their political differences and amidst rising racial tension, Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman decided that it was best for Singapore to

¹¹ Infopedia - National Library Board Singapore, "Merger with Malaysia," http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2017-11-06_110458.html?s=merger%20with%20malaysia (accessed March 26, 2019).

¹² The 1964 racial riots were politically instigated along racial lines resulting in twenty-three dead and hundreds severely injured. It came as a deep shock and threatened to split Singapore along communal lines. See Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, 290–91.

¹³ During *Konfrontasi*, Indonesian saboteurs carried out a total of thirty-seven bombings in Singapore. The most serious was the MacDonald House bombing which killed three persons and injured thirty-three others. See Infopedia - National Library Board Singapore, "MacDonald House Bomb Explosion," http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_62_2004-12-17.html?s=macdonald%20house%20bombing (accessed March 26, 2019).

leave the federation. Representatives from both sides worked in extreme secrecy to hammer out the terms of the separation. On the morning of 9 August 1965, the Malaysian Prime Minister announced the separation to federal parliament and moved a resolution to amend the constitution to allow Singapore to leave Malaysia. The bill was passed 126-0 and hours later, the Singapore Parliament passed the Republic of Singapore Independent Act. It was a “moment of anguish” for a tearful Lee Kuan Yew as he announced in a televised conference to a shocked populace that Singapore has become a sovereign and independent nation.¹⁴ Thus, a new nation was foisted into existence.

Life in the Metropolis

Singapore is widely regarded as having achieved an economic miracle. It has gone from third to first world within one generation.¹⁵ When it gained independence in 1965, its GDP per capita was US\$516 adjusted to current dollars. This has soared 100 fold to US\$52,962 in 2016 according to the World Bank.¹⁶ It is ranked as the third richest nation by the International Monetary Fund¹⁷ and the most expensive city by the Economist Intelligent Unit.¹⁸ It has one of the world’s highest concentrations of

¹⁴ Edmund Lim, “Behind the Scenes: What Led to Separation in 1965,” *The Straits Times*, August 5, 2015, <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/behind-the-scenes-what-led-to-separation-in-1965>.

¹⁵ See the memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew of the same title, Kuan Yew Lee, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story - 1965-2000*, 1st edition (New York: Harper, 2000).

¹⁶ The World Bank, “GDP per Capita (current US\$) | Data,” <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=SG> (accessed March 30, 2018).

¹⁷ International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook (October 2017) - GDP per Capita, Current Prices,” <http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PPPPC@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD> (accessed April 1, 2018).

¹⁸ The Economist, “Asian and European Cities Compete for the Title of Most Expensive City - Daily Chart,” <https://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2018/03/daily-chart-9> (accessed May 6, 2018).

millionaires. For the last ten years, it is in the top three most competitive economies in the world according to the World Economic Forum.¹⁹ It has the second highest home ownership in the world at 90 percent and its population is amongst the best educated.²⁰ The PISA test by OCED ranked 15-year-old Singaporean children number one in the world for mathematics, science, reading and problem-solving.²¹ According to the Corruption Perception Index, Singapore is also one of the least corrupt.²²

It can be asked why Singapore succeeded so comprehensively. Many will point to the exceptional leadership of first-generation leaders led by Lee Kuan Yew. According to Kishore Mahbubani, they also implemented three exceptional policies: meritocracy, pragmatism and honesty.²³ Meritocracy meant picking its best citizens to run the country and pragmatism; not reinventing the wheel, copying best practices and adapting it to Singapore. Honesty was the most difficult to implement. It meant having a clean government and taking a zero-tolerance stance against corruption. Many third world countries have failed because of corruption and this was where the strengths of the early

¹⁹ World Economic Forum, "These Are the World's 10 Most Competitive Economies," <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/09/global-competitiveness-2017-top-economies/> (accessed May 14, 2018).

²⁰ Department of Statistics Singapore, "Statistics Singapore - Population Trends," <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/population/population-trends> (accessed April 4, 2018).

²¹ Amelia Teng, "Singapore Students Top OECD Global Survey in Problem Solving through Teamwork," *The Straits Times*, November 21, 2017, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/singapore-students-top-oecd-global-survey-in-problem-solving-through-teamwork>.

²² Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2017," https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017 (accessed May 1, 2018).

²³ Kishore Mahbubani, "Why Singapore is the World's Most Successful Society," *HuffPost*, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/kishore-mahbubani/singapore-world-successful-society_b_7934988.html (accessed April 2, 2018).

leaders lay. They were ruthlessly honest and incorruptible. These three principles in Singapore's nation-building now undergird much of the psyche of the nation.

Meritocracy tries to equalize opportunities and has enabled a whole generation to move up the social mobility ladder. At the same time, it also has created a very competitive environment, most evidently in its education system. Nine-year-olds are tested to identify the top academic talents who are then put on a different curriculum. The Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) at twelve years old is deemed as one of the most important examinations for the Singapore student. A good result will enable one to get into a top school thereby increasing the chances of academic and therefore personal success. A government scholarship to one of the top universities in the world would mean a career path mapped out for life. The flip side is that the Singapore student is also one of the most stressed out with piles of school work and enrichment classes to attend so as to not "lose-out." In fact, the "fear of losing-out" or "*kiasuism*" is a much-joked-about cultural caricature of the competitive and self-centered Singaporean.²⁴

Singapore always has been very pragmatic in its approaches. As a small nation state, it tries to maintain as many friends as possible. As an entrepôt, it thrives on free trade and plans ahead to identify trends and sectors of growth for its economy. The population size has increased three-fold since independence in order to sustain its continuous economic growth.²⁵ It has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world and what it lacks, it imports. It is a city of immigrants with roughly one-in-four residents not

²⁴ For a light-hearted introduction to *kiasuism* and Singapore's culture, see Marion Bravó-Bhasin, *Culture Shock! Singapore: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish International, 2014).

²⁵ The population grew from 1.89 million on independence to 5.61 million people today, consisting of 3.93 million residents and 1.67 million non-residents.

born in Singapore. It is very multiracial and multicultural; its population comprise of 74.3 percent ethnic Chinese, 13.4 percent Malays, 9.1 percent ethnic Indians and 3.2 percent others.²⁶ It is the second densest sovereign state in the world. To solve its unique challenges, the government is not shy to dictate how its citizens live and behave. It has been dubbed a nanny state for good reason with its many laws and rules.²⁷ The government is also very much in the business arena, owning majority stakes in many of Singapore's top companies. Its two sovereign wealth funds are amongst the world's largest.²⁸ Singapore Inc. is involved in every sector of the economy and big government permeates every stratum of society with its control of the media and the press.

The Economist Intelligent Unit rates Singapore as a flawed democracy and the government still attracts international criticism over its curtailment of free press and speech, the right to assembly and unfair treatment of its political opponents.²⁹ The People Action Party (PAP), the only political party who has ruled Singapore since independence rejects Western-style democracy in favor of its own form of democracy. The reasons for

²⁶ Department of Statistics Singapore, "Statistics Singapore - Singapore in Figures," https://www.singstat.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/publications/publications_and_papers/reference/sif2017.pdf (accessed May 3, 2018).

²⁷ For example, there are quotas based on ethnicity for the purchase of government-built housing in a given locality. Since more than 80 percent of the population lives in government-built housing, this policy ensures racial integration of its populace and prevents newly minted citizens or permanent residents (mainly from China, India and Philippines) from clustering in a given town. On a more mundane level, the sale of chewing gums is banned in Singapore, the only country in the world to do so. This saves millions of dollars in tax payer monies for cleaning fees. There are also many rules governing acceptable social behaviours in the public space.

²⁸ The Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC) manages US\$390 billion in assets while Temasek Holdings manages US\$321 billion. See Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, "Sovereign Wealth Fund Rankings," <https://www.swfinstitute.org/sovereign-wealth-fund-rankings/> (accessed May 14, 2018).

²⁹ The Economist Intelligent Unit, "Democracy Index 2017," <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index> (accessed May 14, 2018).

doing so are pragmatic considerations as a multicultural society, a strong desire for sustained economic development and security needs as a vulnerable city in the region.³⁰ As long as the PAP is able to deliver on its promises of a clean government, social order and economic improvement of the nation, the people are willing to forgo certain civil liberties to continue to give it the mandate to rule. This is also why top government officials are paid high salaries and sit on boards of government-linked companies to earn additional director fees, making corruption an unenviable option.

Singapore can be proud of its many achievements in its short history as a nation. It is a metropolis and a cultural melting pot attracting talents from all over the world. It is clean, green and safe. It is a city where things just work. As Singapore transitioned to developed nation status, the challenge of being an open economy and the advent of disruptive technologies underpinned many of the government's initiatives to restructure its workforce and reskilled its workers. There is also a sense of angst amongst its population as political power is slated to be transferred to its fourth-generation leaders in the next few years, many of whom are untested in leading the nation.³¹ The median age of the nation has risen from 18.1 years in 1965 to 40.5 years today and will continue to rise.³² This demographic change is driving many of the changes in society with more emphases on healthcare and work-life balance. Being a global city, regional travel is expected for many of its highly skilled workforces. Singaporeans are known to be honest,

³⁰ Consensus SG, "A Defence of Singapore-Style Democracy," https://consensusg.com/2017/04/15/a-defence-of-singapore-style-democracy/#_ftn10 (accessed May 3, 2018).

³¹ Singapore had three Prime Ministers so far and succession planning has been a carefully thought-out process. Both Mr. Goh Chok Tong and Mr. Lee Hsien Loong served many years in the Cabinet leading different ministries before assuming the PM post.

³² Department of Statistics Singapore, "Statistics Singapore - Population Trends."

hardworking and efficient. The achievement-oriented culture also means that the average Singaporeans work long hours and live stressful lives

Christianity in Singapore

Christianity came to Singapore in the early-nineteenth century with its founding as a British colony. The first mission was established by the London Missionary Society shortly after Raffles' arrival in 1819.³³ Subsequently, other missions arrived as the colony developed. Initially, a large part of these missions was focused on ministering to the British and European communities. Some of these missions started to establish mission schools which became a key characteristic feature of Christianity in Singapore. The mission school system was endorsed by the colonial government and generally accepted by the populace. Catholics and Anglicans were the first to start mission schools followed by the Methodists who came later. The schools they established had a strong welfare impetus. They sought to care for the children of immigrant workers who were coming in large numbers from China and India, many of whom could not afford proper schooling. The government saw mission schools as a relatively low-cost way of broadening English-medium education to the masses. The immigrants were quick to see the commercial value of an Anglophone education in terms of career prospects under the colonial government.³⁴ The more than sixty mission schools are very much in operation today, with a reputation of being quality schools and continuing to serve as effective channels of Christian influence in Singapore society.

³³ Bobby E. K. Sng, *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819-2002*, 3rd edition (Singapore: Singapore Bible Society, 2003), 29.

³⁴ Robbie B. H. Goh, *Christianity in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2005), 38.

Through education missions and to some extent, medical and social missions, Christianity was able to win some converts amongst the local population. However, the influence was minimal. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Protestant community numbered about 2,300 worshippers in a dozen churches, roughly about 1 percent of the 227,000 population at that time.³⁵ The works in the early-1900s were slow and laborious. There were spurts of mass conversion, most notably during the ministry of John Sung in the mid-1930s.³⁶ The war and Japanese occupation disrupted much of the work in the 1940s. The 1950s was a period of rebuilding with the arrivals of new groups and inter-denominational youth organizations. At a time when the population was young and open to new ideas, these parachurch organizations made a significant impact, especially with the youth. They were able to penetrate areas beyond the reach of the churches and their network of activities in society was widespread.

By 1965, Singapore had gained independence and the population grown to 1.89 million people. The free movement of people between Malaysia and Singapore ended and net immigration slowed. The mission school system had become an integral part of Singapore society and was much respected. There was some success in converting students but its ability in translating students into church members was limited at best. The 1970s was known as a decade of evangelism. There were unprecedented Christian activities with lunchtime Bible study groups mushrooming and evangelistic efforts initiated from all sections of the church. It culminated in the Billy Graham Crusade of December 1978 at the National Stadium in which five nights of rallies saw 337,000

³⁵ Sng, *In His Good Time*, 137,139.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 176–79. In 1935 alone, 5,000 Chinese were converted through the ministry of John Sung in the region.

people in attendance, out of which 11,883 made a first-time decision for Christ and 6,519 rededicated their lives.³⁷

By 1980, the number of Christian has grown to 10.3 percent of Singapore's population. The growth was not all even. Christian presence was particularly most evident amongst the English-speaking, the better educated and those in a professional or managerial position with a comfortable middle-income lifestyle.³⁸ In the next three decades that followed, Christianity would become the fastest growing faith among the major religions in Singapore, growing to 12.6 percent in 1990, 14.6 percent in 2000 and 18.3 percent in 2010 of the population.³⁹ The converts were overwhelming of Chinese ethnicity from either Taoist or Buddhist background, the main religious affiliation of the majority Chinese population in Singapore. In a way, Christianization trumped secularization, as those professing to have no religious affiliation grew by a much smaller percentage in the same time period.⁴⁰

Many studies have been done regarding the growth of Christianity in Singapore. It was a confluence of factors such as deep psychological reorientation following independence as a nation, rapid social changes of land development and population redistribution, creative responses of the churches, flourishing parachurches, the use of English in replacement of local languages, the insignificance of religion as an indicator of the Chinese ethnic identity and the movement away from traditional rituals as the country

³⁷ Ibid., 282.

³⁸ Ibid., 305.

³⁹ Department of Statistics Singapore, "Statistics Singapore - Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 1 - Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion."

⁴⁰ Chong, *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia*, 181.

urbanized.⁴¹ Another key factor was the rise of Pentecostalism and Charismatic revivals sweeping across Asia and other parts of the world. Daniel Goh tracked the trajectory of growth in Singapore from 1970 to 2000 and found that churches that grew the most were Pentecostals and Evangelicals derived from American influences followed by non-Pentecostal evangelical congregations as a distant second, and lastly the Catholic Church. Mainstream denominations who embraced the charismatic renewal such as Anglicans and Methodists had also done well.⁴² The most spectacular growth, however, belongs to the independent Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

In the last two decades, the rise of megachurches has redefined the church scene in Singapore. The four megachurches that have estimated attendance above 10,000 were all founded in the 1980s and started to experience phenomenon growth from the 1990s onwards.⁴³ Though they subsequently develop on different pathways, their influence and contextual engagement with the culture makes them the predominant strain of Christianity that is being portrayed in the public eye.

In a 2010 quantitative survey, Terence Chong and Yew-Foong Hui sought to study the economic, social and cultural profile of church-going Protestants. They found

⁴¹ Michael Nai-Chiu Poon, ed., *Christian Movements in Southeast Asia: A Theological Exploration* (Singapore: Armour Publishing Pte Ltd and Trinity Theological College, 2010), 66–68.

⁴² Daniel P. S. Goh, “State and Social Christianity in Post-Colonial Singapore,” *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 25:1 (April 2010): 54–56.

⁴³ The four megachurches are City Harvest Church (20,000), Faith Community Baptist Church (10,000), Lighthouse Evangelism (15,000) and New Creation Church (30,000). See Chong, *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia*, 182. The attendances have changed since the publication of the book with New Creation adding more members while the other three have seen attendances declined.

that the Christian community is actually quite diverse.⁴⁴ It corresponds to the Singapore middle class that is neither homogeneous nor static. Generally speaking, members of the mainline denominations and independent churches are part of the established English-proficient middle class while the megachurch-goers constitute part of the aspiring and emergent middle class. Mainline denominations respondents were more likely to stay in private properties and have educated and English-speaking parents while megachurch respondents were more likely to be recent converts and stay in public housing and speak Mandarin or dialects at home.

This has ramifications on how each group relates to the society at large, their perspective on money and finance, sex and sexuality and their engagement in politics and culture and with other communities and religions. It is interesting to note that respondents from the mainline denominations demonstrated less compartmentalization and privatization of their moral and political views and more likely to participate in civic discourses publicly while megachurch respondents were more likely to see a stronger nexus between the material and the spiritual. Megachurch respondents were also more likely to have non-Christian friends and more likely to be sensitive to unfriendly reactions from other faiths when proselytizing. The determination of the social class background lends credence to the suggestion that megachurches succeed because they are able to articulate an ethos that is consonant with the values and experiences of an emergent middle class.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ They titled their book, "*Different Under God*" to highlight the diversity in the church-going community. Terence Chong and Hui Yew Foong, *Different Under God: A Survey of Church-Going Protestants in Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28, 29.

Challenges and Opportunities Facing the Singapore Church

The growth of the Church has been intricately intertwined with Singapore's growth as a developed state. As mentioned, the growth of the middle class and consumerism has accompanied the expanding Christian community. In broad historical strokes, liberals dominated the Christian scene in the 1960s and 1970s, but were challenged by Evangelicals and then overtaken by Pentecostals in the 1980s.⁴⁶

Chong posits three factors why it was so easy to reconcile Pentecostalism with the South East Asian middle class.⁴⁷ First, Christian resistance to neoliberalism and championing of social justice in the 1960s and 1970s were gradually replaced by an attraction to narratives of redistribution. While churches had earlier invested in tackling social inequality and injustice through advocacy for worker rights, industrial action and community organization, this changed with the emergence of the region's middle class which was dependent on state-centric growth. Second, the prosperity gospels resonated with a newly formed middle class eager to flex its economic muscles. For the aspiring middle class, it offers hope for upward mobility and for the wealthy; it serves as divine legitimacy of their social status. Third, the centrality of spirituality and spirits in core Pentecostal beliefs provided an oddly familiar transition for ethnic Chinese converts who were used to pantheistic folk religions and temple mediums. The raising of hands to receive the Holy Spirit, the speaking in tongues and the endowment of spiritual gifts in believers attested to the body as a conduit for the supernatural. Prayer and fasting and not social activism is deemed a better weapon against the spiritual forces of evil.

⁴⁶ Goh, "State and Social Christianity in Post-Colonial Singapore," 56.

⁴⁷ Chong, *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia*, 8, 9.

In similar veins, others have sought to understand Pentecostalism in Singapore and South East Asian contexts. Simon Chan, drawing from Harold Turner and Harvey Cox sees Pentecostalism's success in its ability to relate to primal spirituality on one hand and social reality on the other. It is the most visible and widespread expression of folk Christianity with a keen ability to contextualize.⁴⁸ In primal religious contexts, it could also manifest itself as a highly sacramental religion. Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori argued that Pentecostal ethic is similar to Weber's Protestant ethic producing people who are honest and hardworking and have no issue reconciling worldly success with spiritual blessing.⁴⁹ Daniel Goh contends that Asian megachurches are not mere adaptations of Western inventions but interlocutors such as Lawrence Khong and Joseph Prince, pastor of Faith Community Baptist Church (FCBC) and New Creation Church (NCC) respectively, are great thinkers in their own right. They are able to engage theological traditions while grappling with contextual relevance in their teachings for their congregations and worldwide audiences.⁵⁰

In spite of its spectacular growth, Christianity in Singapore faced a number of challenges. Firstly, the pull of the attractional model and the intertwining of spirituality with materialism is an obvious one. Christianity is associated with upward mobility and

⁴⁸ On the issue of hybridization, Chan asks the question of Pentecostalism, when does genuine contextualization end and questionable syncretism begin? See Simon Chan, "Folk Christianity and Primal Spirituality: Prospects for Theological Development," in *Christian Movements in Southeast Asia: A Theological Exploration*, ed. Michael Nai-Chiu Poon (Singapore: Armour Publishing Pte Ltd and Trinity Theological College, 2010), 2–6, 9.

⁴⁹ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 165, 171.

