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Won't You Be My Neighbor: Cultivating a Church to Discover How to Love Its Literal Neighbor

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WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR: CULTIVATING A CHURCH TO DISCOVER
HOW TO LOVE ITS LITERAL NEIGHBOR

Written by

JEREMY DECK

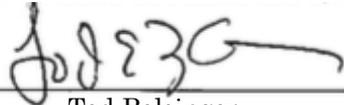
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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



Tod Bolsinger



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WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR: CULTIVATING A CHURCH TO DISCOVER
HOW TO LOVE ITS LITERAL NEIGHBOR

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

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

BY

JEREMY DECK
DECEMBER 2019

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ABSTRACT

Won't You Be My Neighbor: Cultivating a Church to Discover How to Love its Literal Neighbor

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Doctor of Ministry

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2019

The goal of this project was to help Zionsville Presbyterian Church understand the difference between technical and adaptive challenges. As the American church declines, congregations must not simply improve what they are already doing, but examine the way forward to a flourishing future, which depends on knowledge they have not yet acquired. Understanding the adaptive way forward requires shared leadership, an acknowledgement that new, shared learning will have to occur, dealing with loss and developing new hearts and minds. The way forward will be discovered through experimentation, reflection on what has been learned, then continued experimentation and reflection.

To help ZPC with adaptive learning, a pilot group experimented with how to love their literal neighbors. Throughout history, God's people have been sent into their communities and the world. ZPC must learn anew what this means for them. The experiment was based on propinquity, a sociological term for the direct correlation between where people are physically and the number and depth of their relationships. The pilot group spent two hours a week, for two months, in their front yards to see how this impacted their neighborly relationships.

The pilot group discovered that the culture around them had changed and that the number of neighbors who were outside were fewer than anticipated. They also learned that being present and not actively engaged in anything was seen as odd and made others uncomfortable. However, they met neighbors for the first time, learned what their neighbors were enduring and grew in their understanding of Scripture. Through a second round of experiments, participants opened their homes to neighbors and discovered that this was an impactful way to engage more deeply with their neighbors. The process led to a group of people whose hearts and minds were changed.

Content Reader: Tod Bolsinger, Ph.D.

Words: 292

This paper is dedicated to the incredible women in my life who have shaped me in more ways than I can fathom. My mother and sister helped to encourage and mold me when I was in great need of guidance and needing to know I was loved. My four daughters continually remind me that my worth has little to do with how good of a pastor or leader I am and much more to do with who I am as their father (and what a blessed gift it is to be their father!). And my wife, Megan, who I met at just the right time, God's time, and who has been my incredible partner in marriage, parenting, ministry and life. I love you in ever growing ways and know that this is your project as well!

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PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Every Sunday morning when attendees of Zionsville Presbyterian Church (ZPC) in Zionsville, Indiana open their bulletins, they see two statistics: worship attendance from the previous Sunday and the ZPC budget numbers. In the midst of songs of worship, testimony, Scripture reading, and the proclamation of God’s Word, these two statistics stay affixed in the bulletins and in people’s minds. If measurements reveal what an organization values most, then the internal focus of these numbers may reveal where the true heart of ZPC, and perhaps the vast majority of American churches, lies. The importance of these statistics is buoyed by Christian publishers that annually list “Largest U.S. Congregations” and “Fastest Growing Churches;” despite the disclaimers, these lists often cultivate a culture in which significance is tied to the number of people coming through the church doors each weekend.¹ In such a culture, it is unsurprising that the message of Jesus to love one’s neighbor is somewhat drowned out. If culture “eats strategy for breakfast,” it can easily devour Jesus’ critical message of loving one’s neighbor for dessert.² This situation is not the result of willful negligence by pastors or church leaders. Rather, there is a failure of churches to take seriously the culture and systems that influence them—a failure that often leaves congregations without a clear sense of how to love their neighbors.

¹ One of these churches, Trader’s Point Christian Church, is five miles from ZPC and was recently called the fifth fastest growing church in America. See “Outreach 100: The One Hundred Fastest-Growing Churches in America, 2017.” *Outreach Magazine*, September 26, 2017, accessed October 15, 2018, <https://outreachmagazine.com/ideas/24470-traders-point-christian-church-2.html>.

² Peter Drucker, quoted in Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 73.

To be clear, increased church attendance is not a problem in its own right. Instead, church numbers become problematic when they overshadow and impede the command to love one's neighbor. Focus on numbers can create tremendous pressure to ensure a church is growing larger (or at least not declining) and can sometimes come at the expense of loving our neighbors well. Far too often, the value of a church and its pastor is based on measurable data found in church bulletins rather than on less tangible qualities, like obedience to Jesus' call to neighborly love. This emphasis on numbers and budgets can easily lead to unhealthy churches who reflect the culture rather than the Great Commission.

To face this ministry challenge head-on, churches must understand that telling people to love their neighbors with increased frequency alone will not result in changed behaviors. Instead, churches must become more aware of the deeper ways in which people have been formed; by doing so, they will be better positioned to help those who gathered at the Lord's table on Sundays extend that table into their neighborhoods the rest of the week.³ But the challenges are many and will not be easily fixed.

The first challenge for churches trying to form engaged, neighbor-loving people comes from the reality that it is simply easier to count the numbers entering church doors for worship than it is to measure how those who exit each week actually love their neighbors. For most congregations, it takes less than five minutes to count and record how many bodies are seated in its pews. To measure and assess how successful

³ This idea was stimulated by Eugene Peterson's image of what it means to carry the Lord's Supper out into our world. See Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

congregations are at engaging their neighbors requires more time and creativity. It is critical, however, that churches develop new ways of measuring. As Joseph Myers points out, “our way of measuring is not a neutral tool that simply tells us what there is to see.... No, our way of measuring influences the facts in a way that has a profound effect on our perception of reality.”⁴ If churches are going to follow Jesus’ great command, they will need to have the courage and determination to think anew about how and what they measure. As Edwards Deming notes, “Your system is perfectly designed to get the results you’re getting.”⁵ In other words, if what is being measured are the numbers of those who are coming to worship each weekend, then it should be no surprise that these numbers become the focus, rather than how well the church is genuinely engaging in the neighborhoods in which its members reside. Changing this this will require the difficult task of changing the system.

The second challenge facing churches is that they have become accustomed to determining success of mission by how much money they give away, especially to countries outside of the United States. Tod Bolsinger has astutely pointed out that churches who have a history of successfully focusing on world missions will often be the same ones that struggle to take seriously their call to love their literal neighbors.⁶ The temptation to use church budgets as a primary metric for church vitality is understandable. After all, the amount of money earmarked for missionaries is remarkably

⁴ Joseph Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 59, quoted in JR Woodward and Dan White Jr., *The Church as Movement* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 165.

⁵ Edwards Deming, quoted in Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 127.

⁶ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 75.

easy to chart and include in an annual report. This ease makes church treasurers, mission committees, and congregations joyful. But when the definition of being engaged in missions is limited to contributing money or doing overseas evangelism, it hinders congregations from seeing their own neighborhoods as a part of the mission to which Jesus has called them.

Third, defining our neighbor has become ambiguous to the point of almost meaninglessness. As Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon cogently note, a generic neighbor easily becomes no neighbor at all.⁷ While it is certainly true that Jesus did not want to limit one's definition of neighbor to those who live next to you, neither did he intend to exclude those who live in close proximity. In other words, while neighbor may mean more than those who live in your neighborhood, it is critical to see it also includes those who live nearby. If we cannot love those who live next door, our chances of truly loving those beyond our neighborhoods diminish dramatically. The church must take seriously what it means to love one's literal neighbors.

The final challenge churches must overcome to grow members who love their literal neighbors is the cost to leadership involved in this transformational work. The outsized emphasis typically assigned to things happening inside of the church building—which, not inconsequentially, usually extracts members from their neighborhoods—demands that more than occasional pastoral pleadings or sermon series will be necessary to bring about true change. Transforming churches requires what is often called

⁷ Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2012), 35.

“adaptive” change, rather than “technical” change.⁸ The difference between these two types of change will be further explored below. Adaptive change requires more from leadership than technical change. Adaptive change requires a willingness to share leadership, engage in painful losses, risk reflective experimentation, and, perhaps most difficult of all for pastors, admit that he or she does not know the best way forward. Even those congregations and leaders who desire to grow in their ability to love their literal neighbors will fail to do so if they do not consider the depth and difficulty of this change.

The purpose of this ministry project is to ask how an established church like ZPC can cultivate an environment in which congregation members better love their neighbors by being more physically present in their neighborhoods, developing more relationships and understanding more clearly the hopes and needs of those who live near them. With most established congregations, this shift will not come easily. The structures of ZPC are primarily geared toward what happens within its four walls. The leadership will therefore have to balance a new attentiveness to neighbor-love at ZPC with an ongoing care for existing programs on the church campus, ensuring they do not flounder. This will inevitably reveal competing values that will need to be navigated. If the leadership is going to help the congregation embark on this new journey, then the congregation must believe that the leadership has the skills and talents to take them on this journey successfully.⁹ As Bolsinger writes, “if there is no trust, there is no travel.”¹⁰

⁸ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 60.

⁹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 68.

¹⁰ Bolsinger, 66.

It will also be important for ZPC to understand that this shift of focus to congregants' neighborhoods is not changing the church's DNA. Instead, the shift actually allows members to live into who the church has been from the start. Dwight Zscheile writes that "locating a usable past from which to borrow links the church's legacy and its emerging future in ways that foster the sharing of resources, authority, and wisdom."¹¹ When ZPC began in the early 1980s, members went door-to-door connecting with their neighbors in an attempt to better understand who they were. As oftentimes happens, this neighborhood emphasis declined as ZPC grew larger. However, the same passion for the neighborhoods can be rekindled among ZPC members if they can begin to see that this is who they have been from the beginning. This connection to its past will increase the likelihood of a successful adaptive change. As Bolsinger suggests, "successful adaptive change is always a healthy adaption of DNA."¹²

In trying to cultivate change, it will also be critical to begin with a smaller group within the church that can experiment and ultimately teach the larger congregation. Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk point out that when deep change occurs in congregations, it frequently begins on the edges. According to Roxburgh and Romanuk, "adaptive change involves the ability to create multiple experiments around the edge and connect them with one another to form a co-learning environment."¹³ This arrangement allows for flexibility and an increased ability to take risks. This smaller group can engage in

¹¹ Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York: Morehouse, 2014), 117.

¹² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 55.

¹³ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 60.

experiments where they can reflect on what they have learned before launching into more experiments.¹⁴ That said, as Zscheile points out, if this innovative group is too detached from the rest of the church community then what they are learning will never be incorporated into the larger body.¹⁵ Therefore, it is important to be aware of (and not release) the tension between the larger body and the smaller group of experimenters. This rapid experimentation (or prototyping) produces knowledge, which helps the group (and eventually the congregation) to better understand their neighborhoods and how best to engage them.¹⁶

To tackle this particular ministry challenge, this ministry project will undertake an experiment to discover what can be learned when a pilot group engages in an act of propinquity within their neighborhoods. Propinquity is the way that physical proximity affects relationships. Social psychologist Leon Festinger writes that according to his research, those who live in apartments located next to stairwells are acquainted with more neighbors than those who have fewer people who walk by their doors.¹⁷ Also, those who live near mailboxes have more relationships with those in other apartments than those who do not.¹⁸ Propinquity reveals the tremendous effect physical presence makes in our acquaintances or relationships with others. If those in the church are going to learn how

¹⁴ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 117.

¹⁵ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 121.

¹⁶ Zscheile, 63.

¹⁷ Leon Festinger, quoted in Joseph Grenny, ed., et al, *Influencer* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2013), 267.

¹⁸ Grenny, 267.

to love their neighbors, they must begin developing practices that allow them to be physically present with them.¹⁹

Woodward and White Jr. point out, however, that propinquity will not just happen. This shift does not occur haphazardly, but with great intentionality.²⁰ For this reason, this project will ask participants to spend two hours a week in their front yard where people are more likely to walk or drive by. They will be asked to make themselves readily available and interruptible, meaning that they will not be engaging in activities such as yard work or being on their phones. The experiment is seeking to discover what people learn about their neighbors, about themselves and about their faith when they allow themselves to engage in the practice of propinquity. Based on what is learned, the follow up questions will ask how this information might be shared with the larger body, what structural and/or programmatic changes (if any) need to occur at ZPC, and what experiments should be tried next.

To cultivate shared learning, there will be a meeting with the twenty to thirty participants before the experiment where they will receive information on the project and be given a neighborhood map to measure which of their neighbors they already know and the depth to which they know them. Every week via a shared document the participants will answer six questions regarding the experiment. The participants' answers will be viewable by all who are participating so that the learning is not limited to the facilitator. For adaptive change to occur, the learning must be shared by everyone.

¹⁹ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 174.

²⁰ Woodward and White, Jr., 205.

Halfway through the project, the participants will meet again to share what has been learned and whether or not any changes to the experimentation need to be made. Finally, when the two months are over, the participants will gather together again to ascertain what they have discovered, evaluate how best to use this information for the greater church and make suggestions on what experiments should be conducted next. The participants will also fill out the same neighborhood map they were provided at the orientation meeting to see whether more acquaintances and friendships have occurred as a result of this propinquity experiment. In this way, the research will measure both statistics and stories. As Woodward and White Jr. write, “if we ignore statistics, it’s likely we don’t have systems in place to build capacity.... If we ignore stories, it’s likely we aren’t measuring the heart of what we are doing.”²¹

The desire of this project is that ZPC, and perhaps other congregations, will learn how to genuinely follow Jesus’ command to love their neighbors by engaging in practices which clearly focus on those who live near them. This faithfulness to Jesus is going to require an adaptive change that will involve risk, pain and loss, but will also help guide ZPC into a new way of seeing themselves and a new way of life. What exactly this change will look like is unknown to the leadership of ZPC, including myself. This uncertainty may be disconcerting to the leadership and to the congregation. As Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky point out, people understandably expect their leaders to know what to do.²² However, in times of adaptive change, good leaders need to readily admit

²¹ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 166.

²² Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 123.

that they do not always know the way forward.²³ Truthfully, if learning how to love one's literal neighbor was easily done, more congregations would do so. This will undoubtedly be hard work. The hope is that together ZPC and its leadership can slowly begin to grow their presence in their neighborhoods, allowing our members to faithfully learn what it means to love their neighbors. While the people of ZPC may not yet know how to do that or what it looks like, engaging in this project will help to bring them closer to who Jesus has called them to be, what he has called them to do, and where he has called them to go: into the neighborhoods.

²³ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 22.

CHAPTER 1:
COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Zionsville Presbyterian Church is located in Zionsville, Indiana, approximately twenty miles northwest of Indianapolis. The building sits on twenty-five acres and straddles the line between the towns of Zionsville and Carmel. This suburban area has seen strong growth over the last two decades and that growth is predicted to continue in the coming years.¹ While it is becoming more racially diverse, it is still overwhelmingly white. Zionsville and Carmel are both affluent suburbs with predominantly white-collar workers who are highly educated and place a priority on education. It is a family-oriented area with many parks, trails, and recreation programs to attract and keep families with children. As with all contexts, the communities of Zionsville, Carmel, and northwestern Indianapolis are unique and must be taken into account when assessing the congregation. Long before a leader can introduce change to a church, he or she must understand the context of that church. Similarly, before one tries to understand how to love one's neighbor, he or she must grow in knowledge of the characteristics of the neighborhood

¹ Wayne DeLong, Director of Planning and Economic Development, email message to me, June 27, 2019.

that he or she is trying to love. This chapter will give more clarity to the types of communities around ZPC.

Six years ago, during a time of pastoral transition, ZPC received an in-depth report that gave a “demographic story” of the northwest area of Indianapolis.² This report covered approximately a ten mile radius around ZPC. When the report was written, there were 173,736 people who lived in the area, and the community has continued to grow in subsequent years.³ As expected, this area has grown at a much faster rate than the state average.⁴ It is an area where 60 percent of the population is married and that percentage is increasing. There is considerable economic wealth in this ten mile radius with the average income being \$107,170, far higher than the state average.⁵ The racial make-up of this area is primarily white (81 percent), followed by African-American (7 percent) and then Asian and Hispanic (5 percent each).⁶

As one takes a closer look at Zionsville and Carmel, where 75 percent of the ZPC congregation lives, these statistics become more pronounced. The population of Zionsville currently stands at 25,000 and is in the midst of a growth surge.⁷ For many years, Zionsville attempted to limit growth (especially in contrast to its neighboring city

² Mission Study Report and Appendices, internal church document, September 14, 2012, appendix 1.

³ Mission Study Report, 3.

⁴ Mission Study Report, appendix 2.

⁵ Mission Study Report, 7.

⁶ Mission Study Report, 3.

⁷ According to the chamber of commerce, Zionsville has grown 13.8 percent since 2010. See “Live & Work,” Zionsville Chamber of Commerce, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.zionsvillechamber.org/live--work.html>.

of Carmel), but those limitations have been drastically reduced in the last several years. Currently, the average income in Zionsville is over \$120,000, the median property value is near \$350,000 and the population is 90 percent white.⁸ Carmel now has approximately 87,000 residents who have an average income of nearly \$107,000, a median property value of \$306,500 and are 82 percent white.⁹

One of the areas that must be taken into consideration when ministering in this location is the effect that economic wealth has on people. When the average salaries of someone in Zionsville and Carmel are coupled with the relatively low cost of living, it results in people who have a higher than average amount of discretionary income. This reality can be seen in the high amount that is given to charitable organizations, including to churches.¹⁰ ZPC itself gave at a higher rate than average when it comes to those in the Presbyterian Church (USA). While an increase in charitable giving is helpful in fulfilling the mission of ZPC, this abundance of discretionary income also means that people in this area have more money to spend on youth travel sports, second homes, and vacations, resulting in many Sundays when people are not in Sunday worship. In 2012, the average ZPC member came to worship only three out of ten Sundays.¹¹ How to bring about change in a congregation, and how to communicate these things, must take into account

⁸ “Zionsville, IN,” Data USA, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/zionsville-in/>.

⁹ “Carmel, IN,” Data USA, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/carmel-in/#demographics>.

¹⁰ Mission Study Report, Appendix 14.

¹¹ Mission Study Report, 10.

the effect that discretionary income has on people's attendance at worship and participation in the life of the church.

Education is also highly valued in the northwest side of Indianapolis, and many cite it as a reason to move into the area. The school system is continually ranked highly compared to other school districts in Indiana and across the United States. Students at Zionsville Community Schools consistently do well in standard testing done by the state of Indiana (ISTEP).¹² Though ranking high schools is a dubious endeavor, Zionsville High School was ranked third in the state and 271st in the nation by *U.S. News and World Report*.¹³ Athletics, music, and arts are also highly emphasized in Zionsville and Carmel with both schools winning highly competitive state and national championships in cross-country, swimming, show choir, and band.

This academic prowess makes these school districts highly sought after, with 98 percent of Zionsville high school students graduating each year.¹⁴ Unfortunately, with these accolades also comes a high amount of pressure for students to do well. Anecdotally, this pressure results in students feeling stress from their parents and schools, as well as themselves, resulting in increased anxiety and depression. In a high-achieving culture, it is often easy to get people to do tasks and to do them well, however, the impact

¹² Arika Herron, "ISTEP scores are in. Here are the top schools from around Indiana," *Indianapolis Star*, October 3, 2018, accessed on October 14, 2018, www.indystar.com/story/news/education/2018/10/03/indiana-istep-scores-2018-these-top-performing-schools/1507804002/.

¹³ "Zionsville Community High School," US News and World Report, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/indiana/districts/zionsville-community-schools/zionsville-community-high-school-7183>.

