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## Traditional to Missional: A Model for Missional Engagement at Temple City United Methodist Church

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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

TRADITIONAL TO MISSIONAL: A MODEL FOR MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT  
AT TEMPLE CITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Written by

DAVID PALMER

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



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Date Received: March 31, 2020

TRADITIONAL TO MISSIONAL: A MODEL FOR MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT  
AT TEMPLE CITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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

DAVID PALMER  
MARCH 2020

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## ABSTRACT

### **Traditional to Missional: A Model for Missional Engagement at Temple City United Methodist Church**

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2020

The goal of this project was to equip a traditional congregation to navigate through a process of transformation from institutionally to missionally oriented. It is argued that group imagination and practice focused on the six divine missional traits of missional, relational, incarnational, vital, transformational, and revelational can shift a congregation toward missional engagement. The thesis was tested at the Temple City United Methodist Church.

An examination of Temple City United Methodist Church's history and ministry practice revealed six obstacles that need to be overcome in the areas of culture, theology, structure, heart, program, and security. Through an examination of scripture and trinitarian theology, this study identifies six divine traits that are the foundation for the missional calling of the church that address the obstacles of the church. Furthermore, it argues that practicing these traits empowers Christians to engage in faithful kingdom ministry beyond the local congregation. To test this hypothesis, a series focused on these traits was presented to the Temple City United Methodist Church. Directly following this series, a group of eight people from the church gathered weekly for three months to study the six missional traits, listen imaginatively to Luke 10:1-11, and to apply these traits to their lives through weekly ministry experiments. Following the completion of this project, the transformative effect of the project was evaluated utilizing McNeal's three missional shifts.

This project concludes that the use of missional imagination and practice significantly moved the participants and the church toward a missional orientation. However, not all of the participants moved in this direction. Due to the limited scope of the project, these findings will require further research before a conclusion can be made. The series presentation and weekly training modules developed in this project will stimulate opportunities for initiating missional change in the local church.

Content Reader: Tim Morey, DMin

Words: 298

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I want to thank the people of the First United Methodist Church of Temple City, and Faith United Methodist Church of San Gabriel Valley. This work represents a growth in my understanding of the Gospel that has come out of the caring relationships that we have formed in ministry together. Thank you all for your encouragement and willingness to walk with me through this journey.

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PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## INTRODUCTION

The Church is the greatest mission agency ever created. God is tirelessly guiding the unfolding of history toward an amazing celebration in which all people are fully reconciled to God. Mission is not a part-time hobby for God; it is a function of who God is. The Church is called to join with God in the *missio Dei* and engage in ministry to all the world. The term missional describes the Church's primary identity as being sent into the world as God's agent in every context in which it finds itself.<sup>1</sup> Missional means the Church exists as part of God's work in two ways; first as a recipient of God's grace, and then as a partner with God's work in the world. The missional movement within the protestant Churches of the West is moving individuals and congregations to join in God's work by intentionally engaging with their communities rather than focusing their time, energy, and resources on sustaining the church as an institution. The implication is every Christian is a missionary. When the Church sees itself in light of this missionary mindset, it starts to live differently. Rather than striving to work for the survival of any particular Christian institution, the Church lives into God's agenda that perpetually marches toward a bright and undiminishing future.

### **The Challenges at Temple City United Methodist Church**

During the first two months of my appointment as the solo pastor at Temple City United Methodist Church (TCUMC), I visited each of the prominent leaders and elders of

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<sup>1</sup> Darell Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

the congregation so I could get a good sense of the people with whom I would be in ministry. As I visited them, I asked questions about their spiritual life and how they first came to the church. These questions helped me to get a feel for their faith life and to hear how the congregation had grown and recruited new members. I was eager to grow the church and immediately went to work reenergizing those practices that had helped the church with recruitment in the past. Specifically, I remember hearing several times of how people joined the church after they attended a barbeque event at church.

I had high hopes the church could utilize its annual fall kick-off as a barbeque event that would connect with the community. I made a large, colorful banner to put up on the wall of the church facing the street. We designed postcards that were mailed and given to members of the church to be passed out to friends to invite them. Publicity for the event was placed in the local newspaper and stores as an invitation to the whole community. I created a church website and prominently displayed information about the upcoming barbeque. We coordinated the various church committees to provide for the meal, set up tables, chairs, and booths so guests could view information about ongoing and future programs. I even made sure to give an extra polish to the sermon with a few jokes to keep everyone's attention. When that big kick-off Sunday came, the church had done a great job of decorating the campus to be welcoming to new visitors. Balloons adorned the courtyard creating a party-like atmosphere. Chairs and tables were decorated for the lunch area. I became confused; however, when not a single visitor came from the community. The advertising strategy with its postcards, posters, and banners had not attracted anyone from the larger community. For some reason, the community did not

respond to the church invitation.

The failure of this event demonstrates that something needs to change for TCUMC to reach the community. TCUMC needs to find new ways to respond to the challenges it faces. Albert Einstein once said, “The thinking it took to get us into this mess is not the same thinking that is going to get us out of it.”<sup>2</sup> Essentially, the church can not double down on the practices of the past and expect to see new results.

Examining the current challenges will provide an understanding of the kinds of changes that are needed. There are six specific challenges that the church will need to address.

The first is the challenge of culture. TCUMC struggles to connect with the people in its community. It is in a very different cultural environment than when the elders of the church first moved into town looking for a church to attend. It is no longer a homogenous Anglo-European community. Instead, the city is now predominately Chinese.

TCUMC is also facing the challenge of theology as it seeks to find a way to present the gospel in an increasingly postmodern context. The church continues to pursue the practices of the past with the hope that the broader community will somehow decide to come back to church, but the truth is, the community no longer considers the church as a favorable place to find the answers for life’s tough questions. The community is seeking spiritual direction and meaning from a variety of sources outside of the church. The church is also not the only activity on Sunday mornings. It is not even the only

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<sup>2</sup> “Albert Einstein Quotes,” AZQuotes, accessed August 1, 2018, <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/665977>.

religious option. People are not asking the question, “Where will I go to church on Sunday?” instead, they are asking, “Why do we have churches in our community?”

The church has a structural challenge. Church leadership structures are designed to build and maintain the institutional committees and agencies rather than mobilize the congregation to engage in God’s work in the community. Church resources, practices, and liturgy align the congregation’s energies to support the institution. Visitors and new members are expected to assimilate to church systems to replace the aging member’s roles and commitments rather than releasing people according to their God-given calling.

There is also a heart problem in the church. TCUMC has seen itself as a people set apart from the world; a people saved from the perversions of society. The congregation has reacted to declines in membership, attendance, and offerings by circling its wagons and building even tighter bonds with one another. Thus, it increasingly finds itself isolated and unable to connect with its neighbors.

The challenge of practice recognizes that ministries and programs are currently designed to reinforce the distinction between church members and the community. Church programs and practices need to be retooled to provide opportunities to develop relationships of blessing with people in the community. Membership based on an intellectual agreement with doctrine will need to shift toward a Christ-following community. Such a community creates opportunities for people to feel a sense of belonging even before they understand what they believe. It also recognizes the validity of a sharing in a spiritual journeying together regardless of a person’s starting point.

Finally, the church must deal with the challenge of security. Previously the church

and the city enjoyed a close relationship, which gave the church a false sense of importance and security. The continued separation of Church and state has caused the church to lose its political standing. The church withdrew to the safety behind its walls and refrained from addressing matters in the public sphere. The church will need to find ways to engage directly with situations and systems that break the heart of God, deny life and liberty, and perpetuate poverty. By seeking its security rather than the transformative power of God for the world, the church hobbles along in its brokenness within the limitations of the scraps of power that the city allocates to the fringes.

TCUMC is not alone in this dilemma. This story is being played out in United Methodist Churches across America. Mainline churches are facing a crisis as the number of visitors, and members decline year by year. Many local churches no longer reflect the ethnic and linguistic communities in which they live. The message of salvation is reaching fewer people in the pews of local church buildings. Mainline churches are also aging out, creating a generation gap that few younger families are willing to overcome. United Methodist Church (UMC) leaders in the Southern California area are bracing for a kind of death tsunami in the next decade that will begin when key supporters of existing congregations leave or pass away, resulting in the closure of many churches.

### **Introducing the Missional Church**

The only hope for the future of TCUMC is faithfulness to God's missional call for the Church. Rather than patient idleness, it requires direct engagement with God's mission for all people. Jesus said to Peter that the gates of hell would not prevail against

his Church (Mt 16:18).<sup>3</sup> Even with the current decline and struggle of the mainline Churches in America, God is faithful and continues to call the Church to greater fruitfulness. Global Christianity is on the rise with an ever-increasing witness to the power of God to transform lives and bring salvation even to the darkest corners of life. The most crucial aspect for the Church to consider is whether it is doing what God has asked it to do or if it has replaced the call of God for the maintenance of the existing institutions of the church. For churches to thrive, they will need to rediscover and reconnect with God's mission that infuses people with the power to live as part of God's kingdom on earth. The church will need to reexamine its current purposes, practices, and strategies and realign itself with God's missional agenda.

Missional churches have rediscovered these truths in the past two decades. They seek to live according to God's missional truths rather than the demands of church institutions. The missional concept moves the Church from operating as if mission was an extension ministry such as a summer missions program, to practicing mission out of the core of its identity as the Church. The missional church is centered on the nature of God, who calls the Church to engage with the world that God loves. It is not centered on its preservation nor in perpetuating its history. In this way, the Church is called to live into God's Kingdom rather than its separate institutional fiefdom or trendy niche modality.

God's nature and character reveal six essential missional traits that are callings for the Church to enter into the *missio Dei*: relational, missional, incarnational,

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<sup>3</sup> All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

transformational, vital, and revelational. These traits stem from the nature of God. They directly counter the challenges that the church is facing in Temple City. Relational means that God calls all people into a relationship not only with God but also with one another. The missional calling is the sending of God. Incarnational is the calling to join in with a specific group of people and embody the gospel. Transformational is the calling to be part of the change that God is actively accomplishing in the world. Vital is the calling to bring life and blessing to the world. The last is revelational, which is the calling to creatively communicate the truth and love of God to all in relevant ways. Each of these is explored more fully later in the practical ministry section of chapter four. These traits address the challenges of TCUMC and provide a guide for congregational transformation.

### **Project Goals**

This project aims to equip TCUMC to navigate through a process of transformation from a traditional to a missional congregation. There are critical changes that are needed for TCUMC to live into greater faithfulness and engage in God's missional agenda rather than the program of institutional survival. The church will need to address each of the challenges identified above as it seeks to live into greater missional faithfulness. This project will utilize the six essential missional traits to redeploy the church into a faithful future. This paper argues for the need for this project in three parts: context, theological foundations, and practice of ministry.

The context section covers the history and development of Temple City and TCUMC. Temple City has gone through several ethnic tensions amid distinct demographic shifts throughout its history. TCUMC flourished in its early years in the city

with vibrant ministries and methodologies that connected well with the city. However, shortly after its heyday, the church began to struggle and falter in its ministry growth and its connections with the community. The contextual analysis section unearths the six challenges that the church is currently facing that will need to be addressed in order to live into greater faithfulness and fruitfulness. These are the challenges of culture, theology, structure, mission, practice, and security. These will help lay the groundwork for identifying the theology and practices that are needed to transition the church toward developing as a thriving, missional congregation.

The second part of this paper, chapters two and three, explores the theological foundations that provide a framework from which the church can respond to the challenges that it is facing. Chapter two reviews a selection of missional literature covering theology, leadership, ecclesiology, and change dynamics. These readings provide insights for developing a project that will equip TCUMC to navigate the transformation from a traditional to a missional church.

Chapter three explores the theological foundations for missional congregations. Utilizing a trinitarian framework, it will define the mission, gospel, hermeneutics, leadership, and ecclesiology of a missional church. The structures, practices, and purpose for a missional church are also recognized. God's strategy of working through a small group of people sets the stage for a pilot project. These theological reflections establish a foundation for developing the traditional to missional church project.

The third and final part of this paper describes the ministry practice for the pilot project. Chapter four explores the implications of a missional theology for the TCUMC.

The six missional traits for the Church compel TCUMC to face the identified challenges of its context. These will enable the church to live into God's preferred future. A pilot project designated specifically for TCUMC establishes a new set of traits for church leaders that transform TCUMC from a traditional to a missional church. It identifies a vision for the church's future and defines successful outcomes for the church. This chapter pulls together the connection between faithfulness and fruitfulness. The timeline, leadership, and change dynamics for the project are also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter five describes the implementation process and evaluation for the pilot project that seeks to transform TCUMC from a traditional to a missional congregation. This project will utilize a pilot group of leaders from the existing congregation to walk through a process of training, engagement, and reflection. The chapter chronicles the details of the dates, recruitment, training, development, implementation, engagement, and assessment of this pilot project. It utilizes three missional vectors as well as qualitative and quantitative aspects to evaluate the results of the project. These tools establish a new set of metrics for the congregation to monitor its ongoing development toward missional faithfulness.

### **Project Summary**

TCUMC is facing several challenges that threaten its continued existence. Faithfulness to God's missional call provides the only hope for the church to live into God's preferred future. The church needs to move beyond the traditional structures and assumptions that they have relied on in the past in order to confront the challenges that it is facing. This project will equip a small group from the church to practice the six

missional traits of God beyond the walls of the church in the community. The insights and experiences of this project will help transform the church from a traditional to a missional orientation. Rather than closing its doors, the people of TCUMC have the opportunity to partner with God to experience the kingdom of God as they embody their missional calling. The goal is to bring about change not only for the church but also for the community.

## CHAPTER 1:

### CONTEXT

The context for ministry governs how the Church embodies the gospel in the community. Lois Bartlett encourages the practice of examining one's context as a part of missional faithfulness: "To be faithful to its calling, the Church must be contextual, that is, it must be culturally relevant within a specific setting."<sup>1</sup> The historical overview of the church and the community of Temple City provides insight into the challenges that the congregation faces. It demonstrates why the congregation is unable to continue to flourish as it had in the past. It also reveals areas for potential engagement in the community. These historical highlights lay the groundwork that is needed for the congregation to transition toward being a missional congregation.

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<sup>1</sup> Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 18.

## **Temple City's Historical Context**

Temple City is a charming city in the San Gabriel Valley of roughly 36,000 people in the suburban sprawl of Los Angeles, California.<sup>2</sup> Over the past two centuries, this area has burst through its development as a mission frontier into a multicultural oasis. The history of Temple City reveals the political, economic, and cultural waves that have shaped the church, its community, and their interactions. This chapter identifies six challenges that the church is currently facing that it will need to overcome if it is going to thrive in the future. These insights provide the groundwork for considering how TCUMC can missionally engage in ministry with the community. Each historical section concludes with a reflection on the context.