⁵⁰ Daniel P. S. Goh, "Grace, Megachurches, and the Christian Prince in Singapore," in *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia: Negotiating Class, Consumption and the Nation*, ed. Terence Chong (Singapore: Iseas-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018), 188.

to be a Christian is to be blessed. The consumerist mindset in a materialistic society pays scant regard to the issues of spiritual formation and discipleship. Churches also face the pull of the attractional model of doing church. Due to Singapore's small geographical size and high population density, it is easy for members to "shop around" for a suitable church. As a result, Sunday services in some churches can become an "entertainment extravaganza" with multi-faceted programs to bring in the crowds. Inevitably, this creates what Kent Carlson called a monster that needs constant feeding.⁵¹ It is hard to keep up with the Joneses or the Lims and the Tans in Singapore's case.

Secondly, and relating to the first, it is the creeping in of "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," especially amongst the youth.⁵² Just as it has been supplanting Christianity in America, it is fast becoming the brand of Christianity that is practiced here. In the past, following Jesus meant a life of devotion, sacrifice and paying a price. Now, it is about self-fulfillment and self-actualization. This self-serving spirituality is accentuated by the attractional model that focuses on felt needs. God becomes a cosmic butler at one's beck and call. The enculturation of Western values, the assertion of the autonomous self and the consumerist tendency of big city living all contribute to churches becoming centers for dishing out spiritual goods and services. The result is a reductionism of mission in the Church's soteriology and ecclesiology.⁵³

⁵¹ Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken, *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Books, 2011), Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 201.

⁵² Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) is a term introduced by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Denton. It is used to describe what they consider common religious beliefs among American youth. Smith and Denton as quoted in Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

⁵³ Guder, "Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership after Christendom," 253.

Thirdly, the Church in Singapore was in the news lately for the wrong reasons. The trial of City Harvest Church hogged the limelight. Six of its key leaders, including its charismatic founder, Kong Hee were sentenced to jail terms for criminal breach of trust involving some S\$50 million of church funds.⁵⁴ An exposé into the pastor and his wife's lavish lifestyle did not help the cause and perception of Christianity in Singapore. The fact that City Harvest paid S\$310 million for a stake in a well-known convention center and New Creation was able to fund an iconic S\$500 million building further shows the ostentations of the church.

Fourthly, even amongst the megachurches, New Creation Church (NCC) seems to be winning the narrative with its hyper-grace message. Attendance at NCC has grown exponentially to over 40,000 in the last few years while other megachurches have all seen attendances dropped.⁵⁵ Daniel Goh in comparing the teachings and practices of FCBC and NCC was insightful to note how Joseph Prince's messages are skewed towards the individual. Prosperity is not just a sign of God's grace but is grace itself. In FCBC, the key metaphor for its members is a soldier; while NCC's metaphor is the client. The entire New Creation's setup is client-centric and filled with consumption logic. Whereas it is the people who are drafted to serve the church in FCBC; it is the church that serves the

⁵⁴ Huiwen Ng, "City Harvest Case: Is This the End of the Saga? Here's All You Need to Know," *The Straits Times*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/city-harvest-case-recap-of-a-saga-that-dragged-on-for-7-years>.

⁵⁵ Attendance at Faith Community Baptist Church has dropped to 8,000 from 10,000 and Lighthouse Evangelism to around 10,000 from 12,000. The biggest drop belongs to City Harvest Church due mainly to the court cases, from a peak of 33,000 in 2010 to about 16,000 presently. See Danson Cheong, "City Harvest Attendance Declines Again," *The Straits Times*, May 8, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/city-harvest-attendance-declines-again>.

individuals and supports them in effective living in NCC. Their care groups function more like clubs than ministries or work units.⁵⁶

Fifthly, the bane of modern city living in a competitive and workaholic society is a key impediment to the spiritual life. Living in a pressure-cooker environment, Singaporeans are badly infected with hurry sickness. There is very little margin left for rest, recreation or personal reflection. Jensen has shown the spiritual damages done due to this collapse of space and time.⁵⁷ While the Church has continued to focus on outward ministry, this is done to the exclusion of inward spirituality. The result is a lack of power and spiritual vitality for mission. In the words of Jensen, the church needs to subvert these temporal-spatial codes by devoting more time and space to spiritual practices. This is where the disciple makes effort in solitude and in community “for God to be active.”⁵⁸ In this aspect, the Singapore church needs to return to an emphasis on spiritual disciplines that were part of its founding heritage in this pluralistic society.

Sixthly, the digital revolution and the proliferation of online Christian teachings and churches resulted in a movement away from face-to-face interactions and community. At the same time, the Christian message suffers from over-exposure. It has been attacked as intolerant by the increasingly vocal LGBT community. Coupled with postmodernity where there is a tendency to question the veracity and authority of all totalizing schemes

⁵⁶ Goh, “Grace, Megachurches, and the Christian Prince in Singapore,” 184–85, 192–97.

⁵⁷ L. Paul Jensen, *Subversive Spirituality: Transforming Mission through the Collapse of Space and Time* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

of explanation,⁵⁹ the Gospel faces increasing difficulties and needs to be presented through a different mold.

Lastly, the Church in Singapore has acquired property, wealth and power as it moves from the margins towards the center of society. While this move towards the center is not complete, having been curtailed by governmental actions and sensitivity to living in a multicultural and multi-religious context, many churches face a crisis of relevance to their younger generations.⁶⁰ These second and third generations of Christians have grown up and started families. Having seen the church upfront with all its quirks and imperfections, they have their fair share of disillusionment. They may have kept their faith but they are not active in attending church services or programs. They value relationships over activities. They long for authenticity and community. Churches need to better engage their younger generations who are not too enamored by the institutional church.

While there are challenges, there are also many opportunities for the Singapore Church. As can be seen, the Church has been successful in part because of its ability to adapt and contextualize to its unique cultural setting. Singapore being a cosmopolitan city is in a constant flux of change. It boasts a hardworking people who are well aware of the need to always innovate to stay ahead in the game. Many churches are taking steps to

⁵⁹ Roger E Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2007), 126.

⁶⁰ The Singapore government maintains a secular state and resists any encroachment from religious groups to usurp the public space. It keeps a close watch on any social phenomenon that may rock its power base or disrupts the delicate religious and racial harmony that it sought so hard to build. For example, in the past, it has acted against liberation theology in both the Protestant and Catholic Church. The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act also gave the State wide ranging power to muzzle religious leaders and practitioners who stray beyond the social and political boundaries established by the State. These boundaries restrict the sphere in which religious bodies can play and maintain a clear separation of State and Church. For more details see, Goh, "State and Social Christianity in Post-Colonial Singapore."

address the slide before it becomes a rot. They have restructured to stay nimble and injected new ministries. Some influential pastors are highlighting the danger of the consumption culture and seek to bring the church back to community, spiritual formation, scriptural emphasis and discipleship.

New churches are mushrooming up with new ways of doing church. Certain individuals dissatisfied with the status quo have started missional cafés to reach non-believers. Others are experimenting with organic church structures to ensure greater participation of the members in the Christian life together. Some pastors have left the church-centric model to go into the marketplace as tentmakers and bivocational pastors. The church in Singapore will continue to evolve. It has shown its great ability to adapt to the ebbs and flows of culture. The question to ask in the days ahead is not about its contextualization ability. Rather it is about its ability to resist being absorbed into the culture that it loses its voice and distinctiveness.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, several works that informed the understanding of the missional conversation and by extension, this doctoral project will be reviewed. Five areas will be covered; namely missional church overview, cultural engagement, missional church planting, discipleship and spiritual formation and envisioning missional replicability. A total of six books will be reviewed. For each book, the central thesis and a summary of the author's arguments will be offered. Key contributions as well as any limitation of the resource and how it relates to the doctoral project will also be discussed.

Missional Church Overview

The Missional Church in Perspective, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile

This book was published in 2011, slightly more than a decade after the publication of the book, *Missional Church* in 1998, which popularized the word "missional." It seeks to bring clarity to the missional conversation by putting it in perspective on how it was understood, popularized and enriched and how it also informed

the wider conversation. There are two parts, each with three chapters. Part one provides an introduction to the missional church conversation while part two extends it.

The authors identify four common themes in recent missional church literature in North America and their implications.¹ Using an analogy of a tree, the authors map these works with the 1998 book serving as the trunk. Six areas relating to theological concepts serve as the roots. They are church and missions/mission, Trinitarian missiology, *missio Dei*, Reign (Kingdom) of God, church's missionary nature and missional hermeneutics. The authors further grouped the literature into four branches and ten sub-branches depending on the theme and understanding of the word missional.²

The book is an excellent way to get acquainted with the missional conversation. The authors are well versed in the literature and the subtle nuances of the other authors writing on this topic. Their model of the tree and the branches provided a systematic way of understanding the plethora of writings out there which otherwise can be quite confusing for the uninitiated. It not only helps the reader to process through an immense amount of literature involved but there is also deep theological integration of all the key issues involved. The key concepts detailed in the roots section provide much of the

¹ The four main themes are 1) God is a missionary God who sends the church into the world; 2) God's mission in the world is related to the Reign (Kingdom) of God; 3) The missional church is an incarnational (versus an attractional) ministry sent to engage a postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized context and 4) The internal life of the missional church focuses on every believer living as a disciple engaging in mission. See Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 3, 4.

² The four branches are discovering, utilizing, engaging and extending. For discovering, this branch reaches back to the previous framework of "church" and "mission" as separated and related realities, promoting a more traditional understanding of mission focusing primarily on human agency. For utilizing, this branch actively tries to use the theological ideas that shaped the initial missional conversation to deepen an understanding of what a missional church looks like, especially in relation to God's agency. For engaging, this branch attempts to live out a missional perspective in relation to some aspect of church life. For extending, this branch seeks to further develop the biblical and theological frameworks that undergird a missional understanding. See *ibid.*, 9–11.

theological foundations on the missional church in this study and will be discussed in detail. Generally, churches in Singapore are quite mission-oriented, sending mission teams and missionaries overseas and are active in evangelism locally. Many fall into the branch of discovering missional focusing on human agency.

It is thus through this book that a missional imagination emerges. For this project, it falls mainly into the branches of utilizing and engaging missional. Based on the theological foundations mentioned in the roots-structure of the missional tree, it seeks to answer what is the true nature of the Church and how it is connected to its mission. The agency for mission is shifted from the Church to God. God is at work in the world. God's Kingdom (Reign) is much larger than the mission of the Church. There is a need for every congregation to take on a missionary posture for engaging its local context. Every member becomes a minister of God and the focus for spiritual growth is to be able to participate more fully in God's mission in the world. Based on these ideas, this project envisions a missional community that serves as a contrast society, participates in God's mission in the world and is a sign, witness and foretaste of the Kingdom of God. How it intends to do this requires an organic discipleship process and a leadership-construct that break the clergy-laity divide. These issues are covered in some detail in the second part of the book.

Two developments by the authors to extend the conversation further contribute to the practice of this study. Firstly, their treatment of Luke 10:1-10 in the sending of the seventy reveals a counterintuitive way of practicing hospitality. The disciples were to enter deeply into the lives of the Samaritans on the terms of the Samaritans' culture. Hospitality in mission here is reversed—not offering hospitality to the stranger but

seeking the hospitality of the stranger, with all the vulnerability that implies.³ This will require the missional community to engage differently with the people that it is trying to reach. Secondly, the movement from a Western hierarchical model to an Eastern Orthodox understanding of the Trinity has great implications for leadership. If the social Trinity is a more accurate representation, then leadership within the missional community needs to be more plural and inclusive.⁴ These aspects of the missional imagination on congregational practices and transforming leadership systems are helpful in attempting to formulate how the missional community will look like.

Cultural Engagement

To Change the World, James Davison Hunter

The thesis of this book is the antithesis of its title. Hunter's key contention is that Christians in all their diversity, cannot "change the world" in a way they desire. This is quite the irony because the great desire for many Christians is to engage the world, shape it and finally change it for the better. Hunter calls it the mandate of creation; that Christians are obliged to engage the world and pursue God's restorative purposes over all of life, individually, corporately, publicly and privately.⁵ Yet, in spite of all good intentions, Christians cannot change the world because their dominant ways of thinking about culture and cultural change are flawed. This is provocation par excellence.

³ Ibid., 131–34.

⁴ Ibid., 101–11.

⁵ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4–6.

Hunter discusses how people tend to view culture as made up of values which are found in the hearts and minds of individuals. The common way in which Christians tried to effect culture change is through the tactics of evangelism, political action and social reform. The assumption is that cultures change when people change and that if they have the courage and hold the right values, they too can change the world. This account is almost wholly mistaken according to Hunter. He goes on to show the failure of the common way and along the way, refutes Andy Crouch's culture as artifact argument as operating on a framework of market populism. He lays out eleven propositions on culture and culture change. What was especially useful were his connection of culture with power and elite networks and his differentiation between the "center" and "periphery" of cultural production. In summary, cultures are endlessly complex and profoundly resistant to intentional change. World-changing occurs when ideas are dynamically embedded in very powerful institutions, networks, interests and symbols operating near or in the center and in common purpose.⁶

Since culture and culture change is invariably tied in with power, Hunter sets out to rethink about power. It is interesting to read about the power and politics in America and the antagonistic stances taken by the Christian Right, the Christian Left and the Neo-Anabaptists as they attempt to impose their values in their engagement with the larger culture. Three paradigms for culture engagement emerge which Hunter details and finds each falling short. They are "defensive against," "relevant to" and "purity form." Hunter masterfully weaves in his suggestion of a new alternative which he calls a theology of "faithful presence." In this paradigm, Christians are to incarnate Christ, not only to model

⁶ Ibid., 44.

shalom but to be the *shalom* of God for others.⁷ It is an expression of the Christian's divine nature since humankind is created in God's image. This call to live toward the well-being of others is to all, not just within the community of faith. It is disarmingly simple, yet provides a challenge to our dominant ways of cultural engagement by the Church.

The posture in which the Church takes with its engagement with the world is important. If the Church sees itself as the builder and protector of Christian culture, it could possibly lead to some Nietzschean self-aggrandizing tendencies. On the other hand, if culture making is possible only through cultural artifacts as Crouch asserts, then the Church would need to be busy with cultural goods production. We have seen how evangelicals have tried to catch the winds of mainstream culture, copy it and produce a whole range of new cultural goods such as books, magazines, radio, contemporary Christian music, Christian television and Bible studies for a peripheral subculture. However, if the missional imagination is about the Church as sign, instrument and foretaste of God's Reign, then Hunter's theology of faithful presence is the right step in engagement. Here, the Church's interaction with the world is not rooted in its desire to change it, but rather an expression of a desire to honor God, a manifestation of loving obedience to him, and a fulfillment of God's command to love our neighbor. In as much as Christians acknowledge the Rule of God in all aspects of their lives, their engagement with the world is a proclamation of the *shalom* that is to come. At root, this theology of

⁷ Ibid., 229.

faithful presence begins with their acknowledgement of God’s faithful presence to them and that his call is to be faithfully present to him in return.⁸

Missional Church Planting

Planting Churches in the 21st Century, Murray Stuart

As suggested by its subtitle, this is a guide book on church planting. The focus is strategic and practical, rather than theological. It seeks to address issues church planters and those who deploy them face.⁹ Murray spent twelve years as an urban church planter and was subsequently director of a church planting course at Spurgeon’s College, London. He also founded Urban Expression, a church-planting agency with teams in London, Glasgow, Manchester and the Netherlands.

Murray starts by detailing the church-planting efforts in the 1990s in Britain and the problems it ran into as well as the emerging church expressions that were gaining traction at the time of writing. For him, church-planting is more than evangelism and success is not a number game. He looks to Andrew Walls’ “indigenizing and pilgrim principles” for the church. The missionary task is to encourage the emergence of indigenous churches in every culture and also challenge dimensions of the culture that are not consistent with the values of God’s Kingdom. In Christendom, the gospel was inculturated but compromised. The church has to be both “attractional” and

⁸ See Essay III, Chapter 3 and 4. Hunter, 225-254.

⁹ Stuart Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 110.

“incarnational” versus “extractional” and “impositional.”¹⁰ This requires the need to identify and affirm the social and cultural contexts the church is in and also offer and live out countercultural values that shape Christians as the people of God.

In the next seven chapters, Murray takes a practical approach answering the why, how, where, when, what, who and what next for church-planting. Each chapter ends with a series of thought-provoking questions for the church-planter or would-be church-planter and sending agency to consider. The strength of the book is that it tries to be as comprehensive as possible and allows for reflection and assessment on one’s approach and methods in various church-planting contexts. The weakness is that its content is still derived mainly from the British church-planting context. Adjustments will be needed before it can be transferred to other contexts for example, the Asian urban setting in this project.¹¹ The second challenge is that because it tries to be as wide-ranging as possible, many of the scenarios described are not relevant to one’s specific situation. The material presented seems more like an academic course wanting to cover as much ground on the topic of church-planting within a Western/British paradigm.

In answering the why for church-planting, Murray gives eighteen reasons out of which four fits well into this doctoral project: planting in new housing developments, planting to disciple new Christians, planting to reach the unchurched and planting fresh expressions of the Church. Of the many church planting models described in the “how” chapter, only two models are relevant; the church planter and mission team methods. Regarding where to plant the church, it is interesting that Murray provides five options;

¹⁰ Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 195.

¹¹ Murray is aware of this limitation, see *ibid.*, Kindle: Chapter 7, Location 1877.

domestic space, public space, sacred space, social space and virtual space. Initially, this project seeks to plant only within the domestic space. Further reflection and lessons learnt from the first attempt allow for the possibility to move to a public space as the church develops progressively. The social space can be used to establish friendships with non-Christians within the housing development of this missional community. There may be a need for a virtual presence in the future but not during the initial formation.

The next chapter provides advice when starting a church plant. It comes from two perspectives; that of churches planting churches and mission agencies planting churches. Since this is more of an organic church-plant, the considerations are quite different. Nevertheless, it helps to clarify certain expectations for the planting team for this doctoral project. The “what” chapter asks what kind of church is being planted. It looks into whether the church is a clone; by whom and for whom is the church-plant for and understanding of what is the church. The “who” chapter provides insights into the selection criteria for the church planter and the church planting team. It also looks into the training of the team. The final chapter “what next” describes the phase on what to do when the church is finally planted. Interestingly, it details when things go well and also when things go badly. These considerations are very practical and helpful.

For Murray, church planting, “is an unusual opportunity to reimagine church, experiment with new patterns and practices, integrate missional and ecclesial dimensions, review inherited traditions and assumptions, configure the relationship between gospel and culture in fresh ways, and pioneer on behalf of the wider church. The point is not to introduce changes for the sake of change but to grapple with the ecclesial implications of

our changing mission context.”¹² This resonates well with the thrust of this project, an experiment with ecclesial implications for the Singapore context.

Discipleship and Spiritual Formation

Subversive Spirituality, L. Paul Jensen

Paul Jensen seeks to show a correlation between inward spirituality and outward mission in both the historical and current context of space and time. His thesis is twofold: first, that empowered inward spirituality expressed in creating time and space for God through solitary and communal spiritual practices correlates with transforming outward mission – expressed in word and deed; and second, that because of the cultural collapse of space and time, postmodern mission requires the church to subvert these temporal-spatial codes by devoting more plentiful space and time to spiritual practices in her structures of mission, church and leadership development.¹³

Jensen starts by looking at classifications and definitions of spiritual disciplines and mission. He establishes two dimensions of spirituality and mission: that as from above and that as from below. He further makes a distinction of mission as centrifugal, that is, outward direction of the missionary or mission community towards and into the population; and centripetal, that is, movement of individuals or groups towards the missionary or mission community. Next, he explores the collapse of time and space to show the detrimental effects it has for spiritual formation. He then canvasses the history of culture and spiritual practices, looking into rhythms of spirituality and mission of Jesus,

¹² Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 6, Location 1560.

¹³ Jensen, *Subversive Spirituality*, 4,5.

the early church, the modern age and the postmodern age. He concludes with his model for Christian spirituality and mission and shows how the collapse of space and time causes God, God's grace and initiative to fade into the background.¹⁴ What are left in churches are only the practices and structures of spirituality and mission. By subversive spirituality, Jensen calls the Church to undermine this status quo by creating sustained time and space for secret and corporate prayer practiced in fresh ways. The goal of this subversive action is not only for the disciple to be in God's presence, in solitude, and in community but as a foundation for engagement with the world.