¹⁴ "Zionsville Community High School," US News and World Report, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/indiana/districts/zionsville-community-schools/zionsville-community-high-school-7183>.

that this culture is having on students and adults needs also to be further understood as one ministers in this context. Furthermore, for this project, this pressure to be outwardly successful is something that participants must be mindful of as they make themselves available to their neighbors. Well-manicured lawns and solid fences do not always indicate that all is well within the home's walls.

For many in this area, the stress on academics comes out of their own experience of having graduated from high school, college, and perhaps even graduate school. The percentage of those who live in northwestern Indianapolis who have bachelor's degrees far exceeds the state average. In Zionsville proper, 98 percent of people have a high school degree, 68.7 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 33.1 percent have a graduate or professional degree.¹⁵ This translates into a higher than average amount of white-collar workers. Over 80 percent of residents in Zionsville have white-collar jobs, with the most prevalent being occupations in management, professional specialties, and sales.¹⁶ There are also many entrepreneurs in the Zionsville area and many that work from home. In 2015, an entrepreneurial and co-working center called zWorks opened in downtown Zionsville. Three years later, after reaching capacity in their original location, they opened up another location nearby. For church leaders, this emphasis on education and the prevalence of white-collar jobs is critical to understand when communicating what is happening in the church and why. This demographic is open to change, but they need to understand clearly why the change is occurring. Also, because many of those who

¹⁵ "About Town," Zionsville Chamber of Commerce, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://view.joomag.com/zionsville-visitors-guide-about-town-2018/0170059001534366235?short>.

¹⁶ Mission Study Report, 3.

live in this area are leaders in their respective fields or businesses, they need to be able to participate in the choices being made. These considerations will be examined more closely in the following chapters.

Also critical in understanding the Zionsville area is the relational connectedness and sense of community that go beyond statistics. Unlike many other suburbs in central Indiana, Zionsville has a downtown area that has been in existence since before the nineteenth century. The city was incorporated in 1866, but before that year there were enough people gathered in this area that in 1861 Abraham Lincoln addressed citizens at a railroad depot in what would five years later become the city of Zionsville.¹⁷ Though the railroad that brought Lincoln and many others through the town no longer exists, that railway now serves as a pathway that serves as a major gathering place for many residents.

Zionsville has placed a strong emphasis on parks and recreation. The village has over four hundred acres of land consisting of seventeen parks and facilities.¹⁸ It has a municipal golf course, a splash park, a skate park, a nature sanctuary, and over twenty miles of paved pathways. The largest gathering place for the community is Lion's Park, which sits in the heart of the community, nestled between Main Street and Eagle Creek. Lion's Park has several baseball and softball fields, separate playgrounds for younger and older kids, a gazebo, basketball courts, a sand volleyball court, and a pathway for walkers and runners. The Fall Festival, Easter Egg Hunt, and Independence Day fireworks are

¹⁷ Historical marker, Zionsville, IN.

¹⁸ "Visit," Zionsville Chamber of Commerce, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.zionsvillechamber.org/visit.html>.

three of many gatherings that occur in Lion's Park each year. The park also serves as a place to gather during impromptu times of celebration or sadness.¹⁹ This emphasis on community and family (a modern day "Mayberry" as it is often called) can provide strength in difficult times. It should be noted, however, that this culture can also be stifling for those who prefer to be unique. There can be pressure to fit in and keep up appearances, rather than engage in difficult conversations.

The quaint downtown of Zionsville is also a hallmark of this community, drawing people in from around central Indiana as well as serving as a hub for locals. The brick street and older buildings give a sense of rootedness, especially at a time when so much around the downtown area is growing and changing. The restaurants, boutiques, and antique stores serve as alternatives to chain restaurants and stores found a couple miles east or west. In many ways the downtown and Lion's Park are oases that harken back to a different, and perhaps simpler, time. Many who live in the Zionsville area grew up in more rural parts of Indiana and so their wealth now allows them to move to a place that is close to the accoutrements of a large urban city like Indianapolis, while retaining a piece of their own upbringing. This tension serves as a metaphor for this community in that it often seems to be straddling and navigating the old and the new. Perhaps this metaphor can be used as ZPC tries to move forward from what has worked in the past to a new future in people's neighborhoods.

In looking at the community context as a part of this ministry project, it would be negligent to overlook the religious element of this area. There is certainly a strong

¹⁹ Lion's Park recently hosted a balloon release for hundreds of residents who gathered to commemorate two students who had been tragically killed the day before.

element of Christendom that holds on in central Indiana. It is not an aberration in this area for a greeting of someone new to include the question of where he or she goes to church. While, like the rest of North America, there may be a downward trend in church attendance, it continues to be relatively high in the Zionsville and Carmel area, especially for those in more politically and socially conservative circles.

According to the report done for ZPC in 2012, 48 percent of residents in this area considered themselves spiritual, whereas 36 percent would classify themselves as conservative evangelicals. Having over one-third of the area residents who consider themselves to be conservative Christians certainly shapes area norms and expectations. One way in which this reality plays out is in the assumption that everyone believes the same things, and therefore the notion of trying to be a witness to Jesus in one's neighborhood can be undervalued. Again, it is easier for many to believe that the only place to truly minister is across the globe to those who are explicitly non-Christian. Changing ZPC members' understanding of the reality that not everyone in this area is Christian will only occur as the subject is discussed and, more importantly, as they begin to truly get to know their neighbors. One hope of the experiment is that as people engage with their neighbors, they will begin to understand more clearly that there are many who do not yet know of the love of Jesus. As the participants of this experiment are able to share this with the rest of ZPC, the assumption of who their neighbors are and what they believe will begin to grow more nuanced.

It is also important to be aware of how this community is affected by the conservative nature of its politics. In 2016, Boone County, where Zionsville is located,

voted over 60 percent for Republican Donald Trump.²⁰ Hamilton County, where Carmel is situated, voted nearly 57 percent for Trump.²¹ There is a sense in this area that if one wants to win an election, then he or she needs to run as a Republican. The congressional representative, state senator and representative, and mayor of Zionsville are all Republicans.²² This tendency towards one party can give the impression that, much like religion, this area is monolithic in how it thinks and acts. This presumed uniformity can lead to a lack of curiosity or desire to engage with others because of assumptions that one knows his or her neighbor simply by looking in the mirror. Hopefully a renewed sense of loving one's neighbor could not only help ZPC members realize that not everyone thinks the same as they do, but also serve as a way of beginning to bridge some of the political divide that is so rampant in this time.²³

The final element of the community context that is important to keep in mind for this project—and more difficult to measure—is the importance of neighborhoods or subdivisions. Newcomers to this area are struck by how directions are given using subdivisions rather than street names. After living here for some time, it becomes apparent that subdivisions mark social status in addition to location. While the

²⁰ “Indiana Presidential Primary Results,” Politico, December 13, 2016, accessed December 1, 2019, www.politico.com/2016-election/primary/results/map/president/indiana/.

²¹ “Indiana Presidential Primary Results,” Politico, December 13, 2016, accessed December 1, 2019, www.politico.com/2016-election/primary/results/map/president/indiana/.

²² WAYEO, accessed December 1, 2019, www.wayeo.egis.39dn.com/#.

²³ Mark Labberton, President of Fuller Theological Seminary, has said that hard conversations must occur at short distances. Since there is rarely anything as close as one house to another, one result of this experiment might be to have more meaningful conversations with neighbors with different political, religious, or moral viewpoints.

characteristics of each subdivision are certainly generalizations, it would be difficult to argue that they do not play a role in understanding the ethos of this area.

Living in The Village implies that one cares less about the amount of property he or she has and more about being able to walk to Main Street to enjoy the shops and restaurants. This is an area with fewer children than other Zionsville subdivisions and is often the landing place for empty nesters who are downsizing. Those who live in the subdivision called Village Walk also want to be somewhat close to Main Street, but cannot afford to be in The Village.²⁴ Brookhaven is seen as being the subdivision for those who have new money and have not yet achieved what neighbors on the other side of 146th Street in The Willows have accomplished. That said, The Willows can be further subdivided between the East Side which is wealthier than Brookhaven but not as much so as the West Side of The Willows known as Willow Bend. At the same time, it is assumed that those who live in the more rural parts of Zionsville with five or more acres are wanting to get back to their roots and out of the competitiveness of the subdivisions. Even in the rural areas, those who live in Old Hunt Club Road are viewed as having more wealth than their rural neighbors.

These are, of course, all stereotypes and generalizations, but they do play a significant role in social stratification in this area. While churches certainly play a role in helping to bridge divisions (even divisions as frustrating or seemingly silly as subdivisions), there is also the reality that the most natural way to reach deeper into neighborhoods is by having ZPC members connect with people in their own subdivision.

²⁴ It should be noted that I live in The Village and was told that, because I live on 9th street, I am not truly in The Village because, according to the true locals, the village ends at 6th street.

This is not a call to limit one's witness to only similar people, but it is to say that oftentimes people are most receptive initially to hearing from those with whom they have fewer barriers. In this way, rather than waiting to witness to Jesus' love after they have been extracted from their neighborhoods, members can meet people right where they are and where they might be most open to receiving love.

Understanding the context in which one lives, works, and ministers can be incredibly beneficial when trying to understand how best to love people and be effective witnesses for Jesus. Woodward and White Jr. point out that the church must move from "unconscious busyness to conscious habitation."²⁵ Because every context is unique, understanding the role that family, politics, faith, and academics play in a community can be incredibly enlightening for knowing how to approach one's neighbor. As Zscheile writes, "the church cannot expect people to listen to its teachings without first engaging people where they are."²⁶ While listening to each individual neighbor will be critical for understanding them and how to best love them, understanding the context of the community and the pressures and values of those who live there will help ensure that we can love them right where they are.

²⁵ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 206.

²⁶ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 66.

CHAPTER 2:

A FLOURISHING CHURCH PLANT

Zionsville Presbyterian Church began in the early 1980s when a group of Presbyterians astutely realized that the northwest suburbs of Indianapolis were on the precipice of booming growth.¹ Beginning on the back porch of someone who would become a ZPC charter member, a small group slowly began assembling more people and asking if there was interest in planting a church. In 1982, they started going door-to-door through the village of Zionsville asking residents of the town if they went to church. If their neighbors answered affirmatively, the future ZPC members would wish them well and move on. But if those answering the door indicated they did not attend church, these intrepid church planters asked if they would be interested in joining their new church.²

Slowly this group began to grow. In February 1983, twenty-three people gathered at Zionsville Middle School for their first worship service.³ On Palm Sunday of that year they reached one hundred people in worship and in October 1984 they were chartered by

¹ Much of this information came from conversations with charter members between 2014 and 2019.

² Peter Hudson, email message to me, June 2, 2018.

³ Mission Study Report, 4.

the PC(USA) with 143 members.⁴ Late in 1983, ZPC purchased 4.3 acres at the corner of 116th and Michigan Road where the present church building currently stands. In 1987, it moved out of the middle school and into its own ten thousand square foot building with a three hundred seat sanctuary.⁵ The impressive growth continued and because of this increase, ZPC continued to expand its facilities. In 1997, the church added 65,000 square feet that included a new sanctuary, gym, narthex, and more classrooms, the latter housing Noah's Ark Preschool that ZPC began in 1992.⁶ In 2005, attendance was averaging nearly one thousand people each Sunday. ZPC even hosted a PC(USA) conference on how to plant new churches.⁷

There are many reasons for why ZPC was able to flourish as it did. In the first several months of my time as pastor, I held many small group meetings with ZPC congregants to understand more fully why ZPC had the impact it did.⁸ Reverend Glenn McDonald was the first installed pastor and was known for being a riveting preacher. His tenure lasted until 2011 and the vast majority of that time was looked upon favorably by the congregation. McDonald's intelligence was often mentioned as being something that drew people to him and to the congregation. In a community and culture where intellect and scholarship are highly respected, this was a genuine asset for McDonald and ZPC.

⁴ Mission Study Report, 4.

⁵ Mission Study Report, 4.

⁶ Mission Study Report, 23.

⁷ Mission Study Report, 10.

⁸ Much of the following information was gleaned from notes transcribed from events called Desserts with the Decks.

ZPC also did a good job of empowering its members to create their own ministries, which tapped into the entrepreneurial spirit of the congregation.⁹ ZPC is full of entrepreneurs and business leaders, so giving them this freedom helped them assimilate their professional strengths with what ZPC was doing. While church plants are typically creative, there can be a temptation to become more conservative and status quo as buildings go up and the number of congregants swell. ZPC's commitment to allowing the laity to continue to lead in various capacities helped them to avoid much of this temptation.

Many at the Dessert with the Decks, the name of the introductory gatherings with congregants I embarked upon with my wife when we arrived at ZPC, mentioned how Great Banquet also played a pivotal role in the flourishing of ZPC. Great Banquet is the Presbyterian version of Cursillo, a program which was started in 1944 in Madrid, Spain by Roman Catholics. It is a three-day weekend that cultivates honesty, vulnerability, and community through fifteen talks, all but one by laity, in which speakers stress the grace of Jesus. Great Banquet is solely lay-led, which gives the laity a remarkable opportunity to grow in leadership as well as allowing them to connect more easily with the guests of the Banquet. Many of those who went through Great Banquet ended up becoming leaders of ZPC. The weekend also involves the "Great Banquet Community," a large group of people who have previously gone through Great Banquet and serve as team members, sponsors, designated prayers, servers, and so forth. This continual role of the community helps many members to continue to feel engaged with the Great Banquet process. More

⁹ Jerry Deck, "Zionsville Presbyterian Church Organizational and Personal Assessment," course paper, Fuller Theological Seminary, November 1, 2015, 11.

than five thousand people have gone through ZPC's Great Banquet since it began in 1992 and this particular Great Banquet community has planted nineteen new communities in places like Indiana, Ohio, Mexico, Florida and most recently, Brazil.¹⁰

ZPC's focus on international missions was also cited by many as being something that attracted them to the congregation and helped to give the church vitality. Throughout its history, ZPC has spent a significant portion of its operation budget for mission work.¹¹ The majority of this giving has been to international missionaries and mission projects. They have primarily focused on the countries of Romania, Egypt, Spain, Brazil, Egypt and most recently, Uganda. Though at times ZPC has struggled with communicating to the congregation all of its involvement in global mission, there is a significant amount of joy and energy that the congregation has derived from being involved (at least monetarily) in mission work outside of its walls.¹²

Troubles Arise

For its first twenty-five years ZPC served as an example for what church plants should look like. However, in 2008 things began to change dramatically. Two years of plateauing attendance coupled with the recession of 2008 sent ZPC spinning in a direction it had never experienced and ultimately left it in a very different place. By 2013,

¹⁰ Mission Study Report, 20.

¹¹ At one point ZPC's goal was to designate 30 percent of its giving to missions and was increasing giving by 1 percent each year. During the difficult period at ZPC (discussed further below) that increase stopped. Currently, ZPC designates 22.1 percent to mission work such as supporting international mission workers, giving to international church plants and supporting local organizations that work with the poor and homeless.

¹² Mission Study Report, 16.

over half of the congregation had left the church. The first, only and long-time senior pastor Glenn McDonald resigned twice. The staff was decimated, going from five installed pastors to one. The morale of the congregation moved from a place of joy and excitement to one where the remnant looked to be suffering from what was described by some as PTSD. It was an experience that left few unscathed.

Just as there were a myriad of reasons why ZPC flourished during its first twenty years, there are also a myriad of causes for the turmoil during this half-decade. This difficult season began when a staff member with significant clout engaged in an affair with a church member. This incident caused concern for the congregation. Many believed that the church leadership did not deal with this issue in a healthy manner.¹³ Perhaps as critical to ZPC's struggles was the staff member who replaced the staff member caught in the affair. This replacement immediately began conducting one-on-one interviews with about one hundred members of the congregation, asking about the relationships between the staff and the congregation.¹⁴ The result of these interviews caused a schism between the beloved executive pastor and the beloved senior pastor. Eventually, under pressure, the executive pastor sought and received a new call. This action resulted in many in the

¹³ There was a letter that was sent out that, in the opinion of some at ZPC, was too revealing and shamed those involved. This has been gleaned from conversations during my time at ZPC and was brought up again recently when we had to let go of a staff member because of a different ethical issue.

¹⁴ Like much that surround this time in ZPC's life, there is a fair amount of ambiguity about these interviews. Some said that they were session-sanctioned and others that they were not. Some said the specific questions were appropriate, while others suggest that the staff member began asking his own questions with his own answers in mind. What is not disputed is that these interviews were done one-on-one, meaning that no one could corroborate, or dispute, what the staff member said he heard in these interviews.

congregation who sided with the executive pastor being at odds with those who did not. Eventually, some of those who were disgruntled left ZPC to start a new church nearby.¹⁵

Amidst this turmoil the session was in uncharted territory and hired consultants to address the situation. The consultants, paid for by five ZPC families, made their assessment through many meetings with the staff and congregation.¹⁶ After the consultants finished their work, they recommended that Glenn McDonald take a six week break from ZPC and go to their headquarters in the Seattle area for counseling. This recommendation took many in the congregation by surprise. Some questioned if this course of action was wise or if McDonald was being squeezed out by the session or particular congregation members. Others, of course, began to wonder what was wrong with McDonald that he needed to have special counseling. The ambiguity of this time continued and the turmoil seemed only to grow.¹⁷

When McDonald returned from his counseling he was refreshed and prepared to resume his position. However, McDonald was unaware that the sealed letter that the counseling center had asked him to give the session made it clear that they did not think he should continue to be the pastor of ZPC. Not surprisingly, this recommendation set off

¹⁵ The ZPC youth pastor at the time ended up becoming a pastor at this new church, further dividing the congregation.

¹⁶ Initially it was thought that having the consultants paid for by five church families would assuage any concern from the congregation about the cost of the consultants (at this time ZPC has already started using a line of credit in order to make payroll). The reality is that, because of the divisiveness of the consultants' work, the fact that only five families paid for it became an issue for many in the congregation, as they blamed these five families for dividing the church even more.

¹⁷ It was also during this time that ZPC engaged in a survey called Reveal which was to measure whether ZPC was doing a good job of making disciples (this came out of work by Willow Creek Church). The results were abysmal, continuing the downward spiral of ZPC as many questioned whether they had truly been making disciples. See "Organizational and Personal Assessment," November 1, 2015, 7.

another round of confusion, anger, and unsettledness. Within a short time, McDonald gave his letter of resignation, called for a congregational meeting to officially dissolve his call, but then rescinded his resignation.¹⁸ Though his resignation was voted down by the congregation, it was clear that this was a short-lived resolution and, after eighteen months full of additional turmoil, debate about McDonald, and continued decrease in attendance and offering collection, McDonald resigned permanently to take another call. By this time, ZPC was in deep mourning and a shell of what it had once been. A church that had been highly centered around the charisma of McDonald was now left trying to discern its identity moving forward.

At the end of the 2011, Reverend Jim Capps, a respected pastor in the presbytery, became the interim pastor for the next eighteen months. While he was unable to squelch the turmoil altogether, nor stop the decline in attendance and offering, he was able to slowly bring peace to the congregation. By the end of his tenure, the congregation had around four hundred people in worship (down from one thousand a few years prior), had a \$2 million budget (down from nearly \$4 million) and was left with one ordained minister. Reverend Scott Shelton became the acting head of staff upon Capps's departure. It was a long way from where they once were, but ZPC was now in a position to begin clarifying its vision for the future and who it would call as their next senior pastor.

¹⁸ Due to PC(USA) polity it was decided by presbytery that the congregational meeting to dissolve McDonald's call could not be cancelled, and so the meeting was held even though McDonald no longer wished to resign. McDonald began the meeting by asking the congregation to reject the vote that he had called for to accept his resignation. Again, the congregation was thrown deeper into confusion. Approximately 80 percent of the congregation voted against McDonald's resignation, however, this vote did not ultimately bring resolution to the situation.