### **The Historical Development of the San Gabriel Valley**

Political and economic forces transformed the San Gabriel Valley starting in the mid-Eighteenth Century. Spanish explorers arrived in the area as part of the expansion of European claims in the new world. The San Gabriel Mission was established in the region by the Franciscan Catholics in 1771. They subjugated the Tongva Native American tribe, who had occupied the land for some 3,000 years.<sup>3</sup> During this period, the area now occupied by Temple City was a turkey farm.<sup>4</sup> When Mexico gained its

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<sup>2</sup> "Fact Sheet Demographics," Temple City's website, accessed 10/16/2017, <http://www.ci.temple-city.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/756>.

<sup>3</sup> Historic Resources Group, Survey Report: City of Temple City Historic Resources Survey (Pasadena: Historic Resources Group), May 2012, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 11.

independence from Spain in 1841, it took ownership of the San Gabriel Valley. Two frontiersmen, William Rowland and John Workman were granted the land previously owned by the San Gabriel Mission from the Mexican government as *rancheros*. This area, known as *Rancho La Puente*, grew to extend to over 48,000 acres.<sup>5</sup> Cattle ranches covered the landscape at this time. The United States took political control of the region in 1848 at the end of its war with Mexico. Two years later, the area was integrated into the great state of California in 1850 as part of the thirty-first state.

The Temple family made a name for themselves in the San Gabriel region, setting the stage for the inception of Temple City. In 1841, Francisco Pliny Fisk Temple came to Los Angeles from Massachusetts and opened a store in the heart of the San Gabriel Valley.<sup>6</sup> Four years later, he married John Workman's daughter, Antonia Margarita.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, this marriage was the first in Los Angeles County between two people with Anglo surnames.<sup>8</sup> In 1851, Workman gave Temple an undivided half-interest in the 2,363-acre *ranch* near the site of the original San Gabriel Mission.<sup>9</sup> Temple was very successful in several enterprises, including real estate, ranching, railroads, and banking. He also served as treasurer for the City of Los Angeles in 1850 and served as one of Los

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<sup>5</sup> "Introduction to the Homestead Museum," Workman and Temple Family Homesteadmuseum, accessed August 14, 2017, <http://www.homesteadmuseum.org>.

<sup>6</sup> Historic Resources Group, Survey Report: City of Temple City Historic Resources Survey (Pasadena, Historic Resources Group), May 2012, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 13.

Angeles County's Board of Supervisors.<sup>10</sup> Los Angeles named a primary street in the downtown area in his honor. His tenth child, Walter P. Temple, was born in 1869 and would become the founder of Temple City.<sup>11</sup>

### **Reflection on Early Development**

The presence of the missions would forever change the landscape of the area, leaving the indelible mark of European expansion on the landscape of the region. The experience of having a foreign nation impose its theological and epistemological worldview on the lives of the natives through economic and military power has had ripple effects on the current multiethnic and multinational experience of the city. The land that was initially taken from the Tongva people was given to the Temple family through a series of political and family grants. The purpose of these gifts was to preserve power for a select group of people. The preservation of wealth within an elite class of people echoes the political tensions that are present today in Temple City. In a bit of historical irony, the White Europeans of Temple City struggle to contend with the number of Chinese who have purchased homes and moved into the city.<sup>12</sup> This trend has also changed the theological, economic, and ethnic make-up of the community. The recent wave of Chinese immigrants who have moved to the area buying homes with cash leads to the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "Asian Americans surpass whites in San Gabriel Valley, marking a demographic milestone," Los Angeles Times, February 22, 2018, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-asians-sgv-data-20180221-story.html>

perception that they have more money, education, and higher wages than the previous Anglo residents, thus setting up the current political and cultural tensions.<sup>13</sup> These concerns underlie the challenges of culture and security for the struggling congregation.

### **Walter Temple's Grand Dream for a City**

Walter Temple pursued several interests, including ranching, farming, real estate, oil drilling, and walnut farming, but his grandest enterprise was founding the city of Temple in honor of his family on May 20, 1923.<sup>14</sup> He and his wife, Laurenza Gonzalez, lived on a fifty-acre plot of land given to them when his mother died.<sup>15</sup> He was a rancher and farmer on the land until 1914 when he discovered oil in the Montebello area, which generated millions of dollars for the Temple family.<sup>16</sup> The new infusion of wealth helped the area to “rekindle its pioneering spirit.”<sup>17</sup> Temple purchased approximately three hundred acres of land a few miles east of Alhambra for half a million dollars for the development of a new city in his name.<sup>18</sup>

Temple's vision for the city was clearly to establish the name of Temple in the region. He used his wealth to buy land and laid out a plan for a town to be established in

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<sup>13</sup> “Chinese buyers flood U.S. housing market,” CNN Money, July 8, 2013, [https://money.cnn.com/2013/07/08/real\\_estate/chinese-homebuyers/index.html](https://money.cnn.com/2013/07/08/real_estate/chinese-homebuyers/index.html).

<sup>14</sup> Survey Report, *Historic Resources Group*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Oil Feat Gives Birth to City,” *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, November, 1972.

<sup>18</sup> “Site for New Town Acquired,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1923.

the middle of a valley of ranches, chicken farms, and orchards. He ran an article in the Los Angeles Times announcing his plans “A new town to be called Temple will be founded, involving an investment of over a million dollars... The town will be built as a memorial to the pioneer Temple family, which came to Los Angeles a century ago and which has been prominently identified with the development of the Southwest.”<sup>19</sup> Temple Townsite Company, under the leadership of Walter Temple, developed and organized the town. The outlay for lots in the city provided for both business and residential areas. He named streets after friends and family, such as Workman, Kauffman, Temple, and Agnes, which still exist today.<sup>20</sup>

The announcement of the new city of Temple ushered in a new era of growth and development for the city. It developed into a community where people of medium income could afford to live and own their homes. It was noted to have good soil for farming, an abundance of water, and the convenience of being close to Los Angeles.<sup>21</sup> The city further developed by building a bank, hardware store, drugstore, market, and church.<sup>22</sup> This is the same church that became TCUMC. Businesses also began to spring up in the town providing necessary services to its residents. In 1924 several civic essentials were established, such as the library, the chamber of commerce, the Temple Times newspaper,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Survey Report, *Historic Resources Group*, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 40.

and an expansion of the schoolhouse. By 1930, the city had a population of over 8,000 people.<sup>23</sup>

Temple's forward-thinking helped the city thrive. He connected his city with the County of Los Angeles through name recognition and transit lines. In 1928 the area adopted the name of Temple City, but instead of incorporating as a city, it remained part of unincorporated Los Angeles.<sup>24</sup> Temple also arranged to have his city included in the Alhambra-San Gabriel Red Car line, which traveled to Los Angeles until 1941.<sup>25</sup> City planners coordinated with the nearby cities of Alhambra and San Gabriel to provide a single main street through these cities.<sup>26</sup> The Temple City section of this road, *Las Tunas*, denotes a connection to the area's Hispanic roots.<sup>27</sup> The completion of the Arrow Highway further connected Temple City to Los Angeles and San Bernardino.

### **Reflection on Walter Temple's Work**

Walter Temple's can-do attitude and the infusion of funds from the oil fields helped him to achieve his dream of founding a city to preserve his family name in the area. His presence is felt throughout the city, particularly at Temple City Park, where his image is seen in bronze. He exemplifies the idea that in America, anyone can shape the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 25. The delay in incorporation allowed neighboring cities to claim valuable nearby commercial lands for themselves, leaving the city without a sufficient tax base for future development.

<sup>25</sup> Historical Photograph found at Temple City Historical Society 1924.

<sup>26</sup> Survey Report, *Historic Resources Group*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> This is the Spanish word for the fruit that grows on the Prickly Pear Cactus.

future with enough money. One could applaud his forward-thinking about connecting to Los Angeles. He utilized the technology of his day, railroads, and main streets to help his city thrive. These examples demonstrate that Walter Temple was able to create alternatives as he faced the challenge of rigid structures in his day.

### **Suburban Development: A Mayberry of Sorts**

Temple City continued to grow throughout the next decade, particularly in the number of single-family residences. Despite the national economic downturn during the great recession, Temple city had the highest number of new homes developed in the Los Angeles area during this time.<sup>28</sup> By 1948 the city boasted 250 businesses and nearly 24,000 residents.<sup>29</sup> Growth in the area was primarily due to a population boom following World War II and the development of housing through post-war subsidies and loans. Another notable claim to fame for Temple City is that it was the birthplace for Winchell's Donut House. Verne Winchell opened his first shop in Temple City on October 8, 1948. By the 1950s, the San Gabriel Valley had transformed from an agricultural region into a bedroom community. These projects also benefited from financing through the California Department of Veterans Affairs and FHA.<sup>30</sup>

The woman's club created the city motto, Home of the Camellias, in 1944. In subsequent years, Camelia parades led by youth groups began the proud Camelia Festival

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<sup>28</sup> Survey Report, *Historic Resources Group*, 24.

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

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

tradition in the community. This annual event is hosted in the middle of February each year. Youth organizations from around the area march through the center of town. Floats displaying camelia flowers are a central attraction for this event. The event also features a coronation event selected from first-grade students from local elementary schools.

Temple City's growth pushed the city to incorporate in 1960.<sup>31</sup> The population at this time was just under 32,000.<sup>32</sup> One of the first projects of the new city was to establish a master plan and zoning ordinance to guide future growth. Residents and elected officials preferred the small-town feel and prevented larger, high-density housing units from being built in the city. The Temple City population grew by a modest 12 percent over the next fifty years, while the surrounding Los Angeles County increased by 32 percent over the same time.<sup>33</sup> Even though there were significant changes to the city, such as the drive-through fast-food burger places, Temple City residents remember this time as a Mayberry like enclave from the dense population of Los Angeles City and County.

### **Reflection on Suburban Development**

The season of suburban development in Temple City was also one of racial prejudice and isolation. A city promotional pamphlet during that time boasted that "Only White people reside here—White people of desirable class."<sup>34</sup> This statement stands in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 34. See also, "Asian Americans in Los Angeles," Center for the study of Los Angeles, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.slideshare.net/causeusa/asian-americans-in-los-angeles>.

<sup>34</sup> "Sharing homestead history with the Temple City Historical Society," Workman and Temple Family Homesteadmuseum, accessed January 16, 2019,

stark contrast to its Hispanic roots. Another example is the use of the nearby Santa Anita Race Track as a temporary internment camp in 1942 to house over 17,000 Japanese Americans. Temple City residents value being in a safe and secluded community that is unaffected by the issues of Los Angeles. As the housing shortage in the county begins to affect San Gabriel Valley, the residents resist the development of affordable housing in fear that it will attract unwanted people to the city.

### **Current Realities: Backyard of the Chinese Beverly Hills**

Initially heralded as an all-White community, Temple City has dramatically changed over the years. The influx of Chinese Americans into the San Gabriel Valley began shortly after the “elimination of discriminatory federal immigration policies in 1965.”<sup>35</sup> Asian Americans are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the San Gabriel Valley, consisting of more than half a million people.<sup>36</sup> The area has become known as the Chinese Beverly Hills. In Temple City, Chinese people represent the largest group within the Asian community.<sup>37</sup> In the past forty years, the non-Hispanic White population of Temple City has decreased from 98 percent to 22.8 percent of the total population.<sup>38</sup>

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<https://homesteadmuseum.wordpress.com/2017/01/15/sharing-homestead-history-with-the-temple-city-historical-society>.

<sup>35</sup> A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the San Gabriel Valley, Report (San Gabriel, CA: Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “Fact Sheet Demographics,” Temple City’s website, accessed 10/16/2017, <http://www.ci.temple-city.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/756>.

During this same time, the percentage of Asians in Temple City has increased from 1.3 percent to 61.4 percent.<sup>39</sup> The Hispanic population has also grown to 19.3 percent.<sup>40</sup> More than half of the current residents in Temple City were born outside of the United States.<sup>41</sup> Temple City High School demographic information provides an insight into the future trends for the area as it reports that its student body is made up of 69.9 percent Asians, 18.3 percent Hispanic, and 9.9 percent White.<sup>42</sup> 67.1 percent of households in Temple City speak a language other than English at home, primarily mandarin.<sup>43</sup>

The landscape of Temple City reflects these changes. Chinese restaurants, karaoke bars, and Boba shops now stand where the hardware, donut, and antique shops once stood. Asian American's own nearly 82,000 businesses in the San Gabriel Valley, more than any other racial group.<sup>44</sup> These changes have also had an impact on churches. The formerly thriving Anglo congregations have dwindled in membership. Churches in the area have survived by sharing facilities with at least one language congregation that rents or leases their facilities.

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<sup>39</sup> "Quick Facts: Temple City California," US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/templecitycalifornia/PST045218>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> "Fact Sheet Demographics," Temple City's website, accessed 10/16/2017, <http://www.ci.temple-city.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/756>.

<sup>42</sup> Jennifer Lashier, *School Accountability Report Card* "Temple City High School" Annual Report 2015-2016, <http://www.sarconline.org/SarcPdfs/8/19650521938679.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> "Quick Facts: Temple City California," US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/templecitycalifornia/PST045218>.

<sup>44</sup> *A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the San Gabriel Valley*. A report by the Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2018, 8.

## **Reflection on Current Realities**

Several new felt needs have emerged in this area. There are an estimated 52,000 undocumented Asian people in San Gabriel. There is a need for citizenship classes, immigration services, and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Language). As expatriates, there is a desire to create a sense of community with people with similar national origins. These new neighbors have also brought with them a high value for education, music, and business. Chinese people who come to church are looking for an opportunity to connect with faith, but they are also looking to connect with a taste of home, a familiar language, and people from their home country. The lunch hour after church at TCUMC is often an opportunity to network and share business information.

These demographic shifts have also increased ethnic tensions. When Asian Americans began to outnumber Whites in the San Gabriel Valley, groups of White residents pushed to establish English as the official language, and to mandate English only signs for businesses.<sup>45</sup> Although these measures were defeated, the sentiment that the Asian community has taken over the place is common among White residents.

Temple City is currently experiencing a wide variety of ethnic, cultural, and economic changes. While the majority of leadership in the city still reflects its White past, the majority of the city residents are non-White. Recently, real estate developers fueled these tensions among Asian households to thwart the transition of a rundown motel into permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals. Fueled by fears of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 10.

depreciating home values and increased crime, Asian households showed up in droves at the Temple City council chambers to demand that the city leaders put an end to the project. The High School PTA president fumed that he would not endorse any city Council-member who was not Chinese. This conflict highlights the racial tensions that continue to be present in the community. Navigating the racial tensions will be a significant challenge for the church to face as it seeks to do ministry in the community.