While Jensen's work is not written in the context of starting a ministry or is a how-to guide to incorporate spirituality in the church, it is important to this project in a number of ways. Firstly, the spiritual damages done due to the collapse of space and time is not being recognized. In Singapore, people live in a pressure-cooker environment and are badly infected with hurry sickness. Space is a prized commodity as land is scarce and population density is one of the highest in the world. Singaporeans pride themselves as competitive and efficient. The world is being incorporated into the way church is run. Calendars are filled as Christians want to do more for the Lord. So they organize more programs and outreaches. Whatever time church members have left from their hectic work schedule, they are squeezed further by the churches. Instead of being a safe sanctuary of God's presence, such activist stances have contributed to the space-time compression. The linkage between inward spirituality and outward transforming mission is thus an important consideration for starting this missional community.

¹⁴ Jensen's model for Christian spirituality and mission can be found in page 271 and the truncated version due to the effect of the collapse of space and time found in page 276. This model helps us to see how our spirituality and mission are driven from below if we do not spend time to connect with God from above. Ibid, 271,276.

Secondly, is the question on how to undertake the subversive spirituality as espoused by Jensen. Given the cultural bubble that Singapore is in, what can be done to undermine the status quo to create sustained time and space for solitude and community? Without Jensen, the model would be to engage the world from below and not create sufficient space and time to be connected with God from above. There is therefore a need to resist the temporal-spatial codes and create unhurried time and open space for God. This has great implication for the incorporation of spirituality and spiritual formation in the discipleship and life in the community.

Thirdly, Jensen's model and classification of practices into normative, practices in polarity and optional practices are helpful.¹⁵ His recommendations provide ideas on how to create the rhythms of life both personally and corporately so that outward mission flows out of inward spirituality.¹⁶ This will involve intentional choices and programming. The community's calendar must include those daily, weekly, monthly, annual and occasional rhythms that Jensen recommends. More can be done with less and the focus should be on the content of faith rather than activities. Discipleship must include mentoring relationships, meditative prayer, silence retreats and communal participation in sacraments and worship.

¹⁵ Jensen's classification of these three kinds of practices is found in Table 36. Practices in polarity are innovations and contextualization as Christianity spread from Palestine into new cultures. Opposites were present and there is great fluidity in the practices between the poles. Polarities for subversive spirituality include: solitary-communal, eremitic-cenobitic, listening-speaking, consolation-desolation, culture affirming-culture denying and spontaneous-liturgical. Polarities for transforming mission include: kerygmatic word-deed; suffering love-prophetic; centrifugal-centripetal, indigenous-pilgrim and culture affirming-culture denying. See *ibid.*, 273–74.

¹⁶ His recommendations for making spirituality the ethos of mission and ministry structures include discernment retreats, rhythms of life (daily, weekly, monthly, annual and occasional) practices, the Lord's supper and affective contemplation of the cross, spiritual mentors for the next generations, spiritual reading, biblical story, meditation and theological reflection, justice and compassion for the marginalized, contemplative evangelism, ecological engagement and twelve steps recovery. See *ibid.*, 277–83.

Fourthly, Jensen's distinction of mission as centrifugal and centripetal enables mission to be seen in a more comprehensive way. There is movement in both directions; the church into the world and the world into the church. With the missional church imagination, there has been quite a lot of disparaging against the attractional church model. Jensen's treatments of the rhythms of Jesus in Luke, the early church in Acts and the early church fathers showed these rhythms are not linear but inter-related and enmeshed. The church will need to be both missional and attractional.

Envisioning Missional Replicability

Organic Leadership, Neil Cole

Neil Cole calls for a radical re-thinking on the ecclesiastical practices of the church in particular towards leadership and leadership development. He writes in a polemic way decrying the failure of the institutional church and advocating an organic response to how to do church. As with many trailblazers, there is a tendency to stretch his arguments to one extreme. The truth is always somewhere in the middle. It can come across as institutional church bashing and an unrestrained bias towards his vein of ministry. Some of his arguments are superficial, with an overgeneralization of the present church malaises and setting up straw men to knock down. He also draws more from observations, experiences and inferences rather than theological or biblical sources.

The book is divided into 5 parts. The first looks into the issues why organic leadership is not emerging, the second focuses on how healthy leadership can emerge, the third shares some scriptural principles, the fourth presents practical leadership development practices and the fifth provides resources and examples. In the introduction,

Cole described spiritually plateaued leadership and its impacts. The next seven chapters are the most provocative as he details the weeds that have infiltrated the garden of Christian leadership. He deals with the issues of being institutionalized, the corruption of leadership characters, legalistic leadership, monopolization of truths, hierarchical chains of command, false views of reality and parasitic ministries. When I first read Cole, I was still in professional clergy and found myself agreeing very much with Cole on his depiction of the ills that plagued the institutional church. Now that I am a few years into the missional church imagination, having left “full-time ministry,” joined the marketplace and started an organic church, I must say some of his ideas appears idealistic and need contextual adaptation in order to be of practical use. For example, Cole calls into question the importance of the Sunday church service.¹⁷ He proposes a flat structure where everyone is led by Jesus.¹⁸ In addition, he denigrates paid full-time pastors.¹⁹ I think it is not an either-or situation, it is both-and. God works in a multitude of ways and humans are greatly diverse.

Nevertheless, Cole’s approach and arguments have great implications and applications in this study. He sees the church as a spiritual family rather than a religious

¹⁷ Cole puts forth a very good point questioning why churches place so much importance on the Sunday service. I have tried to do away with Sunday services and realised that people still have an expectation for some sort of service where the Word is preached or taught even in home settings. Most churches in Singapore and Asia function both with Sunday services and expected participation in small group gatherings. See Neil Cole, *Organic Leadership: Leading Naturally Right Where You Are*, reprint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 61–68.

¹⁸ Cole asks the question who is in charge? It cannot be Jesus and our designated leaders. If people no longer look to their leaders but to the Head, we would be operating in New Testament pattern and all structures will fade into irrelevance. I think this is either too naïve or idealistic. See *ibid.*, 95–96.

¹⁹ Who should be paid? For Cole, it is only Apostles and widows. Preachers and teachers are entitled to an honorarium, not full-time salary. For pastors, he skirts the issue by saying it is beyond the scope of this chapter. See *ibid.*, 282-291.

event. He was right to point out how Christian leaders inevitably create codependency with their congregants and keep them in the dark by feeding them with regurgitated truths rather than teaching them to feed themselves. He asks for a return to the priesthood of all believers and explains how the false dichotomies between secular versus sacred and clergy versus laity have not served the church well. Professional pastors have become a separate class of Christians, elevated to a higher stature. The DNA of the organic kingdom stands for “Divine Truth, Nurturing Relationship and Apostolic Mission.”²⁰ The smallest possible unit of the church is made up of two or three disciples in relation with God, in relation to one another and on mission. It is simple, uncluttered, powerful and replicable.

The strength of the book is also found in Cole’s plans for organic leadership development. Cole alludes to the recruitment paradigm in filling leadership gaps in most churches. He proposes the farming or reproduction method which requires an intentional discipleship process where leaders are developed organically. It will take time and rather than loading the person on the cerebral side, it calls for a need-based, person-based and obedience-oriented training. He provides practical tools for mentoring and explains the process required for developing leaders who develop other leaders. He distills the difference between delegated authority and distributed authority and contends for a decentralized structure in organizing the church. God’s Kingdom is counterintuitive, opposite of what is normative. His section on the upside-down kingdom and the downward mobility of Christ is inspiring. In a day when top leaders are seen as indispensable, the true servant leader must aspire to be the very opposite; and that is to

²⁰ Ibid., 91.

equip others so that he or she is no longer necessary. For leaders desiring a new paradigm of doing church, Cole's call is to "lead, follow and get out of the way."²¹

The Permanent Revolution, Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim

This book is so titled to convey the idea that the Church that Jesus intended is to be a "permanent revolution," never meant to settle down and become a civil religion. Christians are designed to be the world-transforming agents of the Kingdom and have the built-in capacities for ongoing renewal of theology and practice.²² To achieve this, Hirsch and Catchim propose a missional ecclesiology based on the apostolic missionary strategy set out by Paul in Ephesians 4:11. They argue that the five-fold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers, known by the acronym APEST, are essential for the formation of authentic and faithful witnessing congregations. This emphasis is linked with a strong critique of Western Christendom's reduction of these essential functions to the last two: pastors (or shepherds) and teachers. Especially crucial is the recovery of the apostolic vocation, known for its entrepreneurial drive, to take the church into new contexts. The authors use an interdisciplinary recipe of theology, sociology, leadership and management theories, psychology and organizational development to drive home their arguments.²³

The first part of the book outlines the roles that each of the five-fold ministry gifts plays in the body of Christ and how they complement one another. The authors argue for

²¹ Ibid., 175–83.

²² Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*, first edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), Kindle: Introduction, Location 896.

²³ Ibid., Kindle: Preface, Location 516.

the recovery of the APE (apostles, prophets, evangelists) functions in the church. The genius of the church is in the distributed intelligence when all vocations come together. The second part looks into the role of the apostle in depth. The authors find no basis in Scripture for the apostolic ministry to be eliminated. They assert that apostles, then and now, have an irreplaceable purpose in maintaining ongoing missional capacities, generating new forms of ecclesia and working for the continual renewing of the church.²⁴ The Scripture, though central and important was never meant to replace the apostles as purported by many traditional interpretations. Using Paul as a prototype, the apostle can be viewed as a planter, architect, foundation layer, father and ambassador. He is also a pioneer, a change agent, a networker and an entrepreneur. Hirsch and Catchim contrast the apostolic ministry of Paul and Peter and conclude that both are needed. Paul was a pioneer and Peter was a miner. Paul extended the mission while Peter reframed the identity and mission of the church.

Applying modern organizational theories, Hirsch and Catchim postulate that APE types (apostles, prophets and evangelists) will dominate in the early phases of a movement but soon need to integrate with shepherd and teacher types.²⁵ After which, desiring stability, the shepherd and teacher types will push out the APE types. Recognizing this, it is thus important to allow APE types to occupy strategic roles in the organization so that they can exert a generative influence and help revitalize the organization before decline set in. APEST leadership, therefore, is an absolute necessity for the missional church and missional movements.

²⁴ Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 5: Location 3156.

²⁵ Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 7, Location 4223.

This book helps to frame the missional community in this project within a larger purpose for replicability and movement. From the outset, the apostolic strategy must be focused on the calling and forming of communities that would continue the witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ that had brought them into being. Practical ideas and personal assessments were provided for those starting missional communities. Connection to best practices in management and organizational theories were also given on how to structure the organization for empowerment and release.²⁶

What was found lacking is the inadequate exegesis to Ephesians 4, especially when the whole argument of the book hinges on it. The relationship of Ephesian 4 as office gifts in relation to other lists of spiritual gifts was not developed. Hirsch and Catchim call the Church to bring back the five-fold ministry especially the role of the apostle. This is admirable and they claim a lack of writings in this area. However, what they propose is many years behind where the Pentecostal and charismatic churches have been. Personally, I came from an Assemblies of God background in Singapore. We were taught very early in our Christian walk to operate spiritual gifts in our life and ministry. The church I was in acknowledges people with prophetic gifts though we shy away from giving them the title of a prophet.²⁷ It was very obvious our pastor functioned at an apostolic level; rallying people, connecting networks and planting churches all over the

²⁶ Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 10, Location 5867. Some examples are Miller's organizational cycles and Brafman and Beckstrom's "The Starfish and the Spider".

²⁷ Within the Assemblies of God, persons are not recognized by the title of apostle or prophet. However, many within the church exercise the ministry function of apostles and prophets. Apostolic functions usually occur within the context of breaking new ground in unevangelized areas or among unreached people. The planting of over 225,000 churches worldwide since 1914 in the Assemblies of God could not have been accomplished unless apostolic functions had been present. See Assemblies of God (USA) Official Web Site, "Apostles and Prophets (Official A/G Position Paper)," <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Topics-Index/Apostles-and-Prophets>, (accessed August 29, 2018).

world.²⁸ We never had a sense that he was that one-dimensional super-pastor with dominion theology that Hirsch and Catchim allude to. Similarly, APEST should not be used only to identify the leadership team in Pentecostal and Charismatics churches. The gifts are given to all. There is a need to desire the greater gifts though not everyone will have an apostolic or prophetic calling (1 Cor 12:28-31). These being said, it is heartening to hear from Hirsch and Catchim coming from mainstream evangelicalism to be advocating for a return of the role of apostles in the church today.

In this chapter, six books that informed the basis of this doctoral project were reviewed. Together, they provide many of the theological underpinnings for the missional church conversation and for this project. They enabled ideas for starting the missional community and helped formalize approaches for engagement with non-Christians. Internal processes for discipleship, spirituality and leadership within the community were clarified as well as strategies to ensure structures of replicability were gathered. The next step is to synthesize these ideas, processes and plans for implementation within the Singaporean context. This will be detailed in chapter four. The next chapter discusses a theology for missional communities.

²⁸ My wife and I were privileged to have served as staff under Pastor Rick Seaward. He was a visionary apostolic leader who died recently in a car crash in Brazil doing what he loved best; mobilizing pastors, leaders and members for mission. The movement that he created helped plant 10,000 churches in 93 countries. We played our part as missionaries, sent out by the church; for me to China and my wife to Australia before we were married. See Fabian Koh, "Founder of Singapore's First Megachurch Dies in Brazil Car Crash," *The Straits Times*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/founder-of-spores-first-megachurch-dies-in-brazil-car-crash> (accessed August 30, 2018).

CHAPTER 3

A THEOLOGY FOR MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

Theological Foundations for a Missional Church

The missional church imagination is primarily a theological reorientation of the true nature of the Church and its mission. Guder describes it as “a profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission.”¹ It seeks to replace the “ecclesiocentric understanding of mission” of the past. Being a three-way conversation between the Gospel, the Church and the World/Culture, it enlivens the interactions between the three and imagines what it means to be the Church in today’s pluralistic society.²

Recapturing the essence of “the mission of God” or “*missio Dei*” is the basic tenet of the missional church conversation. Mission is being understood as being derived from the very nature of God. To quote David Bosch, “Mission is not primarily an activity of

¹ Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, reprint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 4.

² Alan J. Roxburgh, “What is Missional Church? An Introduction to the Missional Church Conversation,” Handout received in “Exploring the Contours of Ministry,” Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February 2013, 8.

the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God.”³ The Church is not God’s mission; Jesus did not come into the world to save the Church. Rather, the Church is God’s means to fulfilling his mission. As Alan Roxburgh puts it, the missional church is not about the Church.⁴ It is not the Church of God that has a mission. It is the God of mission that has a Church.⁵ God is not interested in getting more and more people into the institution of the Church. Instead, the Church is to be God’s hands and feet in accomplishing God’s mission. As advocated by Alan Hirsch, the Church must “defines itself and organizes its life around its real purpose of being an agent of God’s mission to the world.”⁶ For him, the Church’s true and authentic organizing principle is mission.

There are, however, some misunderstandings on what the missional church is all about. It is certainly not an evangelistic program, an advocacy for foreign missions, a method for church growth or a new way of doing church. What was more troubling was that the missional language was now being used for almost everything the Church was already doing. The missional church is not a new label for old ideas.⁷ To describe the Church as missional would be making a theological claim on the fundamental purpose of the Church. God has called a people into community with the purpose of sending them

³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-390.

⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One*, ed. Mark Priddy (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 220.

⁵ Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury as quoted in *ibid.*, Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 229.

⁶ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Brazos Press, 2006), 82.

⁷ Roxburgh, “What Is Missional Church? An Introduction to the Missional Church Conversation,” 4.

out as an apostolic witness for him. The Church that Jesus intended is missional by its nature.⁸ Jesus' mission for the apostles was not merely the saving of souls and their collecting into communities of the saved. The apostolic strategy was the formation of witnessing communities whose purpose was to continue the witness that brought them into existence.⁹

Trinitarian Missiology – God is a Missionary God

At the heart of the missional imagination is an understanding that the Triune God is a missionary (sending) God who sends the Church into the world to participate in God's mission – *the missio Dei*. The doctrine of Trinity claims that God is one yet the three persons; the Father, the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit are God. While this seems on the surface to be self-contradictory, the doctrine of Trinity is actually very crucial for Christianity because it concerns who God is, what he is like, how he works and how he is to be approached.¹⁰ The classical Western Trinitarian approach affirms the single divine substance of God yet expounds on the distinct roles and actions of the three persons of God. Karl Barth using this framework reclaimed the meaning of “mission” within the interrelations of God as that of sending – the Father sent the Son, and the Father and Son sent the Spirit.¹¹ For Barth, the term mission was an expression of the doctrine of Trinity; the divine sending forth of self, the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the world.

⁸ Gerhard Lohfink as quoted in Guder, “The Church as Missional Community,” 116.

⁹ Guder, “Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership after Christendom,” 256.

¹⁰ Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013), 347.

¹¹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 26.

He then extended these movements within the Trinity to include the gathering, forming and sending of the Church into the world.

This concept shifted the rationale and agency for mission away from the Church and placed them within the life of the Trinity. God is the starting point for mission, not the Church; and the Church is now understood as being the result of God's mission. There is mission because God is a missionary (sending) God.¹² In the same vein as Barth, Newbigin understood the work of the Triune God as calling and sending the Church through the Spirit into the world to participate fully in God's mission.¹³ This participation is tied to the doctrine of election.¹⁴ God's pattern through the biblical narrative is to choose the one for the sake of the many, the particular for the sake of the universal. The Church is chosen and called, not as a privilege, but as a responsibility to witness to God's purposes for all humanity. In God's words to Abraham in Genesis 12, it is blessed to be a blessing. In this theological understanding, the Church is understood to be the "hermeneutic of the gospel."¹⁵

These formulations were revolutionary; they represent a way forward in overcoming the dichotomy between the Church and mission. However, relying primarily on a Western Trinitarian emphasis carries some problems too. There is a tendency to

¹² Ibid., 27. It also meant that a theology of mission could no longer be adequately informed by drawing primarily on either ecclesiology (emphasizing the mission of the Church) or Christology (stressing human obedience to the Great Commission) as the starting point. A theology of mission required one to understand mission in relation to the Trinity.

¹³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), Kindle: Chapter 3, Location 280.

¹⁴ Ibid., See Chapter 4 and 7.

¹⁵ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 38.

view God in modalistic terms.¹⁶ The works of the Father, the Son and the Spirit are subject to being separated and individualized. As a result, one can be left with a missional church that has two under-integrated views of the work of God. One view posits a missional church shaped primarily by the message of Jesus and responsible for embodying and emulating the life that Jesus lived. The other view proposes a missional church shaped primarily by the power and presence of the Spirit, who creates, gifts, empowers and leads the Church into engaging in a series of ecclesial practices.

The way forward as proposed by Van Gelder and Zscheile is to consider the Eastern Orthodox tradition that stresses on the relational personhood of the Triune community. This view is now being referred to as the “social Trinity.”¹⁷ The social Trinity is conceived as a relational community of equality and mutuality within which the distinctive identity of each person of the Trinity is fully maintained. There is an irreducible otherness within God in relation to each person of the Trinity as Father, Son and Spirit. This deep interrelated communion of the three persons of the Trinity is often expressed by the word *perichoresis*, which refers to the mutual indwelling within the threefold nature of the Trinity. All three persons of the divine community mutually indwell one another in a relational unity while maintaining their distinct identities.

Having functional modalism leads to a more individualistic conception of the Father, Son and Spirit and downplays their relationship. This can foster views of mission as the isolated actions of individual Christians or individual churches on behalf of God, rather than the participation of the Church in the Triune God’s life and movement within

¹⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹⁷ Ibid., 54.

all creation. This sending movement from Father to Son to Spirit to Church and then to the world can result in making the Church primarily an instrument and rendering the world a mere “target” of mission. In an instrumental view, the Church primarily exists to do something; the character of its being is neglected. It is then not God who is doing something through the Church but the Church that bears the primary responsibility.¹⁸ This can be seen by those who advocate the church-centric “Great Commission” perspective and those who emphasize the incarnational approach of a life that imitates Christ.