Learning from the Past

As ZPC works to recover from its loss, it needs to remember that there was much more to its identity than Glenn McDonald.¹⁹ In 2017 a focus group was convened to reflect on what had been learned during the difficult years of 2008-2013 and to determine how group members felt those years had helped to shape them for the years to come.²⁰ Some of the things discussed by those in the focus group were mentioned above: the strength of lay leadership, the entrepreneurial tendencies of the congregation, the influence of Great Banquet, and the focus on mission.

During this focus group conversation, ZPC's focus on discipleship and recapturing its zeal for outreach was also discussed as a part of ZPC's turnaround over the last few years. The mission statement that was developed in the early 2000s has been drawn from continually as ZPC has refocused on being sent out. It states that ZPC is "called together by God to make disciples and release them for service in our broken world."²¹ During the difficult half-decade that ZPC went through, it was nearly impossible to not become internally focused as they navigated considerable setbacks. Beginning to consider again their call as disciples to go out into a broken world has helped ZPC members to slowly redevelop this focus they once had as well as preparing them to better recognize that the broken world begins in their own neighborhoods.

¹⁹ That ZPC was strongly focused on McDonald would be hard to dispute. During the turmoil one member said bluntly to a staff member, "Glenn is our cash cow, if he is not here we're in trouble." This reality should not be an indictment on any one person though. A church plant that is led by a solo pastor, and then grows tremendously, will almost inevitably develop a structure where this pastor will be the focal point of the congregation.

²⁰ Some of the findings of this particular focus group can be found in my D.Min paper, "Practical Theology and Leading Change," course paper, Fuller Theological Seminary, March 23, 2018.

²¹ Zionsville Presbyterian Church, accessed December 1, 2019, <http://www.zpc.org/>.

Another strength cited by this group was that the difficult years eventually led to a renewed sense of the importance of community. By the time ZPC had reached its nadir, those who remained were fully committed to the mission of ZPC and to one another. For this reason, focusing on community in the last few years has been a growing edge for ZPC. In 2015, a renewed focus on small groups (called home groups) began and now over 60 percent of the congregation are in these weekly groups. An all-church retreat began in 2015 where over three hundred ZPC congregants spent a weekend together at a state park.²² As someone said during the focus group meeting, it is clear that ZPC was “called to be in community together.”²³ This sense of unity and community has given a new sense of courage to ZPC, a courage that will be necessary as it tries to make adaptive changes in the future.

Additionally, a strength that came out of those turbulent years and will help ZPC as it navigates the future is its willingness to take challenges head-on. The focus group repeatedly discussed how difficult it was to remain a part of the community when the future seemed so uncertain. Encounters with former ZPC members around the community would often result in their feeling shamed by others who seemed to judge them because they had not left ZPC. Despite this shame and the challenges that they faced, their endurance helped to cultivate an environment in the church that said no matter what they might face in the future, they believed they would come out of the struggle changed but also strengthened. Reminding the congregation of this in the future

²² There have now been three all-church retreats and all of them have been well attended.

²³ Deck, “Practical Theology and Leading Change,” 17.

will be important when the turbulent times that are inevitable during seasons of change arise again.²⁴

Moving Forward by Experimenting

As ZPC moves into the future, it will need to grow in its understanding of the seismic shifts occurring in the culture that surrounds it. Even in the midwest where vestiges of Christendom continue to be seen, this area is different than when ZPC was launched over thirty-five years ago. Rather than a “build it and they will come” mentality, ZPC will need to focus on what it truly means to be sent out into the neighborhoods. This shift will not occur easily because much of the church’s staffing and structure are focused on what happens on its campus. ZPC needs to grow in its ability to turn its focus to where people live rather than where they worship each Sunday. While the solution has not yet been discovered, engaging in experiments will help the leadership of ZPC learn how it might need to change if it is going to prepare itself for the future. The first part of this process will be to form a pilot group that will engage in acts of propinquity that will test what happens when we simply make ourselves available to our neighbors. These experiments will help ZPC find out more about its congregation and the communities in which it lives as the pilot group actively imbeds itself in its neighborhoods. The outcomes will teach us how to more effectively reach our neighbors for the sake of Christ.

²⁴ One of the remarkable findings of this focus group discussion is the way in which time and perspective can change the way a particular story is interpreted. As the years have passed, the stories are the same, but the way they are interpreted has changed dramatically. Many at ZPC now structure those experiences as being things that strengthened the church rather than decimated it. Again, this will be critical to remember in those moments when adaptive change is difficult. One must take a longer view of this change process. Scott Cormode, “Stories Shape Religious Identity,” essay provided by Tod Bolsinger in *Leading Change Year 4*, Fuller Seminary, Winter 2018.

There are several aspects of ZPC, including those mentioned above, that will be helpful as ZPC engages in this experiment. A focus on being about more than just itself has been a foundational element of ZPC's identity. Their mission focus can be a lens through which the pilot group understands what it is doing. The fact that this pilot program will be done in community will be helpful for a congregation that believes strongly in the power of doing things together. While a two month experiment may not seem like a lengthy time, if the results are slow-coming, then the knowledge that one is not doing this alone will help them to persevere. Remembering that at its beginning, ZPC members valued the neighborhoods in which they lived will also be helpful in ensuring that what the pilot group is doing is not contrary to who ZPC is. While it may be a different manifestation of what it has done in the past, it will be rooted in the same DNA.

Because ZPC has many members who are entrepreneurs and heads of businesses, using words like experimenting, risk, and failure will provide language that makes sense to the pilot group. Frequently what church members do within the confines of church and what they do as a part of their vocations are dichotomized. Using this language will help them to understand more clearly what the pilot group is trying to do and will be critical in their understanding of the importance of this experiment for the future of ZPC. It will also be key for their being less caught up in whether the experiment is successful and more drawn to what is being learned.²⁵ That vantage point will be crucial as the experiment is reflected upon and used for discerning what next steps should be taken.

²⁵ In class lectures and personal conversations Tod Bolsinger has repeatedly enumerated the importance of not asking "did it work?" but rather "what was learned?" This learning component is a crucial attribute of adaptive change.

Another aspect that will be helpful for the pilot group working on this project is the influence Great Banquet has had on cultivating leadership. In moments of change, it can be easy for congregations to wait for the pastors to lead the way and to fail to see the role they play in the process. Because Great Banquet relies heavily on lay leadership, it will not be foreign to the pilot group to be participating in leading this change. This role of the laity is critical to adaptive change. As Roxburgh argues, the extent to which leaders do the primary work of change, there will be no change.²⁶ The leadership's empowerment through Great Banquet will equip the pilot group to move forward with boldness, appreciating the role they play in cultivating a new future for ZPC.

There are, predictably, attributes of ZPC that will serve as obstacles to ZPC members learning what it means to love their literal neighbors. Perhaps the greatest impediment to this experiment and the overall desire to move in a direction of more direct engagement with their neighbors is simply a lack of time (or a lack of prioritizing time) for this process. As a congregation full of driven, results-oriented people, there is a premium placed on filling one's calendar and being as busy as possible, resulting in a lack of margin. Not only will the lack of time be an issue, but the reality that a practice of doing nothing but being present in their neighborhood will also be a struggle for those whose purpose frequently comes from constant activity. The majority of those in the pilot group will be forced to give up something they deem productive to spend two hours a

²⁶ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 77. Bolsinger argues that "Roxburgh's Rule," as Zscheile calls it in his book, is an overstatement and that leaders clearly play a pivotal role in bringing change. While this is true, Roxburgh's Rule does a nice job of clarifying the oft-overlooked reality that the congregation also plays a key role in change.

week in their front yards.²⁷ There is a real question as to whether they will be willing to give up something that was important to them to be able to create the space necessary and whether they will persevere when they are not producing anything tangible.

There is also a perception by many that the worship service on Sunday morning is what is most critical to the life of the church and so trying to expand the vision of priorities to one's neighborhood will not be easily done. As mentioned in the introduction, what is currently measured focuses on what occurs on Sunday morning and this focus conveys to the congregation that this is the most vital aspect of the church. Spending twice as much time each week being present in their neighborhood as being in Sunday morning worship will hopefully expand the vision of the participants, but it may also result in pushback for those whose established imagination says that the time in Sunday morning worship is most critical. This change in vision of what it means to be the church will be a significant, and difficult, part of the adaptive change.

As ZPC tries to live more fully into what it means to love one's literal neighbor, another struggle will be how to ensure this change is not merely a program or a short-lived campaign. In the mission study done in 2012, one of the common complaints was that ZPC was continually rolling out new projects or visions but that those things would rarely endure. This may be the downside of having entrepreneurs; ZPC was good at coming up with new ideas, but deficient at having the right people to sustain those good ideas. If ZPC is going to engage in genuine and deep change, it must figure out how to

²⁷ As Bolsinger and others point out, one attribute of an adaptive change is the necessity of loss. Neither organizations, nor people, cannot continue to hold on to everything they have done in the past if they genuinely want to move into the future. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 88.

make this more than a short-lived enterprise. One critical aspect of leading in difficult times is to “Start with conviction, stay calm, stay connected, stay the course.”²⁸ There is always a temptation to veer away from change when the initial energy of the new idea begins to wane or when conflict begins to swell. If the leadership of ZPC is going to make the adaptive changes necessary for the church to love its neighbors, they will have to be prepared for the long journey and sustain its direction, despite the challenges. This experiment cannot fizzle out, but instead must be a catalyst to reflection and further experimentation as the leadership and congregation discern what next steps to engage in once the learning has occurred.

Over the last three decades, ZPC has experienced remarkable times of flourishing and serving as an example to its denomination of a healthy church plant while also going through a season that demonstrated how painful and dysfunctional churches can be in the midst of turmoil. To the credit of many at ZPC, especially those who lived through the troubled years, their endurance has helped them to discover attributes of themselves they would not have recognized had they not lived through those years in community. As ZPC prepares for its next chapter, it is these lessons that will be critical to lean on. Becoming a church that is fully engaged in the neighborhoods in which its members live will require the same kind of tenacity, courage, creativity, and willingness to be vulnerable that it learned during those difficult years. Adaptive change is not easy, but if done well, it will help prepare ZPC to flourish in the years to come.

²⁸ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 128.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no dearth of literature on the subject of how leadership can help bring change to organizations. The abundance of material on this topic reveals, if nothing else, the prevalence of anxiety that leaders feel when it comes to instigating change, especially in volatile times. Church leaders are not immune to anxiety about cultivating congregations that are willing to change when the ground is continually shifting underneath them. If as many as seventy percent of pastors regularly ponder leaving the ministry then the question must be how can church leaders bring change without such change including their vocation.¹ Fortunately, there are resources geared toward pastors to stem departures and help address these anxieties.

The change to which this ministry project is devoted is not simply to try and get more people to fill the pews each Sunday, but rather a call to congregations and leaders to recapture the sense of mission that the church has had since its genesis. Amidst depleted rolls, diminishing budgets, and an increasingly secular culture, the emphasis within

¹ Anugrah Kamar, "Nearly 3 in 4 Pastors Regularly Consider Leaving Due to Stress, Study Finds," The Christian Post, June 21, 2014, accessed on January 7, 2020, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/nearly-3-in-4-pastors-regularly-consider-leaving-due-to-stress-study-finds.html>.

churches has focused on internal matters at the expense of external concerns. Churches must be transformed into missional communities. Church leaders need to be able to shepherd that transformation without being crushed by it.

This section of the project looks more closely at the literature on bringing institutional change in the business and non-profit world with a focus on how leaders are engaging in adaptive leadership. Next comes an examination of the literature on churches and their leaders, specifically, on what makes churches distinct from other organizations and how leaders can adapt to those differences while engaging in the same important transformation. Finally, the chapter reviews literature regarding how church leaders can gain more clarity on the kinds of changes that need to be made and why. If, as John Kotter suggests, it takes sacrifice to move in a new direction, then churches will need to know exactly what that sacrifice is and why it will be worth the pain and loss.²

Leading Change

To lead any organization today, including churches, one must be willing to engage in both technical leadership and adaptive leadership. In his book *Canoeing the Mountains*, Tod Bolsinger defines technical problems as “those where the solutions are available to and ‘within the repertoire’ of the community.”³ As Heifetz and Linsky adroitly point out, such a definition does not mean that technical problems are trivial or unimportant.⁴ People’s lives are saved every day because medical personnel are

² John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Press, 2012), 72.

³ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 41.

⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 18.

technically adept at what they are doing.⁵ Significantly, if technical problems are not handled in a satisfactory manner, a leader will never be able to address more adaptive changes. As Bolsinger argues, if an organization or church does not trust its leader to lead them on the map, they will certainly not trust said leader to lead them off the map.⁶ Being led off the map is exactly what adaptive leadership requires.

Heifetz and Linsky suggest that a leader is engaging in adaptive change when “people’s hearts and minds need to change, and not just their preferences or routine behaviors.”⁷ Moreover, if an organization repeatedly fails to solve a challenge using technical means, there is a strong possibility the challenge at hand is of the adaptive variety.⁸ As *Canoeing the Mountains* clarifies, an adaptive challenge is one that “cannot be solved with one’s existing knowledge and skills, requiring a people to make a shift in their values, expectations, attitudes or habits of behavior.”⁹

Bolsinger explains there are three components to adaptive challenges. First, the environment in which the church or organization finds itself is shifting and no clear answer is at hand. If the answer seems clear then the challenge is probably technical rather than adaptive. Next, adaptive challenges present the need for both leaders and followers to learn. As addressed below, no one is precluded from having to learn in

⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 18.

⁶ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 14.

⁷ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 60.

⁸ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 60.

⁹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 42.

adaptive situations. Finally, adaptive challenges require loss. There is no easy or painless way to take on an adaptive change.¹⁰

Research on adaptive change reveals that such change is not an easy undertaking. If an organization is going to undergo adaptive change, it is imperative that leaders are willing to change also. Heifetz and Linsky explain that leaders gain credibility and authority in their careers because they can solve others' problems.¹¹ By their very nature, however, adaptive challenges are problems that are not easily solved. This dilemma is why one of the most important phrases adaptive leaders must learn and share is: "I don't know what to do."¹² Such an admission is not easy for most people, especially leaders. Yet it is the starting point for engaging adaptive issues. Instead of becoming defensive when the answers are not easily discerned, leaders will be better served to look at the issues through the lens of curiosity as opportunities to learn.¹³ Whereas a lack of knowledge can make leaders defensive and vulnerable, adaptive challenges can serve as examples to leaders and organizations that lifelong learning is the one of the great keys to flourishing.¹⁴

Another critical theme in adaptive leadership research reveals that leaders must not operate alone in tackling adaptive challenges. While in business lore it is often the lone leader who swoops in, calls the shots, and saves a company (for example, Lee

¹⁰ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 42.

¹¹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 123.

¹² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 22.

¹³ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 175.

¹⁴ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 186.

Iacocca and Chrysler), adaptive challenges require what Kotter calls a “guiding coalition.”¹⁵ Bolsinger points out that the leader must continually give the work back to the people.¹⁶ It should be noted that it is not only the leader who may want to singularly tackle the issue on his or her own, but the rest of the organization may often be delighted to have the leader take it on. “Typically, the group will strongly prefer the technical interpretation, particularly one in which the ‘problem’ lies with an individual rather than the group as a whole. This allows for a simple, straight-forward solution, one that does not require any hard work or adaptation on the group’s part.”¹⁷ Adaptive shifts, however, require shared learning where everyone involved participates in discovering the way forward. Moreover, because these adaptive issues always involve loss, a wise leader will not want to find him or herself facing the issue alone.¹⁸

Shared learning does not mean that leaders can be passive in approaching the process. Instead, leaders will need to create safe spaces in which to wrestle with these adaptive changes. Heifetz and Linsky call such spaces holding environments, which they describe as “space formed by a network of relationships within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying apart.”¹⁹ To create this holding environment a leader must ensure that relationships are healthy and remain intact.

Bolsinger describes this ability as the art of being able to “stay calm, stay connected, stay

¹⁵ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 53.

¹⁶ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 167.

¹⁷ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 57.

¹⁸ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 139.

¹⁹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 102.

the course.”²⁰ Staying connected means that in addition to giving attention to structures, a leader must cultivate healthy relationships in which others are able to express their honest and vulnerable opinions freely.²¹ There will be times when leaders will prefer to silo themselves away from the heat of the action, but such self-separation will ultimately end in a failed transformation. Heifetz and Linsky’s helpful analogy of adaptive leadership is when a leader gets up on the balcony to see the action going on down on the dance floor. This distance is critical for objectively ascertaining what is going on. However, the leader cannot remain on the balcony. As the authors observe, a leader can only bring change when he or she is willing to return to the fray of the dance floor and enter into the relationships that will ultimately bring true adaptive change.²²

Of course, following the steps of recognizing the issue as adaptive, engaging in shared learning, and maintaining good relationships will not automatically bring about adaptive change. Repeatedly, research makes clear that true adaptive change requires that churches or organizations must be willing to take risks. Often these risks take place through a focus on experimentation.²³ These experiments should be healthy adaptations of the church’s unique DNA rather than attempts at simply imitating the burgeoning church down the street.²⁴ Experiments and changes that go against a church’s DNA are

²⁰ Richard Blackburn, “Healthy Congregations,” workshop sponsored by Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, Lombard, IL, hosted by Trinity Presbyterian Church, Santa Ana, CA, 2006. See also Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 22.

²¹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 22, 65.

²² Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 53.

²³ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

²⁴ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 120.

destined for failure. Furthermore, research reveals that the experiments need to be survivable so that if, and in many cases, when, they fail, they will not adversely affect budgets or the leaderships' jobs.²⁵ Simply doing experiments is not enough to bring adaptive change, however. To learn from experiments there must be time for observation and interpretation of the experiment.²⁶ People do not learn from experience itself, but rather from reflection on experiences. Because of this, experiments must always be followed by examination and evolving past experiments into new ones.²⁷ In this manner, leaders of organizations and churches begin a cyclical process of experimenting, observing, and interpreting that repeats itself. This continual shared learning process allows for adaptive shifts to slowly evolve and the organization to address issues it had not previously been able to solve.

The literature on leadership makes clear that many of the challenges organizations are currently facing are adaptive rather than technical. Such claims are not to suggest that technical challenges are unimportant. Indeed, without technical prowess no leader or organization can engage well in adaptive challenges. But adaptive challenges require new learning and a willingness to go into unknown places. Consequently, leaders must grow in their ability to engage in shared leadership, cultivate healthy relationships, and create spaces to practice and reflect upon risky experiments. Such traits are especially necessary for individuals leading church congregations.

²⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 121.

²⁶ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 134.

²⁷ Tod Bolsinger, in a phone conversation with me, 2015.

Leading Change in Churches

Most congregations in the United States have been confronted with change. Seventy percent of all churches are either stagnant in attendance or are in decline.²⁸ Mainline congregations are losing attendance at a rapid pace and the Presbyterian Church (USA), more specifically, has seen its membership decline by approximately 50 percent over the last twenty years.²⁹ The fastest growing religious demographic are those who are unaffiliated with any religion at all.³⁰ In response to this denominational decline, church leaders have unsuccessfully attempted to stem the tide. As Zscheile argues in *The Agile Church*, a majority of congregations have attempted to address the demographic challenges facing them by simply trying harder at the same thing they have always done. Churches think that if they just get the right leader, she or he will rescue them, bring in new people, and fix the problem of institutional decline and irrelevance. “They try to market the church better, spruce up websites, perhaps put out a nice new sign by the road proclaiming, ‘All are Welcome.’”³¹ In other words, churches are attempting to solve adaptive challenges through technical competence. But as noted above, this approach will

²⁸ Thom S. Ranier, “Major New Research on Declining, Plateaued and Growing Churches from Exponential and Lifeway Research,” Growing Healthy Churches Together, March 6, 2019, accessed on December 1, 2019, <https://thomrainer.com/2019/03/major-new-research-on-declining-plateaued-and-growing-churches-from-exponential-and-lifeway-research/>.