### **Temple City United Methodist Church's Historical Development**

TCUMC has experienced a full life cycle as a congregation. From gathering in a schoolhouse to considering whether or not to close its doors. Through its rich and vibrant history, the church has provided a central place of worship and ministry to the community. However, it faces an uncertain future. An examination of the church's origin, development, zenith, and decline will provide insights into the critical challenges that it is facing today.

### **The First Church Built in Temple City**

The church that is now TCUMC began in 1908 when thirty people from the Pasadena Methodist Episcopal Church gathered for worship at the South Santa Anita School.<sup>46</sup> They met “with a vision to build a church, a place where they could worship God together, where their children would learn the Christian faith, where those who were

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<sup>46</sup> *First United Methodist Church of Temple City: 100 Years of Ministry and Service*, 2010, 2.

in need would find help, and where creative expressions of mission would be fostered.”<sup>47</sup> They incorporated under the name “Mountain View Methodist Episcopal Church” in 1910.<sup>48</sup> One year later, they built their first building on the corner of Lemon and Golden West Avenues.<sup>49</sup> As the only church in the area, it was home to people from a variety of protestant groups with fourteen different denominations worshipping together.<sup>50</sup>

Walter Temple was instrumental in moving the church to his city. He offered the church \$2,500 and two lots of land: one for the church buildings and one for the parsonage, on the condition that they would move to his new town.<sup>51</sup> The church accepted this offer and moved the church a half-mile south to a plot near the center of town. They then changed their name to “Temple Community Church, Methodist Episcopal” on December 3, 1924. Walter Temple’s desire to move the church to the center of town was not born out of an abundance of faith, but rather it reflected the practice of establishing cities by providing for the essential services such as a church, a school, a library, and a city hall. Moving the church helped him to secure his claim to establish a city in the San Gabriel Valley. These feelings were also reflected in the desires

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

of the congregation as “They envisioned that the church would be a foundational piece of the growing larger community.”<sup>52</sup>

The congregation thrived in its early years. They built a Neo-Classical sanctuary with Ionic columns in June 1925.<sup>53</sup> The church was one of the first buildings in the city of Temple and was a central gathering point in the new community. It was intended to be the only church in town and to be a dominant feature in the life of the city. The theater-style seats were intended to draw on people’s desire for comfort and entertainment. The stage separated the congregants from the leaders, and implicitly conveyed the concept of performance. The architects built the church to be used for public assembly. The women’s club initially met at the church. The traditional style of the sanctuary’s interior was designed to provide a theologically safe place for the congregation. The church saw itself as guiding a “just future where people would treat each other fairly and demonstrate God’s love and compassion.”<sup>54</sup>

### **Growth from Transplanted Methodists from the Midwest**

The church’s primary ministries were Sunday School for children and two Sunday morning worship services. Pictures during the period of 1946 to 1950 show about 200 children attending Sunday School, and about 350 people in attendance between the two

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 2.

worship services.<sup>55</sup> During the industrial build up for WWII, families from the mid-west flooded into the area. Many of these had grown up in Methodist Churches in the states of Iowa, Nebraska, and Wyoming. Military soldiers stationed in California saw an opportunity to start a new life in the warmer climate of California. The church demonstrated its central role in the life of the community by holding the city's Victory Service to celebrate the end of WWII on November 15, 1945.<sup>56</sup>

In 1957, the church erected a second sanctuary to resemble Noah's ark with a long center aisle and narrow windows just below the roofline. The imagery was a visible reminder of how God provides salvation to those who seek refuge inside its doors from the dangers of the world. The original sanctuary was damaged from an earthquake and torn down in 1965.<sup>57</sup> In place of the original sanctuary, the congregation built a fellowship hall with a professional kitchen and office space.

### **Mergers, Name Changes, and Decline**

The Temple City church underwent three decades of mergers and name changes. Nationally, three branches of Methodism joined together in 1939 to form the Methodist Church (Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Protestant Church, Methodist Episcopal South), leading to a reincorporation under the name of Community Methodist Church of Temple

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>57</sup> *First United Methodist Church of Temple City: 100 Years of Ministry and Service*, 2010, 2.

City in 1944.<sup>58</sup> The congregation built the parsonage and education buildings at this time. St. Paul's Methodist Church merged with the Community Methodist Church in 1962 to become the First Methodist Church of Temple City.<sup>59</sup> The stated reason was "the cause of Methodism in Temple City could best be served by a unified effort of the two congregations."<sup>60</sup> In 1968 the United Methodist Church was formed from the merger of the United Brethren and Methodist Episcopal Church denominations. This merger created the largest denomination in the United States at that time, with over fifteen million members in the United States.<sup>61</sup> The congregation adopted this change to its current name, The First United Methodist Church of Temple City.

These mergers coincided with significant challenges for TCUMC. Attendance and membership began a steep decline from a peak of 847 members in 1955 to seventy-eight people in 2010.<sup>62</sup> TCUMC struggled to keep up with the competing activities and programs of other churches that started during this time. Churches that provided childcare, youth groups, midweek activities, and recreation space tended to do well. The church also struggled to keep pastoral leadership. Between 1970 and 2010, TCUMC had fourteen different senior pastors with an average tenure of just under three years. Pastoral turnover and decades of membership decline brought the church to the edge of closure.

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<sup>58</sup> *First Methodist Church Directory*, 1969.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> "History," The United Methodist Church, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/history>.

<sup>62</sup> "*District Church Ministry Review*," 1980, California Annual Conference Claremont Archives. A graph of membership and attendance records can be found in Appendix.

However, in 2009 the church opened up space for Faith United Methodist Church, a Chinese congregation, which provides ongoing funding that sustains the congregation.

### **A Growing Multiethnic Congregation**

When Rev. Palmer began his work at the church, there were only 16 people in worship. White people in their eighties comprised the entire congregation. The church identified itself as an old, White, dying congregation. However, over the past decade, TCUMC has slowly moved toward embracing a new identity as a growing multi-ethnic congregation, with roughly 40 percent of the congregation being non-White. The church adopted several marketing strategies, such as utilizing online media, brochures, and targeted mailings. The church began using small group ministries focused on discipleship rather than age groupings. It has offered classes to the community and employed contemporary themes in its worship. The congregation has begun to reflect the changing community demographics as people from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, India, and Mexico have joined the church. The Sunday Morning worship attendance now hovers around fifty people.

### **Challenges for a Historic Church in a Changing Landscape**

TCUMC faces several challenges that threaten its future. The attractional ministries that were effective in the past are no longer drawing people to the church. The decreased effectiveness of these efforts demonstrates that there is a more fundamental shift that needs to happen for the church to live into a more faithful and fruitful future.

The six challenges described below are different ways that the traditional church modality prevents the church from living into God's preferred future.

### **The Challenge of Culture: Uniform Versus Diverse Relationships**

The community has changed significantly from being an all-White community into a predominantly Chinese community with an international flair. Demographic changes present a relational challenge for the church to connect with its new neighbors in relevant ways. TCUMC will need to overcome its internal resistance toward connecting with people who are different from themselves. They will need to adopt values that help them cross the distance between themselves and their neighbors.

The values of uniformity and diversity are one example of the type of change this is needed. Uniformity causes people to exclude those who are different from themselves. Insiders exclude others from experiencing certain privileges, activities, or customs. Uniformity can also act to preserve power and control within one group. The tendency toward uniformity shows up at TCUMC in several ways. Church members share stories of feeling disconnected from Chinese neighbors, restaurants, and businesses, creating a narrative of inclusion and exclusion. Congregants do not take the time to learn the names of those who have a different language, skin color, or behavior. Ushers may list Chinese visitors as unknown while listing White visitors by their name and a general description. Congregants also comment about the misbehavior of Chinese children while celebrating the laughter and play of White children. Church leaders reflect the same attitudes of discrimination.

TCUMC needs to move into its relational calling and replace its value of uniformity with a value for diversity. The truth is that God loves the world, the whole world, not just certain people in the world (Jn 3:16). God loves diversity, inviting people of every tribe, and ethnicity into the kingdom (Rv 5:9). For TCUMC to thrive, it will need to learn to embrace the diversity of its whole community rather than isolating itself. Diversity allows for a wide variety of expressions and embraces those who are different. In nature, diversity provides for the adaptability, sustainability, and long term viability of environmental communities, as well as its beauty and variety.<sup>63</sup> Taking the time to develop caring relationships with the people who are non-White in the community will require that the church undergo a kind of heart examination.

### **The Challenge of Theology: Message Versus Revelation**

Spiritual and epistemological changes surround TCUMC. The community, which once supported and helped to build the church, now questions the need for churches and religious activities as part of the fabric of society. There is an increasing number of non-Christian voices in town, including those of the Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Bahai, and Islamic communities. Mainline churches in America previously enjoyed a kind of synchronicity with the larger society that no longer exists in a postmodern America. The perceived notion that America is generally a Christian culture where people are expected to grow up to be Christians no longer exists. Not only is American society increasingly

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<sup>63</sup> *Wealth, Innovation, and Diversity: Putting our Differences to Work*, directed by Joel Barker, (Star Thrower, 2000), <https://starthrower.com/products/wealth-innovation-diversity>.

secularized, but 23 percent of the United States population identified itself as religiously unaffiliated.<sup>64</sup> The sources of authority for the traditional church that existed in modern epistemology are giving way to postmodern approaches to life and spirituality.

The challenge of theology is a change in orientation from a propositional message about Jesus to a missional gospel that inspires the congregation to partner with the *missio Dei*. The gospel of God's kingdom transforms every aspect of life, not just the personal, spiritual, and intellectual. Sharing the gospel with others is an expression of a living relationship with God in the community, not a formula to be memorized. Reducing the gospel to a pamphlet to be disseminated misses a fundamental truth: salvation is not a moment of intellectual agreement with a doctrinal theory. Instead, the gospel "summoned people to life in God's reign and invited them to convert to a distinctive way of living with each other."<sup>65</sup> God reveals the gospel to the people of the world and through the people of the Church as they bear witness to God's love and grace in their lives. God's kingdom message is not limited to words, but partners with God to liberate humanity from the shackles of sin and death in its many forms.

TCUMC has waited for the community to attend its programs and worship services as a religious commodity offered to others. The church needs to be converted to a missional gospel whereby they share in God's kingdom invitation to a hurting world.

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<sup>64</sup> "A Closer Look at America's Rapidly Growing Religious 'nones'" Pew Research Center, May 13, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones>.

<sup>65</sup> Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Baker Publishing Group, 2007), Kindle Edition: Location, 1612-1613.

Only through this conversion can the church live into its revelational calling to share the good news of Christ. Both individual and corporate theological transformations are needed. Congregants reflect their theology in the way they live and interact with others. Religion that is divorced from a person's way of life lacks transformative power and the presence of God. Each person will need to take ownership of their faith journey and encourage others toward love and good deeds (Heb 10:24).

### **The Challenge of Rigid Structures: Institution vs. Mission**

The structure of the church is designed to support the institution rather than empowering its people to embody the gospel in the world. TCUMC's structure operates according to a hierarchical order of committees that serve the needs of the institution. Meetings loosely follow the Roberts rules of order. Members are trained to serve God through church committees and attend meetings throughout the week. Typically the result of these meetings is an updated set of minutes and a list of suggestions for the pastor to consider. Most of these committees are part of the denominational guidelines for the church. They function to maintain the institutional resources, practices, and liturgical formalities of the past. The congregation's energies are absorbed in the efforts to support the institution rather than engaging in God's work with people outside the church.

The structural challenge arises from the church's origins. Both the city and the denomination assisted in building the church. The value to promote and preserve the aims of both these entities have been there from the beginning. The church accepted Walter Temple's offer to move because of municipal, practical, and financial motivations. Further, each local UMC is expected to support global Methodist institutions such as the

General Board of Global Ministries. These entities do great work but have the unintended consequence of muting the missional responsibilities of congregations locally.

The challenge of rigid structures presents the church with the need to understand their design as the sent people of God in mission. The church will need to catch hold of God's missional trait to go into all the world and partner with God's work with people in the neighborhood. New structures are needed to support the work of the members of the congregation as they are sent out in the community. TCUMC must embrace the world that God loves, not only church people. Faith is needed for congregants to gain an attitude of exploration and experimentation to get them outside their comfort zones and develop new relationships in the community.

### **The Challenge of the Heart: Isolation Versus Incarnation**

The church faces a challenge of the heart. It will be challenged by the incarnational trait of God to join in with those who are outside of the church. TCUMC is increasingly isolated from their community. The congregation sees itself as a people set apart from the world; a people saved from the perversions of the larger society. The congregation reacted to declines in attendance by circling their wagons and offering more fellowship opportunities. They built tighter bonds with one another and became increasingly isolated and unable to connect with their neighbors. The current hope is to catch those who visit the church and assimilate them into church family life and function. When asked to invite a friend to Easter Sunday, most of the members express that they do not know anyone outside of TCUMC. The congregation has directed its attention, love, and care toward one another for so long that it has a difficult time seeing people outside

of the church.

The church building has become the center of TCUMC's spiritual life, ministries, and programs. It is the place where people are cared for, and faith is developed. Even outreach events such as Barbeques, movie nights, and Vacation Bible School happen on the church campus. These activities reinforce the church's concern for those who come to the church, but not for the many who are outside. As a result, the people that God sent into the world to partner in ministry have limited their understanding of the location of God's activity. TCUMC also lost its footing as the central worship venue in the city. There are many churches in Temple City with newer, better buildings and worship venues. They also provided more exciting and contemporary options for the worship needs of the people of the city. Uncertain of how to compete with these newer churches, TCUMC continues to be isolated from its community.

The challenge of the heart will push the church to join God's invitation to join in with the people groups outside of the church walls. The physical location of the church is not the most significant place in which faith development happens. Every believer is a living outpost of God's kingdom in the world. Jesus declared that he is present wherever two or three are gathered (Mt 18:20). Church members will need to incarnate the gospel among the people groups of the city. As they pull away from the single cell of the church family into new social networks, they will discover multiple opportunities to embody the love of God.

### **The Challenge of Practice: Membership Versus Vitality**

The church faces a challenge of practice. TCUMC needs to consider ways of

being a blessing to people in the community rather than focusing on how to make new members. Mainline churches across America are focused on growing in membership, through attraction which feeds into consumerism. Churches compete for recognition by providing the best praise band, worship service, sermon, bathroom, parking lot, coffee venue, and education program. People choose to partake of these commodities based on individual preferences. Churches respond to these market pressures by providing increasingly better venues and entertainment options to keep the attention of the fickle client base. Success is measured by the number of people in the pews and the amount of money that is collected. The California Pacific Conference of the UMC keeps statistics on church attendance and membership but has no consistent metrics for church vitality. Churches need to evaluate their success based on God's agenda for the Church rather than on marketing metrics.