Newbigin was careful to offer a fuller view, noting that the Church is a “sign,” “instrument” and “foretaste” of the reign of God.¹⁹ Missional ecclesiology is also representational ecclesiology.²⁰ Guder and others describe the Church’s missional vocation as that of being called and sent to represent the Reign of God.²¹ In this aspect, the Church as a concrete community is a representation of the Triune God and his wider purposes for humanity. The Eastern Orthodox emphasis of relationality is better able to capture this interdependent life of the body of Christ. As such, the Church transits from merely imitating God’s life and mission to become a community of mutual participation in God’s own life and the life of the world.

¹⁸ Ibid., 106.

¹⁹ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, Kindle: Chapter 8: Location 1523.

²⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 107.

²¹ Guder, *Missional Church*, 77-109.

The Reign (Kingdom) of God

Hans Kung contends that the Church's essence is found in its "origins in the gospel."²² As to what is the Gospel; it is Jesus himself. The Gospel is also his preaching, his announcements that the Kingdom of God is at hand. The Gospel reveals the coming Reign of God. It portrays the coming of Jesus, particularly his death and resurrection as the truly decisive eschatological event in world's history. Therefore, the Church whose origin is in the Gospel is "an eschatological community of salvation."²³

According to Ladd, the Kingdom is to be thought of as the Reign of God.²⁴ The Church, by contrast, is a realm of God, the people who are under his rule. The Kingdom is the Rule of God, whereas the Church is the human community under that rule. Jesus was both the herald and bearer of the Kingdom whose full consummation is yet to come. Thus, there are two dimensions of the Reign of God, those that are already present and those that are yet to come.

It is important that we do not confuse the Church with the Kingdom. From Matthew 18:16-19, one might infer that the Church is synonymous to the Kingdom. However, this is pressing the metaphorical language too far.²⁵ On the other hand, there is an old saying that goes "Jesus came preaching the Kingdom; what he got was the Church." This is a lie. Jesus didn't have to settle for second best and the Church is not a poor downgrade from the Kingdom. Newbigin alludes to the fact that the Church has been

²² Hans Kung as quote in *ibid.*, 85.

²³ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁴ George E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 259-260.

²⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1052.

entrusted with the “open secret” of God’s purpose.²⁶ There is thus a strong relationship between the Church and the Kingdom. Arising from Newbigin, Sutherland in his treatment of various biblical passages and in particular, Romans 8 and Ephesians 3 establish that the Church is part of God’s cosmic plan.²⁷

The nature of the relationship between the Kingdom and the Church is the key question here. For Ladd, the Church is not the Kingdom but the Kingdom creates the Church. The Church witnesses to the Kingdom and the Church is both the instrument and custodian of the Kingdom.²⁸ Others felt that Ladd made too strong a distinction between the Church and the Kingdom. For Sutherland, the Church embodies the Kingdom; its very life and being is a glimpse of the new heaven and earth.²⁹ This makes the Church a visual representation of the Kingdom and almost equates it to the Kingdom. Guder and others provided the balance when they note that it is better to use the words “receive” and “enter” rather than “building” and “extending” when talking about the Church’s role in regard to the Reign of God.³⁰ These two images of the Reign of God as a gift one receives and a realm one enters seriously restrain our cultural instincts to think of the Reign of God as something we can achieve, build or enlarge. It moves the Church’s mission from merely an activist’s viewpoint of a social or sales project to one that concerns missional identity and engagement. As the responsive community of God’s

²⁶ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, Kindle: Chapter 10, Location 2556.

²⁷ Martin Sutherland, “The Kingdom Made Visible: A Missional Theology of Church,” *Stimulus* 13, no. 1 (February 2005): 4.

²⁸ Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 259-273.

²⁹ Sutherland, “The Kingdom Made Visible,” 6. We shall look more into this under *Missio Dei*.

³⁰ Guder, *Missional Church*, 93-95.

Reign, the Church's mission must firstly be an internal mission: how the Church is evangelized by the Holy Spirit again and again in echoing the word of Jesus inviting us to receive the Reign of God and to enter it.³¹ Integral in this are the implications for Christian's calling and discipleship where daily life becomes a discipline of asking how one may receive and enter into the realm of God's Reign. Evangelism also moves from an act of recruiting or co-opting those outside the Church to an invitation for companionship in the Reign of God.

In trying to capture the Church's calling and vocation within the framework of the Reign of God, Guder and others used the word "represent": the Church represents the Reign of God.³² Both the passive and active meanings of "represent" were intended to add to our understanding of the missional calling of the Church. In its passive meaning, the Church represents the divine Reign as its sign and foretaste. The emerging multicultural Church is a foretaste of God's redeeming purpose for the world whose mystery is now revealed (Eph 2:11ff, 3:6). The Church is also a sign of God's wisdom for the cosmos (Eph 3:10). As a sign and foretaste, the Church points away from itself to what God is going to complete. In its active meaning, the Church represents the divine Reign as its agent and instrument. As its agent and instrument, the Church bears the divine Reign's authority (Mt 16:19; Jn 20:19-23), engages in the divine Reign action as its co-workers (Col 4:11) and is representative as an embassy of the divine Reign ("ambassadors for Christ" in 2 Cor 5:20).

³¹ Ibid., 96.

³² Ibid., 100.

The Reign of God with its already/not yet dimensions broaden our understanding of mission to include a more holistic understanding of God’s work in the world in sending God’s son. It reframes the necessity of obeying the Great Commission within the larger message of the Reign of God.³³ It helps keep the entire gospel in perspective and enable a deeper understanding to the redemptive work of God in the world apart from just considering individualized salvation. It also leads to an understanding of the Church as deriving from this larger redemptive work in the world – the mission of God (*missio Dei*).

Missio Dei – The Mission of God

Missio Dei is the Latin for “God’s mission” or the mission of God. Arising from Trinitarian studies, this concept asserts that God has a mission for the world. It became prominent following the Willingen conference of the International Missionary Council in 1952. Bosch expresses this theological consensus succinctly, explaining that mission is “understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It is thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit³⁴ was expanded to include yet another movement: The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit sending the Church into the world.”³⁵ In this way, the rationale for mission is shifted to God’s initiative and the Triune God is the acting subject of mission rather than the Church.

³³ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 28.

³⁴ For the Filioque controversy that led to the East-West Church split, see Got Questions Ministries, “What Is the Filioque Clause / Filioque Controversy?,” GotQuestions.org, <https://www.gotquestions.org/filioque-clause-controversy.html> (accessed May 10, 2019).

³⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

However, there were two versions of *missio Dei* that emerged: a specialized view that understood God as working in the world through a redeemed people who were called and sent, and a generalized view that understood God as working in the world beyond the Church through secular history.³⁶ In the former, the Church is viewed as the primary way in which God works in the world; while the latter makes the world the primary locus of God's mission. In the beginning, the majority at Willingen leaned to the former but subsequently, others acted on the latter understanding especially after the works of Dutch missiologist J. C. Hoekendijk. This shift is best summarized in the popular reframing of the equation from God-Church-World to God-World-Church.³⁷ With this shift came an understanding that God's agenda resides in the world and therefore it should be the agenda for the Church. In this approach, God is understood to be already present and active in the world, with the Church being responsible for discovering what God is doing and then seeking to participate in that.

Van Gelder and Zscheile in their survey of missional literature highlight two variations within both the specialized and generalized views.³⁸ Under the specialized view, the Church can be thought of "embodying" the reign of God or "witnessing" to the Reign of God. Under the generalized view, God's mission can be thought of unfolding "through" secular history or "in the midst" of secular history. These concoctions represent different nuances in the understanding of the intersections between God, the Church and the world. A third integrated view was proposed: the Church "participates" in

³⁶ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 29–30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-59.

God's continuing creation and redemptive mission. This view arising from an appreciation of the relationality of God's Triune life is the view advanced so far in this paper. A participatory understanding opens up a highly reciprocal view of the God-World-Church relationship, in which the Church shares in the Triune God's own vulnerable engagement with the world. Participation also means that Christians are invited into what God is doing and will do as God's plans and promises are brought to fulfillment in the world.

The Church's Missionary Nature

The idea that the Church is missionary by its very nature was articulated by Vatican II:³⁹ "The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Guder and others noticed that learning to speak of God as a "missionary God" naturally resulted in an understanding of the Church as a "sent people."⁴⁰ The Church is conceived as a community, a gathered people, brought together by a common calling and vocation to be a sent people rather than a place or an organization.⁴¹ In this understanding, mission is no longer just one function of the Church, but its purpose for existing.⁴²

By speaking of the Church as missionary in nature, it implies mission precedes the Church and ecclesiology must be derived from missiology. Everything that a church

³⁹ in both *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes Divinitus*.

⁴⁰ Guder, *Missional Church*, 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 78-85.

⁴² Craig Van Gelder as quoted in Stephanie Lutz Allen, "What Is Missional Church?," *Cultivate Mission*, 9. http://cultivatemission.org/pdf/What%20is%20Missional%20Church_StephLA.pdf, (accessed September 1, 2016).

does is to be understood with the purpose of equipping God's people for participation in God's mission. This approach collapses the dichotomy between Church and mission and recovers the theocentric view of mission. It recaptures the notion of mission as the responsibility of the whole Church, involving all of God's people. It also recovers theologically, the fourth characteristic of the Church mentioned in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 381).⁴³ This creed affirms belief in "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church." The last-mentioned distinctive, apostolic, asserts the Church's missional vocation.

Leadership and Discipleship Considerations

There has been an indiscriminate and uncritical acceptance of secular leadership theories and practices by many Christian leaders today. Blackaby warns that this trend toward a "CEO model" of ministry. The adoptions of secular leadership methodologies are dangerous especially when they do not measure them up against the timeless precepts of Scripture.⁴⁴ The world measures success by results. Just like how Israel was dazzled by its neighbors' grand palaces and magnificent armies and clamored for its own king, the results of functioning outside of God's ordained principles can be disastrous. It is not just about effectiveness and numbers. What is needed is an understanding of Christian principles and how it affects church leadership, the community life together and ministry praxis.

⁴³ Guder, *Missional Church*, 83.

⁴⁴ Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 9-14.

Leadership and Community within the Trinitarian God

An understanding of the Triune God is important as a model for integrating faith and work. Human work is in some sense an expression of the Triune God and therefore it is imperative to start with the Godhead.⁴⁵ As mentioned earlier, there are two ways of viewing the Trinity: the classical Western Trinitarian approach of affirming the single divine substance of God yet separating the distinct roles and actions of three persons of God and the Eastern Orthodox viewpoint of seeing the Godhead as a relational community of equality and mutuality while maintaining the distinctive identity of each person of the Trinity. Changing from a Western to an Eastern view of the Trinity does have profound implications for leadership and the community life together. Among other things, the Western viewpoint has been linked by theologians to fostered individualistic understandings of the human person, monarchical or hierarchical forms of leadership and contributed to the rise of a view in which God is not seen to be actively at work in the life of the Church or in the world.⁴⁶ The Eastern tradition, however, stresses the generative, outward-reaching love (*ekstasis*) and communion (*koinonia*) of the three persons.⁴⁷ The Trinity is seen as a community whose orientation is outward, and whose shared love spills over beyond itself. In addition, the concept of mutual indwelling within the threefold nature of the Trinity (*perichoresis*) offers rich analogies for human

⁴⁵ Human work parallels that of the creative and providential activity of the Father, the serving and redemptive work of the Son, and the charismatic and transformative work of the Spirit. See Robert J. Banks, *Reviewing Leadership (Engaging Culture): A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), Kindle: Chapter 4, Location 1661.

⁴⁶ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 103-104.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

interdependence and relational community. Here, to be a person is to participate in others' lives, to have an identity shaped by other persons, rather than to be an isolated individual.

In leadership, there is a need to navigate between the hierarchical (top-down) and egalitarian (leaderless) styles. Williams and McKibben overcome this tension by linking the former with the structure of decision making and the latter with its communication, both of which are needed for effective leadership and mutual accountability.⁴⁸ For them, the Father is the source of life within the Trinity, but all three members of the Trinity act in a unified, loving and conciliar way. Others such as Miroslav Volf insist that the Trinity does not support a hierarchical chain of command but rather a *perichoretic* and collegial approach.⁴⁹ Whichever view one takes, however, it is clear that leadership should never be authoritarian, coercive or dictatorial. Love and service, not command and control, characterize relations within the life of the Godhead.

There is also much to infer from the inter-relationality within the Trinity. Inclusiveness, community and freedom are ethical values found within the Trinity and these should characterize human relationships. The members of the Trinity work together in developing the plan of redemption, exhibiting interdependence, unity, and diversity. While there is role differentiation, the members share authority. In the same way, Stacy Reinhart argues that leadership should be multiple, not single, with shared authority.⁵⁰ It should also be relational, not hierarchical or organizational. Relationships, not positions or the task of an organization should be the key to bind leaders to followers. Mutual

⁴⁸ Banks, *Reviewing Leadership (Engaging Culture)*, Kindle: Chapter 4, Location 1737.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle: Chapter 4, Location 1661.

⁵⁰ Banks, Kindle: Chapter 4, Location 1694.

respect and interdependence are spiritual requisites of leadership. The model of leadership should be servanthood rather than mastery over others.

Jesus and Disciple-making

Many authors have looked at Jesus' as the exemplary role model for leadership. They tried to systematize him and impose their contemporary assumptions in interpreting him. For example, some have painted Jesus as a visionary leader, a successful manager or even a top salesperson. Henry Cadbury warns of the perils of modernizing Jesus.⁵¹ Modern society is fixated with outcomes and success. People live in organizational cultures with a managerial mindset. However, Jesus' life was not as strategized or as organized as one tends to think. In fact, many of the things that Jesus did and taught run counter to the values of modern culture. Cole calls it the upside-down kingdom and spoke of the downward mobility of Christ.⁵² Many of Christ's actions such as his self-sacrifice, his inversion of the power scale, his confrontations with authority and his deference for divine timing would find them hard for applications in today's organizations, whether Christian or not.

Similarly, Christians miss the point when they think that adopting Jesus' methodology is the key to spiritual leadership. It is not. The key to Jesus' leadership was the relationship he had with the Father.⁵³ The salvation plan requires his lowly birth, his excruciating crucifixion, his resurrection and ultimately his ascension. This plan was the Father's, not the Son's. Jesus did not come to develop a plan or cast a vision. He followed

⁵¹ Banks, Kindle: Chapter 4, Location 1617.

⁵² Cole, *Organic Leadership*, 184–95.

⁵³ Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 24–26.

the Father's plan. He sought only to please his Father and do nothing apart from him (Jn 5:19-20). Spiritual leaders must be connected to the Father and be a good follower.

The Bible is explicit about Jesus' total reliance on the Holy Spirit. It was through the Spirit that he was conceived (Lk 1:35), began his ministry (Lk 3:22), led to the wilderness to be tempted (Lk 4:1), anointed to preach (Lk 4:18), casted out demons (Mt 12:28), performed miracles (Acts 10:38) and ultimately risen back to life (Rom 8:11). What is more, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his followers (Jn 14:16, 26, 16:7, 13, Acts 1:4- 8). The Spirit was to take Jesus' place on earth, be their comforter and teacher and empower their witness. Having the Holy Spirit is an absolute necessity for spiritual leadership.⁵⁴ Leaders must be Spirit-led; after all, spiritual enterprises require spiritual resources.

It is interesting that if one were to measure Jesus' leadership based on present-day conventions, he would be deemed a failure. He had no results to show; the crowds and his disciples deserted him and he ultimately paid for his vision with his life. Yet, it was his counter-intuitive way of living that started the greatest movement in the world, the Church. Mark 3:14 tells of how he appointed the Twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out. Jesus took the rabbinic model of discipleship and expanded it. He lived with his disciples for extended periods of time. He trained the Twelve in the experience of a loving community. His style of discipleship was centered on relationships and intensive relational modeling. In referring to the Twelve, he used endearing terms such as "my brothers" (Mt 12:49; 28:10; John 20:17), "children" (Mk 10:24), "friends"

⁵⁴ Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1993), 201-4.

(Jn 15:15; 21:5) and “my friends” (Lk 12:4) rather than “disciples.”⁵⁵ His was a learning community and it was in the security of this context that the men were able to share their hearts and have their hearts shaped by Jesus.⁵⁶

Jesus did not form a school; he majored on developing close relationships. He selected his disciples, associated with them, instructed them and sent them out to serve.⁵⁷ He modeled what he taught and this proximity between tutor and apprentices was a potent force for all learning.⁵⁸ Jesus was a master coach.⁵⁹ He gave the disciples a vision larger than themselves. He was open to their ideas and was transparent before them. He believed in them and held them accountable when they strayed. He spent time with them and set an example for them. He prayed for them and kept urging them on. He asked great questions. The Gospel of Mark alone recorded fifty-seven questions.

There were many things that Jesus’ did and taught. By looking at Jesus, one begins to know who God is and what he is like. Many principles can be derived just by studying Jesus’ words and deeds.⁶⁰ However, some has taken his discipleship of the Twelve as a divine model and apply it to church structure and governance. This can lead to a

⁵⁵ Rowland Forman and Bruce Miller, *The Leadership Baton: An Intentional Strategy for Developing Leaders in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), Kindle: Chapter 5, Location 1137.

⁵⁶ Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 60.

⁵⁷ LeRoy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 27-36.

⁵⁸ Roy Zuck, *Teaching As Jesus Taught* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2002), 69.

⁵⁹ Steve Ogne and Tim Roehl, *TransforMissional Coaching* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2008), 62–64.

⁶⁰ For example, Bob Logan derived seven principles in his study of the deeds of Jesus. See Robert E. Logan and David DeVries, *The Missional Journey: Multiplying Disciples and Churches That Transform the World* (Bellevue, WA: Missional Challenge, 2013), Kindle: Chapter 2, Location 486-650.

hierarchical and pyramidal scheme of discipleship and authority.⁶¹ Blackaby is right to caution against using it as a matter of strategy or formula in the number.⁶² He argues that the choosing of the Twelve was the Father's idea. Luke 6:12-13 tells of how Jesus spent the entire night in prayer before choosing them. Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17:6-7 indicates that Jesus had twelve disciples simply because that was what his Father had given him. If it were about implementing a discipleship strategy, Judas would not be included. He was given to Jesus because it was part of the Father's redemptive plan. Discipleship should not become a man-made system. Similarly, it is important to be aware of and guard against any over-controlling tendency in disciple-making.⁶³

Paul's Strategy for Leadership Development and Multiplication

Much of the praxis of the Church came from the writings of Paul. As someone who had planted churches and led mission teams, he practiced leadership on a wide range of situations. Contrary to popular beliefs, Paul was neither authoritarian nor hierarchical in his leadership orientation. He was not the alpha male with a take-charge personality that some had made him out to be. This could be seen by the language of leadership used

⁶¹ For example, the G12 movement conceived by Pastor Cesar Castellanos of Columbia. The G12 model was widely propagated in Singapore about 20 years ago. Two large churches, Faith Community Baptist Church (FCBC) and Victory Family Centre (VFC) adopted the model and restructured their entire church around G12 concepts. The cell group structure which was an integral part to the success of these churches were disbanded and reorganized into net groups along gender lines. Families and spouses were split up to attend different groups which was not the cultural norms in Singapore. Despite much effort, the G12 movement was not successful in Singapore.

⁶² Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 27.