²⁹ Michael Griboski, “PC(USA) Lost Over 140 Churches, Nearly 5 Percent of Active Members in 2018,” *Christian Post*, April 30, 2019, accessed on November 27, 2019, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/pcusa-lost-over-140-churches-nearly-5-percent-of-active-members-in-2018.html>.

³⁰ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 14.

³¹ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 30.

not solve an adaptive problem. As Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk write, in the midst of discontinuous change, “there is no getting back to normal.”³²

Like most organizations, church congregations will often happily delegate the work of institutional change to the leader in hopes that he or she can solve the problem and return the church to flourishing. Pastors report that their congregations desire leaders who express certainty of the future with clear and firm convictions.³³ However, as Darrell Guder points out, church leaders “will never have the whole answer nor will they be able to see clearly through the glass of their context. Leaders can’t operate in the certainty of their own knowledge or skill.”³⁴ Facing a congregation and admitting that one does not have the exact answers will require church leaders to cultivate vulnerability if they are to successfully meet adaptive challenges. Indeed, vulnerability is the cost pastors and other church leaders must pay if they truly want to engage in adaptive challenges.³⁵ Of course, as Woodward and White Jr. point out, vulnerability is also a cost of being a disciple. In taking vulnerability more seriously, therefore, church leaders are preparing themselves for adaptive change at the same time that they are tapping more deeply into what it means to follow Jesus.³⁶

³² Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 7.

³³ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 151.

³⁴ Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 190.

³⁵ “Leadership is a critical gift, provided by the Spirit because, as the Scriptures demonstrate, fundamental change in any body of people requires leaders capable of transforming its life and *being transformed themselves* (italics mine). Ibid., 183.

³⁶ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 89.

Vulnerability is not limited to church leaders. Churches as a whole will also need to learn the vulnerability of being on mission for God. As Zscheile points out, most congregations have grown comfortable within their own building and doing their own programs. But since such things are preventing the majority of congregations from flourishing, risk-taking—and hence vulnerability—must be embraced.³⁷ “There is no learning and no innovation without vulnerability,” Zscheile argues.³⁸ As such, congregations facing adaptive challenges must be willing to be vulnerable. Again though, as literature on church transformation makes clear, this kind of adaptive change will be costly and require hard work.³⁹ This hard work is why Kotter argues it is critical that leaders continually articulate a clear vision that makes sacrifice necessary.⁴⁰ Pastors must be willing to endure the pain of loss while at the same time reminding the congregation that the sacrifices will be worth it in the end.

To endure the challenge of pain and loss, a congregation needs the hope of what will one day be, even if the exact future is unclear. They also need to know that they are not engaging in this journey alone. The literature reveals that a critical part of a congregation enduring adaptive challenges is shared learning through the obstacles. Zscheile points to Luke 10 when Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs; in the midst of that mission, the disciples developed learning communities where they discovered together

³⁷ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 56.

³⁸ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 92.

³⁹ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 19.

⁴⁰ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 72.

their new way in this world.⁴¹ Congregations today have far too often forgotten how adaptive the church was at its genesis and the how such adaptations occurred in the midst of community. While in most congregations there are small contingencies of people who are learning together, they are often doing so in isolation from the rest of the congregation.⁴² However, if congregations can engage in more peer learning, where vulnerabilities, pain, fears—as well as celebrations and joys—can be shared, this sense of community can help congregations move forward into the unknown in ever more healthy ways.⁴³

As previously mentioned, the literature on organizational leadership suggests that experimentation is one of the key attributes for cultivating adaptive change in organizations. Likewise, when working with churches, the research is clear that experimentation is also essential for bringing about change. Churches learn through experiments. As Woodward and White Jr. put it, “Experiential learning comes into its fullness when we learn to take a risk, experiment and practice.”⁴⁴ Zscheile again points to Luke 10, remarking that these were opportunities that Jesus gave to his disciples to engage in experiments in ministry.⁴⁵ Regardless of the experiments’ successes or failures, the disciples learned something. Another example of ministry experimentation is the scene in Matthew 17 where the disciples were unable to cure a boy suffering from a

⁴¹ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 47.

⁴² Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 74.

⁴³ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 74.

⁴⁴ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 16.

⁴⁵ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 46.

demon. Jesus entered the scene and healed the boy. In response, the disciples privately asked why they were unable to do so. Jesus told the disciples that this type of healing took more faith than what they currently had. Throughout his life, Jesus allowed the disciples to experiment by engaging in ministry on his behalf. Sometimes such ministries were successful, sometimes they were not. But what was most critical was that Jesus' disciples were allowed to experiment and then learn from their experiences.

Roxburgh and Romanuk argue that one of the most important things church leaders can do is create space for experimentation. "To create an environment that releases the missional imagination of a congregation, leaders need to cultivate forms that give people space to experiment and test out actions with one another."⁴⁶ Experimenting allows congregations to discern "fresh ways of being God's missionary people."⁴⁷ Oftentimes, churches' imaginations are established by what happened in their prime years and they believe that if they can simply replay what worked, then they will be able to recapture what once was. This desire seems especially true for those who were in the congregation during those flourishing years, which is why experimenting will often be done by the newcomers or those on the margins rather than those who have been a part of the congregation for many years.⁴⁸ Their imaginations not yet established, these newcomers and outsiders are able to dream afresh about what can be rather than about what once was.

⁴⁶ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 32.

⁴⁷ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 41.

⁴⁸ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 60.

Experimentation alone is not enough to learn how to engage in adaptive challenges a church is facing, however. Because experiments fail, Zscheile remarks, “[i]t is tempting to keep experiments isolated, underground, or disconnected from the rest of the organization’s life rather than make them public and participatory.”⁴⁹ For this reason, congregations must experiment, discuss what happened, and discern what was learned if they wish to retain key insights.⁵⁰ The process of experimenting in small ways (prototyping) and then intentionally reflecting on what has been learned allows churches to learn quickly and cultivates an environment more open to trying new things.⁵¹

As the literature on adaptive change within churches makes clear, most churches are in decline and realize that change may be necessary for flourishing.⁵² While churches may be in agreement with the need to change, they often struggle to identify the kind of change necessary. They would prefer to make technical changes in hopes of bringing back their zenith. Congregations in decline believe that simply finding the right pastor will transform their church. Such congregations are discovering that technical changes and pastoral search committees alone cannot bring about the transformation that they need and desire. These congregations must be willing to take on the work themselves instead of turning to one person to do the work for them. Indeed, congregations must be willing to be vulnerable and take risks if they hope to discover a new way forward. They must also experiment in such a way that they focus on what they have learned rather than

⁴⁹ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 117.

⁵⁰ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 117.

⁵¹ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 63.

⁵² See for example Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 28 and Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 14ff.

whether their experiments fail or succeed. In so doing, they will be able to move confidently forward into the future God has in store for them.

CHAPTER 4: THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

For the church in America, where attendance is in steady decline and polls reveal that a high percentage of the population has negative views of the church at large, it is clear that something needs to change.¹ It is important to remember that throughout its history, the church has frequently struggled. The reality is that the twenty-first century church in America is flawed, therefore, it should be understood in this larger context. As Hendrik Kraemer argued in 1938, “Strictly speaking, one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it.”² To state it differently, while a struggling church may not be ideal, a church who recognizes it is struggling and needs to change has taken a step in the right direction. Pointing to the importance of keeping the church’s current status within an appropriate historical context, David Bosch notes that churches in the past have been successful at eventually responding imaginatively to the changing paradigms of the time in which it

¹ “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Pew Research Center, Religion and Public Life, October 17, 2019, accessed on January 7, 2020, Anugrah Kamar, “Nearly 3 in 4 Pastors Regularly Consider Leaving Due to Stress, Study Finds,” The Christian Post, June 21, 2014, accessed on January 7, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

² Hendrik Kraemer, quoted in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 2.

finds itself.³ This historical context is critical to ensuring that church and its leadership is not overwhelmed or left hopeless when the statistics and polls could easily cultivate pessimism.

Of course, the question that must then be asked is not just should change occur, but what change or changes (technical and/or adaptive) need to be initiated if the church in America is going to flourish in the days ahead. To simply change without knowing why one is changing will rarely be successful. Kraemer points out that when the church is considering change, it “has always needed apparent failure and suffering in order to become fully alive to its real nature and mission.”⁴ In other words, the challenges of the church today can and should drive the church to remember its true nature and reason for existence. If the church is going to change, the result should be a church who is becoming more who it was meant to be from the beginning rather than one who ignores its DNA and looks nothing like its predecessors.⁵ This transformation requires a deeper understanding of both Scripture and who God has called his followers to be throughout history.

This project is based on the idea that from the beginning God has desired his people to be sent out into the world rather than being content to only gather with one another. Such a claim is not to suggest that gathering is unimportant—texts like Hebrews 10:24-25 make clear that gathering together to worship and commune is critical in the life

³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 4.

⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 2.

⁵ As mentioned previously, Bolsinger writes that if true change is going to occur and hold it must not change its core, its DNA. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 68.

of the church—but it is to suggest that gathering is not enough. For those in the Reformed tradition like Presbyterians, this understanding can run counter to what has classically been defined as being the church. In defining the true church, the Reformer John Calvin said that the church was where the Word of God is rightly preached and where the sacraments are rightly administered.⁶ This formulation of church is not to say that Calvin believed that the work of the church should be restricted to what happens when Christians gather together. But such a framing of church does suggest that when the defining two marks of the church occur when Christians gather, the structure, values and goals of the church will naturally focus heavily on the gathering. It should not be surprising then that a Presbyterian church like ZPC would feel drawn towards defining itself primarily by what happens on Sunday mornings when the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered.

To supplement Calvin’s definition, Bosch makes clear that when one looks at Scripture there should be two distinct foci: worship and engaging the surrounding world. Rather than these foci competing against one another—or one completely overshadowing the other—they should “stand in each other’s service.”⁷ As the Third World Conference On Faith and Order in Lund stated, “The church is always and at the same time called out of the world and sent into the world.”⁸ To set up the church as being either a group of people who worship God together or as a group of people who are active witnesses for God in their neighborhoods, communities, and world, is to set up a false dichotomy.

⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 482.

⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 385.

⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 386.

Rather, as Howard Snyder suggests, it is to hold these two things in “redemptive tension.”⁹ ZPC has certainly held the gathered worship time in high regard (especially preaching), but has struggled to see themselves as those who are sent out to be witnesses in their neighborhoods.¹⁰ For this reason, the following section will focus primarily on the critical nature of being sent as seen through the lens of Scripture.

Genesis 12:1-3

In John 20:21, Jesus tells the disciples that just as he has been sent by the Father, so too is he sending the disciples out into the world. This sense of God’s people being sent out into the world has been revitalized in the last two decades, catalyzed in part by the publishing of the book *Missional Church*. This book was influenced strongly by Lesslie Newbigin, the English missionary to India who returned to England and realized that this western European country was now in need of having missionaries sent into its own neighborhoods, towns, and cities. Newbigin’s book was not a call to have missionaries from other countries come to England as much as a call for the church in England to wake up to the reality that they were being sent out into their own country.¹¹ According to Guder, Newbigin’s approach can be summarized by the term “*missio Dei*,” which refers to the mission of God in the world. God, by his very nature, is a sending

⁹ Howard Snyder, *Liberating the Church* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 29, quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 386.

¹⁰ To be sure, as mentioned earlier, ZPC has taken seriously the call to spread the gospel all over the world, however, this has taken the primary form of giving money to missionaries in other countries or going on international mission trips, rather than wrestling with what it means for the people of ZPC to be sent into their local neighborhoods.

¹¹ Guder, *Missional Church*, 3.

God. However, in a unique twist, Bosch expands the definition of *missio Dei*, “The classical doctrine of *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.”¹²

Because of the trinitarian nature of *missio Dei*, it would be natural to think that this idea of a sending God is primarily found in the New Testament. While, as Bosch suggests, it may be true that the New Testament is a missionary document, it is inaccurate to suggest that the sending God is absent in the Old Testament.¹³ As Guder rightly states, “God’s mission began with the call of Israel to receive God’s blessings in order to be a blessing to the nations.”¹⁴ The call to which Guder speaks—that of being sent out to be a blessing—did not begin in the New Testament but rather early in the Old Testament.

Even the writers of the New Testament seemed to understand the connection between what they were doing, how they were called to live and the Pentateuch they had learned. In Acts 15 an argument breaks out among the early church leaders as to whether they should be on mission to the Gentiles and if so what exactly that mission should entail. In Galatians 3:6-9, Paul responds by writing, “Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles

¹² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 54.

¹⁴ Guder, *Missional Church*, 4.

shall be blessed in you.”¹⁵ For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed. As Christopher Wright states, “the Gentile mission, Paul argued, far from being a betrayal of the Scriptures, was rather the fulfillment of them. The ingathering of the nations was the very thing Israel existed for in the purpose of God; it was the fulfillment of the bottom line of God’s promise to Abraham.”¹⁶

Abram (later renamed Abraham) received a calling from God. God says to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gn 12:1-3). This is a pivotal text for understanding who God is, what God’s mission is in the world, and what God calls his followers to do in the world.¹⁷ The importance of this story is made clear by the author of Genesis repeating it four more times throughout the remainder of the book (18:18, 22:18, 26:4-5, 28:14).¹⁸

It is important to understand this story in the context of what came before God’s call to Abram. God’s desire has always been for his people to be scattered out into the world rather than to focus solely on being gathered. In Genesis 9 God calls his people to go out into the world and multiply.¹⁹ Sibley Towner points out that the story of Abram’s

¹⁵ All Scripture quoted is from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 194.

¹⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 194.

¹⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 194.

¹⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 196.

call emerges out of a response to the debacle at the Tower of Babel where God's people sought to reject God's call to be scattered.²⁰ As they said in Genesis 11:4, "Let us make a name for ourselves; *otherwise we shall be scattered* abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (italics mine). This refusal to be scattered was anathema to God, which is why he caused them to be scattered by not allowing them to communicate with one another.

Wright points out that the story of the Tower of Babel, unlike other stories in Genesis 3-11, has no saving grace or redemptive aspect.²¹ In other words, from the very beginning God takes getting out of one's comfort zone and safe spaces an absolutely critical component of following him.

God repeats his desire for his people to scatter by giving Abram the imperative to leave his home. Everything hinges on the importance of Abram listening to God's command to go. Wright remarks, "Bluntly put, if Abraham had not got up and left for Canaan, the story would have ended right there, or with an endless recycling of the fate of Babel. The Bible would be a very thin book indeed."²² It is important to note that when God is giving this command, Abram and his wife Sarai are old and barren. In other words, the promise of building a nation is contingent upon Abram actually going and it is spoken to someone for whom it seems there is little hope for progeny, nonetheless a whole nation.²³ For the church in America this Abrahamic insight is an important

²⁰ W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 134-135.

²¹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 203.

²² Wright, *The Mission of God*, 206.

²³ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 117.

reminder that it is often to and through the hopeless and seemingly barren that God works and brings new life.

It is also critical to understand that by going, Abram is leaving the safety and security of his home and his family. As Towner points out, in asking Abram to leave, God is asking Abram to leave the security of his very identity. Towner writes that God tells Abram to “‘Go from your country’—from the fatherland, that piece of earth that your people claim and their neighbors recognize, the territory that offers the safety of defined limits and the lifegiving routine of seedtime and harvest.”²⁴ When God sends his people, this sending is an invitation to leave what is secure and stable. In times of vulnerability it is critical to not simply resort to what is safe, for example, to focus only on being gathered. As Walter Brueggemann writes, “The whole of the Abrahamic narrative is premised on this seeming contradiction: to stay in safety is to remain barren; to leave in risk is to have hope.”²⁵

The command that God gives to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 also makes clear that it is in going and scattering that Abram’s life and the life of the world will be blessed. In going, God’s people are blessed and given new life and those to whom they are sent are also blessed and given new life. These blessings appear to involve every sphere of existence: spiritual, physical, and emotional.²⁶ Wright writes that these blessings are connected with creation and the gifts that God longs to give his people, including peace,

²⁴ Towner, *Genesis*, 133.

²⁵ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 118.

²⁶ Terrence E. Fretheim, *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 425.

long life, rest, fruitfulness, and good relationships.²⁷ In Deuteronomy 28, Moses declares that the Lord wants to bless his people by providing them with food and prosperity, by keeping them safe from their enemies, and by giving them offspring. When being sent out by God it is clear that part of the call is not simply to be in motion, nor to take risks, nor to be around outsiders, but instead is to be a part of improving the lives of those to whom one is sent. Abram is called to go, and in so doing, his life and the whole world have more shalom.

This command by God also serves as a clear reminder to his people that their lives cannot be lived apart from the world in which they live. “Israel is never permitted to live in a vacuum. It must always live with, for, and among the others.”²⁸ Beginning with Babel and continuing until today, those who have followed God have frequently struggled with discerning what it means to be in the world, but not of the world. Scripture suggests that this tendency to want to escape the world in which one lives, while natural, will not lead to blessing for those who escape nor for those in the world who need to be blessed. As Wright puts it, “The work of redemptive and restorative blessing will take place within and for the created order, not in some other heavenly or mythological realm beyond it or to which we can escape.”²⁹ One cannot bless the world from a distance or in a detached way, but instead must be willing to be scattered in order to do so. Again, this emphasis on scattering does not mean that followers of God are not called to also gather

²⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 221.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 119.

²⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 212.

together, but it does mean that if the world is going to be blessed, then God's followers are called to be the conduit through which that blessing is to occur.³⁰

From the first book of the Bible, it is clear that God calls his people to be scattered in order to be a blessing not just for themselves, but for the whole world. Genesis 12 is a foundational text upon which later texts in the New Testament build to argue for the importance of the church being sent out. As Brueggemann suggests, this Genesis text hints at what will eventually become the mission of the church.³¹ As Wright sees it, the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20 is a "christological mutation" of the Abrahamic commission in Genesis 12:1-3. To go and make disciples, in other words, is to go and be a blessing.³² With this in mind, it is appropriate to turn to the New Testament to reflect on how Jesus, the sent one, continues to make it clear that those who follow God must be scattered to be a blessing to those in the world, in their communities, and in their neighborhood.

Luke 10:1-12

As Christians seeking to understand their call in this world, it is critical to see how their call continues the mission as described in the Old Testament, how Jesus lived his life, and how he called Christians to live theirs. When one begins his or her understanding of Christian mission with the life and conduct of Jesus, it becomes very clear that Jesus was the one who was sent into this world.³³ In other words, if the church

³⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 207.

³¹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 119.

³² Wright, *The Mission of God*, 213.

is to define itself by the character and conduct of Jesus, then it must begin with realizing that just as Jesus was sent, so too is the church to be sent. Jesus did not begin his ministry by holding court within a fixed building. Rather, Jesus traveled along the way as he began to call disciples to come and follow him. There is a sense of movement from the earliest part of Jesus' ministry.

As Jesus' ministry continues it becomes even clearer that the role of a disciple, a follower of Jesus, is to be on the move and scattered. One text that makes this abundantly clear is the sending out of the seventy found in Luke 10:1-12:

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

In understanding this passage from Luke it is important to remember that Luke's gospel was written by a Gentile, who was perhaps the only Gentile to write a book in the New Testament, and was written primarily to Gentiles.³⁴ His writing occurred after a time

³³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 31.

³⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 85.

when the new Christian faith had moved from one full of Jewish converts to one that had become predominately Gentile. The Christian faith was a generation or two removed from its first followers and, as oftentimes occurs in movements of faith, the energy of those first converts had begun to wane. “[T]he heyday of missionary expansion and of Paul’s energetic outreach in all directions already lay a quarter of a century back and a degree of stagnation had set in.”³⁵ As the only gospel author to include the story of Jesus’ sending out of the seventy, it seems clear that Luke is cultivating in those who would receive his letter a sense that being sent out was a critical part of Jesus’ ministry and that this sending must continue to be the way of life for his followers.³⁶

Luke 10:1-12 elaborates on what it looks like to be a people who are sent out on mission for God. It builds on God’s initial call to Abraham to go and to be a blessing, while also giving more detail as to what this being sent out to be a blessing looks and feels like. Luke, according to Keith Nickle, is helping these Christians understand the sent nature of being a God-follower as well as helping Jew and Gentile alike to see that Jesus’ coming to earth is a fulfillment of the promise that God gave to Abraham long ago.³⁷ While the participants have changed, the same mission of God continues. In Luke 10, Jesus gives the church today a clear mandate to go out into the world (as he has already been doing) while also making clear the cost of doing so (as he would soon exemplify by his death and sacrifice on the cross).

³⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 85.

³⁶ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2011), 128.

³⁷ Keith F. Nickle, *Preaching the Gospel of Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 116-117.

Luke begins by stating that Jesus sent out seventy others ahead of him to where he intended to go. Scholars point out that the number seventy is oftentimes connected with Genesis 10 where, after the story of Noah and the flood, seventy nations are accounted for as being descendants of Noah.³⁸ To put it another way, the seventy being sent out seems to infer the universal nature of the mission to which these seventy are called. Moreover, it hearkens back to the promise God made to Abram that the nations of the world would be blessed because of Abram's being scattered as God had commanded him. The pattern of being sent out to the whole world to be a blessing is repeated yet again.

It is also important to see that the seventy who were sent out were described as seventy others, in other words, not those whom the listener or reader has heard of before nor will hear about again. David Lose points out that these seventy are ordinary and perhaps even an unlikely group for Jesus to choose.³⁹ Of course, as noted when reflecting on the story of God's call to Abram, he and Sarai were also up to that moment ordinary and unlikely. They were two nomads who were old and barren and would not have been suspecting that God would use them to go out and bless the world. In this ministry project and when considering the modern day church, it is easy to believe that the call of God is for those who are special or seem to have a unique call in their lives. Abram, Sarai, and the seventy in Luke 10 make it clear that God prefers to use the ordinary and unlikely in order to fulfill his mission. As Alan Culpepper writes, "The work of the church is not

³⁸ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 144.

³⁹ David Lose, "Pentecost 7C: The Ongoing Mission of the 70," accessed August 4, 2019, <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/06/pentecost-7-c-the-ongoing-mission-of-the-70/>.

merely the calling of a select few,” but instead is the call of each person, however unlikely he or she thinks they are, to be used by God.⁴⁰

Jesus sends out the seventy in pairs, which reveals the critical reality that being sent out as followers of Jesus is not something that should be done in isolation, but rather in community. Even the call of Abram to go and scatter occurred in community since Sarai and his family accompanied him out into the world. By going out in pairs, they can help one another when uncertainties or troubles arise. When one is discouraged, the other can be a person of encouragement.⁴¹ Nickle points out that going out in pairs helps give veracity to testimonies and provides “mutual protection, support, confirmation, and care.”⁴² For church leaders who desire to have their congregations become more engaged in being scattered, it is essential to remember the importance of the communal nature of this call.

Jesus makes it clear that the call to be on mission with him and to be sent out will unquestionably be a task that puts one in a vulnerable position. Jesus says that the seventy he is sending out will be like “lambs in the midst of wolves” (Lk 10:3). It would be difficult for Jesus to have given his followers a more vivid image of the difficulty and fears that would be a part of being scattered. Nickle writes, “Disciples in the process of carrying out their mission are in a precarious, vulnerable position in a world still committed to allegiances opposing God’s purposes for creation.”⁴³ As discussed above,

⁴⁰ R. Alan Culpepper, *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 222.

⁴¹ David Lose, “The Greater Gift,” Luther Seminary, accessed August 4, 2019, https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=2617_.

⁴² Nickle, *Preaching the Gospel of Luke*, 114.

for Abram and Sarai there was certainly a sense that in leaving what was familiar and stable they would be entering into a world that was much less known, predictable, and stable. As Brueggemann puts it, the road out of barrenness was risky, but also the only road that led to hope.⁴⁴ Being sent out entails an inherent vulnerability that accompanies the travelers.

The vulnerability and risk of being sent out that Abram, Sarai, and the seventy experienced is the same reality that faces the church today. According to Guder, “[t]he church’s task of announcing the reign of God will mean moving beyond the four walls of the church building, out of the safe group of people who know and love each other, into the public square. The missional church will be in the world with good news.”⁴⁵

Roxburgh echoes Guder in understanding that the contemporary church must also replicate the God-followers found in Scripture. Roxburgh posits that Jesus calls the church today to be sent out and as such, it must be willing to leave places of “familiarity, control, and security.”⁴⁶ The church and its leaders must honestly confront the reality that to be sent out will almost always require vulnerability and risk. Such predicaments are difficult for any church, but especially the American church that has grown used to feeling comfortable. Lose suggests that there may be a direct correlation between a church full of those with disposable income whose existence guards against feeling insecure, and a church full of people reticent to take risks.⁴⁷ Yet, it is clear that if one

⁴³ Nickle, *Preaching the Gospel of Luke*, 114.

⁴⁴ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 118.

⁴⁵ Guder, *Missional Church*, 137.

⁴⁶ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 155.

desires to pursue the mission of God by being scattered into the world, then one must be willing to move beyond what is safe and comfortable.

Luke 10 also carries with it an undeniable sense of urgency. As in Genesis, the call of God for his followers to be scattered is not offered as a suggestion, but as an imperative. “Go from your country,” God says to Abram in Genesis 12. “Go on your way,” Jesus says to the seventy (Lk 10:3). N.T. Wright says there is no missing the sense of urgency that Jesus feels as he sends out his followers into the world.⁴⁸ This urgency is made even clearer by Jesus’ command for his disciples to not carry anything with them, no purse, bag, or sandals. “Provisionless,” Nickle remarks, “honoring their absolute trust that God would supply all that they needed, they were to be consumed by the urgency of their assigned task.”⁴⁹ When God calls one to go out, there is not time to pack bags because God is on the move. Jesus continues this theme of urgency when he further commands the seventy not to greet anyone along the way. Normally this command would seem strange, perhaps even inappropriate, for one who is trying to reflect the love of Jesus. Yet, as Culpepper writes, “The instruction not to greet anyone underscores the need for urgency and singleness of purpose.”⁵⁰ It is clear that Jesus understands how easily distracted and complacent his followers can become as well as how much he values their being sent out on his mission.⁵¹ The kingdom of God, Scott Hoezee says, was

⁴⁷ Lose, “Pentecost 7C,” <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/06/pentecost-7-c-the-ongoing-mission-of-the-70/>.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 120.

⁴⁹ Nickle, *Preaching the Gospel of Luke*, 115.

⁵⁰ Culpepper, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 220.

⁵¹ Scott Hoezee, “Luke 10:1-11, 16-20,” Center for Excellence in Preaching, accessed August 5, 2019, https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-9c-2/?type=the_lectionary_gospel.

clearly serious business to Jesus and it must be serious business to the church as well. This is why being sent out is not something that would be helpful or a nice addition to what a church already does, but is absolutely essential to the identity of a church. Jesus encouraged others to be sent out and was sent out himself. The same must also be the case with his followers.

As with Abraham, however, the point of Jesus sending out the seventy was not simply to get them out of their comfort zones. Rather the seventy were sent to be a blessing. God told Abram that through him the world would be blessed spiritually, physically, and emotionally. God's blessing through Abram would bring peace to those who were prepared to receive it. The life and ministry of Jesus was one in which he fully embodied these blessings to those to whom he was sent. To the religious leader Nicodemus, Jesus offered the peace of spiritual salvation through being born anew (Jn 3). To the woman at the well in Samaria he offered spiritual wholeness seen through the metaphor of living waters which give eternal life (Jn 4). He offered physical peace or healing to multiple men who were blind, to a bleeding woman, and to lepers along the way (Mk 8, Jn 9, Mk 5 and Lk 17). He gave peace to a man fighting the mental demons of his time and he taught of the foolishness of people's worries with the hope that they would put their trust in God instead (Lk 8 and Mt 6).

This peace or shalom was a continuation of the blessing that God had promised would occur through Abram and his seed, and was a sign of the kingdom of God for Jesus.⁵² In other words, the blessings that Abram was promised were the blessings of

⁵² New Testament scholar Norman Perrin writes, "The central aspect of the teaching of Jesus was that concerning the Kingdom of God. Of this there can be no doubt. . . . Jesus appeared as one who

God's coming kingdom. Early in his ministry Jesus made clear that his being sent to earth was also a sign of God's coming kingdom. In Matthew 4:17 Jesus proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." In Mark 1:15, Jesus begins his ministry by preaching the good news saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." The connection between the coming kingdom of God and the blessing of peace is made clear in Matthew's gospel when, after healing a demoniac who was blind and mute, Jesus said to the critical Pharisees: "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Mt 12:28).

Perhaps the most explicit revelation that Jesus being sent to earth was part of God's mission to bless all the nations is seen in his reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Returning to his childhood home of Nazareth, Jesus entered a synagogue on the Sabbath and read aloud from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19).⁵³ This description of bringing wholeness or shalom to the poor, the blind, the captive, and the enslaved is a clear picture of a world that has been blessed by God. Accordingly, it is critical to see that immediately after reading this text

proclaimed the Kingdom; all else in his message and ministry serves a function in relation to that proclamation and derives its meaning from it. The challenge to discipleship, the ethical teaching, the disputes about oral tradition or ceremonial law, even the pronouncement of forgiveness of sins and the welcoming of the outcast in the name of God—all these are to be understood in the context of the Kingdom proclamation or they are not to be understood at all. Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 54, quoted in Guder, *Missional Church*, 89.

⁵³ Bosch points out that "one could say that, for Luke, salvation actually had six dimensions: economic, social, political, physical, psychological, and spiritual." Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 117.

Jesus boldly said to those in the synagogue that “[t]oday this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21). In being sent to the world by his father, Jesus understands his ministry is equated with the kingdom of God, a kingdom that brings the blessings of peace to all aspects of life and continues the blessings that God had promised to Abram thousands of years earlier.

This recognition is a critical lens by which to interpret Jesus’ command to the seventy to go out into the world. He does not simply tell them to go out, but rather he tells them to go out, announce peace, and proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near. This announcing of peace and the arrival of God’s kingdom were not simply kind words to encourage the seventy, but were words of weight meant to convey that the blessings of God were upon all those who heard those words. In discussing those who would hear the words of peace from the seventy, Roxburgh and Romanuk write, “[w]hen they hear the language of shalom on the lips of these strangers who are followers of Jesus, it reminds them of God’s promised future. Shalom is the promise of Jubilee and the rule of God among them.”⁵⁴

Luke 10:1-12 also demonstrates the importance of being physically present as we proclaim the gospel. This approach changes the dynamic of relationships. Research shows that where people are present dramatically shapes their relationships.⁵⁵ In light of the notion of propinquity, it is interesting to note that Jesus values where the disciples are physically when they are sent out. Jesus desires them not to wait for those in the

⁵⁴ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 157.

⁵⁵ Festinger, quoted in Grenny, ed., et al, *Influencer*, 267.

community to come to them, but instead sends them to where the people are. Next, he tells them to enter into people's homes. In other words, the message of Jesus is to be conveyed not solely through words, but also by being physically present in places where people are comfortable. Finally, they are to remain in that house rather than moving from one place to the next. In this way the seventy are not merely visitors in the places to which they are sent, but are truly engaged and embedded in the neighborhood. Roxburgh and Romanuk write, "This is about entering deeply into the life of the other on his or her terms, not your own—'eat what is set before you' (10:7 NRSV)."⁵⁶

Therefore, where Christians meet others is not inconsequential to their message or to how their message will be received. A message that is received where people are will feel different than a message that is received in an unfamiliar place. The good news of Jesus cannot be separated from people's everyday lives, because it meets people in the midst of their lives. This insight is significant, not only for those who are receiving the blessing of the good news that the kingdom is near, but also for those who are giving that message. It requires that followers of Jesus not dichotomize their faith and their daily life, because they are forced to look at both in the midst of their neighborhood. Being sent out, indwelling, and remaining were critical parts of Jesus' sending out the seventy and they should be an essential part of the life of the church today.

⁵⁶ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 140.

CHAPTER 5:
THEOLOGY FOR LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

If the Old and New Testaments make it clear that Christians are called to be sent out in order to be blessing, the question then becomes exactly where should they go. The shortest and simplest answer is everywhere. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus tells his followers to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells the disciples that they are to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” There is no place the church is not called to go and bless. Being sent to all the world also clearly means that Christians are called to bless their neighbors. When Jesus told the disciples that they are to love their neighbors, Jesus was not strictly limiting their love to those who lived near them geographically. However, it would be erroneous to think that this love and blessing should exclude those who are in one’s neighborhood. Woodward and White Jr. maintain that while mission sends the church out, the incarnation also calls the church “to be rooted in our neighborhoods.”¹

In the book *The Art of Neighboring*, Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon suggest that far too often the church has interpreted the story of the Good Samaritan, in which Jesus makes clear that loving one’s neighbor includes enemies who may live far away, only

¹ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 124.

metaphorically. While not wrong, such interpretations have caused Christians to miss that loving one's neighbor also includes loving one's literal neighbor.² "If we don't take Jesus' command literally, then we turn the Great Commandment into nothing more than a metaphor. We have a metaphoric love for our metaphoric neighbors, and our communities change—but only metaphorically, of course. In other words, nothing changes."³ It is because of this metaphorical rendering of neighborly love that, according to Christine Pohl, even neighbors in this society can be complete strangers.⁴ The call of the church, however, must include the call of loving and blessing one's literal neighbors. If not, the areas in which followers of Jesus live will never fully understand the love and grace of Jesus because they have not experienced the love and grace of their neighbors. As David Bosch suggests, "To become a disciple means a decisive and irrevocable turning to both God and neighbor."⁵ Elsewhere, Bosch more strongly states that "...love of neighbor may be regarded as the litmus test for love of God."⁶

It is for this reason that scholars and church practitioners have increasingly been challenging churches and church leaders to take the call of loving their literal neighbors more seriously. Zscheile writes that far too often churches "assume that their neighbors know who Jesus is, what church is, what churches do, and how to differentiate between

² Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 32-34.

³ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 36.

⁴ Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans Publishing, 2012), 164.

⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 82.

⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 67.

types of churches.”⁷ For this reason, Zscheile asserts, Christians must go into their neighborhoods with the conviction of listening and being vulnerable so that they can better understand their neighbors.⁸ Roxburgh suggests that churches spend so much time running the church and meeting the needs of its members that they do not have enough time to indwell the neighborhoods in which they live and so they must begin to prioritize the time they spend in their neighborhoods.⁹ David Fitch, meanwhile, writes that churches have spent so much time casting aspersions at the world “out there” that they have lost their ability to recognize the presence of God in their neighborhoods, and that disciples must begin to learn how to be more present in the communities in which they reside.¹⁰ Finally, Woodward and White Jr. assert that disciples of Jesus need to turn away from Facebook and “face our neighbors” so that followers of Jesus can truly bring good news to their neighborhoods.¹¹

Even if disciples of Jesus believe that being sent into the world to be a blessing includes being sent into one’s literal neighborhood, they may not understand how to love their neighbors well. Scripture’s emphasis on hospitality is helpful. Throughout the Old and New Testament it is clear that being hospitable is a crucial element of one’s faith. In Genesis 18 Abraham and Sarah welcome three strangers by washing their feet, giving

⁷ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 4.

⁸ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 5.

⁹ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 171.

¹⁰ David E. Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines that Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 25.

¹¹ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 124-125.

them bread, and killing a calf for their nourishment.¹² Their hospitality not only welcomes the strangers, but it also opens up their own lives to the blessing and promises of God.¹³ The book of Hebrews gives credence to this truth when it says that Christians should “not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (13:2). Repeatedly, in the Old Testament, the Israelites are encouraged to show hospitality to sojourners and travelers with whom they meet, remembering that they too have been sojourners and travelers.¹⁴

Jesus continues this tradition throughout the gospels. In various times throughout his ministry he welcomes those whom other religious leaders would have spurned. In Mark 2:15-17 Jesus welcomes and eats with tax collectors and sinners in spite of the criticism of the Pharisees. Jesus welcomes the children even though the disciples sternly try to prevent them from bothering Jesus. He says to the disciples, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs” (Mk 10:14). When the crowds surrounded Jesus and the disciples had grown weary and wanted to send them home, Jesus chastised the disciples and commanded them to have the crowds sit down so that they could, miraculously, feed all of them (Lk 9:10-17). Jesus told the parable about the great banquet in which his message was that they should be hospitable, not to those who could repay them, but to the poor, crippled, lame, and blind (Lk 14:1-24). Finally, as Pohl points out, John 21:1-14 describes a scene in which Jesus

¹² John Goldingay, *Genesis for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 18.

¹³ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 161.

¹⁴ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 161.

cooks breakfast in order to give courage and hope to the discouraged disciples.¹⁵ It is clear that hospitality was central to who Jesus was and who he called the disciples to be.

In the book of Acts, the early church embraced and continued the focus on hospitality as a means of blessing others. They worshipped and broke bread in one another's homes.¹⁶ In the early centuries of the church when they had to defend the faith before hostile rulers, they would point to Christians' hospitality to friends and strangers alike as a witness to the truth of the gospel.¹⁷ As Pohl writes, this hospitality was always more than having good manners; it was about replicating who Jesus was and who he had been to them. "The welcome and grace they had experienced in Christ was the model and the empowerment for their hospitality to strangers."¹⁸ Miroslav Volf sums it up well when he writes, "Having been embraced by God, we must make space for others and invite them in."¹⁹

If hospitality is one key way in which the church can take seriously its call to be sent into one's neighborhood and be a blessing, then the church must learn how to practically embody hospitality in its neighborhood. While there are many ways in which to show hospitality, it begins with paying attention to one's neighbor and truly seeing them. Danny Meyer, a successful entrepreneur and restaurateur, wrote a book on the

¹⁵ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 161.

¹⁶ Acts 2:46 as one example.

¹⁷ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 162.

¹⁸ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 163.

¹⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 129, quoted in Pohl, *Living into Community*, 165.

power of hospitality in business called *Setting the Table*.²⁰ Meyer highlights the word *ubuntu*, which is a traditional greeting in South Africa that literally means, “I see you.” As Meyer points out, this phrase addresses a core human need to both be seen and to feel seen.²¹

Seeing others, of course, is what Jesus continually did in his ministry on earth. From the beginning of his ministry when he called his disciples, Jesus was noticing those that others easily overlooked. When Jesus calls Matthew, a hated tax-collector, the gospel of Matthew writes, “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, ‘Follow me’” (9:9). In the famous story of Zacchaeus, also a tax collector, the gospel writer Luke records that “When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today” (19:5). Again, Jesus noticed those who others did not notice, but perhaps even those who desired not to be noticed. Matthew records the story of a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years and, in the midst of a crowd, reached out to touch Jesus in order to be healed. Jesus knew that he had healed someone, but was not content to simply move on without knowing and seeing who it was. Matthew writes, “Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, ‘Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well’” (9:22). Repeatedly Jesus’ heart was to let people know that they had been seen. In his ministry, the first step towards people knowing they were loved by Jesus is that he took the time to notice them.

²⁰ Danny Meyer, *Setting the Table* (New York: Harper, 2006).

²¹ Danny Meyer, *Setting the Table*, 215.