At TCUMC, membership functions much like being part of a club with more members than committed disciples. The congregants see visitors as a way of preserving the church's future and an opportunity to pass along committee responsibilities. Membership concerns drive the advertising strategy for the church. These aims miss the calling of the Church to participate in God's life-giving mission to the world. Rather than recruiting for membership, a more faithful aspiration would be to equip each person to bless others. The congregation must move from devising programs and systems that benefit its membership to finding ways to be a life-giving, vital, blessing to the community.

Addressing the challenge of practice will also change the concept of belonging to

a congregation. Membership based on a person's agreement with policies and doctrine does not prepare them to be active disciples. The church will need to adopt a centered rather than bounded set understanding of belonging. This model embraces all who are moving toward Christ as the center of church life regardless of their starting position. These adjustments move the church from self-centered to God-centered living.

### **The Challenge of Security: Brokenness Versus Transformation**

The church is facing a challenge of security in response to the stresses within the community. The history of Temple City provides a clear picture of racial tensions and divisions. Individuals are increasingly feeling isolated and lonely. People in the community struggle with addiction of every type from gambling, drugs, the internet, and shopping. The growing disparity between those who have and those who do not further heightens the stresses of poverty and materialism. These pressures are opportunities to extend God's transforming love, even amid brokenness. The church is called to participate with God in transforming the world.

By seeking its security rather than the transformative power of God for the world, the church has hobbled along in its brokenness. The historical evidence is reflected in the decision to build the sanctuary as a type of Noah's ark. At some point, the congregation felt that it needed to be set apart and protected from the community that it is called to serve. This imagery provided the church with the hope that God would preserve them into the future apart from the difficulties of the community.

God invites the Church to join in the work of transforming lives. The church's Wesleyan roots can provide some guidance with this challenge. The early Methodist

movement recognized that the Church is called to not only care for itself. They understood that there is a need for both personal and social holiness. John Wesley exemplified this practice by preaching at the worksite for coal miners, teaching children in the streets, and sparking social reforms in society. Congregants helped to pass laws against child labor in England, and slavery in the United States. Wesley brought his message outside the walls of the established church so that he might engage more directly where people were suffering. These are just a few examples of how the church can pursue a transformational ministry in response to the challenge of security.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2:  
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews theological writings in preparation for the missional transformation at TCUMC. It will review the theological foundations, leadership, change dynamics, and structures needed in this transition. Research in these fields provides the church with an understanding of the various components that are necessary for this transformation.

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

This book sketches out the contours of missional ecclesiology in light of the “post-Constantinian, post-Christendom, and even post Christian mission field” of North America.<sup>1</sup> The writers begin with an examination of the context of the Church in North America. Secondly, they identify a missional ecclesiology and extrapolate ways that church communities could express these concepts. Finally, they describe missional

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<sup>1</sup> Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 7.

leadership, structure, and connection with other such communities.<sup>2</sup> This book provides several insights for TCUMC relating to understanding context, missional theology, and church community formation.

A key theological insight for TCUMC is understanding that the primary reason that the Church exists is as an extension of God's mission to the world. Guder points out that understanding the Church as the instrument of God's mission is the natural result of a trinitarian understanding of mission.<sup>3</sup> Rather than seeing mission as an activity of the Church, missional church recognizes that mission is part of the nature of God. God shapes the Church according to this nature, as Guder points out, "mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation."<sup>4</sup> The theological shift that is needed in a traditional congregation begins with understanding that they are not principally a gathering of those who have received salvation. Instead, they are partners with a sending God. This insight is further grounded in the apostolic function of the Church as articulated in the Nicene creed, which is not only connected with the historical apostles but identifies the nature of the Church as a people who are sent.<sup>5</sup>

This writing also reorients the theological task of a traditional United Methodist Church toward its essential missional vocation. The authors identify that for a missional church, the five essential callings are: biblical, historical, contextual, eschatological, and

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 5.

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

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 83.

practical.<sup>6</sup> These callings overlap with the stated theological task of the United Methodist Church, “Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason are sources and norms for belief and practice.”<sup>7</sup> These four are known as the Wesleyan quadrilateral. The first two elements, biblical and historical, are essentially duplicated in the Methodist appeal to scripture and tradition as primary sources of authority for the believer. Missional theology helps to ground the practice of the Christian Church to its Biblical moorings “The struggle to be both faithful and relevant is constant for every Church.”<sup>8</sup> The historical and traditional elements speak to the connection with the doctrines and community of the Church as they have understood the gospel throughout the past two millennia. The added missional insight is that the Church has always been on the move reaching new people and places rather than resting in its dogmatic certainty.<sup>9</sup> Practical experience is an essential part of the Methodist movement with its “emphasis upon the Christian life - faith and love put into practice.”<sup>10</sup> United Methodists affirm the eschatological calling of the missional church as it states, “We also look to the end time in which God’s work will be fulfilled.”<sup>11</sup> The missional church’s distinction of context helps to push the Church to engage with its local community “The gospel is always translated into a culture, and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>7</sup> Marvin Cropsey, ed., *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, House (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), Paragraph 330.5.4.

<sup>8</sup> Guder is quoting from Leslie Newbigin’s *Christ and the Cultures*, 195.

<sup>9</sup> Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Cropsey, ed., *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, Part 3, Section 102.

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

God's people are formed in that culture in response to the translated and Spirit-empowered Word."<sup>12</sup> This emphasis moves the Church to a theology of engagement.

The book also provides a clear analysis of the context of American Culture and that of the North American church. These chapters provide support for recognizing that in a postmodern, post-Christian context, the Church needs to change not only in practice but also in theological orientation. Guder notes that the Church in North America "has moved from its position of dominance," as demonstrated by a loss of "numbers, power, and influence in society."<sup>13</sup> He reiterates Stanley Hauwerwas' observation that discipleship in American "has been absorbed into citizenship."<sup>14</sup> This writing crystallizes the recognition that the Church is no longer the "chaplain to the culture and society."<sup>15</sup> This type of chaplain mentality was seen in the development of the Temple City church as Walter Temple invited them to move within his new city limits. The historical overview of denominationalism also highlights the limitations that the church faces as it seeks to support the institutional structures of the city.

The missional church re-examines the meaning of the gospel "We are persuaded that any responsible missional ecclesiology must be centered on the hope, the message, and the demonstration of the inbreaking reign of God in Jesus Christ."<sup>16</sup> Rather than a

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<sup>12</sup> Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

gospel that is gutted of its potency, the missional understanding of the gospel centers on the broader narrative of the kingdom of God. The authors envision the Church as “representing the reign of God.”<sup>17</sup> This development shifts the orientation of the Church away from merely proclaiming a propositional truth about Jesus, toward living into and engaging in the greater metanarrative of God’s redemptive reign. Guder expands the Church’s ministry from exclusively dealing with the saving of human souls to participating in God's transformation of all of creation. It also moves the Church from institutional centeredness toward the kingdom-focused ministries.

The book’s application of missional theology to Church structures, leadership, and greater ecumenism was sometimes inconsistent and contradictory. One example of this is the description of bounded and centered sets. The authors reject the model of concentric bounded sets as anthropocentric because they are based on voluntary human commitments.<sup>18</sup> However, they also assert that “The centered-set organization invites people to enter on a journey toward a set of values and commitments.”<sup>19</sup> These are also voluntary human commitments. His argument would be strengthened by acknowledging that the primary distinction between these two sets is that bounded sets focus on external actions while centered sets are internal values. This difference avoids the awkward multi-layered set described in the book. The concept of these two sets will be helpful to the church as it moves past external identifiers and becomes more permeable and flexible.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 206.

**Scot McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the  
Local Church, 2014**

Scot McKnight seeks to distinguish the relationship between kingdom and church, as well as evangelism and social work. He endeavors to unlock the meaning of the kingdom as he walks through the Biblical concepts of context (location), people, mission, King, and moral fellowship (Church). This work is significant in providing a synthesis of the ongoing discussion regarding the meaning, place, and purpose of the kingdom of God for the missional church. His renewal of the understanding of the gospel in relationship to the reign of God is of particular importance for congregations seeking to become missionally oriented.

McKnight's strategy is to contrast two strawman misunderstandings of the kingdom as a way of providing clarity to his argument. On the one hand, he describes the social activist non-evangelic folks as Skinny Jeans kingdom people who define the kingdom as "good deeds done by good people (Christian or not) in the public sector for the common good."<sup>20</sup> He contrasts this with a similarly dissatisfying definition of Pleated Pants folks who define kingdom as "redemptive moments when God's redemptive reign breaks in to save, to restore, to reconcile, to heal."<sup>21</sup> It is helpful for congregations that seek to live missionally to understand the pitfalls of both approaches. He reconciles these

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<sup>20</sup> Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

positions by narrowly locating God's kingdom within the Church as the people of the kingdom.

McKnight offers a transformative understanding of the gospel for the missional church. The kingdom of God emphasis within the missional concept moves beyond a creedal understanding of faith as the basis for salvation. McKnight recounts the normative understanding of salvation as CFRC (Creation, Redemption, Forgiveness, Consummation).<sup>22</sup> He points out that the CRFC story skips much of the biblical narrative and is an "inadequate reading of the Bible."<sup>23</sup>

In contrast, he describes the gospel as an A-B-A story.<sup>24</sup> This story describes how humanity usurps control from God's sovereignty over creation, thereby rejecting God's rule. God's mission to restore humanity is seen in the unfolding story of Israel's history. Israel rejects God as they prefer a human king to God's sovereign rule. Ultimately, God establishes the kingdom in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Entering into the kingdom is based on the acceptance of the person and work of Jesus as he is the King, who is inaugurating the kingdom of God on earth. In the A-B-A story, salvation is not seen simply as a moment of personal agreement with a doctrinal theory, but instead a conversion to the reign of God. Forgiveness of sin and justification by faith are still essential to the gospel but are gifts of a gracious God to those who are in the kingdom of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 27.

God. The gospel in the missional concept is an invitation to experience faith within a community of people who are seeking to live according to the reign of God.

McKnight provides helpful descriptions of the kingdom, which connect the concept of God's reign with the people and location in which it takes place. He argues that God's redemptive activity happens in a limited location "Jesus did not come to make the world a better place or to 'influence' or 'transform' the world. He came to redeem people out of the world."<sup>25</sup> He refutes the idea that the kingdom is limited to the reign of God because ruling requires that there be "a people governed by a king."<sup>26</sup> He then concludes that the kingdom is located only among those people who are so governed, the Church.

While it is helpful for a missional congregation to understand itself in light of God's reign, it is shortsighted for a congregation to consider itself the end goal of God's kingdom action. McKnight's argument selectively chooses excerpts from the Bible that describe the world as being a place that is opposed to God and then concludes that the world is not the place of God's reign. He misses scriptures that identify God's operative power in the world, such as "there is no authority except that which God has established" (Rom 13:1). He also skips those that identify God's mission to all, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him" (Jn 3:17). Although the world is the recipient of God's mission, it does not direct God's actions or subjugate God's authority. God's activity is not limited to those in the Church.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 73.

Indeed, the Church has a part in God's mission, but God's sovereignty extends well beyond the limitations of his people.

**Mark Lau Branson and Juan Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*, 2011**

Mark Branson and Juan Martinez write with the intent to equip people with the perspectives and skills that are needed for multicultural ministry, and to “encourage Church leaders to create environments that make God's reconciling initiatives apparent in Church life and in our missional engagement with neighborhoods and cities.”<sup>27</sup> Part one focuses on practical theology in a multicultural context. Part two explores the sociocultural ways that people interact in different ways across cultures.<sup>28</sup> This second part provides insights for understanding the ways that culture impacts one's interactions with others. Part three covers the subjects of leadership, communication, and change in a multicultural environment. Throughout the book, the authors provide group discussion sections to stimulate biblical reflection and action with church leaders. They also utilize their histories and practical stories to illustrate their points.

This book provides both leadership and adaptive insights for the missional transformation at TCUMC. The framework for leadership praxis is explained as an ongoing cyclical process of study/ reflection and engagement/ action.<sup>29</sup> Branson

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<sup>27</sup> Mark Lau Branson and Juan Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 41.

introduces into this process three interrelated leadership tasks: interpretive, relational, and implemental.<sup>30</sup> These tasks guide the change process to purposefully engage the community, the congregation, and the scriptures. Branson proposes a step by step praxis cycle of reflection and action. The first step is to name and analyze the current praxis and context. The leader then studies and reflects on scripture, theology, and Christian history. The group recalls and discusses the stories that formed the current praxis, before then discerning and shaping a new praxis through imagination, prayer, experiments, and commitments.<sup>31</sup> These cycles of reflection and action inform a contextual missional transition. Rather than impose a particular model or prescribed experience onto a particular context, these cycles evoke a culturally relevant ministry that immerses from missional experiments in the context.

Branson defines leadership as “shaping an environment in which the people of God participate in the action-reflection cycle as they gain new capacities to discern what God is doing among and around them.”<sup>32</sup> Creating such environments is critical for TCUMC as they engage with their community as a fading White culture in the growing Asian American culture of San Gabriel Valley. This book provides insights into the necessary skills for developing cross-cultural competencies within a congregation, including communication, worldview, and perception. He highlights the importance of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 47.

emotion, empathy, sympathy, and power in communicating cross-culturally.<sup>33</sup> Branson maintains that “Church leaders, in their interpretive and relational work, have a primary role in shaping environments and prompting conversations that increase the communicative competence of a congregation.”<sup>34</sup> Part of this task at TCUMC will be to introduce church leaders to new relationships with people in the community. Branson highlights that the leadership in a multicultural context is not the work of one individual but requires “pluralistic leadership.”<sup>35</sup>

Branson further identifies three areas of leadership focus comprised of “Interpretive, Implemental, and Relational” that he calls a “Leadership Triad.” A leader shapes a congregation by interpreting the environment, nurturing its life through relationship, and implementing experiments and practices, so that embody the gospel.<sup>36</sup> Leaders glean information from both culture and scripture to construct a narrative for the congregation’s missional life.

Networks and missional imagination are two specific leadership concepts that are formative for the project at TCUMC. Branson reflects that societies and churches form connections of people in relational networks. These networks are a practical avenue for pursuing relational development with communities. In his reflection of Luke 10, he notes

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 213.

that Jesus sent the disciples according to their relational networks.<sup>37</sup> These networks are also known as household or *oikos* relationships. Identifying and developing these networks beyond the walls of the existing church is a critical task for missional ministry, and will be a key component for the group project.

Branson also advocates for the Church to practice missional imagination as they reflect on their calling in light of their congregational networks and biblical narratives.<sup>38</sup> This approach trusts that God works among the people to provide direction for missional action. The imagination discernment finds its voice in the congregation rather than from individual leaders. The result is greater relational connection, ownership, and fruitfulness among the congregation. Branson asks a useful question that will be used for the project: “How would participants respond if they engaged Scripture, neighbors and the Spirit with an expectation that God would reveal a missional life right in their context?”<sup>39</sup> The project invites people in the church to gather together to hear, imagine, and reflect on the scriptures and the community. They will consider ways that God is inviting them to join in mission to the community.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 76.

**Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 2006**

The authors intend to expand the bandwidth of church leaders beyond administration and maintenance to include leadership that “is about cultivating an environment that innovates and releases the missional imagination present among a community of God’s people.”<sup>40</sup> He addresses missional leadership in two parts. The first explores the context and challenge of leadership. Here the authors address the critical issues of the cultivation of the imagination, the change dynamics, the context, and the change model for missional leaders. The second part looks at the qualities and characteristics that are needed for missional leaders to mature in understanding themselves and others in light of God’s narratives. This part addresses the maturity of missional leaders and a theological framework for missional engagement.

The authors challenge the assumptions of traditional church leadership, advocating that a new type of leadership is required in a missional church. They highlight the stark difference between pastoral and missional leadership roles. These differences underscore the need for missional leaders to cultivate the congregation to focus on the mission of God rather than local church maintenance. The role of the leaders is to equip and train a congregation to function like cross-cultural missionaries rather than religious consumers.<sup>41</sup> This approach recognizes that leaders have the responsibility to cultivate the

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<sup>40</sup> Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2006), Part 1, Chapter 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Issue Five.

culture of a congregation. Rather than providing an organizational strategy for congregations, he encourages leaders to understand the narratives that shape the congregation and community.<sup>42</sup> These stories reveal opportunities for discerning missional action and organization. The aim of congregational leadership is to cultivate an environment of change, “in which the focus of group attention shifts from the self and one another to God.”<sup>43</sup>

Roxburgh explains that there are three areas of awareness for cultivating leadership: God’s work within a congregation, their cognizance of God’s activity, and God’s activity in the broader context.<sup>44</sup> Missional leadership connects biblical imagination with the practice of engaging in ministry experiments. The biblical accounts of God’s activity are an essential ingredient in developing missional imagination within congregations. These insights will provide a leadership direction for the project at TCUMC. The aim of the project is to shape a new missional imagination within the congregation, “wherein people discern what God might be about among them and in their community.”<sup>45</sup>

Roxburgh describes three zones for organizational life that each require a different style of leadership: emergent, performative, and reactive.<sup>46</sup> The reactive zone

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 626.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 652-653.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 744-764.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 657-659.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 886.

describes how each generation improves on the church's practices, even as the congregation sees diminishing results. He posits several insightful concepts for leading a congregation out of this zone toward the more productive emergent zone. He suggests that a congregation can move out of this zone by following the narrative imagination in scripture as they begin to "learn again how they might imagine fresh ways of being God's people."<sup>47</sup> Listening and dialogue are critical skills for leaders in creating this type of environment. He advocates that congregations in this zone need stability so that they might feel more capable of entering into a new imagination for their future.

He encourages missional leaders to focus on the need for cultural change within a congregation rather than organizational change.<sup>48</sup> This focus helps the congregation to live into a new direction in which the structures are developed as needed rather than by a procrustean agenda, "Leaders must create an emergent zone organization for emergent actions in discontinuous change."<sup>49</sup> One way this might happen is by having leaders reflect on the ways that God encounters people in the Bible and then consider possible contemporary relevance. This journey will require that the congregation connect with the biblical narratives in such a way that they can speak about God's work in the world, not merely within the church.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1150.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1289-1291.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 2057.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 1474.

Roxburgh references Heifetz's distinctive between tactical and adaptive change. Tactical change is "about changing programs, introducing new programs, or changing elements of the organizational life of the congregation."<sup>51</sup> Whereas changing a church organization could simply be a change in tactics, he advocates for congregations to embrace a more substantial adaptive change. This type of change "requires us to design a new approach to the challenges we face."<sup>52</sup> He advocates that congregations develop into this type of operating by attempting experiments that are not designed for systematic change.<sup>53</sup> While these experiments are intentionally short term and have low expectations for lasting results, the hope is to move toward developing new approaches. Roxburgh illustrates that the transition is not a smooth linear progression. Instead, it is like a sailboat moving into the wind that moves forward in a stair-step kind of way as it weaves across the currents of life and ministry.<sup>54</sup>

Roxburgh's call for stability for a congregation runs contrary to other leadership theories, which emphasize that a crucial awareness of the current crises instigates the willingness to develop new behaviors.<sup>55</sup> His call to do the basics of church worship and pastoral care with excellence to provide stability for the congregation in preparation for change also seems contradictory. These activities could provide a false sense of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Chapter 5.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> John Kotter recommends establishing a sense of urgency as the first step in leading change.

confidence in a group that needs to adapt and change. He advocates that “People have to be reassured that much of their congregational life will remain fairly familiar, and there will be no structural and organizational changes.”<sup>56</sup> Assuring people that things will remain the same while hoping for change, seems to be a recipe for disaster. Church organizations are perfectly designed to produce their current results. Unless there is a significant change, expecting different results is ridiculous. The resolution to the tension in these two points of view would depend a great deal upon the ability of the people in the congregation to let go of past models and be motivated to follow the working of the spirit rather than the desire to assert and consolidate control from the past. As Roxborough identifies, congregations have an essential task to “evaluate their current activities, attitudes, and values as a congregation relative to its changing context.”<sup>57</sup>

**Stephan Ross, Leadership and Organization For Fruitful Congregations, 2014**

Stephan Ross served as a District Superintendent of the UMC in the Oregon-Idaho conference and has experience in pastoral ministry. He wrote this book to assist UMC congregations who are seeking to move away from the daunting number of committees that are required by the United Methodist Book of Discipline. These congregations are making these changes to be more effective in ministry. He states that “this is a book about what practices of leadership seem to be the most needed in our struggling and somewhat discontented old-line congregations during the early years of

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<sup>56</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, Chapter 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 4.

the 21<sup>st</sup> millennium.”<sup>58</sup> His work moves congregations toward a streamlined committee structure, sometimes called simple governance. He intends to unburden churches to live more fully into God’s mission. Ross builds upon a central concept of mission before identifying leadership and structural implications. He provides study questions and appendices that outline a denominationally approved process for making changes in the local church structures so they can move toward missional alignment. His experience and knowledge of the inner workings of the UMC is a valuable asset for TCUMC as it moves towards becoming a missional congregation.

The most useful part of the book for this project is his description of a single board of governance. Reducing the bureaucratic overhead for the church liberates the congregation to engage in mission outside the local church. He recognizes that the current structures of the church fit a time that no longer exists in American culture.<sup>59</sup> Ross identifies that there are three categories of responsibility that the church needs to account for in its structure: governance, management, and ministry.<sup>60</sup> For each of these categories, he lays out their purpose, processes, structure, and accountability. He proposes that the roles of governance and management could be brought together under one church council. This council would provide for the management of the facilities, finances, and staffing. It would also meet quarterly for a time of prayerful discernment regarding the

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<sup>58</sup> Ross, Stephan, *Leadership and Organization for Fruitful Congregations* (Portland, OR: Stephan W. Ross, 2014), 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

church's vision, mission, values, and policies. These four areas make up the concept of governance. The ministry area would operate in any way that enables people to do ministry. This freedom gives space for missional experiments. People in the congregation are encouraged to consider how God is sending them into the community. He advocates that the church "needs fewer experts and more experiments."<sup>61</sup> Ross provides a timeline for coordinating these changes with the denominational hierarchies and councils.

Ross guides leaders on processes for missional experiments. He defines leadership as "the quality exercised by a person or persons when they empower a group of people to accomplish their mission through a coordinated effort."<sup>62</sup> For leaders to succeed, they need clarity about their responsibility, authority, and accountability.<sup>63</sup> Responsibilities are defined in collaboration with others as leaders understand their interests and calling. He contends that congregations that thrive "help people to learn their God-given gifts and discover how they can put those gifts into service of the mission that Christ has entrusted to their church."<sup>64</sup> His understanding of the charisma of the whole congregation is commendable, even if church centric. He encourages church ministries to be discontinued that are not supported by anyone's interest or calling. Authority is the ability to pursue and perform ministry according to one's responsibilities.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 57.

Ross encourages accountability that uses clear definitions, tracking, and expectations for success.<sup>65</sup>

This book is beneficial to churches that are reorganizing their structures to be more missionally effective. His desire for ministry to extend beyond the local church is palpable throughout the book. He emphasizes the relational aspects of mission as he instructs congregations to “seek affinity between the people you are and the people you are being sent to.”<sup>66</sup> Ross also identifies the incarnation as a model for ministry as he expresses that the church should “embody and extend the Way of Jesus Christ in the world.”<sup>67</sup> He promotes the concepts of flat and simple leadership to remove leadership barriers within the church. He advocates for congregants to be counter-cultural, but not to the extent that they become an isolated community.<sup>68</sup>

There are ways that this writing obscures the missional point. It is written as a business manual encouraging basic practices such as establishing a statement of mission, vision, and values. He stresses the need for clear job descriptions and expectations for each person in ministry. He also advocates for local churches to adopt the denominational mission statement for themselves rather than articulate one that is distinct for their area. The UMC mission statement is explicitly church centric “Local churches provide the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 96.

most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.”<sup>69</sup> The church has primarily understood this to mean a place where ministry happens rather than a people who are sent in ministry with God into the world.

**Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*,  
2009**

Reggie McNeal pulls back the curtain of mystery surrounding the practices and values for a missional Church. He contrasts the ways that traditional church metrics are in stark contrast to a kingdom orientation. He outlines a new set of metrics for measuring success in a missional community. As McNeal describes it, “the missional renaissance is altering both the character and the expression of the Church in the world.”<sup>70</sup> He examines three shifts that happen as the church moves in a missional direction: from internal to external mission focus, from program to people development, and from church to kingdom based leadership.<sup>71</sup> His purpose is to “develop a scorecard that supports these shifts.”<sup>72</sup> These correlate with three cultural changes that he identifies in the broader culture: altruism economy, personal growth, and spiritual vitality.<sup>73</sup> Missional

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<sup>69</sup> Marvin Cropsey, ed., *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), Paragraph 120.

<sup>70</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 17.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Renaissance unpacks the metrics that TCUMC will use as it moves from a traditional to a missional church orientation.

Recognizing a pull toward altruism in the broader culture, McNeal identifies that the first shift toward missional is from “church-centric to Kingdom focused.”<sup>74</sup> This shift affects the structure and ministry of the church in every aspect. Rather than consuming and orienting resources to sustain the institution of the church, a missional Church looks outward to the community. The agenda for the missional church is driven by God and God’s kingdom rather than by the church institution. This shift will require that the church change its values and motivations from seeking to convert people to become good church-going Christians to “leveraging the gospel into people’s lives right where they live, work, and play.”<sup>75</sup> Ministry flows through the natural relational networks rather than institution locations. McNeal encourages congregations to have a blessing strategy instead of an evangelism strategy.<sup>76</sup> This type of evangelism results in new life for both the congregation and the community.

The second factor he identifies is the search for personal growth in which people “expect to be able to maximize their own personal development.”<sup>77</sup> The shift for the church is from program to people development.<sup>78</sup> He highlights the truth that churches

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 89.

are exhausted from putting together programs that the community might need, instead of focusing on people development. He points out that “Loving God and loving our neighbors cannot be fulfilled at church.”<sup>79</sup> The church needs to develop an intense concern for people beyond its doors, thereby echoing God’s heart for the world rather than one for institutional survival. He provides several suggestions for moving the Church’s focus from program to people. The project will utilize times for relational brainstorming to encourage this type of orientation.

The third factor is the hunger for spiritual vitality outside the church context.<sup>80</sup> McNeal points to the Pew Forum survey that indicates that while only a fourth of adults under age thirty are religiously unaffiliated, half say that religion is very important to them.<sup>81</sup> Missional churches operate with kingdom leaders who are likely to arise from outside the church.<sup>82</sup> Moving in this direction requires that leaders shift their focus from the typical clerical duties to “being mission-centered, kingdom-focused, entrepreneurial, profoundly spiritual, reproducing, and culturally connected.”<sup>83</sup> Part of this shift is from church-centered duties to kingdom assignments in the community. McNeal offers several examples of pastors serving outside the local congregation in corporate and community settings. One of the implications of this shift is that leaders promote God’s work and will

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 132.

in the world “as a way of infecting them with God’s love” rather than the church programs and services.<sup>84</sup> These leaders release others for ministry rather than needing to direct it themselves. Another implication is a change from the professional training model to a debriefing process, as was demonstrated by Jesus with the disciples. The disciples were formed into kingdom leaders as they participated in ministry and then debriefed their experience with Jesus (Lk 10).

The scorecard for each of these three shifts explores ways that resources are utilized for the God kingdom rather than for the church institution. These resources include prayer, people, calendar, finances, facilities, and technology.<sup>85</sup> Each of these resources can be repurposed from serving the institutional church to engaging in the community. McNeal’s new scorecard is not a set of rules, but are designed to help stimulate thinking about how to measure a change in the “quality of life of those in the faith community and the people they serve.”<sup>86</sup> The metrics for the shift toward kingdom leadership are more complicated than measuring attendance because they explore four issues that impact leadership: paradigm issues, micro skill development, resource management, and personal growth.<sup>87</sup> Within each of these four issues, he addresses the use of resource metrics that were employed in other chapters. He also provides tentative outlines for each area of personal development for kingdom leaders. More than the other

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 158.

sections, this final area draws attention to the impacts that a missional shift will have on the role of professional clergy.

This book reorients the structure of the traditional church toward a more faithful response to God's call. McNeal challenges the Church to measure itself as God's agents through metrics that go beyond the barriers of its physical location. The traditional church will need to embrace these three shifts as it moves toward a missional future. McNeal points out that the church risks not only missing out on the opportunity to participate with God but also in being recognized by God as faithful people.<sup>88</sup>

Although McNeal repeatedly identifies prayer as a critical resource, there is a surprising lack of discussion about practices such as communion and worship that provide cohesion for a missional community. These practices may seem at odds with missional engagement, but without them, it is challenging to sustain missional synergy. The author could consider writing more on these core practices for missional congregations.

**Bob Whitesel, *Preparing for Change Reaction: How to Introduce Change in Your Church*, 2007.**

Bob Whitesel addresses the reactions that arise when change is introduced in congregations. He tracks the top ten reactions to change while providing a biblical and practical response to each. The author lays out his thoughts into four parts church change,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 37.

biblical theology of change, changing methods, and the future of change.<sup>89</sup> He advocates for churches to create a mutually agreed on “Statement of Change Boundaries” that can “foster unchangeable principles amid changing methodologies.”<sup>90</sup> This book is very pragmatic in its focus, providing step by step approaches to ministry amid change.

There are several insights to be gleaned from this writing to aid TCUMC in its change process toward becoming a missional church. The first is the identification of three leadership types: visionary, tactical, and operational that are essential for making effective change.<sup>91</sup> This section helps churches recognize that all three leadership styles are needed for effective change. This section is aided by a self-evaluation tool that people could use to consider which of these roles is the best fit for them. Church leaders who understand their unique type are better prepared to navigate the change reactions.