⁶³ For example, the Shepherding Movement of the 1970s in the US. See Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others Into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership*, 2 edition (Columbus, OH: New Paradigm Publishing, 2012), Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 517.

in his epistles.⁶⁴ He seldom used terms related to formal power or organization. Of the three dozen terms used of people in leadership positions, the only high ranking one Paul used was in reference to Christ (Col 1:18). He also rarely used the word “authority.” When he did use in two places in reference to himself (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10), it was not an exertion of authority over others but an appeal to reestablish his apostolic link. Paul drew heavily from several metaphors from family life. He described himself as a father to his offspring in the faith (1 Cor 4:14-15; 2 Cor 12:14; 1 Thes 2:11), as a mother who suffer labor pains (Gal 4:19) and as a nurse who cares for her charges (1 Thes 2:7; 1 Cor 3:2). These metaphors emphasized his affectionate relationship with his converts and his sense of responsibility towards them.

Interestingly, even in his instructions to the Corinthians on the need for orderliness, Paul never suggested that it was the role of one or a few people to regulate the gatherings. When the churches gathered, Paul expected a highly participatory and charismatic process. What happens originated in the Spirit and it was everyone’s responsibility to discern and share what the Spirit was saying (1 Cor 12:7-11; 14:28, 30, 32). The task did not rest on one person or a leadership team even if certain people played a more prominent role in shaping what took place (1 Cor 12:10; 14:30). In general, Paul focused on effective functioning rather than appointed positions in churches.⁶⁵ This could be seen by the use of verbs rather than nouns when referring to those making the contributions (for example, Gal 6:6; 1 Thes 5:12; 1 Cor 11:19). Paul also did not make any status distinctions. In his letters, the language of servanthood predominates. He

⁶⁴ Banks, *Reviewing Leadership (Engaging Culture)*, Kindle: Chapter 2, Location 585-618.

⁶⁵ Banks, Kindle: Chapter 2, Location 618-651.

desacralized and democratized the role of the priesthood to all New Testament believers.⁶⁶

The question remains as to what to make of Paul's references to elders, overseers and deacons. Bank and Ledbetter contend that these were not appointed positions based on individual qualifications. Instead, they were the church community's recognition of a group of people based on the quality of the ministry that they were already engaged in.⁶⁷ Frank Viola points out that one of the most dynamic features of Paul's church planting ministry was his consistent subjection to other Christians.⁶⁸ Paul was never an authoritarian figure. He motivates by persuasion rather than by command.⁶⁹ Similarly, Paul's associates such as Timothy and Titus did not have a settled and official role in the congregations. They had an ambassadorial and an exemplary one. Their authority was only functional and derived based on the ministry they had undertaken.⁷⁰ Paul himself functioned more like a collegial leader in the mission teams. He operated in a highly consultative manner and described his companions as "coworkers" (Phil 2:25) and

⁶⁶ The language of priesthood appears only metaphorically in Paul's writings, never of a literal person or group but in regard to the collective church in a wide range of devotional, compassionate, financial and evangelistic activities. See *ibid.*, Kindle: Chapter 2, Location 630.

⁶⁷ Apart from the pastoral epistles, the term "elders" does not appear in Paul's writing. They refer to older, respected Christians who probably had a corporate responsibility for a cluster of churches in a city. The word "overseer" occurs just once and in the plural (Phil 1:1), serving as a description rather than a title. The book of Acts describes the laying on of hands in various ministry situations suggesting a community's involvement in choosing or recognizing specific people for specific tasks including leadership. See *ibid.*, Kindle: Chapter 2, Location 641.

⁶⁸ Frank Viola, *Finding Organic Church: A Comprehensive Guide to Starting and Sustaining Authentic Christian Communities*, New edition (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 99.

⁶⁹ You find him "urging", "beseeching", "pleading", "appealing" and "asking" rather than issuing authoritarian decrees. See Viola, 100.

⁷⁰ Banks, *Reviewing Leadership (Engaging Culture)*, Kindle: Chapter 2, Location 684-729.

“brothers” (Acts 18:18). They had a ministry in their own right and were not merely extensions of him and his work.

Neil Cole examines Paul’s missionary methods and demonstrates that Paul improved his effectiveness with each journey by focusing more energy on mentoring and multiplying leadership.⁷¹ In his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-14:28), Paul and Barnabas went from town to town, preaching the gospel and making disciples. Some of Paul’s most influential apprentices were saved during this time, including Timothy (Acts 16:1), Gaius (Acts 20:4), Luke, and Titus (Gal 2:1-3). However, the work was mostly addition growth and the churches that were left behind needed significant follow-up work (Acts 14:21-23; 15:36; 16:1-5; 18:23). Before they could start on the same strategy, God sovereignly implemented a dramatic shift. Paul and Barnabas disagreed on the suitability of John Mark (Acts 15:36-41) and two partners split into two teams. It was a strategy that released multiplication which Paul would later learn.

On his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22), Paul took Silas and recruited others such as Timothy and Luke. They began with the same traveling evangelist method but God forced Paul into multiplying church planting strategy by orchestrating him to be all alone in one of the darkest cities at that time, Corinth. Paul was discouraged and frightened but Jesus came to him in a vision to encourage him to keep on speaking for there is a harvest to be reaped in the city. As a result, Paul settled there for one and a half year, teaching the word of God (Acts 18:9-11). This marked a dramatic shift in Paul’s methodology. He raised a team from out of the harvest and sent

⁷¹ Neil Cole, “A Fresh Perspective on Paul’s Missionary Strategies: The Mentoring for Multiplication Model,” Article received in "Transforming Your Leadership Development," Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, March 2014, 1.

them out to start new works. This can be seen by how Paul mentored Aquila and Priscilla who were used by God not only in Corinth but also in Syria (Acts 18:18), Rome (Rom 16:3) and Ephesus (Acts 18:19-28). Instead of producing a church, Paul was now producing a missionary team who would produce churches throughout the empire. In addition, Aquila and Priscilla led Apollos to faith in Christ and mentored him in the same manner that Paul had done for them (Acts 18:24-28). This further shows the multiplying effect of Paul's influence. Other apprentices trained by Paul at Corinth include Stephanas, Aristarchus, Sosthenes, Erastus, Fortunatus, Achaicus, Sopater, Secundus, Epaphroditus, Clement, Crispus, and perhaps Syzygus and Tertius.

On his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:16), Paul invested himself completely to the task of mentoring and multiplying leaders from the harvest who could be deployed back into the harvest. When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he first set up ministry in the synagogue and later at the school of Tyrannus where he mentored his disciples for two years (Acts 19:1-10). Altogether, Paul stayed at Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31) during which Ephesus became the mother church of all the churches of Asia Minor. Cole points out that Paul had never actually met the Colossian and Laodicean churches personally (Col 2:1).⁷² It seems that Paul had sent Epaphras whom he had trained at Ephesus to start these works. Apparently, Epaphras was not the only one. Other leaders whom Paul raised up at Ephesus include Philemon, Trophimus, Tychicus, Archippus, Nympha, Apphia and perhaps Artemas and Onesiphorus.

Cole further identifies seven strategic objectives that Paul implemented while at Ephesus. They are: 1) Paul established a regional base of church planter development

⁷² Ibid., 7.

(Acts 19:9, 20:18); 2) Paul implemented a teaching/mentoring strategy by life example, both in large gatherings and small groups (Acts 20:19-20); 3) Paul integrated evangelism into the spiritual formation of his disciples as a foundation for training leaders for ministry (Acts 20:21); 4) Paul released the power of God's word in people's lives to carry the grassroots movement of multiplication (Acts 19:20); 5) Paul gave the Holy Spirit His rightful place in leading his disciples into ministry (Acts 20:28); 6) Paul mentored individuals on a one-to-one basis (Acts 20:31) and 7) Paul empowered his leaders with accountability to God for the work that he modeled for them, so that his presence wasn't needed for the work to continue after him (Acts 20:32).⁷³

Paul had one final recorded journey and that was his imprisonment from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 21:17- 28:31). His arrest even proved to be a great progress for the gospel. He was able to reach lost people he otherwise could never have reached. His appeal brought him such reputation that many came to hear him. From his house arrest, he was able to pen a few epistles and send out workers to the churches. Paul continued to mentor all those who came to visit him and released them to ministry. In this way, Paul multiplied himself many times over and was effective in reaching the Gentile world.

Integrating Culture and Contexts

The question of how the church is to engage culture lies at the heart of the missional imagination. Since its publication, H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* has framed nearly every conversation in this area. Niebuhr outlines five possible relationships between Christ and culture: Christ against culture, the Christ of culture,

⁷³ Cole, 8–13.

Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox and Christ transforming culture.⁷⁴

While he did not conclude with any ringing endorsement of any of the five motifs, there is no doubt that most readers will come away with the language of transformation. This has spawned several generations of Christians of all persuasions to reflect on their own embeddedness in culture and want to change it. Niebuhr's analysis has been shown to be inadequate.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the passion to shape and change the world is deeply entrenched in the Christian's psyche.

A Theology of Faithful Presence

One predominant way of Christians trying to change the world is to cultivate the right worldview in people.⁷⁶ This is because Christians tend to view culture as made up of values found in the hearts and minds of individuals. Crouch is right to say that culture is not changed simply by thinking.⁷⁷ For him, the heart of culture is constituted by things; the things people create.⁷⁸ It stands to reason that culture changes when new cultural goods; concrete, tangible artifacts are introduced to the world. The only way to change culture is to create more of it. The paradox, for Crouch, is that while all share the

⁷⁴ Guder, *Missional Church*, 114-116.

⁷⁵ "Christ" and "culture" are not parallel concepts. They are not comparable comparisons. We can never be separated from culture; indeed, there is "no nature without culture." Everyone lives in the context of a culture or cultures. Jesus himself preached, taught and healed within a specific cultural context. There is no cultureless gospel nor can it be reduced to a set of cultureless principles. The church always lives in and among a culture or group of cultures. In this light, some of Niebuhr's motif such as "Christ against culture" appears misguided. How can Christ do anything for human kind except in the context of culture?

⁷⁶ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 6-17.

⁷⁷ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Books, 2008), Kindle: Chapter 3, Location 681.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 191.

imperative to be culture makers, it is hard to change the world because one cannot anticipate or dictate how one's cultural artifact will be accepted by others. Crouch's perspective while generating a good deal of interest is derived from an anthropological theory called cultural materialism and operates within a framework of market populism. He focuses more on the explicit at the expense of the implicit nature of culture and fails to address the dynamics of power in relation to cultural change.⁷⁹

James Davidson Hunter asserts that Christians, in all their diversity, cannot change the world in a way that they desire.⁸⁰ This is because their "common view" of changing culture originated from idealism and is flawed. Idealism maintains that something "ideal" or nonphysical is the primary reality and places ideas or "the mind" as having greater ontological significance. When idealism is woven with elements of individualism and Christian pietism, cultural change becomes a fight for the heart and mind of individuals and it is about changing people's "values and worldview."⁸¹ Thus, this results in activism in evangelism, political action and social reform to bring about cultural change.

For Hunter, culture is endlessly complex, difficult and highly resistant to intentional change. There are many streams at work such as history, power structures, institutions and networks, interests and symbols to name a few.⁸² A great deal of conflation is needed before world-changing can occur. Since culture and cultural change

⁷⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 29-30.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 24-27.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 23-47. See Chapter 4, An Alternate View of Culture and Cultural Change in Eleven Propositions. Here, Hunter sets out his propositions on culture and cultural change.

is also tied with power, the Church in America has variously adopted 3 dominant paradigms of engagement with the larger culture as evidenced by the Christian Right, the Christian Left and the Neo-Anabaptists. They are “defensive against”, “relevance to” and “purity from” respectively which Hunter finds inadequate.⁸³ He proposes an alternate way, the theology of “faithful presence.”

In this paradigm, Christians are to incarnate Christ, not only to model *shalom* but to be the *shalom* of God for others.⁸⁴ It is an antidote against power and a recognition of the vocation of the Church to bear witness and be the embodiment of the coming Kingdom of God. In this, Christians are to live toward the well-being of others, not just to those within the community of faith, but to all. The work involved strictly speaking is not redemptive or salvific in character. It is an expression of one’s divine nature since mankind is created in God’s image. The theology of faithful presence is disarmingly simple in concept, yet provides a challenge to the dominant paradigms of cultural engagement in the Church. It begins with an acknowledgement of God’s faithful presence to the Christian and that his call to faithfully present to him in return.⁸⁵

This theology of faithful presence provides a framework for understanding cultural engagement for the Church in Singapore and by extension, for this project. Singapore, being a secular state maintains a strict separation of religious beliefs in its politics. In this aspect, the contexts are vastly different from Hunter’s America and the issue of power is not apparent at first sight. Yet, as the Singapore Church grows and

⁸³ Ibid., 213-224.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 229.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 243.

begins to exert its influence in the public sphere, it is taking a stance similar to the Christian Right as described by Hunter. LoveSingapore, an ecumenical movement of more than 100 churches is embroiled in a bitter battle with the LGBT lobby.⁸⁶ It is increasingly taking a political path by seeking dialogues with governmental ministers and mobilizing churches to sign public petitions and pray for “Christian decisions” to be made for the nation. It also calls for a prayer thrust to “effect Kingdom transformation in the Seven Gates of Cultural Influence in Singapore.”⁸⁷ Clearly, it is pushing for a Christian agenda or at least for Christian principles to prevail in the nation.

If Hunter is right in that Christian dominant thinking about culture and cultural change are flawed and that Christians can’t change the culture as much as they desire to, then all these efforts to “reclaim morality” and “propagate Christian values” are exercises in futility. The strong “defensive against” paradigm only breeds resentment and will hinder the cause of the gospel in Singapore. On the other hand, if their engagement with culture is a theology of faithful presence, then they stand to function as an “*altera civitas*”⁸⁸ becoming that ray of hope that this world needs. Their expression is simply a desire to honor their creator, a manifestation of loving obedience and a fulfillment of God’s command to love neighbor rather than a desire to change the world. The motive in relating to non-believers must not be for the sole purpose of wanting to convert them. Rather, it is to enact the *shalom* of God in all circumstances that God places the Christian

⁸⁶ Section 377A of the Penal code of Singapore criminalizes sex between mutually consulting adult men. The LBGT is lobbying to get the government to repeal this law and declare it unconstitutional in that it violates personal liberty.

⁸⁷ “LoveSingapore,” <http://www.lovesingapore.org.sg/>, (accessed August 30, 2018).

⁸⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 283.

with them. This vision is for the entire community. It is for everyone, not just the professional clergy, that in all tasks, in all vocations and in all walks of life that Christians exhibit this faithful presence.

Reclaiming the Centrality of Mission in the Church

As mentioned, the Singapore Church has done well to advance the gospel. She embraces the Great Commission seeing it as her primary responsibility to bring the salvation message to the world. As the Church grows, she faces a greater need to care for her members. Church life becomes increasingly defined by what transpires in and through a building.⁸⁹ The purposes of the churches are distilled to include elements such as worship, fellowship, discipleship, service and evangelism/mission. This was especially so from the mid-1990s onwards with the wide adoption and adaptation of the influential Rick Warren's Purpose-Driven Church Model.⁹⁰ Furthermore, most studies on ecclesiology seem to subscribe to such thinking regarding the purposes of the church.⁹¹ In such a schema, mission becomes one of five key activities of the church and the secret to a healthy church is about balancing between these five purposes.

In the missional conversation, mission precedes the Church and ecclesiology is to be derived from missiology. In such a set-up, mission would supersede the other purposes

⁸⁹ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, Kindle: Chapter 2, Location 385.

⁹⁰ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

⁹¹ Erikson distils four functions of the church as evangelism, edification, worship and social concern Charles Hodges describes the church as having a three-fold ministry; ministry to the Lord (worship), ministry to the saints (education, fellowship, application) and ministry to the world (evangelism).

and the question arises as to which is correct. A way out of this quandary is to consider Kolb's usage of the word "primary mission."⁹²

The mission on which Jesus has sent His church is to seek and save the lost. The goal or objective is to see people come to faith in Jesus Christ, to be made disciples. The task or activity is to use the means by which a person is saved, the gospel, to baptize and then to teach. The functions are the normal activities of Christians as they do the above, such as worship, nurture, witness, service, and fellowship.⁹³

Much of the confusion arose because of the careless and imprecise use of terms. Inadvertently, Christians have confused many of the Church's functions with its mission. The functions of the Church, however many; are the normal, proper way in which Christians, who make up the body of Christ, exist and live together. They serve and support the body in fulfilling its mission. However, to elevate them as "the" mission of the Church would be a grave mistake. Similarly, others have used terms like "real purpose" or "central purpose" to emphasize the primacy of mission in the life of the Church.⁹⁴

In this project, a new missional articulation is required by starting with the identity/nature of the Church rather than the purpose/mission of the Church. Identity/nature concerns what the Church is, while purpose/mission deals with what the church does. What the Church is must deeply inform what the Church does. As advocated by Van Gelder, the sequence should flow as follows: "The church is. The church does

⁹² Edwin J. Kolb, "The Primary Mission of the Church and Its Detractors," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54, no. 2-3 (April 1990): 117-29.

⁹³ *ibid.*, 120.

⁹⁴ See Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 82; and Justin Peter, "Mission: The Central Purpose of the Church," <http://justinpeter.wordpress.com/papers-essays/mission-the-central-purpose-of-the-church/>, (accessed September 12, 2016). This article debunks the common held notion that worship is the most important purpose in the church.

what it is. The church organizes what it does.”⁹⁵ Since the Church is missionary, the Church doing and organizing must be mission.

Spirit-Led and Egalitarian Leadership

Roxburgh uses the first century Jerusalem church as an illustration of how the Spirit can break through an attractional model of doing church and turn it into one with missional imagination.⁹⁶ The first church had settled into a pattern they thought exemplified God’s mission as they met at the temple and in homes. However, persecution forced many out of Jerusalem and the Spirit took some of them to Antioch. What happened next was outside the imagination of these Christians. The Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles and a new kind of church was birthed at Antioch. This did not fit their plans and paradigms. It was the Spirit that broke the boundary.

God is up to something in this world. Being missional means that Christians join this heritage of entering into a journey without any road maps to discover what God is up to in their neighborhoods and communities.⁹⁷ The missional church is Spirit-led. It seeks to recognize what the Spirit is up to and then partner with Him. Indeed, Newbigin writes, “the active agent of mission is a power that rules, guides, and goes before the church: the free, sovereign, living power of the Spirit of God.”⁹⁸ In this aspect, there are no models,

⁹⁵ Van Gelder as quoted in Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 64.

⁹⁶ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 148-173.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 148.

⁹⁸ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, Kindle: Chapter 6, Location 775.

formulae or blueprints.⁹⁹ The Jerusalem church was an attractional model, centered on Jerusalem, shaped by assumptions in Judaism. It was the Spirit that took them beyond their attractional center and led them onto a mission they did not understand.

Hildebrandt details the transforming and empowering work of the Holy Spirit in many of Israel's leaders in the Old Testament. The Spirit possession/reception is a necessary endowment for leadership.¹⁰⁰ Numbers 11:16-29 is an interesting passage that describes the transfer of the Spirit from Moses to the seventy elders. Roger Stronstad has shown that this transfer episode to be both paradigmatic and programmatic.¹⁰¹ The Spirit's enablement is a paradigmatic requirement for all who assume leadership duties. Natural skills and resources are insufficient for the accomplishment of divine purposes. It is through the Spirit that God makes human efforts fruitful. At the same time, Moses' desire for all of God's people to have the Spirit and prophesy (Num 11:29) is programmatic. The democratization of the Spirit to the seventy was carried further in Joel 2:28-32 and fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. In the Messianic age, God's Spirit is no longer restricted to priests, kings or prophets, but poured out on all flesh. The Spirit is now democratized to all believers creating a charismatic community which crosses all age, gender and socio-economic barriers. This has important implications. In the Old Testament, the focus is on the Spirit's enabling of specific individuals for specific

⁹⁹ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 246-303.

¹⁰⁰ Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God*, 110.

¹⁰¹ Roger Stonstad, *Spirit, Scripture & Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Baguio City, Philippines: Asia Pacific Theological Seminary Press, 1995), 117.

situations and particular needs. Group leadership roles are seldom portrayed.¹⁰² However, in the New Testament, the focus is on group expressions of individual gifts, which are diverse and require the pooling of resources in unified and harmonious expressions. Individuals must function together for the benefits of all and egalitarian leadership and team ministry is to be advocated and practiced.