For this reason, if the church is going to take seriously its call to love its literal neighbor, then the first step is to notice its neighbor. For this recognition to occur, disciples of Jesus will have to more intentionally examine their “pattern of availability.”²² This intentional shift in the way one lives in his or her neighborhood is what Woodward and White Jr. call moving “from unconscious busyness to conscious habitation.”²³ Dan Steigerwald, a onetime missionary in Europe and current missionary in the United States, calls this move “creating proximity” with non-Christians.²⁴ David Fitch remarks that “It is only through being present to the other, what I have called kinship, that God changes the world.”²⁵

What these scholars and practitioners understand is that following Jesus’ mode of being sent into the world to be a blessing requires loving one’s neighbor by seeing them, creating space for them, and simply being present with them. Intentional availability allows Christians to learn about their neighbors and their neighborhoods before sharing the gospel with them. Zscheile writes that, “The work of translating Christian faith and practice into new cultural vernaculars requires deep listening to God, to the tradition, and to neighbors.”²⁶ Zscheile further criticizes the church for failing to listen to its unchurched neighbors which has prevented the church from blessing its neighbors by connecting with their “hopes, dreams, struggles and spiritual yearnings.”²⁷ When one

²² Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 174.

²³ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 206.

²⁴ Dan Steigerwald, *Growing Local Missionaries* (Portland: Urban Loft Publishers, 2014), 65.

²⁵ Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 122.

²⁶ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, xii.

begins with listening, he or she can more accurately answer the question that Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch write that followers of Jesus should be continually asking: “What is good news for this community?”²⁸ To answer this question, one must be willing to first be present and listen. In other words, one must begin by truly loving their neighbors. If the church can begin to live into this call, it will not only be a blessing to those who surround it but perhaps even to those within the four walls of its building.

²⁷ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 30.

²⁸ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 213.

PART THREE
MINISTRY PRACTICE

CHAPTER 6:
MINISTRY PLAN

Woodward and White Jr. reflect on how, in order to learn something well, one must engage in three forms of learning that include the heart, mind, and body.¹ First is meta-learning which involves a transfer of information to one's mind.² Meta-learning occurs primarily through teaching that awakens the mind to a new way of life. Throughout Jesus' ministry, he uses this type of teaching in order to open up the disciples' eyes to new truths.³ Secondly, one learns through reflection. "Reflective learning is the effort to excavate deeper learning in the *soul* through good questions and conversation."⁴ This learning was frequently used by Jesus in the form of his questions to his disciples, requiring them to reflect on what they had been learning and thereby processing more deeply what they had heard from Jesus' teaching.⁵

¹ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 91.

² Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 92.

³ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 92.

⁴ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 93.

⁵ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 93.

Finally, one learns through experiential learning. Woodward and White Jr. argue that true learning has not occurred until one has actively used their bodies to practice what they have been hearing and learning cognitively.⁶ In order to truly understand what it means to love one's neighbor or one's enemy, one must do more than intellectually assent to the fact that he or she is supposed to love his or her neighbor. Woodward and White Jr. write, "To learn from Jesus the Messiah we must participate."⁷ Athletes do not learn how to throw or kick by listening to a coach tell them how to do so. Instead they must listen and practice their sport repetitively until they begin to improve. So too, in order to fully learn, Christians must use their minds, hearts, and bodies.

Understanding the theological correctness of being sent out by God on mission is only the first step in truly learning what it means to be sent out. Meta-learning is critical but not sufficient if one desires to embody what one has learned. For that reason this project seeks to do more than teach a congregation how they are called to go out and love their neighbors. As Roxburgh poignantly states, "[W]e will not know what God is up to in the world by huddling together in study groups, writing learned papers, or listening to self-appointed gurus."⁸ With this in mind it is clear that cognitive learning, while an important first step, is not enough to shape a church into a people who genuinely love their literal neighbors. This project seeks to help a group within the congregation begin to practice loving their neighbors through experiential learning as well as processing and reflecting on what they have learned.

⁶ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 94.

⁷ Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 94.

⁸ Alan Roxburgh, *Missional*, 133.

This experiential and reflective learning will be framed by what has been cognitively learned about being the sent people of God, especially as taught in Luke 10:1-12. First, the project will be rooted in the practice of being physically present with one's neighbors. Jesus made it clear in Luke 10 that being physically present was the first step in being sent out, being a blessing, and conveying his message of love and grace. The disciples were to establish roots where they were rather than moving from place to place. Moreover, they were not to complain about the situation in which they found themselves, but to find the mission of God wherever they were located by staying in one home and eating the food offered by the host family. The project, in order to be effective, must require that participants be readily available to their neighbors rather than assuming that Jesus works only in other more sacred places like sanctuaries that may be miles away from one's home.

This will also require that participants begin seeing their neighborhoods with new eyes. As mentioned above, Jesus continually practiced conscious habitation rather than unconscious busyness. This will need to be practiced by those engaging in this neighborhood experiment. In a community in which busyness is both prevalent and honored, the practice of presence will, in many ways, require more energy than the practice of engaging in multiple tasks. Recognizing one's neighbor by more than a handwave will require a firm commitment by those participating in this project and will, hopefully, cause an unsettledness within the neighborhood that might provoke questions about the actions of the participants.

Secondly, the project will be done not by clergy or church staff, but by lay people who not only sit in the pews each Sunday, but Monday through Friday serve in positions

such as architects, doctors, small business owners, and contractors. If a congregation is going to genuinely learn what it means to love their neighbors, they will need to see the person who sits to their left and right as those who are actively engaged in loving their neighbors. When someone believes it is only the paid mouthpiece of the Lord who is encouraging people to love their neighbors, the message will often be lost because it is not coming from someone like themselves.

Thirdly, the neighboring project must be done in community. As seen by Jesus sending out the seventy in pairs and in Abram and Sarai pilgriming together, being sent out where one is vulnerable is always more sustainable when it is not done in isolation. The practice of loving one's neighbor is counter-cultural and will likely be met with opposition, both internally and externally. Internally, it will be difficult to carry out the practice of loving a neighbor due to the amount of time and energy it requires. Knowing that others are with you, even if not physically, will not only keep the participants accountable, but also give them encouragement as they hear of others' experiences. Externally, while it is well within society's demands to be friendly, it is altogether different to love one's neighbor by being physically, emotionally, and perhaps even spiritually open to them. This openness and vulnerability could very well be taken as odd at best or unseemly at worst. To stand up to this external pressure, it will be critical for participants to know they are not alone in receiving this criticism.

Some participants may fear being vulnerable to the strange looks and questions they might receive from their neighbors. When Jesus told his disciples that they would be going out like lambs amongst wolves, he was both warning them about what they might experience as well as giving them permission to be afraid about the mission in which they

were about to engage. It will be important in this neighboring project that participants be given permission to be anxious or afraid of what they will encounter so that when these things occur it will not seem abnormal or serve as an excuse to no longer engage in the project. Confronting these fears will enable participants to share them freely instead of hiding them or feeling alone in their fears.

Experiment Goals

The overall goal of this experiment is to discover in richer ways what it means to follow Jesus' command to love one's neighbor. The phrase love your neighbor can be so broad that it becomes ambiguous to the point of insignificance. This experiment will begin by being more intentionally specific about how one loves his or her neighbor, forcing the participants to ask specific questions about whether they are loving their neighbors and whether this is bearing any fruit. While this experiment may feel wooden, uncomfortable, and even contrived, it will nonetheless force Jesus followers to be accountable and reflective on the impact they are having in their neighborhoods.

Another goal of this experiment will be to allow the participants to experience what it looks like for loving one's neighbor to include, at the least, creating space for him or her. As mentioned above, Jesus repeatedly loved others by creating space for those who were around him. In a world of busyness, distraction, and drivenness, stopping what one is doing in order to be fully present will not only be a practice of being countercultural, but also it will be a distinct challenge to the participants who are followers of Jesus and yet often reflect their community more than Christ. Hopefully participants will have the discipline and fortitude to withstand the temptation of doing

more than simply being present. Whether they fulfill this ideal or not, they will learn a lot by intentionally creating space for being present.

The difficulty of this practice will also fulfill another goal of this project which is to understand more clearly what must be sacrificed if neighbors are truly to be loved. Dave Ramsey writes about financial goals, but his words are relevant to this project as well, “The most important decision about your goals is not what you’re willing to do to achieve them, but what you are willing to give up.”⁹ In ZPC’s community the temptation regarding goals is to continually add to one’s agenda in the hopes that he or she can do it all. In order to take the time to genuinely create space for neighbors, participants will be forced to reduce busyness, otherwise they will not be able to be fully present as the experiment requires. Watching television, scrolling through their phones, and even volunteering for the church may need to be sacrificed if they are going to be able to grow in their ability to love their neighbors.

Another goal of this experiment is to actually learn more about their neighbors and their neighborhood. There is a temptation in this area to believe that everyone knows about Jesus and that everyone is content and comfortable, and therefore have no needs, pain, or emptiness.¹⁰ If space was created for relationship, there may be more opportunity for honesty and transparency between neighbors. The participants will likely have their

⁹ Dave Ramsey, Twitter post, August 12, 2013, 7:54 a.m.
<https://twitter.com/ramseyshow/status/36693563862220290?lang=en>.

¹⁰ Tod Bolsinger tells the story of how, when attendance at the church he was serving started to decline, leadership began to jump to conclusions about the cause and how to strategically counter it. Bolsinger was able to help them to pause and take two months for adaptive inquiry and experimentation. At the conclusion of this they discovered that the reasons were not what they had originally assumed. Hence, the importance of patiently testing one’s assumptions before they jump to conclusions. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 110-122.

assumptions challenged during this process. Hopefully their neighbors will see a different side of what it means to follow Jesus once the members of ZPC show a willingness to be present and listen.

The participants will also have an opportunity to experience what it means to learn by reflecting in community. There will be intentional space for participants to hear about the experience of others. This time will hopefully lead to shared learning of best practices regarding what has worked in this experiment and what has been less than successful. Rather than being a monologue approach to learning such as a lecture or sermon, this experiment will have dialogue built into the entire process. This will help to educate, build community, and get participants to see that they have the ability and the need to help, teach, and learn from one another. This conversational and shared learning will allow for a more robust experience and will increase the learning that occurs.

Along with shared learning, the experiment is not to be a one time occurrence but rather a step in a much longer process of learning what it means to love one's neighbor. Adaptive changes require that organizations engage in iterative learning in which, after reflection, new experiments are engaged in, practiced, and reflected on before the process begins anew.¹¹ Moving into change as a process rather than a clear and one-time decision will help the participants to see that all adaptive change requires this type of iterative change. This will help them not only love their neighbors more deeply, but also be more prepared for other adaptive changes they will face in the future.

¹¹ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 32.

Finally, the hope is that engaging in this experiment will help Scripture and the teachings of Jesus become more alive in the lives of the participants. Woodward and White Jr. write that if true learning does not occur until it has been physically practiced, then the actual practice of creating space for one's neighbor as an act of loving them will force participants to grapple with the joys and challenges of putting Jesus' words to practice.¹² It is one thing to say that one loves his or her neighbor, but it is an altogether different thing to actively create space for them, to sacrifice in order to love them, and to reflect on whether one is truly growing in his or her ability to love one's neighbor. It is this physical practice that will shape people spiritually so that they will no longer be content to merely cognitively assent to neighborly love.

While I do not expect all participants to achieve all the goals set forth, I hope that by intentionally focusing on what it means to love one's neighbor that real learning will occur and will affect the participants, their neighborhoods and eventually, ZPC as a whole. This process will be iterative and will be done in community which will help to ensure that it is not simply a technical solution to a truly adaptive problem. With this in mind, the next section addresses how these goals will be specifically achieved.

Content

The loving your neighbor experiment will begin by gathering a pilot group of participants. If Roxburgh and Romanuk are correct that adaptive change usually begins with a smaller group, then a pilot group of twenty-five will allow for easier shared learning as well as providing more flexibility if and when the experiment needs to change

¹² Woodward and White Jr., *The Church as Movement*, 94.

based on that learning.¹³ The pilot group will be made up primarily of early adopters who are not afraid to try something new.¹⁴ While they will be distinct from the larger congregation, through reports and other avenues, they will also stay attached to the larger body. Zscheile writes that this connection “avoids the common problem of innovation initiatives being so marginal to the ongoing operations that learning doesn’t take place in the larger organization.”¹⁵ In order to be representative of the larger congregation, the pilot group will have people whose ages range from in the 30s to 70s, single or married, and some who live in single homes and others in townhouses or apartments. This representation will help to ensure that the results do not unduly skew toward one type of neighborhood or demographic.

Each person in the pilot group will be asked to spend two hours a week over a two month period simply being present in their neighborhoods. Participants will be asked to be physically located in their front yard, or whatever yard is open and available to the public. Not only must they be physically present, but they must also be visibly present which means they are not to be reading a book or scrolling through their phones. If the proposition of propinquity is true, then changing where participants spend their time should make them more open to beginning new relationships or strengthening relationships that they already have with their neighbors. Zscheile writes about the importance of a willingness to simply engage in practices repeatedly as a means of

¹³ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 60.

¹⁴ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 121. According to Zscheile, innovators make up 2.5 percent of communities, early adopters make up 13.5 percent, the early majority consists of 34 percent, the late majority is approximately 34 percent and the laggards consist of the final 16 percent.

¹⁵ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 120.

developing new habits that will, eventually, prove beneficial. He writes, “There are always days in which practices go well and those in which they don’t. There are moments of connection and moments of disconnection, times in which things flow together and others in which they seem to fall apart. Unless we keep at it, we never reap the benefits.”¹⁶ The focus of this experiment will not be to see immediate results, but to develop a habit of being present with one’s neighbors and then discover what is learned when one is committed to this practice.

The experiment will begin with a gathering of all participants in order to clearly lay out the expectations. This gathering will also allow the participants to see that the experiment is being done in community. At this meeting, the shared learning aspect of the experiment will be explained. There will be a Google Doc created to allow participants to input information and reflections gleaned while spending two hours in their neighborhood each week. This shared document will firstly serve as a means of accountability. If spending two hours per week in their front yards is difficult, then it will be important that each person has a means of reporting what they did or did not do. Second, the Google Doc will continually remind the group that though they cannot physically see that they are participating in this experiment with others, they are not alone in what they are doing. Reading other’s reports will encourage them when perhaps their own results appear less successful.

Third, the Google Doc will increase the amount of shared learning that occurs and provide timely check-ins that will increase the likelihood that participants are learning

¹⁶ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 104.

from one another on a continual basis. Peer-to-peer learning is critical for adaptive change and is not a common type of learning within most congregations.¹⁷ As participants increasingly engage in this practice, it will begin to emphasize the importance of learning, not just from professional clergy but from ordinary people too.

Fourth, the questions that they are asked on the Google Doc will help to frame the experiment in a way that allows the goals of the experiment to be achieved. Those questions will be: 1) How much time were you able to set aside to create space in your yard/neighborhood this week? 2) Did you meet anyone for the first time? If so, what were their names? (feel free to assign "code names" for them) 3) What did you learn about the person or neighborhood? 4) As you reflect on your time being outside is there any one thing you learned about following Jesus? More specifically, as you look at Luke 10:1-12 did your time outside give you any insights into this passage? 5) What did you have to say "no" to in order to spend this time outside (e.g. time spent with family, doing a church activity, watching television, etc.)? 6) As you reflect on each day, was there something that inspired you, something that forced you to ask a particular question, something that irked you, or something that called you to change in some way (or make you think that the church should change)?¹⁸

The first question will help to discern whether participants are able to actually carry out the experiment or whether they find it difficult to spend two hours a week being fully present. The question will also help discover whether there is a direct correlation

¹⁷ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 74.

¹⁸ This question was inspired by the way in which Tod Bolsinger would begin his D.Min Class each day.

between time spent in the front yard and neighborly interaction. Furthermore, this question provides accountability between the participants and myself, as well as between participants.

The second and third questions illuminate whether or not being fully present actually brings about changes in one's relationships with his or her neighbors. They address the continuum that Pathak and Runyon propose of moving from stranger to acquaintance and then acquaintance to friend.¹⁹ It is important that the experiment not provide mere anecdotes of what changed, but actual changed numbers. The hope is that this experiment will increase the number of relationships and the quality of relationships within neighborhoods.

The fourth question sheds light on whether practicing loving one's neighbor helps to illuminate Scripture such as Luke 10, which speaks expressly to the importance of being sent out by Jesus into one's surrounding community. Being engaged in loving one's neighbor may either make Scripture come alive or it may raise questions. Obeying Jesus ought to make his followers look and act more like him. Finally, the participants' actions should not just change them and what they do, but should affect how they understand or appreciate Scripture and Jesus' commands. It is important that the experiment be rooted in Scripture, so this question will continue to bring the participants' minds back to Scripture.

The fifth question is critical because it instills more deeply the reality that following Jesus and his commands will always require sacrifice of some sort. It is

¹⁹ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 75.

important that the participants name their sacrifices as a way of more fully understanding that one cannot simply add to what one is already doing in order to follow Jesus, but instead must be willing to give up something in order to be fully present to one's neighbors. Also, in trying to connect what the pilot group is doing with the congregation as a whole, the ability to name those things which had to be sacrificed will help the larger group understand what it will cost them to change. As the book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* makes clear, it is not change that people detest but rather the loss that accompanies the change.²⁰ Naming that sacrifice or loss from the beginning helps the loss to lose some of its power and increases the likelihood of the change being successful.

The sixth and final question allows participants to check-in and to address what is standing out to them about the experiment. If adaptive change is contingent upon a more organic approach, then it is important for each participant to have an opportunity to freely express what is and is not going well. Also, participants' questions or concerns can be used to help frame what the next experiment will look like. Finally, this question invites participants to begin thinking about how what they are learning might be used to engage or bring change to the larger congregation. Keeping this idea in the forefront of people's minds ensures that the experiment does not happen once and fall out of focus, but is being done within the context of a larger congregational change.

After one month, at the halfway point of the experiment, the participants will come together to discuss and reflect on their experiences in person. While shared learning can certainly occur virtually, there is great value in being together physically in order to

²⁰ "What people resist is not change per se, but loss." Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 22.

more fully be able to share what each participant is learning. This will also be a time when participants can be encouraged by other participants. This will be especially helpful for those who might not be seeing any tangible outcomes from their time in their front yards. At this meeting the participants will be asked what they have learned, what they have learned about themselves, what experiments they think we should do next, and for any initial thoughts on changes that need to be made when rolling this out to the wider congregation. These questions help to make clear that the main goal of the experiment is not to succeed, though that is ideal, but to learn from the practice of being fully present. Moreover, the third question emphasizes that adaptive change is an iterative enterprise and so participants need to continually consider how they can learn from their experience and how they can use that learning to develop more experiments. The final question reinforces the idea that the work of the pilot group not detached from the congregation, but rather is directly connected to it and is vital in bringing important changes to ZPC.

After this, the participants will continue to engage in the experiment for four more weeks before meeting again in person to assess the experiment once again. Discussing the same four questions as at the midpoint ensures that the conversation focuses on what is being learned rather than simply whether the experiment is successful or not. Because the nature of this experiment is one where results may be slow, it is important to continue to ask similar questions rather than quickly moving from one experiment to the next. It will also be important to begin asking the participants how what they are learning can be incorporated into new experiments.