Whitesel suggests that churches embrace “both-and” strategies in dealing with multigenerational and multicultural churches.<sup>92</sup> He envisions groups within a church living into a variety of modalities for worship and fellowship while operating under one administrative leadership structure. He promotes the idea that the church should “reach out by organizing as many sub-congregations as feasible.”<sup>93</sup> Each of these sub-

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<sup>89</sup> Bob Whitesel, *Preparing for Change Reaction: How to Introduce Change in your Church*, (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), Introduction.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

congregations represents a different cultural group or *oikos*<sup>94</sup>, which is uniquely gifted to reach. Rather than seeking to expand the circle of one cultural group by recruiting individuals, the aim is to multiply the number of people groups that can be reached by the church. He postulates that because of the rapid change in American society, it is increasingly difficult to expect people to conform to any one form of gathering. Relevant incarnational ministry joins in with people where they are, and provides a new expression of Christian community in that new space. This concept will be a central aspect of the transitional project for the church.

Whitesel describes a “Statement of Change Boundaries” or SCB as mutually agreed on boundaries or limits to changes that are permitted, particularly as they relate to principles and actions.<sup>95</sup> He advocates that taking the step of creating an SCB is “critical for allaying fears... and ensuring change does not fundamentally alter a church’s nature, will, or character.”<sup>96</sup> In this chapter, he lays out eight steps that churches can follow to achieve change.<sup>97</sup> These are primarily editorial stages for drafting a good negotiation which incorporates various drafts, feedback and modifications, and perspectives before producing a final statement.

Chapter eight walks through the six stages of change and their corresponding triggers. Whitesel describes how a church can navigate through these stages while

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<sup>94</sup> This is the Greek word for house seen in the sending of the disciples in Luke 10:5-6.

<sup>95</sup> Whitesel, *Preparing for Change Reaction*, 136.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

retaining membership and even expanding its ministry. He proposes altering the two typical triggers that move a congregation toward division and attrition.<sup>98</sup> The first is to intentionally slow down the discernment process to give the congregation time to adjust and live into the proposals. The second is to provide opportunities for buy-in, diversity, and creative options.<sup>99</sup> The exploration of these six stages clarifies the general flow of change. Knowing what typically happens in each stage alleviates the tensions that might arise. The remaining chapters of his book describe insights for developing better leadership for the church.

There are a few areas where Whitesel's writing could be improved. His theological exploration of change begins with a section on God's immutability.<sup>100</sup> He explains that God changes in action and relationship toward people, but God's character does not. This starting point leads to an unnecessarily strained parsing of what God can and can not do. As he describes the church, he utilizes the same framework, which alleviates the church from the burden of needing to change except in her actions and relationship toward others. However, the church does not have an unbiased understanding of itself. The church has absorbed years of Constantinopolitan, and capitalist ideologies into its self-understanding. The church in America needs to examine its understanding of itself to divest itself of its cultural entanglements. Lastly, his understanding of missional church misses the theological reorientation that is required for the church to live into the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 166

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 155-169.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 79-86.

*missio Dei*. Instead, he advocates for each person in a church to be equipped to share the gospel message and introduce people to Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup> His focus on the external actions of evangelism and mission misses the primary shift toward a missional orientation.

### ***De Jongh van Arkel, Understanding Change as Practical Theologian, 2001***

De Jongh van Arkel's article maps the contours of the theories of change encompassing the realms of philosophy, physics, psychology, and organizational research. As a practical theologian, he points out that ministry is all about change.<sup>102</sup> The primary function of ministry is to enact some form of change. Change is found in many forms of ministry, including counseling, preaching, and teaching. His synthesis provides a connection between the behavioral, cognitive, and spiritual transformations that are required in this project.

Arkel summarizes the theories of cognitive behavior, stating that "People are capable of learning and displaying new behaviors in the context of new situations."<sup>103</sup> Essentially, the research points to the fact that if circumstances change, people's behavior will also change. He points out that people maintain the capacity to change, often called human plasticity, even as they grow older.<sup>104</sup> While individuals may have mitigating factors that limit their ability to change, such as cognitive or emotional barriers to

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>102</sup> De Jongh van Arkel, "Understanding Change as Practical Theologian," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 5(1):31 Jan. 2001.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 47.

learning, people as a whole have demonstrated the ability to adapt to new situations over time.<sup>105</sup> Cognitive theorists have further identified that behavioral change is not only a way of measuring change; it can also be the vehicle by which mental and emotional change occurs.<sup>106</sup> They explain that purposefully altering one's actions can aid in changing the way one thinks.

Arkel's article reveals that change and stability are interlinked since "all change can be understood as the effort to maintain some constancy, and all constancy is maintained through change."<sup>107</sup> Change creates disequilibrium in a person or system that then seeks stability. He notes Lyddon's research that identified that "one way in which change can occur is through a temporary increase in disorder; in other words, the experience of dis-order, dis-equilibrium, or dis-ease is necessary for some new order to be created."<sup>108</sup> These observations demonstrate that new normalized ways of thinking and behaving can result from purposefully modifying the behavior of a group. Missional church behaviors could be part of the process of causing the church to think missionally.

He also outlines five elements from Bakker's work on cognitive behavior that perpetuate stability: self-definition, public commitment, stability of the environment, feedback, and the myth of stability.<sup>109</sup> These are significant because they identify the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 47.

conditions that keep people from changing. Modifying these essentials in some way would create the disequilibrium that is needed to instigate change. This article also highlights the importance of feedback to reinforce change. Feedback has the benefit of appropriating and stabilizing change for people.<sup>110</sup> During the missional project, team participants will report back to the group on a weekly bases on their behaviors and observations.

In order for people to assimilate change, they need to either appropriate new ways of thinking to make sense of it or change their circumstances in such a way as to alleviate the dissonance that the change has created. Change processes "present both opportunity *and* danger in that personal identity reorganization may either be progressive or regressive in nature."<sup>111</sup> People and systems stabilize by finding a new order and self-definition. However, when the change is too disruptive for this to happen, then the system will either revert to previous its status quo or disband.<sup>112</sup>

The author highlights the necessity of religious change "The change of mind affects the feeling, the will or the thought and is seldom a function of the intellect alone. Paul regards *metanoia* as the change of thought and will which releases from evil and renders obedient to the will of God"<sup>113</sup> He also explores the importance of conversion as

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 56.

a re-ordering of one's cognitive and behavioral dissonances or a social reordering.<sup>114</sup>

Arkel asserts that people convert when they come to recognize the disequilibrium of their lives before God and their community and then desire to change as a way of entering into a new experience of stability. He turns to Gerkin's research, who contends that "We are embedded in history but also live at the same time within (the knowledge of) the eschatological reality of the coming of the *basilea*, which is made present in the saving events of the cross."<sup>115</sup> This theological insight pulls together the need for people to move toward conversion to the kingdom of God, not merely to a sense of forgiveness. The teaching for the project will focus on the dissonances between the way people think and behave and the way that God's reign requires people to live. Opportunities for public confession and conversion may help to create the new desired stability. As the author concludes, "The change we are interested in as practical theologians includes the personal conversion aspect but also goes beyond it to the transformation and change which we must see in society and the world around us: the coming of the *basilea*."<sup>116</sup> Arkel has pulled together the need for change for individuals and society and the concept of the kingdom. He powerfully illustrates how the kingdom of God is a disruptive force that drives people to change their lives to align with the reign of God.

While this article provides a treasure trove of insight regarding cognitive and behavioral change, his work does not explicitly describe the application of these insights

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 58.

for ministry and the Church. He also leaves the intended outcomes or implications to the reader, stating that “we partake in the process (of change), even though we are not able to predict definite outcomes.”<sup>117</sup> His writing would be strengthened by one or two examples of how these theories might apply to a ministry setting.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 60.

## CHAPTER 3:

### A MISSIONAL THEOLOGY FOR TEMPLE CITY UMC

This chapter provides the theological underpinnings that support the transformation from a traditional to a missional congregation. Missional theology contends that mission is central to the nature of God and the Church. As Bosch points out, “We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a theological agenda for mission; for theology, rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei*.”<sup>1</sup> Missional ecclesiology is foundational for understanding the Church as a part of God’s covenantal strategy to reach the world as a sign, foretaste, instrument, and agent of the kingdom of God. It also establishes the necessity for missional leadership that is charismatic, global, strategic, and shaped by the character and nature of God. The theological task for the UMC places the highest priority on Scripture while utilizing the lenses of tradition, reason, and experience. This chapter will use these lenses to articulate a missional theology that will form the foundation for the transformation that is necessary at TCUMC.

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<sup>1</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Transforming Shifts in the Theology of Mission*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 488.

## **Missional Theology - What a Missional Church Believes**

Grounding mission in the nature of God unearths fresh theological understandings of God, Scripture, the gospel, the Church, its leadership, and its practices. These theological areas flow naturally from the trinitarian nature of God as a missional God. A missional hermeneutic bears witness to the *missio Dei* from the witness of the early Church and the Scriptures. A missional gospel invokes Jesus' invitation to the kingdom of God and for people to experience a new life. The Church, as God's covenant community, is called to participate in God's missional relationship with the world. A missional ecclesiology recognizes that the Church is a foretaste of God's new covenant and takes on the identity as a sign, instrument, and agent of God's kingdom. Finally, God equips the Church for its mission to reach all people through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### **A Missional God**

The term mission comes from the Latin term *missio*, which means to send. The sending dynamics within the trinity demonstrate God's missional nature. The idea of the trinity has, of course, been part of the Church since its inception and later codified at the first council of Nicaea. However, missional theology sheds fresh insight into the trinity as it emphasizes the activities of sending and relating within the Godhead. These insights bring together both the Western and Eastern understandings of the trinity to provide a foundation for missional theology.

The traditional western concept of the trinity focused on the substantive unity within the trinity. This doctrine recognized that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all of the same substance *homo-ousia*, yet with three *hypostases* meaning that each person of

the trinity retains specialized properties or activities.<sup>2</sup> Van Gelder notes that by the mid-twentieth century, the doctrine of the trinity was criticized by Immanuel Kant as providing very little relevance for the life and ministry of the church.<sup>3</sup> However, the doctrine of the trinity moved toward greater relevance when Karl Barth identified the missional aspect of sending within the Godhead. The creedal statement that “God the Father sent the Son, and then the Father and Son sent the Spirit.” makes clear that God is a sending God.<sup>4</sup>

Trinitarian missiology locates the mission of God within the nature of the Godhead rather than as an external work of God. Barth points out that mission exists because “God is a sending God.”<sup>5</sup> He also argues that “the term *missio* was used in the ancient Church as an expression of the doctrine of the trinity - namely the expression of the divine sending forth of self.”<sup>6</sup> The fact that God’s nature is one of sending points to the reality that the missional dynamic is not merely something that God does, but an essential characteristic of God’s nature.

Both Jesus and the Spirit express the function of sending in their ministries. Jesus understood his ministry as part of the sending of God. He often referred to himself as the

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<sup>2</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 60.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 26.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

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

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

“one that was sent.” He told the disciples that “I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me” (Jn 6:38). Jesus commissions the disciples with these words “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (Jn 20:21). Regarding the Holy Spirit, Jesus tells the disciples that the Father will send the Spirit to them after he departs from them (Jn 14:16, 15:26). The Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2).

The missional concept also emphasizes the interrelationship of the Godhead. This understanding takes advantage of the Eastern Orthodox theology of the trinity. Eastern theologians focused on the fact that the triune God is in relationship within the one divine substance.<sup>7</sup> Through the distinctiveness of each person of the trinity, the orientation of relationship emerges within the Godhead. One example is the dynamic of self-sacrifice and stepping aside for the other. The incarnation as Christ is the supreme expression of this dynamic as he empties himself to advance the *missio Dei* (Phil. 2:6-7). Ray Anderson summarizes the perspective of the Hebrew scriptures “The unity or oneness of God's being, for the Israelite, was not mathematical but organic and synthetic.”<sup>8</sup>

The trinity demonstrates diversity within its relational unity. Hunsberger's research uncovered that “the *perichoresis*, or interpenetration, among the persons of the trinity, reveals that the nature of God is communion.”<sup>9</sup> Communion emphasizes the

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<sup>7</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), Chapter 1.

<sup>9</sup> Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 82.

ongoing interaction and interdependence of each person of the trinity. A few significant examples include creation, annunciation, and Jesus' baptism. The concept of communal diversity emerges within early Church theology. Anderson points to the gifting of the Church, which is attributed to all three persons of the Godhead (1 Cor 12:4-6). He notes, "early Trinitarian theology formulated as a means of grounding the manifestation of the Spirit in Christ, and the ministry of Christ in God the Father."<sup>10</sup>

Grounding missional theology within the trinity provides a centering point for the transformation of the church. The *missio Dei* comes directly from the sending and relational aspects of the Trinity. Rather than a static God to be worshiped within the confines of religious observance, God sends the divine in relationship beyond these ecclesiastical boundaries. The implication is that the trinitarian missional God lovingly sends the Church into the world to actively engaging people in every community.

### **A Missional Hermeneutic**

The missional concept utilizes a hermeneutic that reads both scripture and Church history together. This perspective recognizes that the *missio Dei* is manifested in the development of the early Church. The first few decades after Pentecost, the Church did not have a written gospel account of Jesus' life. The earliest reported writings for the Church came from Paul, who was himself a missionary but who did not have the benefit of a personal pre-resurrection experience with Jesus. His writings depended primarily upon the leading of the Holy Spirit and divine revelation.

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<sup>10</sup> Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, Chapter 1.

A new scriptural hermeneutic arises from several sources of the missional concept. Anderson sets up a contextual lens for interpreting the scriptures that utilizes the contrast of two churches. The first perspective is the obedient and missional Church of Antioch. The second is the entrenched and disobedient Church of Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> This contrast points to the active movement and inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the primary source of authority for the early Church rather than a reliance upon the written texts. Leslie Newbigin describes his use of this type of hermeneutic “We do not take statements at their face value, even the statements of Scripture.”<sup>12</sup> Karl Barth’s influence on the missional concept is unmistakable. His emphasis on the word of God as an encounter with the living God rejects the notion that scripture apart from the working of the Spirit is by itself authoritative for the Church. Barth rejected this form of protestant papal authority, claiming that for them, “The Bible was now grounded upon itself apart from the mystery of Christ and the Holy Ghost.”<sup>13</sup> Stone observes a growing hermeneutic consensus among biblical scholars as he sites Bultman’s insistence that “what we discover in the New Testament reports is not the faith of Jesus but the faith of his followers.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, Preface.

<sup>12</sup> Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. Kindle Edition, 1989), 149.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.2: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, edited by G.W. Bromily and T.F. Torrance, translated by Harold Knight, (New York: T&T Clark International, 1936), 522.