¹⁰² Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God*, 201.

PART THREE
MINISTRY PRACTICE

CHAPTER 4
A PLAN FOR STARTING MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES
IN BIVOCATIONAL CONTEXTS

Since independence, Singapore has progressed at a phenomenal pace both economically and as a nation. The Singapore Church has been successful to provide a contextual theology for the masses to make sense of the fast-changing societal landscape. This can be seen by her ability to win converts and exert her influence on many facets of social life. As detailed earlier, she also faces multiple challenges moving ahead. A new imagination of church is needed. This doctoral project seeks to start a missional community within a bivocational context that reaches non-believers and models a process of making disciple-making disciples. It is an experiment to complement the old ecology by looking at organic missional structures. Apart from breaking the clergy-laity divide, special attention will also be made on spiritual formation, participation in the community life together and a transformative leadership process of developing leaders who replicate themselves.

Theological Implications

Envisioning a New Expression of the Church

Guder has sufficiently detailed how mission was no longer a central task of the Church with the Christianization of the Western cultures.¹ In similar ways, as Singapore churches grow and become institutionalized, the focus shifted to caring for and tending to the salvation of her members. The vocation of witness was neglected and Christian existence was defined mainly by the benefits one gets from the gospel. This understanding of the Church reflects both a reductionist soteriology and ecclesiology.² At the heart of these reductionisms is a weakening of the centrality of the Kingdom of God as the central theme of the gospel. God's saving purposes for the world is reduced to God's salvation for the members of the Church; the purpose of the gospel is the formation of the Church as the community of the saved. This resultant reduction of mission is further amplified in today's self-centered and consumerist culture.

By envisioning a new expression, this project seeks to reclaim the centrality of mission in the church. The dominant ways of doing church have been through the attractional model which revolves around the Sunday service. The attractional model caters to the consumerist mindset and reduces the church to a religious event in a building. It is important to start with the true nature of the Church; after all the word church (*ekklesia* in Greek) in the New Testament refers to the assembly of people "called out" for a specific purpose.³ That purpose is the propagating of the gospel, the message of

¹ Guder, *Missional Church*, 117–25.

² Guder, "Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership after Christendom," 253.

³ Russell R. Spittler, *The Church*. (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1977), 17.

Jesus as Savior and the replicating of the community of people called out by God. The gathering of God's people is the church. If this is the essence of the church, we are free to reconstruct its form. The Sunday service will continue to dominate and find relevance. This is not a response against the attractional model but an experiment with organic structures. By organic, we attempt to return the church to a simple form without complex man-made religious systems and structures. The church is a spiritual family.⁴ It is a community led by the Holy Spirit, centered on Christ and with a call to be a sign, witness and foretaste of God's kingdom.

The images of the church found in Matthew 5 as the "salt of the earth", "light of the world" and a "city set on a hill" suggests that mission is not just what the church does; it is what the church is.⁵ The visible, taste-able nature of the community and how it lives points people to God. What this means is that the inner, communal life of the church matters for mission. It also means that the church has to locate key points of difference between its surrounding culture and the kingdom's culture and faithfully lives a distinctively holy life in that place. For Roxburgh, the church has to be a contrast society shaped by an alternative story and live by a set of distinct Christian practices.⁶ The communal life together with all its social and ecclesial practices matters. It is the conduit in which the intentional and disciplined community witness to the power and presence of God's reign.⁷

⁴ Cole, *Organic Leadership*, 14, 15.

⁵ Guder, *Missional Church*, 128.

⁶ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, Kindle: Chapter 7, Location 1532.

⁷ Guder, *Missional Church*, 158.

Breaking the Clergy-Laity Divide

Much has been said about how the church evolves such that there are now two separate classes of Christian, the clergy and the laity. Alan Roxburgh looks into two key precipitating factors; Christendom and modernity and traces how the context of church leadership has changed from the apostles to priests during Christendom to pedagogues in the Reformation era and to the professionals since the Enlightenment.⁸ In the modern world, one cannot escape the pervasive influence of living in complex structures and relationships. As a result, people rely on experts and expert systems such that professional classes emerge and their identities are defined by their professional roles. Similarly, in the church, as ministry become more complex, the natural option is to create a professional class that is charged with the responsibility of guiding the church institution, guarding it against doctrinal heresy and leading it to corporate success.⁹

Neil Cole calls this separation of clergy and laity unbiblical and a false dichotomy.¹⁰ Despite the Reformation's clarion call for the "priesthood of all believers," this practice of two classes of Christians continued to be widely accepted. Professionals hold the power and have a vested interest to continue this perception. When someone is serious about serving the Lord, he or she is usually challenged to go "full-time." This idea of a special class set apart for higher service is based on a pragmatic approach as

⁸ Alan J Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership: Equipping God's People for Mission," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 190–98.

⁹ Cole, *Organic Leadership*, 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35,100-112.

churches adopt the business model.¹¹ The pastor needs specialized training, must possess the right experiences and be duly credentialed. After all, he or she is the professional manager tasked to lead the organization towards success. The downside of such a separation is that it gives permission for other Christians to take less responsibility in the church and for the Kingdom of God.¹²

Christian leaders inevitably perpetuate this codependency with their congregations because it is the only model they know. This ingrained practice of clergy-laity distinction must be broken. In the missional imagination, it is not just the clergy but the entire missional community that is the central agency that God's Spirit employs to bring about God's healing for the creation.¹³ The priesthood of all believers eliminates the notion for a superior class of Christians. All are ministers before God. All must be led by the Spirit to sense what God is up to and partner with him in the world. In this project, we will seek to start a missional community where no one will be paid a salary from within the community. All are to derive their sustenance from the larger world and be connected to it. The life of the community is important and leadership will be egalitarian and authority distributed as advanced from our theological reflection.

¹¹ Guder, *Missional Church*, 195–98.

¹² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 467.

¹³ Guder, "Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership after Christendom," 256.

Missional Discipleship and Disciple-making

Guder details two fundamental interactive dimensions of the missional community: its gathering and its scattering (or sending).¹⁴ In Mark 3:13-15, the calling of the twelve “to be with Jesus” was followed immediately by “to be sent out to proclaim the message.” The church is called to be gathered in Jesus’ presence where the priority of Word ministry and the collegiality of calling are practiced. It is then sent out to be Christ’s witness and given authority to cast out demons and confront spiritual forces. For Guder, this is the basic missional movement of God’s people: from the gathered life to the sent and scattered life. The gathering is for our discipleship and the scattering is for our apostolate.¹⁵

As seen earlier, the Jerusalem church has settled into a model of church life shaped by assumptions in Judaism. They gathered in the temple and in homes and saw themselves as a Jewish movement with Jerusalem at the center. If this mindset had remained, Christ followers would have become a little more than a branch of Judaism and not the Christian church.¹⁶ It was persecution that broke out and the Holy Spirit who scattered them throughout the region to a paradigm they had not imagined. The challenge has always been the scattering. Similarly, attempting a new expression of the church will not guarantee that we will not fall back into the comfort of the gathered life. The people of God must be willing to lead unsettled lives. The response, at least in this project, is to

¹⁴ Ibid., 286.

¹⁵ Ibid., 286–91.

¹⁶ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 147.

put in place a missional discipleship and disciple-making process that starts from the harvest field.

Christian discipleship requires following a self-giving God, surrendering to His will and a call to enact His self-giving love to others. Bill Hull wrote that “God’s primary plan for the Church is for disciples of Jesus to develop other men and women into disciples.”¹⁷ Edmund Chan calls the church to return to its discipleship and disciple-making roots.¹⁸ The church must undergo a fundamental shift in ideology; it is not primarily a place for gathering believers but for developing disciples. Any thinking on discipleship and disciple-making must find its reference on Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Many writers have pointed out that the main imperative is to make disciples. A survey of discipleship relationships in the Bible showed a preference for the Hebraic model of intensive relational modeling and intentional association. Like Jesus, this process should start from the harvest field.

Scriptures thus reveal a discipleship process that focuses more on the impartation of life in a situational setting than an impartation of knowledge in a classroom setting. Discipleship is not just about inculcating right belief and behavior. As advocated by Diana Bass, there is a need to move from asking “what do we believe?” to “how do we believe?” and “who do we believe?”¹⁹ This is a shift from “information about” to “experience of” and “relationship with.” Augsburgers went further with his practice of

¹⁷ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker* (Singapore: The Navigators, 1984), 10.

¹⁸ Edmund Chan, *Built to Last - Towards A Disciplemaking Church* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2001), 33.

¹⁹ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 107-135.

radical attachment. Radical attachment to Jesus is not believing something about Jesus (a pietistic experience) or believing in Jesus (a conversionist experience), but believing Jesus (in discipleship) and believing what Jesus believed (in imitation).²⁰ Christianity was never intended to be a system of belief; it is about the disposition of the heart.

In this aspect, the discipleship responsibilities in the missional community must encompass at least the following components: 1) a theology of faithful presence to the world; 2) a process of making disciple-making disciples starting from the harvest field; 3) the subversion of the space-time collapse by devoting space and time for spiritual formation and practices; 4) the communal life together as an agent of change and witness and 5) mentoring and coaching relationships within the community for leadership development.

Goals

This project has four goals. First, it seeks to start an organic missional community as an experiment to imagine an alternate model of being the church. Second, it seeks to implement an egalitarian leadership approach ensuring participation and team ministry without paid professionals and envisioning a Spirit-led community. Third, it seeks to engage non-believers with a theology of faithful presence and demonstrating the church as a contrast society. Four, it seeks to establish a transformative process for discipleship and disciple-making with the aim of replicating the missional community.

²⁰ David W Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 327.

Start an Organic Missional Community

The goal is to gather a group of like-minded Christians and imagine what an organic missional community looks like. It is not to start a church per se. The gathering is to aid our scattering, such that we become faithful witnesses wherever Christ places us. The conversations surrounding the group will be how we are on a journey of being led by the Holy Spirit in the marketplace. When there are new converts in our engagement, the goal is not to integrate them into the group as soon as possible. Rather, reversed hospitality as mentioned by Van Gelder and Zscheile is to be practiced.²¹ The group will seek to disciple and mentor where they are. Being missional and organic, this is possible as gatherings will be fluid and not restricted by a set time and place or program. If possible, the priority is not to extract the new convert but rather explore how we can help the person to form another missional community where he or she is.

Bivocational and Distributed Leadership

The dominant way in which churches are run in Singapore is based on a model of paid professionals and congregational laypersons. Even the Brethren churches which started with a leadership structure of lay elders had over the years employed full-time paid pastors and church workers as ministry becomes more complex.²² As we have seen, paid professionals hindered the missional engagement of the whole church. The goal is to implement an egalitarian leadership structure with authority distributed amongst the members of the missional community. No one will be paid a salary from within the

²¹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 131–32.

²² Bethesda Frankel Estate Church, “History of The Brethren Movement in Singapore,” <https://www.bfec.org.sg/history-of-the-brethren-movement-in-singapore/> (accessed April 23, 2019).

community and all will be bivocational with meaningful engagements with the larger world. There will not be a superior class of Christians as the priestly vocation is given to all in the church. The author will serve as the first amongst equals and function more as the initiator and coordinator of the project rather than its sole leader.

Engagement with the World

It is vital that the project does not degenerate into another model of gathering believers. The focus is to be missional. This means we have to keep in mind our engagement with the world. The conventional way for churches to reach non-believers is a “come to us” invitation. The missional imagination requires us to incarnate the gospel with a “go to them life.”²³ Singapore has seen much success for the Gospel. Christianity has a twenty percent adherence rate of the population. Most non-Christians would have had received an invitation to a church service or a Christian event. They are generally suspicious of these efforts “to convert” them. As such, the theology of faithful presence is the preferred way of engagement in this project. The missional community is to faithfully present God to others not so much as wanting to convert them but as a desire to honor God and obey him with neighborly love for others. In such a way, the community also stands to function as a contrast society to the world. Practically, this would require members of the community to take an active interest in the lives of others and demonstrate Christian love and care.

²³ Rick Meigs, “Missional - A Short Answer,” *Friend of Missional - What Is the Missional Church?* <http://www.friendofmissional.org/>, (accessed August 1, 2016).

Transformative Discipleship and Disciple-Making Process

If we were to obey Jesus by making disciples who make other disciples, then inevitably, we will have a replicating missional community.²⁴ In order for this to happen, we have to put in place the discipleship and disciple-making process mentioned earlier. Discipleship is about our imitation of Christ and disciple-making about the way in which we transmit this imitation to others. Jensen has shown how empowered inward spirituality has a direct correlation with transforming outward mission.²⁵ It is important to create time and space for God. As advocated by Richard Foster, we need inward, outward and corporate spiritual disciplines.²⁶ In the life of the community, intentional cultivation of certain rhythms of spirituality such as meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude and service will be emphasized. The Bible and the Holy Spirit are key transforming agents in the life of the believer. The Christian community is another. Our disciple-making must consist of mentoring relationships and life-to-life impartations where communion, worship and confessions are practiced. It is only when we are connected with God above, then our disciple-making with one another will be life transforming and productive.

²⁴ Logan and DeVries, *The Missional Journey*, Kindle: Chapter 1, Location 271.

²⁵ Jensen, *Subversive Spirituality*, 4,5.

²⁶ Richard J Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). The inward disciplines listed by Foster are meditation, prayer, fasting and study; outward disciplines are simplicity, solitude, submission and service and corporate disciplines are confession, worship, guidance and celebration.

Strategy

Establish the Ethos of the Community

The vision is to reach non-believers and form replicating missional communities. It is not to build a traditional church. It envisions an organic community of Christ-followers who love God and one another, seek to incarnate Christ to the world and fulfill the Great Commission by making disciple-making disciples. The three board commitments of the community are “Communion with Christ”, “Community with one another” and “Commission to the world” as expressed in Figure 1. The vision can be summarized by the slogan: “Love God, Love Others, Make Disciples.”



Figure 1: The Three Commitments of the Community

The eight dimensions of a disciple advocated by Bob Logan form the core values of the community.²⁷ Under Communion (Love God), the values are “Experiencing God, Responsiveness and Personal Transformation;” under Community (Love Others), the values are “Authentic Relationships, Generous Living and Sacrificial Serving;” and under Commission (Make Disciples), the values are “Disciple-making and Community Transformation.”

²⁷ Disciple Assessment, “Dimensions of Discipleship,” <http://discipleassessment.com/dimensions-discipleship/> (accessed April 23, 2019).

Enable Organic Structures and Replicability

In order to enable organic structures to flourish, the community will meet mostly in homes. This will enable ministry in a natural setting. Meetings will feel more like family gatherings rather than religious services. It will also enable replication without the constraints of a building. In instances where a home is not available, alternative meeting places such as a function room, a café/restaurant or even a public park can easily be arranged. The church is wherever the people of God gathered. Meeting in homes also break the Sunday service's mentality and format where the minority serves the majority. Instead, the group will gather for worship, personal sharing, study on the Word, outreach endeavors and prayers. Leadership of the meeting will be rotated with mentors-apprentices relationships to ensure everyone participates fully in the life of the community.

While meeting in homes has many advantages, it also has some constraints. Singapore homes are usually quite small in size. The maximum group size for a meeting in an average home is around fifteen adults excluding children. If children are involved, there are usually space constraints to cater to their needs. Another obstacle is that it is not in the culture for Singaporeans to visit each other's home. The social norm where friends meet up is a café or restaurant. People lead busy lives and homes are regarded as personal sanctuaries and privacy is valued. For this reason, it is common for neighbors staying next door in an apartment block not to know each other or have visited each other's home.

In spite of these obstacles, many Singapore churches have successfully utilized the home meetings in its cell-church model. The cell group providing avenues for believers to fellowship, study the Word, support and care for one another. The cell group

is also supposed to be the smallest self-contained unit for ministry and outreach. However, as churches and groups mature, most cells usually become a bible study session, a social gathering or a prayer meeting depending on the inclination of the cell leader. In order for us not to go down the same path, it is important to program multiplication into the DNA of the community. Multiplication pushes members to focus on developing leaders. It is, therefore, necessary to draw some key differences between organic house communities and the cell church model especially when it comes to the multiplication process.

Cell Church Model	Missional House Communities
The church is the weekend services. Cells are supplementary.	The gathering in homes is the church.
Cell meetings require an additional time slot during the week. The church also runs many other programs which require more time from her members.	By being simple, it enables members to have time to build genuine friendships with non-believers and intentional discipling/mentoring relationships with one another.
Subscription rate to cells varies from church to church. On average, cell attendance is about 50% of congregation size. Half of all church-goers are not connected.	The congregation size is the church that meets in homes. It ensures a high participatory rate in the life of the community.
An attendance of 8 – 12 is preferred for group dynamics and as a unit for outreach.	Size is dependent on the house community's life stage and place of gathering. It can range from 4 to 20.
Average cell attendance must be consistently above 15 before multiplication of the group is considered.	Multiplication is not governed by any mechanical formula but by intentional discipleship and the Holy Spirit's leading.
Multiplication is usually done by division or reconfiguration of group members.	Multiplication is done by planting a new missional house community.
Most cell groups tend to settle into a steady state after some time.	The church is not allowed to settle into a steady state because of its multiplication focus.
The church typically extracts new Christians from the world into the church.	The church empowers the new Christian to reach his non-believing friends and relatives.

Table 1: Differences between Cell Church Model and Missional House Communities Multiplication Process

Engage our World with the Gospel

The theology of faithful presence requires the community to faithfully represent Christ to others. There are three components to our engagement. Firstly, the community needs to build genuine relationships with non-believers. The immediate circles are friends, colleagues, relatives and neighbors in which there are usually good opportunities for regular interactions. Members can also participate in social or interest groups to get to know more non-believers. It is important for members to demonstrate practical Christian love and be interested in the well-being of others. By extending friendship and genuine care, opportunities will arise for the gospel to be shared.

Secondly, members should pray and seek out “persons of peace.” Luke 10 shows us how Jesus sent out his disciples to seek for that pivotal person of peace who will open the door to the town. Here hospitality in mission is reversed.²⁸ In this aspect, members are to seek out conversations with others, even strangers as the Holy Spirit leads. As members are divinely led, doors will be opened for ministry to non-believers through an area of needs. This may provide further access to a new community of the people through the person of peace.

Thirdly, the Alpha course has been proven to be quite effective in nurturing relationships with seekers and leading to decisions for Christ. The community can invite their contacts and pull their resources to run an Alpha course together. Alternatively, members may also invite their contacts to existing Alpha courses run by other Christian groups in partnership with Alpha Singapore. Here, our engagement with the non-believer

²⁸ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 131.

is both centrifugal and centripetal. There is a movement from us to the non-believer and an invitation to the non-believer to the faith community.

Install a Discipleship and Disciple-making Process

Christian discipleship is not about acquiring biblical knowledge but a relationship with God and the imitation of God. Much has already been said about the importance of discipleship and disciple-making in this project. The core value of community is based on how the eight dimensions of a disciple are lived out. The goal of installing a discipleship process is to see 2 Timothy 2:2 fulfilled. Instead of attending classes, real discipleship happens in the life of the community together. Life impacts life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer provides good insights into how community life can be like.²⁹ The day alone, the day together and ministry to one another are important aspects. When the group gathers, time will be given for spiritual practices. The group will also meet up in smaller subgroups in threes or fours for mentoring and coaching. This is where mutual accountability and leadership development can take place. How these processes are implemented will be described in greater details in the next chapter.

Personnel and Target Population

The Author as Initiator

The author will serve as the initiator of the project. The author has twenty-five years of work experiences and had at various points been an engineer, a missionary, a seminary student, a church worker, a sales manager before becoming a full-time paid

²⁹ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954).

pastor in a large church for ten years. While taking his sabbatical for his Doctor of Ministry studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, he felt led to resign from the pastorate to experiment with organic missional communities. His passion is in discipleship and disciple-making and would like to envision what true biblical discipleship looks like. He had experienced the house church movement in China while serving as a missionary in China in the late 1990s. For this missional community project, he will need to find meaningful work in the marketplace which can give him opportunities to relate to non-believers and also time to start the missional community.