As the participants come up with new experiments, they will be asked to spend one more month engaging in whatever experiments they think should be tried based on

their discoveries. This is critical for this process in that it reinforces the reality that adaptive changes will occur, not in one fell swoop, but through an iterative, often slow, process. Each time they experiment, they will grow in their understanding of how to best love their neighbors. Because neighborhoods are contextual and personalities are unique, this process of experimenting and learning over and over allows for results which are crafted for each setting. I am not assuming that being in one's front yard will be the only or even the best way to love one's neighbor, but rather I believe that this serves as a valid way to begin this process. Iterating these experiments also allows each participant to take ownership of the process, which increases the likelihood of success. The Roxburgh principle says that there is a direct correlation between a successful adaptation and the amount of leadership that ordinary members are allowed to wield.²¹ Giving the participants the power to create their own experiments ensures that change is going to be more than simply doing what their pastor asks them to, but rather something that they are beginning to own.

The final step of this experiment will be to gather together again in order to reflect on what was learned in the second experiment. This will also be a time to consider together ways in which the congregation as a whole might learn from the experiments the pilot group did and what changes might need to occur for loving its' neighbor to become a more integral part of ZPC's identity. This continual experimental process will help the participants to both learn in deeper ways what it means to love one's neighbor as well as help them to understand more clearly the process of wrestling with adaptive, rather than

²¹ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 77.

merely technical, change. The overarching question will be what will the participants learn about their neighbors and about adaptive change. This is the question that the next chapter examines.

CHAPTER 7:

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND TIMELINE

During the summer of 2018, approximately thirty-five people were asked to participate in the neighboring experiment described in previous chapters. Of those thirty-five people, twenty-five agreed to be a part of the pilot group that would spend two hours a week in their front yards. This group spanned the spectrum age-wise (from their 30s to their 70s) and lived in typical suburban homes, homes reserved for those fifty-five or older, as well as an apartment closer to the city. The pilot group was composed of empty-nester couples, couples with children at home and one single person, which is representative of the church as a whole. The participants agreed to do the experiment in September and October, to come to meetings at the beginning, halfway point and end of the experiment, and to make weekly reports that would be accessible to the other participants.

The initial meeting was held on August 22 with the goal of helping the participants understand not only what the project was going to be but also why the experiment was important. For that reason, the meeting began with an overview of the difference between adaptive and technical change. This conversation included discussing that adaptive change means that one does not know the outcome before one has started.

The conversation also emphasized the importance of shared learning, a willingness to fail and learn from failure, the critical nature of experimenting and reflecting and finally, not asking whether the experiment was a success or a failure, but what was learned.

The second area of discussion at this meeting was to point to the reality that the culture in America has changed from one in which people were pressured to attend worship on a weekly basis to one in which the societal norm is not to attend worship services. With the shifting cultural trends, it will be increasingly difficult for churches to attract visitors by the size of their building, the excitement of their worship, or the quality of their church programs. For this reason, there is a need for churches to focus less on how to get people to come into the building and more on how to get people who are already in the building to see that they are being sent out into their neighborhoods. This shift, though a difficult one, is also one that allows people to more fully live into the call of Jesus to love one's neighbor.

The initial meeting concluded by delving into the logistics of the actual experiment. An examination of Luke 10 served as a means of discussing the importance of simply being present where one is and the way in which that can be a loving act. By being genuinely present and engaged one might be surprised (as those early disciples seemed to be) at how God can work. The group discussed the importance of praying, being interruptible and living with intentionality in their neighborhoods. At this point, the importance of the term propinquity was discussed, focusing on the difference that one's physical location makes on whether and how relationships are formed. After describing the requirements of the experiment (i.e. weekly write-ups, mid-point and final meetings,

and possible further experimentation) the meeting was concluded and eight days later, the experiment began.

The next time the group got together was on October 3rd when the group was able to discuss in person more deeply what they had been experiencing, what they had learned so far, what had encouraged them, and what had been a discouragement. This meeting is described further below. After that meeting, the group got together twice in November to have dinner, to touch base on what had been learned, and to discuss possible further experiments. Out of this initial group of twenty-five, ten people agreed to do further experiments during the spring of 2019 based on what had been learned by the pilot group. This smaller group met again in June to reflect on what had been learned from the second round of experiments and how this group, and the congregation as a whole, might use that learning to continue to develop into a congregation that is better able to love their literal neighbors. This meeting concluded the official experimenting of this project, though the learning for the congregation continues.

Experiment Learning: Maps

At the initial meeting there was time set aside in order for everyone to fill out a “Who Is My Neighbor?” map. This is a map created by Jay Pathak and David Runyon in their book *The Art of Neighboring*.¹ The map has eight blank spaces that represent homes that surround someone’s particular house. There are three items that the participants were asked to write in those spaces: the names of their neighbors, something inside their home that would only be visible once one steps inside, and a dream or issue of that neighbor.

¹ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 38.

The point of the block map is to discern how many of their neighbors participants know, as well as how deeply they know them. At the meeting that concluded the initial experiment, the participants were asked to once again complete the map block to discover whether or not they knew more neighbors and whether they know those neighbors in a deeper way. The participants knew a fair amount of their neighbors, with the majority of participants knowing approximately eighty percent of their neighbors' names. Their proficiency at answering the second question, however, was dramatically lower, with very few being able to describe something inside of their neighbors' homes. The participants' ability to answer the third question improved somewhat by the end of the experiment, however, it was still minimal. While most were able to name the vocation of 50 percent of their neighbors, they were unable to answer the deeper questions pertaining to their neighbors' hopes or struggles.

At the end of the experiment, the block map was handed out and the participants were asked to fill out the map once again to see if there was any improvement. Half of the participants showed some improvement, nearly half showed no improvement at all and one seemed to know less about his or her neighbor than when the experiment began. For the half that showed improvement, it was surprisingly the second question that improved the most.² Participants were able in the second block map to describe renovations that had occurred in their neighbor's homes, kegs that were located in the

² This is surprising because the participants were not asked to go into people's homes, but instead to see if their neighbors would engage in conversation if the participants simply sat in their own front yards. I hypothesized that the greater learning would come from the third question. Perhaps the participants' willingness to engage in their own front yard increased the likelihood that they would be invited into the space of their neighbor.

basement, as well as a dent in someone's refrigerator. The increase was not staggering, but there was certainly an improvement for half of the participants.

There was also an improvement in their ability to answer the third question, though as stated above it was not as impressive an improvement. This time the participants were able to describe a daughter who dropped out of college, a family history of alcoholism, a child wrestling with mental health illness, and a neighbor's aspiration for his yard. This half learned more, on average, about one to two neighbors during the two month span of this experiment. Spending two hours a week in their front yards slightly increased their knowledge of their neighbors, though the increase was less than had been expected. For this reason, it is important to observe not just the quantitative analysis, but also the qualitative analysis included in the weekly reports and the discussions that occurred during the mid-point and post experiment meetings. While there are certainly quantitative findings in this aspect of the research, the focus was primarily on how the participants experienced the project.

Weekly Updates

Each week the participants were asked to fill out a Google Doc in which they answered six questions about their time in their front yards. Through these weekly reports, the participants were pushed to analyze their experience more closely, to be held accountable through the power of community, to reflect on how this experiment has shaped their faith journey, and to learn from the contributions of the other participants. The weekly reports ultimately revealed that the experiment was more difficult than many had anticipated, got easier as they got into the rhythm of the practice, revealed perhaps as

much about themselves as about their neighbors, and had a more profound spiritual experience the longer they participated. In the practice, they also learned more effective ways of interacting with and loving their neighbors.

The first question on the shared Google Doc addressed how much time they were able to spend outside during the week. This question was to track how much time people were actually able to spend outside, but was also intended to examine what hindered people from spending two hours in their front yards. The vast majority of respondents reported that spending two hours doing virtually nothing but sitting and being open to interruption was a major challenge. The number one reason given for the difficulty was that people were too busy and, to their surprise, could not find two hours to set aside for the experiment. One person commented that he had had meetings away from his home every single night of the week, including two nights of church meetings. Others reported that their work was keeping them from setting aside time. In addition, several mentioned that the weather or vacations kept them from doing the full two hours every week.

In addition to the difficulty of finding two hours each week was challenge of being still for that amount of time. A few participants reported that being off their phone was proving to be more challenging than they had anticipated. Some could not refrain from an activity for that amount of time, so they began to read a book or do yard work as a way of giving them something to engage in. There were two participants for whom sitting in their front yards and doing nothing elicited a negative response from their neighbors. One participant wrote that it made their neighbors uncomfortable that they were just sitting in their front yards and not engaging in any activity except for being present. This participant was told that his neighbors had been talking about what he was

doing and wondering if something was wrong with him. Another participant had three different neighbors stop at some point during the experiment to ask why he was just sitting there for so long. The participants were interested to discover that what has become strange, in this community at least, is when one is still and what has become normative is always being active. Simply being present in one's yard is viewed as bizarre and unnatural.

The second question addressed whether they met any new neighbors. The hope of this question was to quantitatively examine how many new neighbors were met by being present in their yards. A high percentage of participants reported having met a new neighbor through this experiment. There was little question that by practicing presence, the participants met neighbors who they otherwise would not have met. Interestingly, while the question was meant to be quantitative rather than qualitative, the participants ended up answering this question in a more detailed manner than asked. One comment that came up frequently was how surprised they were that there were not more people walking in their neighborhoods. While the vast majority of neighborhoods represented has sidewalks, according to the weekly reports, it was common to see only one or two people walking by during their two hour window. A few participants began to change the time they sat in their yards to see if that affected any change in how many people they interacted with, whereas others changed their positioning to see if a geographic change made any difference. There was a significant amount of frustration that people seemed to never come out of their homes. There was specific concern about why there were not more children out, with comments about how organized sports seem to have taken children out of their neighborhoods. Through this project, people discovered how

people's patterns of living had changed. This proved to be an important lesson for the group as they began to examine what kind of experimenting they should engage in next.

Yet despite this frustration, the group did meet specific neighbors and reported significant outcomes from these meetings. One participant ended up taking over the neighborhood directory because of an interaction he had while sitting outside (this was the same participant who was told that his actions were making the neighbors uncomfortable). Another interaction resulted in a religious dialogue about Jews, Christians, and Muslims. One participant reported that sitting in her front yard precipitated a conversation with a neighbor about how they used to have a neighborhood block party. While the participants may not have had as many interactions as they would have liked, through this experiment they were able to discover how social patterns have changed while also having interactions that allowed them to engage in deeper questions.

The third question asked more specifically about what the participants learned about their neighbors and their neighborhood through their interactions with those they met. More generally, there were comments about how neighborhoods are built and the question of whether they were created in such a way as to cultivate relationships. One person commented that in his neighborhood, which was built in the 1980s, there are no sidewalks and no front porches. He suggested that this inhibited neighboring. Someone else suggested that it was easier for them to connect with their neighbors through their backyards because everyone in their neighborhood has back porches. Another participant who lives in The Village, where the houses were built in the early twentieth century, pointed out that in his neighborhood there were many walkers because of the sidewalks and front porches as well as the proximity to downtown shops and restaurants.

Participants noticed that the structure of neighborhoods can either be a benefit or a detriment to cultivating relationships. Winston Churchill said that, “We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.”³ Perhaps the same is true of neighborhoods.

Participants frequently commented on how not only the development of neighborhoods has changed over the decades, but how the culture itself seems to have shifted away from face-to-face interaction in neighborhoods.⁴ Repeatedly there were comments about how, even on beautiful days, there were very few people outside. There was another comment in this section about how a neighbor stopped to ask why the participant was just sitting in his yard, revealing again the oddity in this culture of simply being present. One person opined that people seemed to care more about their dogs than their neighbors. From these comments, it seems clear that the participants discovered in deeper ways how the society around them has changed and how they had been caught unaware.

That said, there were also meaningful interactions that cannot be overlooked. After one interaction, a participant mentioned how her neighbor had clearly wanted to talk and yet, until that point, she had not been aware of how lonely the person was. Through conversations participants discovered various issues that their neighbors were facing. Whether it was a neighbor who was dealing with dementia, a family struggling relationally, an upcoming surgery, or financial difficulties (resulting in a neighbor having

³ Jan Cisek, “‘We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us,’ Winston Churchill’s thinking and meaning behind it,” *The Capital Feng Shui Expert*, October 28, 2012, accessed December 1, 2019, <http://www.fengshuilondon.net/feng-shui-books-reviews/we-shape-our-buildings-thereafter-they-shape-us-winston-churchills-thinking-and-meaning-behind-it>.

⁴ A response to this shift will be seen in the future experiments the participants think that the pilot group, and eventually the whole church, should engage in.

to come out of retirement), it was clear that being present in their yard and open to conversation created an opportunity for more genuine relationships to develop. Although participants interacted with fewer neighbors than I initially hoped, the experiment did result in a growing awareness of how society has changed as well as created opportunities for understanding at least a few of their neighbors more deeply.

The fourth question addressed whether or not the participants actively pursuing loving their neighbor helped them to experience Jesus or Scripture in a deeper way. More explicitly, it asked them to reflect on whether through this experiment they had any new insights to Luke 10:1-11. Of the six questions answered in the first two to three weeks, this one was answered less frequently than the others. When it was answered, there seemed to be some confusion as to if or how it connected with what they were doing. However, as the experiment continued, there were more connections made between what they were doing and what the seventy disciples were doing in Luke 10.

One theme in the reflections on the passage was the importance of being available. A participant pointed out that God does not require disciples to bear great fruit, but rather to be available to others. Another described how making himself available caused him to be surprised by Jesus. This participant seemed to echo how the disciples in Luke 10 described their own surprise at how God worked through them simply by their willingness to be present with others. Similarly, another participant commented that when one keeps his or her eyes open, then he or she will often discover opportunities to connect with their neighbors.

Of course, to do so takes more intentionality than what most of the participants had been willing to provide prior to the experiment. As one participant boldly stated, “No

matter what the Kingdom of God is near—we just have to notice it.” This noticing happens when, as several pointed out, one is intentional in the way in which they live. “Following Jesus,” wrote one person, “requires a conscious choice.” Rather than drifting in and out of their neighborhoods, there was a clearer sense that a disciple of Jesus needs to intentionally pay attention to others, which requires a willingness to be patient. Much like the disciples in Luke 10 who did not grow impatient or bored nor moved from house to house, so too did the experiment seem to reveal how critical patience and steadfastness is if one wants to follow Jesus’ command to love one’s neighbor.

Finally, many of the participants contemplated what it means to be a person of peace. While Luke 10 suggests that the disciples find a person of peace in the community, most of the participants reflected on what it would mean if he or she were the person of peace. One person asked what it would look like to be a person of peace. Another stated the importance of being a person of peace in one’s neighborhood. Based off an experience that one participant had, he concluded, “some are ready to share in peace and some are not.” Over time, the passage helped the participants begin to interpret what they were experiencing rather than detaching what they were doing from the Jesus who called them to this action. While there were certainly some who struggled to see any significant connection between the disciples two thousand years ago and disciples themselves today, by committing to struggling with the passage and seeing it through the lens of them making themselves fully available to their neighbors, they were able to see the passage through fresh eyes.

The fifth question was intended to communicate that when one follows Jesus and his commands, it will inevitably require sacrifice. While participants did not expound

greatly on this particular question, they were clear that adding two hours a week to be in their front yard required them to give up something they might prefer to do. Some suggested that time with their families and friends suffered because they were engaging in the experiment. Others pointed out that they would be working if they were not sitting in their yards. There were many who mentioned that they would be watching television, especially sports, had they had their two hours back. Some would have been reading had they not felt the pressure to simply be present. One person conceded that giving up her privacy was perhaps the most difficult thing about the whole project.

There was one participant who admitted that he had overcommitted to activities that week, which meant that he did not fulfill the two-hour commitment. Another person reported that he had not neglected any other commitments besides the experiment. While sacrificing time to do the experiment was particularly difficult in the beginning, as the habit became more a part of their daily ritual, the participants were able to focus less on what they were missing out on and more on what they gained by getting away from the hustle of their normal lives. Comments to other questions, as well as the mid-point and final meeting, revealed that while the strict aim of this project was to make themselves available to their neighbors, there was also the healthy byproduct of the spiritual practice of sabbath. Taking a break from their busy lives seemed to breathe life into those who may have otherwise grown weary of the experiment, especially when it was not producing the type of fruit for which they had hoped.

The sixth, and final, question of the weekly reports aimed to collect any miscellaneous thoughts or lessons that participants may have felt the previous questions did not provide them an opportunity to share. This catch-all question resulted primarily in

people remarking on what irked them as well as what the experiment helped them to discover. While there were a few suggestions for how the larger church could engage more with their neighborhoods, most participants shied away from answering this part of question six. They addressed this question primarily at the end of the experiment in the face-to-face meetings that were held.

The two main frustrations of participants were aimed at themselves and at their neighbors. First, there were multiple entries about how the experiment helped them to see just how busy they were each day and how surprised they were that they did not have enough margin in their lives to do the experiment well. One person complained that he could not believe that in one week he could not find more than fifteen minutes to be outside. Others were irritated that work seemed to be controlling their lives and realized that this needed to change. Overall, most participants seemed genuinely surprised at the difficulty of spending two hours a week in their front yards.

The participants were also frustrated at how frequently they discovered that neighbors were either unavailable or unwilling to engage in conversation. One common complaint was the relative few neighbors that walked by. Some suggested that, like themselves, perhaps their neighbors were too busy to be walking in their neighborhoods. Others mentioned that the neighborhoods themselves were not constructed in such a way as to be “neighboring friendly.” Finally, others surmised that organized activities had taken neighbors, especially children, out of their neighborhoods. There was also surprise at how many neighbors seemed to avoid engaging in conversation. One person was especially irked at how many passersby avoided eye contact with her so that they did not have to greet her. Several noted that people seemed to be walking as if they were on a

mission and therefore were not interruptible. Someone else experienced neighbors who would intentionally cross over the street before reaching her house and then would cross back over after passing her house. Clearly, as the participants discovered, there are neighbors for whom this particular experiment was not conducive to developing new relationships.

There were also good discoveries that the experimenters learned as a part of this project. Primarily they realized that intentionality is needed if they were truly going to love their neighbors. This intentionality began by having enough margin in one's life to be able to have space to engage with his or her neighbors. They also talked about the critical nature of the posture in which they approach their neighbors. In other words, by being clearly present and interruptible, they were much more likely to engage with their neighbors. It was also pointed out that leading with questions and being prepared to listen well was vital if they were going to be able to engage with neighbors. Someone else remarked that the choice to be available was in fact a choice. It was not going to happen without genuine intentionality.

Others discovered that a healthy byproduct of this project was the peace they felt from disengaging from their work as well as from their devices. They suggested that while it was initially difficult to be away from their phones or television, eventually they began to experience peace because of their distance from these things. Someone said that the practice of not multi-tasking and focusing on being available was a benefit he had not expected. One commented that he was inspired to simplify his life after engaging in this experiment and another pointed out how relaxing it was to simply be outside. All of these comments suggest that the practice of intentionally making oneself available to others can

also allow one to be more available to God and to their own inner thoughts, something that rarely happens when one is continually working, watching television, or scrolling on a device.

Face-to-Face Meetings

The pilot group met together as a large group at the halfway point of the experiment and then in two smaller groups after the experiment was completed. The aim of these meetings was to be reminded that the experiment was done in community, to discover if meeting face-to-face revealed additional lessons from the experiment that were not in the weekly reports, and, at the final two meetings, to express gratitude to the participants by offering them a meal shared together. While overlap between the weekly digital check-ins and the face-to-face meetings was certainly evident, there was also additional information gleaned in person. This section will look primarily at lessons that have not been previously discussed, as well as suggestions for further experiments and ways that the larger church can become more involved in the neighborhoods in which its members reside.