<sup>14</sup> Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), Chapter 4.

The early Church looked to the Holy Spirit for direction and understanding. Much of their journey to understand the meaning of Jesus' life and death was without the benefit of a written account. The tools of biblical criticism, when applied to the New Testament, sharpen the image of an emerging missional Church that was discovering how to listen to and be led by the Holy Spirit. These observations support a new imagination regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in the early church as its primary source for revelation. This perspective does not eviscerate the importance of the scriptures for the Church today. Instead, it affirms that the same Holy Spirit that was active to lead and guide the early Church is the same that guides believers today.

The scriptures themselves attest to the importance of the guidance of the Holy Spirit for believer's life and practice of faith. Peter points to the primacy of the work of the Spirit in the development of the scriptures. He declares that "the writers were moved along by the Holy Spirit (1 Pt 2:22)." Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (Jn 14:26)." John reiterates this idea in his first letter, "you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things (1 Jn 2:27)." The anointing of the Holy Spirit was poured out on all who were in Christ in the early Church.

The missional concept posits a powerful hermeneutic correction to the established church: the Church is led by the Spirit of the living God, as evidenced through the written word. It is not lead by the written word as confirmed by the Spirit. The missional hermeneutic dares to affirm that God's revelation and activity did not end with the writing of the scriptures or its cannon. Instead, God guides and empowers the Church by the revelatory power of the Holy Spirit. John Wesley recognized the interplay of the Holy

Spirit and scripture, adding that the scriptures are “illuminated by historic traditions and vital faith.”<sup>15</sup> As TCUMC utilizes the Wesleyan quadrilateral to understand its theological task, it holds the scripture and the early Church history together.

### **A Missional Gospel**

The church has often misunderstood the gospel believing that it pertains strictly to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to deal with human sin. However, the missional understanding broadens the bandwidth of the gospel to connect with Jesus’ life, teachings, and ministry as a revelation of God’s kingdom and covenantal history. The gospel that Jesus preached had implications not only for one’s eternal destiny but also for how one lived in daily life. It transformed both the vertical dimension of one’s relationship with God and the horizontal relationships with one’s family, neighbors, and society. Jesus’ gospel enacted a present reality of God’s activity, even as it revealed eschatological truths. It empowered a mixed socio-economic group of subjugated people to change the world dynamically. Finally, it inaugurated a new covenant between God and the world.

The missional gospel is defined by what Jesus did and taught. The primary substance of Jesus’ message in the synoptic Gospels is the kingdom of God. Jesus told the disciples, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also because that is why I was sent” (Lk 4:43). The phrases “good news” and “kingdom” are linked together throughout the Gospels, such as “good news of the kingdom of God”

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<sup>15</sup> Cropsey, ed., *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, Paragraph 103.2.

(Lk 4:23, 8:1, 9:2). Mark describes Jesus' ministry as "proclaiming the good news of God' writing, 'The kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news'" (Mk 1:14-15). These connections show that the writers often referred to the gospel as shorthand for the message of the kingdom of God.

Knowing the particulars of God's kingdom empowers the Church with a clear and compelling gospel. The main biblical words for kingdom are *malkuth* in the Old Testament and *basileia* in the New Testament. The primary meaning of these words is the "rank, authority, and sovereignty exercised by a King."<sup>16</sup> Essentially, it is the active rule or reign of God. The kingdom is manifested as God acts on God's own authority. In other words, it is God's active governance or leadership in the universe. Just as every kingdom has a ruler, president, or king, God is the sovereign of the kingdom. God's claim to the throne will not be repealed, replaced, or recounted since God is an eternal king (1 Tm 1:17). Sanders summarizes the research on the concept of the kingdom, stating that it is "the reign of God, the 'sphere' (whether geographical, temporal or spiritual) where God exercises his power."<sup>17</sup>

The rule of God is over all of creation, the universe, and everything on this planet, including each person whether past, present, or future. Grenz adds that the kingdom of God is "a reality that people can enter, in which people are called to live, that consists in doing the will of God (Mt. 6:10; 7:21-23), and it demands a radical decision (13:44-

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<sup>16</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: scriptural studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 19.

<sup>17</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) Kindle Locations, 1892.

46).”<sup>18</sup> The Kingdom of God is enacted among those who respond to this invitation and live according to God’s kingdom authority. Bauman points out that there are three different ways that the term kingdom is used in the Gospels “(1) kingly rule of God, 2) the subjects ruled, or 3) the realm or sphere of the rule.”<sup>19</sup> It would be difficult to imagine God’s ruling authority apart from those entities, whether human, angelic, or elemental, who act according to God’s will. However, McKnight’s assertion that God’s reign is limited to those who have responded, namely the Church, misses out on the full scope of God’s authority and actions. Recognizing that humanity has rejected God’s rightful place as our king, the mission of God is to extend the boundaries of the kingdom of God into every region of existence until all things acknowledge the rightful reign of God. People are given the opportunity to experience the kingdom of God in their lives and participate in extending this kingdom to the whole world.

God’s Kingdom invades the world through the life and ministry of Jesus. His perfect obedience to the will of God demonstrated the reality of the kingdom of God. Jesus’ miracles, healings, teachings, and life transformations are evidence of the power of the kingdom, breaking into the brokenness of this world. Jesus not only spoke of the kingdom but as the second person of the trinity, he exuded in the presence of the king “Jesus came as the bearer of the claim of God’s rulership and the one who embodies the kingdom of God.”<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, it is in the person and work of Jesus that the kingdom of

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<sup>18</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 476.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Bauman *The Life and Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 147.

<sup>20</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 476.

God is witnessed and established on earth. Jesus' gospel was an invitation for people to live according to God's will.

The missional gospel moves beyond a creedal understanding as the basis for salvation. McKnight's observation on the misunderstanding of salvation by the western church points to a new understanding of the gospel. He describes the process of salvation as an A-B-A story in which God's sovereignty is restored over humanity and all of creation.<sup>21</sup> Humanity receives salvation by returning to God's reign. Entering the kingdom is centered on the person and work of Jesus as he is the King, who inaugurates the kingdom on earth. Stone points out that salvation is not simply a moment of agreement with a doctrinal theory, but instead, Jesus "summoned people to life in God's reign and invited them to convert to a distinctive way of living with each other."<sup>22</sup> The message regarding the forgiveness of sin and justification by faith is still essential to the gospel, but is provided through the mercy of God to those who enter the kingdom of God because it is Jesus "who in the final hour brings salvation."<sup>23</sup> The gospel is an invitation into the reign of God, both personally and corporately.

God's kingdom will come on earth and replace the brokenness of earthly kingdoms. It will be a time in which there will be no more sickness, disease, war, or death. God plans to bring all things under God's authority (1 Cor 15:28). However, when Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God was near, he was not just talking about the

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<sup>21</sup> McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, Chapter 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

future. He was also referring to the proximity of the kingdom in his presence and the availability of God's kingdom to those who would respond. The ramification is that through him and in him, the reign and power of God were present. As further proof, when Jesus freed people from demonic possession, he declared that this ministry was a sign that the kingdom had come among them (Lk 11:20, Mt 12:28).

### **Missional Ecclesiology - Who is Part of the Church**

The missional concept simultaneously infuses new meaning into the nature of the Church and challenges previous notions of the relationship of the Church to the world. Missional ecclesiology highlights the fact that the Church derives its purpose from the missional nature of God. Anderson simplifies this "The Church exists as the missionary people of God - that is its nature."<sup>24</sup> Leslie Newbigin adds to this concept that the Church is called to be the sign, foretaste, and instrument of God's coming kingdom.<sup>25</sup> UMC ecclesiology utilizes many of these same concepts while describing the Church as a covenant community. This section contends that the nature of the Church is as a missional covenant people who are the foretaste, sign, instrument, and agent of the kingdom of God. These renewed insights into the nature of the church, equip local churches to engage in the *missio Dei*.

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<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, Chapter 1.

<sup>25</sup> J.R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 28.

## The Church as a Missional Covenant Community

Jesus calls the Church into a new covenantal relationship that forms the basis for being a missional community. The scriptures reveal that one of God's missional strategies is to call people to enter into a covenantal relationship.<sup>26</sup> As Kline beautifully describes, "to follow the course of the kingdom is to trace the series of covenants by which the Lord administers his kingdom."<sup>27</sup> The UMC upholds the connection between the kingdom and God's covenants as it highlights, "The reign of God is expressed in God's covenants with Abraham and Sarah, the prophets, ... and the ongoing creation of a new people by the Holy Spirit."<sup>28</sup> God initiates covenant relationships throughout scripture, which both reveal God's missional intentions and invite people to partner in this work.

The covenants repeated several common elements, as seen in Jesus' ministry: a chosen leader, blood sacrifice, moral instruction, promised blessings, and commissioning. At Jesus's baptism, God identifies him as the chosen leader proclaiming, "this is my son, whom I have chosen; listen to him (Lk 9:35)." Jesus establishes the new covenant with the disciples during the Passover meal saying, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28)." He identifies his death on the cross as the sacrifice that establishes the new covenant for the Church. The communal meal is a missional act. Paul explains that "whenever you eat this bread and

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<sup>26</sup> Appendix B provides an additional example of missional covenant from the Hebrew scriptures.

<sup>27</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Cropsey, ed., *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* House, Paragraph 121.

drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor 11:26).” The sermon on the mount in Matthew and the sermon on the plain in Luke articulate a new moral code for the disciples that continues to challenge the Church today. Jesus codified a new commandment, “A new command I give you: Love one another... By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn 14:34-35). As the disciples practice the teachings of Jesus, they “bring the presence of the kingdom and its King into every corner of human life simply by fully living in the kingdom with him.”<sup>29</sup> Jesus promised the blessings of eternal life (Jn 11:25), the forgiveness of sin (Mt 26:28), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). Jesus commissioned the disciples to go into all the world, making disciples and teaching them to obey all that he had taught them (Mt 28:19-20). Jesus sent the disciples as part of God's *missio Dei* to the world, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you (John 20:21).” Jesus embodied each of these parts of the covenant as he called the Church to be a missional people of the kingdom of God.

### **The Church as Sign of the Kingdom**

Signs point to realities beyond themselves. Woodward recounts Newbigin's concept that “The Church is to be a sign of God's coming kingdom, pointing people to a reality that is right around the corner.”<sup>30</sup> Being a sign of the kingdom means that the Church indicates the reality of God's kingdom, but is not the kingdom itself. Stone

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<sup>29</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 15.

<sup>30</sup> Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 28.

emphasizes that “as the body of Christ it is a public sign of God’s glory, not its own.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus’ declared that the disciples are the light of the world (Mt 5:14-15). Woodward connects this reference to the Church’s role as a sign that exists to “point others toward God, his Son, and his future.”<sup>32</sup> As a sign of the kingdom, the Church is not a secret society or hidden reality; instead, it gives light to “everyone in the house” (Mt 5:15).

Newbigin identifies the Church is a sign of the kingdom in three ways: firstfruits, agent, and cruciform. By first fruits, he means those who are experiencing the saving work of God in their life.<sup>33</sup> People exhibit the power of God in their lives as their sins are forgiven. The Church is also the agent of the kingdom as it is “the bearer of God’s saving purpose for the whole world.”<sup>34</sup> Newbigin reiterates that the Church must not overstep its authority but fully rely on God’s power and authority. Finally, he admonishes the Church to take on the image of Jesus, who was crucified.<sup>35</sup> In essence, the sign of the Church is a cruciform witness to the activity of God. Just as Christ was obedient to God’s will even in the face of death and political opposition, the Church takes on the cross daily and follows its Lord in faithfulness before a watching world. As a cruciform Church, it cannot align itself with the powers of the world and bear faithful witness as a sign of the kingdom, “The Church is not authorized to represent the reign of God, his justice and his

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<sup>31</sup> Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, Chapter 7.

<sup>32</sup> Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 28.

<sup>33</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 86.

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

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

peace, in any other way than that in which Jesus represented it, namely by being partners with him in challenging the powers of evil and bearing in its own life the cost of the challenge.”<sup>36</sup> To this challenge, Stone adds that churches that seek to be attractive to the world, will itself be disconnected from their true nature of following in the way of Jesus.<sup>37</sup> He claims that one cannot be spiritually aligned to Christ while living to please the politics and money of the day.<sup>38</sup> He is echoing the words of Jesus, who tells the disciples that if they are to follow him, they must “take up their cross daily (Lk 9:23)”, and one cannot serve both God and money (Mt 6:24).

The Church is a sign of the kingdom only if it faithfully expresses the values, mission, and agenda of the King. The problem is that the church in America has graffitied its self-centered salvific message all over the sign of the kingdom. It no longer accurately portrays the nature and power of the kingdom. Rather than pointing the world to the reality of God’s kingdom, it points to itself. Further, while the cruciform witness of the Church may convey the reality of Christ’s death, it misses the calling to express the power of the resurrection. Jesus imparted far more than a death narrative to his followers: he cast out demons, raised the dead, healed lepers, and preached about care for one’s neighbor. His care for the poor demonstrated God’s heart for the least and the lost. The heart of God was on display in the life of Jesus and should be on display in the Church. As a sign of the kingdom, the Church must take on the actions and character of Jesus.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>37</sup> Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, Chapter 6.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

McKnight advocates that “the character of the king shapes the character of the kingdom and life for its citizens.”<sup>39</sup> As the world looks to the Church, something of the character of Jesus should be evident because of the way the Church acts and treats others. Stone exhorts the Church with the recognition that they are “called into being by that reign and in whom that reign is embodied in habits, practices, disciplines, and patterns that are intrinsically social, practical, and public.”<sup>40</sup> The Church is a sign of the kingdom if its interactions, both internal and external, are a reflection of Jesus’ actions and attitudes. The Church is a sign if its ministries connect to people's lives, and her practices demonstrate God’s kingdom reality in the world. It is through the people of God who are shaped according to God’s character that God is making the kingdom known and presented to the world. These observations point to the need for the Church to take heed of God’s character as its prime directive as a sign of the kingdom. It is God’s character that defines the sign for the Church. The Church is also more than a sign as it not only points the way to the kingdom but is “a visible people, a new society, into which persons may be invited and formed.”<sup>41</sup>

### **The Church as Foretaste of the Kingdom**

The opening paragraph for the UMC theological and doctrinal standards states that the church is “Living in a covenant of grace under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we

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<sup>39</sup> McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 133.

<sup>40</sup> Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, Kindle Locations, 1436.