The Start-Up Team

The start-up team will consist of like-minded people who are excited about reaching new people for Christ. They must be willing to experiment with new structures and able to cope with ambiguity. A team of between ten to twelve adults is envisaged. The author will draw up a list of potential team members and share with them the vision of the venture. Formation of the team is expected to take about six months. Just as Paul had a partner in his travels, the author will need a co-leader to start this community together. This co-leader will be identified during the team formation process. Just as Jesus sent out his disciples two-by-two, partnership with this co-leader will be a key success factor. In the beginning, the leadership of the community will rest more with the author and co-leader. It will be progressively decentralized and distributed to other members.

The Target Population

The target population will be friends, colleagues, relatives and contacts of members of the start-up team. Depending on the composition of the start-up team, the target population will be quite diverse. It will consist of singles, married and couples with children. Since the community is small and mobile, there will not be a target area. Instead, the place of the meeting will depend on who is able to host the meeting. The community will also be flexible to take on different outreach or bridging projects with non-believers depending on where the opportunities arise.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

The author transited out of full-time ministry at the end of 2014 and began speaking with people whom he had identified. Soon, a co-leader agreed to come on board. The project began with a small gathering of four adults and a child in April 2015. Subsequently, a core team of ten adults consisting of three sets of couples and their children and four single adults was formed. The group met weekly for two years. A decision was taken to disband the group in July 2017 when it became apparent the meeting was no longer sustainable. This chapter describes the implementation process originally envisaged together with an assessment. Key insights, successes, challenges and recommendations will be provided. With the experience gleaned, the author began thinking about restarting the project in October 2018, albeit with different operating parameters and ambition. A new group consisting of five families residing in the same locality was formed in April 2019. At the time of writing, the author has just gathered his second community and is experimenting with version 2.0 of the project.

Implementation Timeline

The implementation timeline planned is six years. The idea is to multiply a missional community every two years such that there will be four functioning communities at the end of year six. Each cycle of multiplication will consist of roughly the same components: engagement with non-believers, the group life and a multiplication process. Once we have two communities, we will gather for quarterly meetings. This is where we celebrate milestones in the life of the communities and help members see that we are connected to a larger vision.

Engagement with Non-Believers

For the first community, the start-up team will take the first six months for visioning and planning. During this time, the purpose of the project and the ethos of the community will be communicated. Members need to align with the larger goals and understand that they are not in the group to consume ministry. Members will be asked to map people within their circles of influence and pray for those whom they can reach. This is where active friendship building, seeking for a person of peace and even the possibility of running an Alpha course will take place.

Whenever a member leads someone to Christ, that member will personally disciple the convert. The plan is not to extract the convert immediately but explore how we can reach other people within the convert's community. It is only at a later time that we invite the convert to join the community. It is much easier to gather Christians than to reach non-believers. As such, in order to keep to the essence of the project of being

missional, the formation of the second and subsequently communities should consist more of people reached from the harvest field rather than Christians seeking a community.

Community Life

The community will gather weekly on Sunday mornings at 10 am. A typical format goes something like this:

10:00	Gathering and Welcome
10:10	Worship
10:30	Personal Sharing and Update
11:00	Scriptural Interaction and Application
11:30	Prayer
11:45	Lunch and Fellowship

Communion is taken together on a monthly basis. Group facilitation is rotated so that apprentice leaders can be raised. The community follows a bible reading plan and members share how they have interacted and applied the Scriptures throughout the week. For Scriptural intake, the focus will be more on the formation-relational approach rather than the informational-functional approach.¹ This is to prevent the group from becoming just a bible study group. Members will be taught to practice *lectio divina* and prayer of *examen* in their personal devotional time. To create time and space for God, members are also encouraged to go for regular spiritual retreats.

The size of the community can be as small as 4 persons to as large as 20 persons. If the group size is large, sub-grouping will be used to enable more intimate sharing and better participation from everyone. There will be no tithes collection. Members will be

¹ M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000). The information-functional approach studies Scriptures from a cognitive viewpoint and look at how we can derive principles for life whereas a formation-relational approach looks at what changes are needed in our personal lives and what God, our Father is speaking personally to us through Scripture.

taught generosity and voluntary contributions collected for the community's activities and outreach initiatives.² As the community size is small, it can be mobilized for different activities at different times such as a picnic, a connection event with non-believers, a one-day mission trip or a social concern event.

In addition to the weekly meeting, members will also meet together in small groups of twos, threes or fours once every two weeks for mentoring. This meeting will take place during lunch or in the evenings for an hour. Here, some aspects of the Life Transformation Group (LTG) concept of mutual accountability, Scripture intake and prayer for targeted non-believers can be applied.³ For Scripture intake, the S.O.A.P. method by Wayne Cordeiro may be used.⁴

Multiplication Process

The multiplication process happens at two levels: at the community level and at the sub-group mentoring level. As we have seen earlier, this multiplication process is quite different from that of the cell-church model. The smallest possible unit of the church is made up of two or three disciples in relation with God, in relation to one

² The New Testament does not explicitly command the giving of tithes but exhort generous living. In the past, I took the position of tithes as a mandatory command as this was how I was taught. I now see it as a vested interest argument since pastors needed to be paid. Since we do not have the cost structure of an institutional church, tithes collection is not necessary. There is no empire to build.

³ Church Multiplication Associates, "The Life Transformation Group System by Neil Cole," <https://www.cmaresources.org/article/ltg>, (accessed April 30, 2019). A Life Transformation Group is made up of two to three people of the same gender, who meet weekly for personal accountability and spiritual growth. If a fourth person is added to the group, it is recommended that the group multiply into two groups of two.

⁴ Wayne Cordeiro, *The Divine Mentor* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2007), 101. S.O.A.P. stands for Scripture, Observation, Application and Prayer. Applying this method in a mentoring session requires the group to read through, meditate upon and pray through the Scripture under study a few times. It is an easy way to conduct a mentoring session with just the Bible.

another and on mission. For the mentoring groups that meet fortnightly, multiplication can happen whenever we have four or five members. For the missional community, there is no fixed formula but obviously, if the group has grown too large for the home, it should be multiplied. Multiplication can also occur when a person of peace with a potential pool of seekers is found. In such a situation, some members of the community may elect to move out and start a new missional community with this person of peace.

Discipleship Process and Leadership Development

Discipleship Process

A discipleship process is put on paper to help us anticipate the type of training a person may need as he or she grows and develops as a disciple and in leadership. A four-stage discipleship process similar to the Navigator’s framework is adopted and shown in Figure 2.⁵

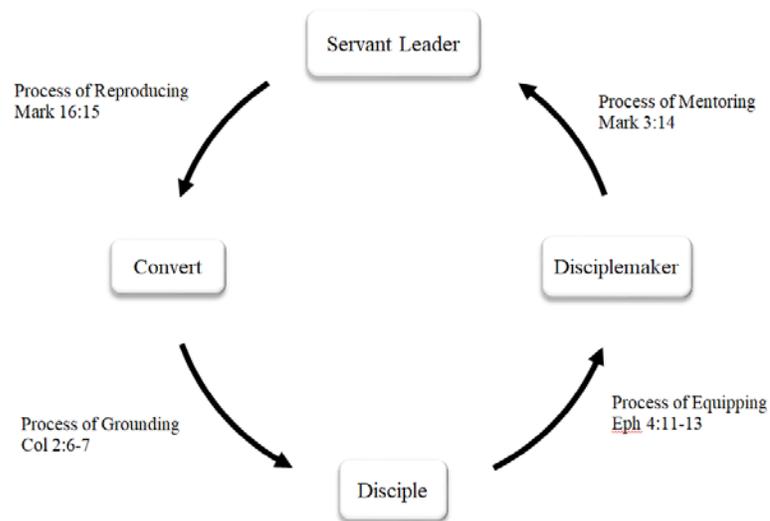


Figure: 2: The Discipleship Process

⁵ Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, 183.

Each stage will consist of courses for a person to take, starting from a convert to becoming a leader of the community. The curriculum design with its associated lesson outline is given in Appendix A. It must be emphasized that the main delivery system is personal discipling and mentoring and not classroom training. In actual life, people may not progress in a sequential manner as shown. One may learn content at any stages depending on his or her own growth and needs. It is important that we do not educate people beyond their obedience. It is thus the role of the discipler or mentor to select the most appropriate content to help the person at his particular stage of growth.

Leadership Development

Leadership development starts from the harvest field. The process of building authentic relationships with non-believers is the first step towards the organic way of developing them for leadership later on when they come to Christ. Since many leadership issues are actually discipleship issues, leadership development is intricately tied to the discipleship process. Once a person comes to Christ, there must be an immediate plan to disciple him. The convert should be discipled on a one-to-one basis, preferably by the person who has won him or her. During this time, the convert will learn how to “follow up” on another convert simply by experiencing the same process from his or her discipler. At this stage, it is vital that the convert know how to feed himself or herself and spiritual practices must be introduced into his or her daily practices. The convert will also be asked to consider baptism once faith is expressed. Baptism is preferred to be carried out early in the convert’s life and in the presence of the convert’s relatives and friends. It is a witnessing event for the missional community.

As the convert continues to grow, he/she enters an intermediate stage where mentoring will play a key role to equip him/her for ministry. During this time, his/her mentor will help him/her acquire ministerial skills by way of modeling. Some examples would be the ability to witness, disciple others, defend the gospel and group facilitation skills. It is also important that the convert learns to create margin in his/her spiritual life. This is where his/her mentor can guide him/her during spiritual retreats where he/she learns the spiritual disciplines of solitude, prayer and meditation. A schedule of such a spiritual retreat is found in Appendix B.

When a person is ready to start his/her own missional community, the mentoring process will transit more to become coaching. Bob Logan describes a mentor as someone who has gone before and pours in, while a coach is someone who comes alongside and draws out.⁶ The default mode of a mentor is to dispense wisdom while that of a coach is to ask questions.⁷ Coaching is a thought-provoking and creative process that enables a person to maximize his potential.⁸ It helps the person to be more reflective, resulting in better awareness and performance. As each missional community is autonomous, the network of missional communities will be held together by coaching relationships. It is important that leaders in the community acquire mentoring and coaching capabilities so that they can truly become people developer.

⁶ Robert E. Logan, Class Lecture, "Transforming Your Leadership Development Process," Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, March 2014

⁷ Ogne and Roehl, *TransforMissional Coaching*, 54–56.

⁸ International Coaching Federation, "ICF, the Gold Standard in Coaching," <https://coachfederation.org/about> (accessed May 2, 2019). ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

Resources

At the start of the project, a few friends were identified to act as mentors and coaches for the author on this journey. The author is also connected with a network of individuals who are experimenting with missional church and missional cafés. This network is loosely organized, consisting of just a few groups and working on different suppositions. It is coordinated by a couple who helped organize yearly training by missional and organic church advocates such as Neil Cole and others.⁹ The missional café is a business initiative started by a bank executive with the intention of creating spaces for intentional interactions with non-believers.¹⁰ In addition, the community will tap upon the resources available at Alpha Singapore and is trained to run Alpha courses.¹¹

As for the budget, it is not a key consideration since the missional community does not incur much cost. There is no paid staff, rental cost for Sunday services or expensive programs to run. Incidental costs such as the running of an Alpha program, the occasional use of a function room for larger gathering and food can be covered by voluntary contribution and co-sharing from the community.

Report on Results

The missional community was started in April 2015 in central Singapore when a small seminar room was offered to the author for use on Sundays at no cost for a few

⁹ Missional Church Communities Network, <http://www.mccnresources.org/>, (accessed May 2, 2019).

¹⁰ See the story of Tim Wong, a friend and fellow collaborator in the missional conversation. Andrew Jones, “Growing Cafe Churches Singapore Style,” Patheos, November 23, 2011, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/emergentvillage/2011/11/hello-world/>.

¹¹ Alpha Singapore, “Got Questions - Try Alpha,” <http://singapore.alpha.org/> (accessed May 10, 2019).

months. The first few meetings were mainly prayer and small group discussions on the true nature of the Church and the purpose for gathering. A small team was formed progressively when a co-leader agreed to come on board. The co-leader is theologically trained and had served as a lay leader in the author's former church. Over the course of two years, the community met weekly at various locations including an office and homes. Planned activities like picnics, group outings, connection events with non-believers and retreats were held occasionally. The community was most stable during the full year period of 2016 when the meeting was held at the co-leader's home which was centrally located. The co-leader and his family have the gift of hospitality and his home was large enough to hold the community comfortably. At its peak, the meeting consistently consists of ten adults and five children.

There were a couple of challenges, chief amongst them, the transitional process experienced by the author and co-leader in their professional lives and secondly, the need for a suitable home to meet. As part of the process of being bivocational, the author became the Singapore partner for a European training and consultancy company in September 2015.¹² The learning curve was very steep and there was pressure to develop the business. There was also a three months period in late 2016 whereby the author had to travel every week in the region for work. Similarly, the co-leader had a job transition and began to work as a project manager with a large Chinese technology company. Initially, the job was based in Singapore but after about a year, he needed to travel for work as

¹² The author joined a company called Krauthammer International, made possible through a connection initiated by a mentor of the author. Being a partner, income is generated by the author's ability to win new businesses or by jobs given from its European office. There was almost no income for the initial year and the author had serious doubts of this suitability for the role. It has been four years now and things have established. For more information on the company, see Krauthammer International, "About Krauthammer," <https://www.krauthammer.com/en/about-krauthammer> (accessed May 10, 2019).

well. A key development took place in January 2017 when he was posted to be based in Manila, Philippines. He is presently still working there while his family stays in Singapore. With the loss of the co-leader, the meeting was subsequently moved to another member's home. By July 2017, attendance had dropped and there were also concerns about children's needs not being met. A decision was then taken to disband the community, though the members still gather occasionally for get-together and meals.

Group Life

It took a few months of meeting together before the community began to gel. Initially, the author and co-leader would lead the weekly meetings which normally involved Scriptural studies, discussions and prayers for the people we were trying to reach. We were careful not to turn the meeting into a bible teaching session. Instead of someone sharing a sermonette or teach on a particular topic, members were asked to read certain Scriptural passages and come prepared to share their insights. We tried to minimize the role of the human leader and let the Holy Spirit lead. Some ways in which we attempted to do this were to use the S.O.A.P. methodology, questions from the Life Transformation Groups and *lectio divina*. Facilitation of the group meetings was rotated so that everybody could take turns to "lead" though it didn't always happen as expected. At times, group discussions were hampered due to the needs of the children, the youngest of whom was a toddler. For the fortnightly mentoring groups, it didn't happen as planned. This was due mainly to the busy work schedules of members and the efforts needed to travel for the meet-ups. Instead, small group mentoring happened more on an ad hoc basis when individuals or families meet up for a meal and sharing.

People Reached and Relationships Initiated

During the two years in which the community met, we did not keep a record of the number of people reached or relationships initiated. Members were encouraged to incarnate Christ to their colleagues, friends and relatives. We prayed for a list of people on an almost weekly basis. Each member would typically target two or three persons for a period of time. As an estimate, we would have prayed for between six to ten persons for each member over the course of two years. Each person prayed for represents an intentional relationship initiated. Thus, the community would have initiated an average of eighty relationships with non-believers. There was never a plan to invite others to the community meetings, especially Christians. In fact, there were a few occasions that the author had to turn down former church members who were keen to visit. We did have five persons who visited the community; three were Christians who had left church long ago, one was a seeker and one was a non-believer. The author's mentor and mentor's wife also visited the community a few times to encourage the members.

There were twelve salvations reported within the network of the community. Most of these salvations were close relatives, colleagues or friends of members. The author had six salvations; both his aged father and mother accepted Christ and were baptized at the hospital bed before they passed away, his late brother-in-law who died from cancer, his eldest sister, a niece and a close colleague who is of Japanese descent and based in Hong Kong. During the course of his work, the author had trained about 1,000 professionals in Singapore and the Asia Pacific. He is also connected with a coaching community, holding coaching credentials with the International Coaching Federation. From these connections, he was able to build varying degrees of friendships with about twenty

persons; about half of which were non-Christians. For the non-Christians, all of them were aware of his Christian faith and he had the opportunity of sharing the gospel directly with four of them. Similarly, most members in the community reported the ability to share the gospel to a few of their targeted persons.

Assessment and Recommendation

The journey of starting the missional community has been both enriching and challenging. The following are the author's observations, assessment and recommendations on key areas in the project.

Bivocational Challenges

One of the key recommendations in the missional church conversation and in this project is to equalize the church by breaking the clergy-laxity divide. The way forward for starting a missional community is to do it bivocationally. In going this direction, there was perhaps a lack of appreciation for the challenges that cause us to evolve to our present state; the engagement of professionals in the modern church. Professionalization does have its advantages such as the better use of resources, greater effectiveness and clearer organization and direction. This is especially important as churches grew and become more complex. It is a logistical challenge to run a church of a certain size. The question on how to cater to the needs of different segments and age-groups plagued most churches. We have seen earlier how the Brethren churches which started with bivocational leadership had joined the ranks of paid professionals out of practical considerations rather than theological conviction.

When starting the missional community, the author and his co-leader were at the same time, experiencing a flux of transitions in their professional lives. It was challenging to juggle between the needs of the community and the demands of the job. The author chose to become a soft-skills trainer because of the time flexibility afforded by the nature of the job. However, he did not foresee the commercial aspect and the learning curve needed for moving into a new industry. Similarly, the co-leader was unable to say no to the overseas posting because of the difficulty for finding another suitable job that is based in Singapore.

These are real challenges for bivocational ministry but it does not mean that we should stop trying. We have already established how paid professionals hindered the missional engagement of God's people. Moving ahead, for bivocational ministry, it definitely has to be team-based. Instead of just two key leaders in this project, it may be a good idea to expand the leadership team to spread the load. The key leaders must have the bandwidth to handle both the demands of ministry and work. In this aspect, the job should be stable and not be overly demanding as the ultimate focus is the ministry. For bivocational team ministry to be viable and replicable, it is recommended to restrict the size of the church community to a maximum of about 150 persons. Any larger, the church should consider planting a new independent community instead.

Egalitarian Leadership

We had set out the theological foundations for an operating framework of egalitarian and distributed leadership in this project. In starting the missional community, we found out that the implementation was more difficult than imagined. The key reason

was that we did not consider certain cultural dimensions in Singapore society. According to Professor Geert Hofstede's research, Singapore scores high on the power distance index (PDI) with a score of 74.¹³ What this means is that there is a preference for power to be centralized and relationships between superiors and subordinates to be distinct and formal. Control is expected and employees are to be told what to do. In the missional community, it took a few months of constant reminders before certain members dropped the honorific title of "pastor" when addressing the author.¹⁴ The attempt to empower members to lead the meetings was also met with mixed results. As a society with Confucian influences, there was always deference to the senior person or the expert teacher (*sinseh*) when it comes to discussions and opinions. In this case, for Scriptural studies and even planning for the group, the author would inevitably be expected to make a final comment of which the members would readily agree or comply.

With the millennial generation, things are changing. They are more vocal, self-assured and exposed to other cultural norms. The power distance index in Singapore will drop in the years to come. In the meantime, it is recommended that a more directive leadership approach be used at least for the formative years of the missional community. Singapore is a well-structured and organized society with rules for almost anything. This

¹³ Hofstede Insights, "Country Comparison," <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/singapore> (accessed May 7, 2019). The power distance index measures the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.