One of the main aspects of learning came over time as the group's focus on Luke 10 deepened. One participant noted that, like in the passage, deeper relationships were able to occur when one stayed in one place rather than moving around. Focusing on the neighborhood in which one lived seemed to allow the participant to reflect more on where he lived and the importance of a sense of place. The participants found that, like the lambs before wolves, there was a real sense of vulnerability that occurred when they placed themselves in their front yards. Whether it was a feeling of being creepy, or

neighbors talking about them, or people avoiding them, they more acutely felt the vulnerability inherent in loving one's neighbor. For some of the participants, engaging in the project gave them a new sense of boldness. As they reflected on Jesus' admonition for the disciples who were not received to dust off their sandals and move on, a few participants shared that even if their efforts were unfruitful or they were ridiculed, they were called to move forward and not allow rejection to hinder them from fulfilling the mission of God. Finally, another experimenter focused on the word go and said the job of followers of Jesus is to simply go. As another person commented, this is not a twelve step program for discipleship, but a simple practice of following Jesus.

As the participants brainstormed about what experiments they might engage in next, most surmised that they would prefer to be more active than passive in what they did. One common suggestion was to hold a block party where the participant could choose to host several of their neighbors at their home. In some areas this used to be common practice that had fallen out of favor. Another suggestion was to sit outside, but to do so while offering a cold beverage or having a yard game such as corn hole in the yard to serve as a focal point. This suggestion was based on the premise that having a different focal point would make the interaction between neighbors feel more comfortable. A few suggested walking their neighborhoods while looking for an opportunity to engage with their neighbors might be a better approach. The primary hope in this suggestion was that, while they may have had few people walk by their house, perhaps by walking themselves they would see people on their porches or working in their yards and be able to connect with them immediately. There was also the suggestion that they could be intentional in their everyday activities such as watching their children's

soccer games, and in so doing they might be able to connect with more people. In this way, the interactions might feel more natural. Some of these experiments were taken up by the experimenters and are to be discussed in the next section.

The participants also engaged in a conversation about how the congregation as a whole might be able to engage more deeply in loving their neighbors. Interestingly, several of the suggestions had nothing to do with engaging more in their neighborhoods, but instead focused on increasing hospitality in the church building itself. There were suggestions of spending more time in the meet-and-greet during worship, encouraging people to find people they do not know and engage them in conversation, and moving around in the sanctuary rather than always sitting in the same place. For some, these suggestions were perhaps rooted in engaging in practices in a more comfortable setting like the church building. For others it seemed to be motivated by the desire to practice hospitality in a more comfortable setting before going out into the more challenging setting of their neighborhoods.

The theme of continually challenging people to love their neighbors was also repeated several times in the conversations. One person suggested making one specific challenge about engaging their neighbors, so that it would be easier to focus on that one task. There was a sense from those who gathered that focusing on one specific practice would be more effective because it would be less forgettable. There was also a comment that the church needed to do a better job of equipping congregation members; one way to do this would be to invite people to engage in the neighborhood experiment that the pilot group had been doing for the previous two months. Doing this would be less risky since one group had already done it and would increase the sense of importance of doing

something scary or vulnerable in community. The hope is that this would increase the likelihood of the experiment producing fruit.

Second Round of Experiments

After the first round of experiments, several participants agreed to do a second round of experiments that was shaped from what was learned during the previous experiment. This iterative process allowed the group to experience firsthand that adaptive change requires more than one project and is a continual series of experimenting, reflecting, and then experimenting again. The second round also allowed the participants to have more input in what their neighboring looks like rather than being assigned to sit in their front yards for two hours. Again, this change allowed them to experience the reality that adaptive change requires the work of all the people, not just a leader who decides what others must do. While the first round introduced the concept of taking neighboring more seriously, the second round allowed the participants to make the practice of loving one's neighbor their own.

The most popular iteration from the first experiment was to invite their neighbors to a block party. There were several things that were learned when people engaged in this particular experiment. First was the sheer number of neighbors who accepted the invitation to come to the block party. Every host expressed their surprise that so many people attended. The high percentage of acceptance energized the participants. At each party there was at least one comment from a neighbor who shared how grateful he or she was for the invitation and the organization of the party. The positivity of the reports from the second experiment was much greater than from the first.

The question of why these parties were so successful was addressed in the meeting that followed the experiments. Most hosts believed that the success revealed that neighbors were genuinely yearning to meet others. During the first experiment, there was often a frustration that neighbors seemed to have little desire to meet one another. However, the block parties dispelled at least some of this frustration since many neighbors explicitly said to the hosts how nice it was to meet their neighbors. There was one story about neighbors who the participant had been trying to connect with for quite some time with no success. Those neighbors not only came to the block party, but they also ended up going to their home, putting their children to bed and returning to the party. This helped the group to see that perception is not always reality and that, rather than feeling dejected when neighbors do not seem to want to be in relationship, they should persevere. One participant stated, “Clearly, our neighbors wanted to get together in this way - they just needed someone to take the step to do it!”

There were other reasons that the hosts suggested as contributing to the success of this second experiment. One person pointed out that she encouraged neighbors to invite other neighbors that she did not know well. This action broadened the amount of invitations and increased the likelihood of a neighbor saying yes since people are more prone to accept an invitation from someone they know. Additionally, this created more buy-in for those who were making the invitations. Another person suggested that having a party where people can stop in for a bit and then leave lessened the pressure of the neighbors feeling like they had to reciprocate at some point. A more intimate invitation would make some people feel like etiquette would require responding in kind. It was also pointed out that an invitation to a block party did not make anyone feel like someone was

going to try to sell them something. The block party seemed to quash the suspicion that invitations always come with conditions. It was also interesting to see that propinquity played a role in at least one party. Because the party was outside on the patio, there were neighbors who were not invited but stopped by when they saw what was going on and ended up staying until the end of the party. Perhaps in these settings, propinquity works better in groups than individually.

The participants also said that these block parties would not be a one-time event. Neighbors asked that they do this again, while others remarked how there used to be more of these parties and it was good to rekindle them. One party in an over-55 community resulted in routinizing the party by doing them twice a month in what they are calling Fridays at 5. For this group, the block party also resulted in the participant getting together with seven other homeowners and getting to know them better. These ensuing, more intimate gatherings were helpful because they allowed the participants to understand more deeply the struggles of many in this community. As those who were in their 60s, 70s, and 80s, there was a sense of loneliness, of feeling insignificant and wondering what use they were now that they were seen as being less productive than earlier in life. A lack of purpose was a prevalent struggle, which allowed the ZPC participants to wrestle with how they might serve as witnesses to this particular neighborhood.

Two participants chose not to do a block party, but instead to be more attentive to others when they were away from their homes. One couple discovered that by asking questions and focusing on listening they were able to engage more deeply with people they were sitting next to during their children's soccer games. They remarked on how

surprised they were that people were so willing to open up if they simply took time to pay attention to them. These conversations resulted in a man opening up about the recent death of his mother and in the ZPC members ministering to a couple who were separated. Being more focused on those they met at these games also resulted in having more shared meals with others. Doing this experiment helped to convey the truth that when people simply change their posture, they are able to be more present wherever they go and therefore increase the likelihood of cultivating relationships.

At the concluding meeting for those who participated in the second round of these experiments, there was also space set aside for coming up with suggestions for how to help the larger congregation engage with their neighbors. It was suggested that ZPC's successful small group ministry might be an effective avenue for engaging the larger congregation. Perhaps, instead of meeting together, one week every small group member could have their own block party or they could host a block party together. There was also the concern raised that trying to make a program out of this would be ineffective. This could be why several of the suggestions were aimed at how to help individuals in the congregation engage with their neighbors. With that in mind, the participants thought it wise to encourage people to try to make themselves available wherever they are and to live life with more intentionality. They also said living with more expectancy would result in people seeing God at work around them.

Overall, the second round of experiments were successful and illustrate the critical nature of continually iterating based off what one has learned in previous experiments. Those who participated in the second round were able to experience the process of adaptive change and to see how learning from previous experiments can be

instrumental in moving one forward, even when the next step is not the final step. The energy that resulted in the latest experiments help to serve as fodder for what comes next and gives the leadership critical information that can be used as we help the church move forward to become a congregation who follows Jesus' command to love our neighbors. This is not an endeavor that is ever finished, but rather experiment by experiment disciples will grow in their understanding of the difficult yet rewarding practice of loving one's literal neighbors.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Churches are in the midst of seismic shifts as the culture in which they are embedded swiftly change. Mainline denominations, like the one to which ZPC is connected, are in the midst of a half-century of decline, aging membership, and unsuccessful attempts at becoming more racially diverse. The desire to recapture the successes of the post-World War II era is prevalent and yet simply trying to engage in the same practices of yesteryear have not resulted in assuaging the year-to-year losses that so many congregations are enduring. The hope, at times, seems to rest on the fact that perhaps the decline in membership has begun to slow down, but of course, that does not mean that the churches or denominations are actually beginning to grow.¹ The attempts to make technical changes such as preaching more relevant sermons or growing one's social media presence in order to stem the tide are readily evident at church conferences. However, while technical prowess is important to churches and denominations, it will not in and of itself effectively help churches to flourish. Instead, what is needed is for church leaders to see is that in a shifting world, the challenges they are facing are adaptive in nature, meaning that perfect exegesis, a beautiful choir, and the most energetic youth group will not successfully navigate the world in which they live.

As described in this project, adaptive issues are those issues in which one's existing body of knowledge is not enough to solve the particular issue one is facing.²

¹ During the latest reflection on another year of membership losses, the Presbyterian Church (USA) stated clerk of the General Assembly, Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II said, "While the difference is not great, we are encouraged by the slowing trend downward." See Rick Jones, "PC(USA) Membership Decline has Slowed," PCUSA, April 23, 2019, <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2019/4/23/pcusa-membership-decline-has-slowed/>.

² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 42.

They also require a change, not simply of one's habits, but of people's hearts and minds.³ Typically, adaptive issues will be identified after repeated attempts at solving them technically are unsuccessful.⁴ Facing an adaptive issue requires that leaders engage the issue with a different mindset than when facing a technical issue. In order to successfully engage in an adaptive challenge, leaders must admit that they do not know the best way forward and must be dependent not solely on themselves, but on a larger group. Adaptive challenges also require leaders, and subsequently the churches or organizations, to willingly engage in loss.⁵

There is no one way to engage adaptive change in a healthy manner. Instead, these changes require a multivalent approach to the problems. Because the problems are not easily solved and one's own expertise or experience are not enough to remedy the problem, shared learning is a necessity. A posture that one person can figure out how to move forward on his or her own will result in unhelpful technical answers to adaptive problems. Great intentionality in creating safe and healthy spaces for smaller groups, what Kotter calls a "guiding coalition," is critical for learning how to engage in an adaptive challenge.⁶ These smaller groups also help to ensure that the leadership remains relationally close to those with whom they are discovering new things. Because of the anxiety that often occurs in the midst of adaptive challenges, it is critical that divisions

³ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 60.

⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 60.

⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 42.

⁶ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 53.

are not allowed to be cultivated, therefore, these smaller groups need relational congruence.⁷

Aligned with this idea of shared learning is the importance of experimenting one's way forward. The language of experimentation creates an environment of learning rather than one in which success or failure is the critical component. If the pressure to succeed is too strong, then most leaders will be less likely to try things that move beyond their current knowledge base (which, as stated above, is absolutely necessary when it comes to adaptive change). Secondly, experimenting focuses on iterative learning rather than completing something once and not returning to it. Again, because failure will be a part of adaptive challenges, it is important to engage in a process where reflective learning is fundamental to the process. Experimenting, learning, experimenting anew and learning anew are all crucial components of engaging in non-technical challenges. As experiments continue, the larger church or organization must be brought into the learning process which helps to ensure that the smaller group does not become alienated from the larger body of which they are a part.⁸ This connection will be critical if the adaptive change is to be enacted on a larger scale, which it will need to be for the organization to move forward well and as a whole.

Bolsinger makes the insightful comment that adaptive changes, if they are going to be done well, need to be built off of the church's DNA rather than being completely new and foreign additions to the church's identity.⁹ One way to look at an adaptive

⁷ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 102.

⁸ Zscheile, *The Agile Church*, 121.

⁹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 55.

challenge is to use it as an opportunity to remember who the church is at its core, including, who it was from its beginning. For churches, this provides an opportunity to remember how God has worked through his people, especially as seen through Scripture. This project described how from its beginning, the community of God was called to go out into the world rather than to solely focus on what happens within its own literal or figurative walls. The story of Abram and Sarai in Genesis 12 and the story of Jesus sending out the seventy in Luke 10 both point to similar themes which describe how God works. These stories include normal people who did not stand out for their faith or their natural giftings. Both contain commands to go and leave what is comfortable and secure. Genesis 12 and Luke 10 include stories of blessings to outsiders with whom followers of God come into contact. Furthermore, these stories make it clear that the people's physical presence is not insignificant in the calls that they have received. There is no sense of waiting for people to come to them, rather they are involved in an active call to go to where people are, despite the vulnerabilities or fears they may feel. As congregations today begin to ask how they might best respond to the time and place in which they find themselves, rather than only focusing on what technical things they can do to improve who they are, they should ask how they might rekindle the DNA that has been a part of who they were since God first began to call them on mission.

With this in mind, as ZPC leadership examined Scripture as well as its own history, we proposed engaging in an experiment built off its own DNA in order to rekindle our understanding of how ZPC continues to be called out of comfortable places in order to be on mission with God. From its genesis, ZPC took seriously the call to be more concerned with others than with ourselves. Whether it was going door-to-door in

order to meet neighbors or a strong emphasis on financial giving to mission, ZPC has often understood its role in continuing the mission found in the Old and New Testaments. That said, amidst the turmoil of ZPC's troubled years and the ensuing focus on survival, some of this fervor was lost. Additionally, the culture has shifted and fewer people are willing to venture into a church building on Sunday mornings. The leadership wanted to know what it would look like for ZPC to reengage in being sent out into its neighborhoods as a means of loving their literal neighbors and what ZPC might learn from such a venture. That has been the aim of this ministry project.

In light of the importance of experimenting when facing an adaptive challenge, I decided to oversee an experiment of loving one's literal neighbor to discover what might be learned in the endeavor of being sent into the world. In order to create a safe space to try something new, a small pilot group was selected. This small group was far enough removed from the larger church that they would not be afraid to fail, while also being intimate enough to increase the likelihood of learning from one another. There were no ordained ministers or staff in this pilot group as a way of accentuating the reality that God uses ordinary people to pursue his mission and to emphasize the importance of no one person leading the change. Built into the process were weekly and monthly opportunities to interact with other participants, to share successes and failures, and to discern what new experiments might result from the work they were doing. The process also allowed participants to connect more deeply with Scripture, particularly Luke 10, in the hopes that through this process of experiential learning they would grow in their understanding of discipleship as well as in their knowledge of what it means to be sent out by Jesus.

Because of the importance in Scripture of physical presence, most noticeably demonstrated through the incarnation of Jesus, the experiment revolved around the idea of propinquity. Propinquity is a sociological term which connects one's physical presence with one's ability to be in relationships. If people are going to love their neighbors, then they must know their neighbors, and getting to know neighbor is enhanced dramatically by being physically present with them. Therefore, the experiment asked participants to spend two hours a week in their front yards and to record what occurred during those two hours. Participants were to record if they met new people or deepened existing relationships, what they had to sacrifice to spend two hours outside, what they were learning, how their learning might help others in the group and the congregation, and what they were learning about discipleship.

Throughout this two-month process, and then in an additional month of further experimentation, there was much learned that will help ZPC in the days ahead as we seek to live into what it means to be sent into our neighborhoods. There was great discovery around the reality that the culture in which this congregation resides has changed dramatically in the last couple of decades. The absence of foot traffic in the neighborhoods surprised and saddened many of the participants. They were especially mournful of the dearth of children playing in their neighborhoods and assumed this was due to the increase in organized activities available since most of them were children. They also felt surprised that they were viewed suspiciously by their neighbors because of simply being present in their neighborhoods rather than actively engaging in something. It was unsettling to them that being passively present was no longer looked at as being

normal. The vulnerability they felt as a result of being negatively viewed by their neighbors was equally unsettling.

The pilot group also learned, however, that they were a part of the cultural milieu that looked askance at being passive, at simply being present. Repeatedly they discussed just how busy they were and how difficult it was for them to find two hours to stop what they were doing and be present. This busyness was something that all participants seemed to understand and most of them experienced. However, it was also interesting to note that, while being still was initially difficult or even painful, as the practice continued it became easier. Eventually, there were some participants who looked forward to their two-hour time where they could disconnect from the world and their phones in order to simply be present. Beyond learning about their neighbors, the participants learned about themselves and how, to their surprise, they had been captured by the culture around them.

Despite their acknowledgment that they needed to be more comfortable simply being present, there was a desire in the next round of experiments to be more active in how they reached out to their neighbors. In the first experiment, the participants grew frustrated with the relatively small number of people who walked by them as they sat in their front yards and they engaged more deeply with Luke 10 and the importance of being sent out into the world. Based on this learning, the majority of participants who engaged in the second round of experiments chose to actively invite their neighbors into their homes by holding open houses. Without exception, the participants were surprised at the number of neighbors who accepted their invitations and attended the open house events. Due to their disappointment and frustration that they met fewer neighbors than they had expected during the first experiment, the success of the second experiment surprised them

as they found that many neighbors were very interested in engaging in relationships. This discovery energized the participants as well as helped them to see the importance of experimenting and persevering. Their appreciation and understanding of Luke 10 grew as they recognized in themselves the surprise of seeing God at work and the importance of not quitting when initial outcomes were not as successful as they had hoped. This also helped to reinforce the importance of experimenting and learning before experimenting and learning again. Adaptive growth is an iterative and long-term process, something that they were able to experience firsthand.

In reflecting on how to share the lessons of the pilot group with the larger congregation, the participants had many good ideas. They suggested that we encourage the congregation to engage in the same propinquity experiment, to become more hospitable within the church building as a way of practicing doing likewise in their neighborhoods, or give unique challenges to congregation members each Sunday from the pulpit. However, the participants emphasized that the key lessons went beyond simply doing things differently. Through conversations and group sharing, it became increasingly clear that one of the greatest things they learned was how to grow in expectancy that God was going to do something through them when they were willing vessels. This aligns with what Heifetz and Linsky write, “you know you’re dealing with something more than a technical issue when people’s hearts and minds need to change, and not just their preferences or routine behaviors.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 60.

Throughout this process, most participants learned that ultimately the challenge of growing in their willingness to go into their neighborhoods and love their literal neighbors, as well as the way the church can face an unknown future and changing culture, is not to simply come up with better tactics or strategies. While spending two hours a week in their front yards and hosting block parties were certainly out of the norm for the participants, it is what these practices unearthed that will be most important for ZPC as it moves forward. Ultimately the participants and the congregation need a change of heart and mind. The lessons from these experiments will certainly be helpful for engaging their neighbors in deeper ways, but the changes in their hearts and minds will have a much deeper impact that will propel ZPC forward in multiple areas as we wrestle with an increasing number of adaptive issues. The more frequently the congregation can experience a changing of heart and mind through experimentation and reflection, the more likely they will be to have the courage to be open to the new things that the Spirit of God is calling them to do in the days ahead.

If it is true that the church is always in crisis but rarely aware of it, then the decline of congregations can be a unique opportunity for those that have the courage and desire to listen, learn, and experiment their way into the future.¹¹ As Bolsinger writes, leaders need to “reframe this moment of history for Christians in the west as an opportunity put before us by God for adventure, hope and discovery—all the while embracing the anxiety, fear and potential loss that comes from answering this call.¹² If

¹¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 2.

¹² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 14.

ZPC can see the shift of culture as an opportunity to more fully follow Jesus into their neighborhoods, then they will not only be able to engage those who live close to them in new and fresh ways, but they will also begin to be changed themselves. This changing of hearts and minds will prepare them for whatever new challenges, technical or adaptive, they will face in the future and will serve as an opportunity for the people of ZPC to build God's kingdom on earth in their communities and their neighborhoods.

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