¹⁴ The author experienced low power distance index while attending classes at Fuller Theological Seminary. Classmates came for lessons dressed in Bermuda shorts and sandals especially during the summer months. They addressed the professors by their first name, something unthinkable in any higher institutes of learning in Singapore. The author took a few days to adapt before dropping the honorific titles of "Professor" or "Doctor" plus family name when addressing his class instructors. It was a surreal moment for the author to be able to call his professors by their first name, as a friend would. Conversely, the author shudders to think what would happen if one of his classmates were to attend a class in an university in Singapore, dressed in the same way and addressing professors by first name.

is a result of a well-oiled, centralized state planning process that makes everything works. Organic spontaneity is not in Singapore's DNA. The missional community will also do well to include more organization and direction in the beginning. Egalitarian leadership with distributed authority can be programmed into the structure when the community grows, matures and multiplies. It should be implemented in stages according to the life cycle development of the community.

Outreach and Discipleship

From the efforts of trying to reach non-believers, it is observed that the theology of faithful presence is only workable for close proximity relationships. This stance of outreach requires members to live for the well-being of others. In order for this to happen, there must be enough data-points for the non-Christian to experience the Christian as an incarnate of the gospel and living a "contrast society" lifestyle. In an urban fast-paced society like Singapore, people work long and hard. In fact, based on available statistics, Singapore residents worked the second longest week, trailing only behind Hong Kong and ahead of South Korea and Japan.¹⁵ The author and members of the community experienced many difficulties in trying to build genuine friendships with non-believers. People were simply too busy to meet up for social connections unless that connection was work-related or family relations.

The community did not try to invite people to the group meeting. This was in line with the focus of reaching people where they are and not relying on an invitational

¹⁵ Louisa Tang, "The Big Read: Breaking Singapore's Workaholic Culture," CNA, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/breaking-singapore-workaholic-culture-long-working-hours-always--11058104> (accessed May 7, 2019). The figures given for Japan and South Korea were for the whole country and the article suspects work hours to be higher in Tokyo and Seoul than in Singapore.

strategy. Other efforts of reaching out include the author helping to run a six-week program at a center for troubled youths and the community attempting to run an Alpha course at one of the members' workplace. The Alpha course did not take place in the end due to unforeseen resignations of some potential participants before the course could be run. In retrospect, perhaps the author has viewed the missional community more in the light of Ralph Winter's sodality when it should have functioned as both modality and sodality, however, small the community was.¹⁶ In this aspect, Jensen's understanding of mission as both centrifugal and centripetal should be advocated.¹⁷ The church needs to move into the world and the world into the church. This church is to be both missional and attractional.

House Church Communities

Being small in size, house church communities are nimble, adaptable and can be easily mobilized. The downside is that resources are limited. For example, in this project, we were unable to cater to the needs of the children simply because we did not have the space and people. As mentioned earlier, the preferred norm in Singapore for casual meetings between people is not in the home but a café or restaurant. The vast majority of people stay in apartments, not houses, with average sizes of about 968 square feet.¹⁸ We were aware of the challenges of starting the missional community in a home setting but

¹⁶ Ralph D. Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," *Practical Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 1974): 121–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182967400200109>.

¹⁷ Jensen, *Subversive Spirituality*, 24.

¹⁸ Teoalida, "Housing in Singapore," <https://www.teoalida.com/world/singapore/> (accessed May 10, 2019). This is the average size of a government HDB 4-room flat at ninety square meters. The average size of private apartments is even smaller.

felt it was the best alternative in keeping with our conviction for simple, organic and missional expression of the church.

Since our experiment, the results from our network of missional communities have been similar; groups were either disbanded or devolved to such a stage that meetings were irregular and small in attendance. The missional café initiative also had to close down due to losses in its business model. A friend of the author spent two years practicing “reversed hospitality” by befriending a group of men at a poorer neighborhood who meet regularly for drinks. When one of them finally accepted Christ, there were great hopes for the initiative. However, efforts to disciple the person and help build a Christian community from amongst his friends were not successful. There were many sacrifices of time and we must applaud the efforts made by this friend. Yet, it showed the inherent challenges of reaching people for God.

These results seem to corroborate with experiences in the West. Interest in the organic church in North America has waned since 2012 such that it is hard to find organic churches.¹⁹ Frank Voila, a key thought leader for organic churches now advises people to stop looking for an “organic church” as it will spare them “a lot of wasted time, heartache and frustration.”²⁰ Perhaps, the person who captured the most imagination for advocating house churches in America is Francis Chan. His network has grown to seventeen house

¹⁹ Organic Church, “Resources for the Organic Church,” <https://organicchurch.com/> (accessed May 9, 2019). This website mentioned that interest in organic churches was popular in North America from 1968-1977, 1994-1999 and 2008 to 2012 and has waned since. It is now hard to find organic churches. They believe a second wave will happen in the future among Millennials.

²⁰ Frank Viola, “Why You Can’t Find an Organic Church,” <https://frankviola.org/2016/04/21/organicchurch/> (accessed May 8, 2019). Frank Viola explains that the cost of securing such community is too high such that the younger people prefer to meet in more convenient places. Even for those who meet, some are highly-legalistic, highly toxic groups with a good mix of personality conflicts and bickering over doctrines and practices.

churches with about 250 people.²¹ This is commendable and a great result. His journey provides a good model for others to learn and follow.²² Considering the immense giftedness of Chan as a leader-communicator and the resources that were available to him, it must be stated that it still took him seven years to reach this stage.

Indeed, the house church community is never an easy proposition. It does not seem particularly suited for the fast-paced urban settings of advanced economies. Reports of where it had done well appear to come mainly from rural communities, third world countries or places where Christianity is persecuted.²³ In moving ahead, we should not be fixated with the idea that the home is the best place for the missional community to meet, especially in Singapore. For reasons already mentioned, a neutral place such as a seminar room or an office may be more comfortable for both members and non-believers alike. It also provides more possibilities for ministry and latitude for growth. The home can be used during the start-up phase before the community grows to a certain size and after that, where members gather in cells for more intimate community life.

²¹ Travis Nicholson, "I Visited Francis Chan's House Church Network. Here's What I Learned.," *Medium* (blog), November 1, 2018, <https://medium.com/@travisnicholson/i-visited-francis-chans-house-church-network-here-s-what-i-learned-1dbf9cf3e363>.

²² We are Church, "Church Intensive," We Are Church, <http://www.wearechurch.com/church-intensive> (accessed May 9, 2019). Chan runs a four day experience called "Church Intensive" for pastors and future pastors to study ecclesiology and observe how ministry is done his network.

²³ The author had experienced the rural house church movement while serving as a missionary to China in the late 1990s. Compared to this project, the context was very different. The revival started in the countryside and people generally have lots of time for each other. Most are farmers living in a collective commune.

Community Size and Sustainability

A key reflection from this project has been the idea of how to get the missional community to be more sustainable and over a longer period of time. In an interesting study titled “Optimizing Human Community Sizes,” Dunbar and Sosis examine community longevity as a function of group size in three historical, small scale agricultural samples.²⁴ They found that community sizes of 50, 150 and 500 are disproportionately more common than other sizes and also have greater longevity. In addition, religious communities tend to be able to grow to larger sizes and be able to maintain cohesion for a longer period than secular ones. In another study by Casaria and Tagliapietra on hundreds of villages in the Alps over six centuries, they found that the average size of successful villages was around 176 individuals, although the variance was quite large.²⁵ These studies provide insights from a socio-ecological viewpoint on how best should we structure our missional communities in order to ensure sustainability and replicability.

In moving ahead, the author offers the following tweaks to future endeavors of starting missional communities in Singapore: 1) a wider base of key leaders at start-up phrase, preferably five or more, all of whom are bivocational; 2) start-up in a home with both invitational and missional endeavors to grow the group to a point that it outgrows the space in the home; 3) move the meeting to a small seminar room or office with the

²⁴ Robin I. M. Dunbar and Richard Sosis, “Optimising Human Community Sizes,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 39, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 106–11, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2017.11.001>. The communities they studied are 19th century American utopian communities, the Israeli kibbutzim and the Hutterite community fission events covering the period 1880–1970.

²⁵ Marco Casari and Claudio Tagliapietra, “Group Size in Social-Ecological Systems,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 11 (March 13, 2018): 2728–33, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1713496115>.

aim of reaching fifty people and have decentralized cell groups in homes; 4) meeting format to be simple with worship, a short sharing, scriptural reading, small group discussion, prayers and fellowship; 5) leadership to be more directive in the initial phase but progressively distributed as the community grows and more leaders are developed; 6) discipling and mentoring in sub-groups, affinity groups and cell groups; 7) community to grow up to a maximum size of 150 people after which a new independent community should be planted with bivocational leaders and 8) the network of communities is held together by coaching relationships amongst the leaders.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The missional conversation is a deep reflection on the fundamental purpose of the Church in post-Christendom societies. There are a number of important shifts as it seeks to reframe the practices of the Church within the larger framework of God's mission for the world. Firstly, the rationale and agency for mission are shifted from the Church to God since God is a missionary God. Secondly, mission is not merely an activity of the Church but concerns our identity since the Church is a representation of the Kingdom of God. Thirdly, the locus of God's mission is in the world and therefore God's agenda resides in the world; the church's responsibility is to discover and participate with God on what he is doing in the world. Fourthly, the Church being missionary in nature means that mission is no longer one function of the Church but its purpose for existing; everything that the Church does is for mission and this responsibility involves the whole Church, all of God's people.

In summary, God has called a people into community with the purpose of sending them out as an apostolic witness for Him. The strategy is not merely the saving of souls and their collecting into communities of the saved; rather it is for the formation of witnessing communities whose purpose is to continue the witness that first brought them into existence. From here, we derive several principles. Firstly, we need to reclaim the centrality of mission in the church. The church must engage the world. Secondly, all believers must be led by the Spirit to sense what God is doing in the world. The corollary of this is that we should not have clergy-laity divisions in churches. There are no two classes of Christians; all are priests before God. Thirdly, leadership must be based on love and service, not command and control. As such, leadership structures should be

team-based, multiple and with shared and distributed authority. Lastly, it is important to put into place a transformative process of developing leaders who replicate themselves. This process must consist of mentoring and coaching relationships with relational modeling and life-to-life impartations, not just cognitive acquisition of knowledge and know-how.

Christianity in Singapore has been a great success. It has grown ten-fold in the last four decades such that one-in-five inhabitants now profess Christ. Singapore churches generally embraced a missional theology due in part to their keen awareness of being a minority in a multi-religious setting. However, this missional outlook is eroding as churches grow and are being institutionalized. Instead, the focus has shifted increasingly to a church-centric model catering to the consumeristic instincts of their members. It is for this reason that this project sought to start a missional community within a bivocational context that reaches non-believers and models a process of making disciple-making disciples. It was an experiment to envision a new expression of the church by looking at organic structures.

A team was gathered and the community met weekly for a period of two years. The premises on which the community functioned was based on shared leadership, transformative community life together, mentoring relationships, meeting in homes and no paid staff. All members are bivocational trying to faithfully represent God to the world. At its most stable phase, the community had ten adults and five children in attendance. An estimated eighty relationships were initiated or maintained with non-believers and there were twelve reported salvations from close relatives and friends.

While the goal of replicating the community into two groups did not materialize and the community was disbanded, there were many insights to be gleaned from this project. The recommendations made can serve as a reference for future efforts to organize decentralized forms of missional communities in Singapore. The key lesson learnt would be to pay attention to cultural and societal norms in Singapore. Singapore is a collective society with a high power distance index. Being influenced by Confucian ethics, there is high regard for seniority, order in society and knowledge and expertise. Singapore society is well-structured and organized with rules for almost anything. Singaporeans being used to a well-oiled, centralized state planning process simply need things to be planned ahead. This is where being organic and spontaneous can be challenging. In addition, in fast-paced urban settings where people lead busy lives, the tendency for people to connect socially is outside of the homes. Coupled with the fact that the average size of Singapore's homes is rather small, it becomes an added obstacle of trying to organize the missional community in a home setting.

While society may change in future especially with the millennial generation, in the meantime, we will do well to consider these social preferences. Moving ahead, we should keep bivocational ministry as a key cornerstone of missional communities. We need to break the clergy-laity division and wean the people of God from relying on the professionals. It is the whole community that is the agency of God for mission. To do so, we should have a wider leadership base, preferably five or more key leaders when starting new missional communities. We should not be fixated that it had to be done in a home setting. It can start in a home, café, park, office, seminar room or wherever that is legal, permissible and accessible. Understanding how community sizes affect a

community's sustainability and longevity, we should aim for a size of fifty people as the community is formed and gathered within two years. This means that we will likely need a small function room, a commercial office or small theatre. Gatherings may then take on a hybrid format of simple worship, a short sharing, scriptural reading, small group discussions, prayers and fellowship. This also means that during the initial phases, leadership needs to be more directive. The cell church is a well-tested model in Singapore, possibly due to Singapore's collective culture. As such, homes will continue to function as decentralized cell groups where the bulk of discipleship, mentoring and leadership development will take place. As the community matures and more leaders are developed, authority will be progressively distributed. In order to ensure that we do not become comfortable and ease into a settled life, the community should always aim to start new and independent missional communities. The community should not be allowed to grow beyond 150 people before multiplying. This number is our estimate that the community can still function properly with a team of bivocational leaders. Any larger, ministry becomes more complex and there is a tendency of wanting paid staff. Power also becomes more concentrated in such situations. Starting new missional communities that are independent raises more leaders and distributes the authority of the church.

As a personal reflection, this project has been a journey of faith. From being a key pastor in a megachurch to becoming someone in the background trying to organize a handful of people, I had my fair share of doubts and disappointments. There were moments where I felt lost and unsure of God's leading. It was my most difficult transition. There were many challenges as I re-entered the workforce after years in the church world. My skills-set seems irrelevant to what the market wants. I experienced swings in my

theological thoughts regarding the church. I started to decry against the institutional church, well-aware of what ill it; and, having attempted an alternative, I also understand the massive challenges facing the outworking of organic missional churches. I am now richer and more balanced through this experience; knowing that God is still in his Church, whatever form it may take.

Looking back, I am most grateful for the salvation of my parents before they passed away. I had time for them and even moved in to stay with my Dad after my Mum died. Those few years were deeply cherished. It would not be possible if I were still in pastoral ministry. More family members are starting to come to Christ; my eldest sister, her two daughters, and her husband who recently passed away from cancer. I had the privilege of leading my brother-in-law to Christ and conducting his funeral; the first ever Christian funeral in my family. Work wise, I have never felt more fulfilled. I deeply enjoy the value and impact that I am bringing to people and organizations. The person who benefited the most is me. I am just amazed at the amount of leadership content that I have learnt during the course of my work. I also picked up an important new skill and now have the option of serving without the need to be paid. This is a wonderful freedom. I am excited with what lies ahead. There are many new opportunities God is opening up for me; both in business and in ministry. At the end, I am reminded that God is in the business of shaping hearts. I must say that through the whole process, I am not the same person I used to be. I have become a better human being. And for this, I am eternally grateful.

APPENDIX A

CURRICULUM DESIGN OF DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS

PROCESS OF GROUNDING

Beginning My Journey With Christ (BMJC)		Contemplative Bible Reading	
1	God's Promises– Our Assurance	1	Longing for God – Study Guide
2	Christ-Centered–Our New Life	2	Longing for God – Lectio Exercise
3	Prayer–Our Spiritual Breath	3	The Call of Jesus – Study Guide
4	God's Word–Our Nourishment	4	The Call of Jesus – Lectio Exercise
5	God's Family–Our Support	5	The Cost of Discipleship – Bible Study
6	Evangelism–Our Witness	6	The Cost of Discipleship – Lectio Exercise
7	Holy Spirit–Our Empowerment	7	The Priorities of Life – Bible Study
		8	The Priorities of Life – Lectio Exercise
		9	The Courage of Faith – Bible Study
		10	The Courage of Faith – Lectio Exercise
Christian Foundations		The Gospels	
1	The Doctrine of the Trinity	1	The World and Culture of Jesus
2	The Deity and Mission of Jesus	2	The Historical Life of Jesus
3	The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit	3	The Ministry of Jesus
4	The Authority of the Bible	4	The Central Message of Jesus
5	The Mission of the Church	5	The Mission of Jesus
6	Church Ordinances: Baptism & Communion	6	The Teachings Of Jesus Part I
7	The Way of the Gospel	7	The Teachings of Jesus Part II
8	The Second Coming of Christ	8	The Miracles of Jesus

PROCESS OF EQUIPPING

Christian Living		Experiencing God	
1	The Father Heart of God	1	God's Will and Your Life
2	The Lordship of Christ	2	God Pursues a Love Relationship
3	The Work of The Holy Spirit	3	Love and God's Invitation
4	The Lifestyle of Worship	4	God Speaks
5	The Discipline of Quiet Time	5	Adjusting Your Life to God
6	The Beatitude of Giving	6	Experiencing God's Will Through Obedience
7	The Importance of Witnessing	7	God's Will and the Church
8	The Commandment to Love	8	Experiencing God's Will In Your Daily Life
Romans and Galatians			
1	Overview of Romans and Galatians		
2	The Guilt of Sin		
3	God's Way of Justification		
4	Results of Justification		
5	Freedom from Sin's Bondage		
6	From Struggle to Victory		
7	What About the Jews?		
8	Living Together in the Body		

PROCESS OF MENTORING

Christian Ministry

- 1 What the Bible Says About Ministry
- 2 How Has God Shaped Me?
- 3 Understanding Spiritual Gifts
- 4 Identifying My Unique S.H.A.P.E.
- 5 Uniquely You Profile
- 6 Grace's Vision for Ministry
- 7 Fitting My S.H.A.P.E and My Ministry
- 8 Developing a Heart to Serve

Disciple-Making

- 1 The Need of the Hour
- 2 The Call to Disciple-making
- 3 The Process of Disciple-making
- 4 The Mark of a Disciple
- 5 The Portrait of a Discipler
- 6 The Discipling/Mentoring Session
- 7 Roles of a Mentor
- 8 Applying the S.O.A.P. Method in Mentoring

Pastoral Epistles

- 1 Finish the Job (I Tim. 1:1-20)
- 2 Conduct in the Church (I Tim. 2:1-3:16)
- 3 Upholding Sound Doctrine (I Tim. 3:14-4:16)
- 4 Wisdom in All Things (I Tim. 5:1-6:21)
- 5 A Peculiar People (Titus 1:1-3:15)
- 6 A Call to Courage (II Tim. 1:1-2:13)
- 7 Constancy in Trial (II Tim. 2:14-4:5)
- 8 Confident unto Death (II Tim. 4:6-22)

PROCESS OF REPRODUCING

Christian Mission

- 1 God's Plan for World Mission
- 2 Old and New Testament Mission
- 3 The Church and Her Mission Task
- 4 Spiritual Resources For the Task
- 5 Discovering My Life Mission
- 6 Equipped to Witness
- 7 Becoming A Spiritual Parent
- 8 Strategy to Reach Your Community

Spiritual Gifts

- 1 The Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- 2 The Vocal Gifts
- 3 The Revelation Gifts
- 4 The Power Gifts
- 5 The Gifts of Healing
- 6 The Ministry Gifts
- 7 The Motivational Gifts
- 8 Exercising Spiritual Gifts

Book of Acts

- 1 The Birth of the Church
- 2 The First Gospel Sermon
- 3 The Spread of the Church
- 4 The Spread of the Church to the Gentiles
- 5 First Missionary Journey
- 6 Second Missionary Journey
- 7 Third Missionary Journey
- 8 Trial and Witness: From Jerusalem to Rome

APPENDIX B

SCHEDULE OF SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Day 1

9.00am	Arrival, Facilities Familiarization and Room Allocation
9.30am	Solitude and Centering Exercises
12:00 noon	Midday Prayer
12.30 pm	Solitude and Lectio Divina
6:00 pm	Evening Prayer
6.30 pm	Simple Dinner
7.30 pm	Group Lectio
9.00 pm	Solitude and Ignatian Contemplation
11:30 pm	Prayer of Examen
12 midnight	Night Prayer
12:30 am	Sleep

Day 2

5:30 am	Arise and Light Refreshment
6.00am	Morning Prayer
6.30am	Morning Walk and Nature Contemplation
9.00am	Worship, Communion and Church Service
10.30am	Group Processing
12.00 noon	End of Retreat

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