<sup>41</sup> Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, Kindle Locations, 3919-3920.

participate in the first fruits of God's coming reign and pray in hope for its full realization on earth as in heaven."<sup>42</sup> Firstfruits are a foretaste of God's kingdom that is breaking into the world. Those who repent and receive the forgiving grace of Christ are part of this foretaste, not only individually but corporately as well. The Church bears the fruit of this foretaste as they "love one another, exhort one another, encourage one another, forgive one another and live in harmony with one another."<sup>43</sup> For Woodward, this is a "concrete, tangible, though not perfect, foretaste of the kingdom that is to come."<sup>44</sup> The foretaste has eschatological implications as Yoder advocates that "The people of God is called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately."<sup>45</sup> However, the Church does not experience the fullness of the kingdom as it has not been completed.<sup>46</sup> Essentially, the Church represents a growing reality that is developing into full maturity.

### **The Church as Instrument of the Kingdom**

Emil Brunner famously observed, "The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning."<sup>47</sup> As an instrument of the kingdom, the Church does not merely have missional activities; it is an operative function of God in mission to the world. John Franke

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<sup>42</sup> Cropsey, ed., *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, Paragraph 102.

<sup>43</sup> Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 28.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), Introduction ix.

<sup>46</sup> McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 96.

<sup>47</sup> Kendra Cassey Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford Press, 2010), 64.

summarized the concept of the Church as instrument saying, “God calls forth a community to participate in the divine mission as an instrument and witness of God’s love for the world.”<sup>48</sup> The church is used by God to accomplish the *missio Dei*. Linguistically, the instrumental use of a term generally indicates the object with which an action is done. As an example, a person might use a hammer to drive a nail into wood. It also brings to mind the concept of a musical instrument through which a musician expresses music. The Church is not the intended result of God’s mission, but instead, it is a tool in the hand of God. Guder applies a trinitarian theology of mission as the basis for understanding instrumental nature of the church, “God the Father has called the church into existence, purchased her through the blood of Jesus, and empowers her by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of extending the kingdom of God into the world.”<sup>49</sup> As an instrument of God’s mission, the church does not exist for itself. Barrett reiterates this point in saying, “the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness.”<sup>50</sup>

### **The Church as Agent of the Kingdom**

The term agent is used in missional literature to describe the Church as a commissioned representative by God to the world. Paul identifies the Church’s role as God’s agent as he says that believers are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:20). However,

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<sup>48</sup> John Franke, Class lecture, May 5, 2015, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena.

<sup>49</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Newbigin distances the church from an advocacy position as he states, “The Church is not so much the agent of the mission as the locus of the mission.”<sup>51</sup> He contends that the church is comprised of those whom God has called to “become part of a community which claims no masterful control of history, but continues to bear witness... as the place where the risen life of Jesus is made available for others.”<sup>52</sup> He emphasizes that the church did not initiate mission, nor is mission any particular activity of the church but that it is the “presence of a new reality, the presence of the Spirit of God in power.”<sup>53</sup> For Newbigin, the Church is an agent as the location of the sovereign presence of God.

However, the church as an agent of the kingdom can not be limited to a passive role. While the Church is not the starting point for mission, it is sent to join in God’s mission. Jesus established the basis for this commission as he prayed, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (Jn 17:18). Rather than centering solely on the aspects of God’s holiness, which moves the church in the direction of being set apart from the world, the sending nature of God defines the nature of the Church as a participant with God’s missional activity in the world. As David Fitch describes, “God is at work in all the places we already inhabit... If we truly believe God is at work in the world, we must take the time to pay attention, listen, and discern what God is doing in the lives of those around us.”<sup>54</sup> A missionary God has called a missionary people join

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<sup>51</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 119.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> David E. Fitch and Geoff Holsclaw, *Prodigal Christianity: 10 Signposts into the Missional Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), Signpost 2.

together in mission. Jesus identified that his followers were to be salt and light in the world. Both of these images are provocative descriptions of the transformation that is caused by their presence in the world. The Church not only receives the light of God's grace but is represents and testifies to God's kingdom values and agenda on earth.

### **Missional leadership**

John Maxwell has famously said that "everything rises or falls on leadership."<sup>55</sup> The effect of great leadership can be seen in many areas of society, whether in business, politics, or the church. Missional leadership is not management or business leadership for the institutional church; it is a partnership in God's work in the world. Those who are missional leaders in the kingdom are those who take their cues from God and reflect the nature and character of God as their leader. Leadership in the missional church is charismatic, global, strategic, and manifests God's character.

### **Charismatic Leadership**

The missional church is charismatic in that it relies on God's gifts to equip the whole church for mission. The early Church recognized that there were a variety of gifts and roles given by the Holy Spirit to the church "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, to equip his people for works of service" (Eph 4:11-12). There are a few things that are worth noting about this passage. The first is that Christ did not give all of the authority and responsibility for the mission

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<sup>55</sup> "Meet John." The John Maxwell Company. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Dec. 2016.

of the church to one individual. Instead, multiple people are given gifts for the benefit of the whole. No single church leader or pastor is responsible for the mission of the church. The second note is that these gifts do not operate separately from one another. Each of these equipping roles acts in an interrelated way to support one another. Paul uses the imagery of a body to describe the relationship of the gifts in the church (1 Cor 12). Just as one part of the body needs the other parts to function effectively, the Church needs to engage in mutually supportive and accountable leadership.

Lastly, each of these gifts is necessary for the church. This passage highlights five primary roles in the equipping of the church: apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher. These five gifts provide the foundational elements that are needed to equip the Church to accomplish its mission. Woodward describes these roles saying that “each of these five equippers and the ministries they represent are the very mechanism for achieving mission and ministry effectiveness as well as Christian maturity.”<sup>56</sup> Apostles are the visionaries who go and initiate ministry with new people. Prophets are those who speak God’s word and exhortation. Evangelists are the recruiters who call people into a new relationship with God. Pastors provide connection, nurture, and care to believers. Teachers provide instruction and understanding that equips the church for ministry. The mission of the Church can not operate without these functions. Local churches need to look to God’s provision in these areas and disseminate the roles and responsibilities of the church to the many individuals whom God gifts for its mission.

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<sup>56</sup> Woodward, 58.

TCUMC has relied on the leadership of their pastor to provide all that is needed for the church to thrive. While the pastoral role is a critical component of God's gifts for the church, it is not sufficient on its own. The church has been sorely missing the full complement of gifts described in Ephesians 4. For the church to be faithful to God's mission, each of these five gifts needs to be developed for ministry.

### **Global Leadership**

Missional leaders move the church to embrace all people with inclusivity and diversity. God's ultimate vision for the Church is revealed in Scripture: "persons from every tribe and language and people and nation... to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on earth" (Rv 5:9-10). The kingdom of God is made of people from every tribe. The Church must align itself with God's ultimate purpose, which is to gather people from every tribe and tongue who gloriously praise God together. Soong-Chan Rah points out the tragedy of the current situation with the churches in America "The danger of the Western, white captivity of the church is an excessive individualism and personalism that reflects the narcissism of American culture rather than the redemptive power of the gospel message."<sup>57</sup> Brenda McNeil further observes the shortsightedness of the American church "We understand that there is something of God in every person and every culture."<sup>58</sup> Missional leadership empowers all whom God calls

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<sup>57</sup> Rah, Soong-Chan, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 33.

<sup>58</sup> Salter McNeil, Brenda, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 69.

to minister from the vast diversity of humanity. Global leadership renews the church's understanding of itself in light of God's mission for the world.

Paul writes that at the cross God's purpose was "to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Eph 2:15-16). This verse states clearly that Christ's death reconciles humanity to God and one another. Christ's ministry of reconciliation transforms both individuals and communities. His sacrifice reconciles the people of the earth with one another. Human brokenness from which mistrust and manipulation are created is being replaced as the church faithfully engages in healing interpersonal brokenness through God's grace and forgiveness. In this way, the cross transforms ethnic tensions with the love of God. Paul describes the *missio Dei* in this way: "he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:19-20). The message is dynamically different from a gospel of personal salvation; it is a gospel of reconciliation into which all of humanity is called.

In light of Christ's sacrifice, TCUMC is called to pursue forgiveness and reconciliation. The church will need to approach its neighbors with humility, rather than with the bitterness of being displaced White people in a racially tense community. A renewed understanding of God's perspective of the world and its various racial, ethnic, and cultural diversities may help adjust the congregation's attitudes so they might be able to reach its community. The church will need to confront its internal attitudes of prejudice, which prevent them from entering into ministry with the surrounding

community. In the past, TCUMC supported the sending of missionaries to other countries, but now the world has moved next door.

### **Strategic Leadership**

God's covenantal approach with humanity demonstrates a strategy of consistently choosing the small to accomplish big things. Some notable examples of this strategy are Moses, David, and Gideon. Each of these individuals had a minimal power index when they were called, yet God used them in powerful ways. God used these leaders as catalysts to spark faithfulness among God's people, inspire them to pursue God's missional agenda, and to renew God's covenant. These covenants were not for these leaders alone; through them, God's mission extended to all people in the world.

Jesus called to himself a small group of disciples out of the multitudes in Israel that he used to accomplish his kingdom work. The disciples were not highly esteemed in the eyes of the political or economic or religious elite. However, these became the core group from which Jesus would change the world. These were the ones that Jesus chose to bring the message to the whole of Israel during his earthly ministry, and then to the ends of the earth after his resurrection. Their witness and ministry gave rise to the church, the largest organization on the planet. Recognizing the small to large strategy of God, it makes sense to work with a small group of faithful individuals to move into the kingdom realities of God as the primary arena from which to realign the direction of the institutional church.

## **Missional Leadership Traits**

Traits are described as characteristics that can be evidenced in one's behavior. God's traits are revealed through divine actions and attitudes toward creation and humanity. Six missional traits are evident through an examination of Scripture. These traits provide guidance for understanding God's missional agenda for the Church. God's missional traits are relational, missional, incarnational, vital, transformational, and revelational. Missional leaders emulate God's traits. This is a natural part of discipleship, whereby the character of God is increasingly developed within the believer. The missional church is led by those leaders whose lives exhibit the missional traits of God.

Jesus demonstrated God's missional traits as he lived in obedience to God. He taught the disciples to live into the character of God as children emulate their parents (Mt 5:45). He urged his disciples to grow close to God through prayer, fasting, silence, reading, and meditation on scripture. He gave them authority to do the works that he did and sent them to demonstrate God's traits to others through ministries such as healing the sick, providing food to the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and visiting those in prison (Mt 25:31-46).

God leads the church in mission because it is part of God's nature. The missional church follows the example of Jesus by living into God's missional traits. God's kingdom breaks into the life of the church when its members redirect their energies from institutional survival toward living into God's missional traits. Each of these six traits will be further described in the next chapter.

PART THREE  
MISSIONAL PRACTICE

## CHAPTER 4:

### A PREFERRED FUTURE FOR TCUMC

At a church council meeting at TCUMC, a long-standing member of the congregation emphatically stated: “our focus now needs to be to take care of our people, we cannot do too many things.” This sentiment, which was echoed by several church members, exemplifies the challenges of a traditional church that has become jaded and has insulated from the *missio Dei*. These attitudes are evidence of the challenges identified in chapter one. There is an urgent need for the congregation to move toward being God’s missional people rather than focusing on institutional survival. TCUMC has the opportunity to move into a bright missional future in which the members partner with God to go beyond the walls of the church in ministry to people in the community.

This chapter describes a project that navigates TCUMC through a process of transformation from a traditional to a missional congregation. The theological foundations from chapter three help to identify changes that are needed to the existing structures and leadership of the congregation to strengthen this transformation. The project invites church leaders to participate in the *missio Dei* by partnering with God to connect people in the community through new and existing relationships. These connections will create opportunities for them to experience the transformative power of

the six missional traits as they experiment together in faithful missional ministry. This chapter describes the six missional traits that will inform the project's activities. It addresses the missional structure and leadership that are needed to support the project. It identifies the shift from an institutionally bounded set to a missionally centered set orientation. Finally, it defines the traditional to missional project at TCUMC.

### **The Six Missional Traits**

The six missional traits are the quintessential missional elements that stem from God's nature. These traits confront the shortcomings of the traditional church. A trait is an identifiable characteristic expressed in action. The use of the term trait ties together the missional nature of God with identifiable behaviors that the missional church is called to live into as they grow in the likeness of God. This section describes the six traits and identifies the changes that need to happen for the church to be faithful to the *missio Dei*. These traits are comprised of both vertical components that connect God and humanity, as well as horizontal components that connect the church and world. The project will apply these traits as a guide for missional action with a select group of leaders. The descriptions below identify how these traits emanate from the nature of God, are seen in Jesus's ministry, experienced by the disciples, and pursued in a missional church.

### **Missional**

God's missional nature provides a direction for the Church to align itself with God's kingdom agenda for the world. God is missional, meaning that sending and being sent is a core part of God's nature. God, the Father, sends the Son into the world (Jn

20:21). The Father and the Son send the spirit (John 15:26). The sending or mission of God operates to demonstrate God's love to the world (Jn 3:16). This mission is a natural outworking of God's core nature of love that emanates from within the trinity to the world. It is a mission to reconcile the world to God's self. Significantly, God is not static but dynamic in relation to the world. God does not merely compel people to come and worship, but instead, God rushes to embrace them.

Jesus understood himself as one who was sent by God. He prayed, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world (Jn 17:18)." This prayer acknowledges his mission and that of the disciples. He impressed the sending nature of his ministry upon the disciples when he sent them into the surrounding villages (Mt 10, Lk 10). They were sent to go and do the same ministry of preaching, healing, and casting out demons that they had practiced with Jesus. The disciples were capable of doing this work because they had been with Jesus and were sent to accomplish his work, not their own. Jesus taught his disciples that their primary concern should be the fulfillment of God's will on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10). This statement sets the agenda for the work of the disciples as God's mission, not their own.

Missional theology has helped to redefine the primary purpose of the church. God calls the church to participate in God's mission, not to further the church's own agenda. McNeal explains that Jesus' word for church, *ekklesia*, in Mathew 16:18 describes an assembly of people who were both called out and given responsibility for the welfare of

the community.<sup>1</sup> The church operates as those whose gathering is for the intent of accomplishing God's mission in the community. Its focus is beyond itself toward God's mission. McNeal further clarifies, "God established the church as an expression of the Kingdom for the people of God as they partner with him in his redemptive mission in the world."<sup>2</sup> These pull into focus the concept of the church as the missional agent of God's kingdom agenda in the world. Roxburgh adds that "A congregation must become a place where members learn to function like cross-cultural missionaries rather than be a gathering place where people come to receive religious goods and services."<sup>3</sup> The point is that God's kingdom work is much larger in scope than the interests and concerns of the institutional church. The missional calling is for the church to align itself with God's kingdom agenda in the world and not with the agenda of institutional survival. Jürgen Moltmann helps to frame the issue in proper context when he points out that "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."<sup>4</sup> A direct implication of this fact is that the church is sent to enter into the places where people live in the community rather than asking the community to enter the church.

TCUMC can look to its denominational forefather as a great example of this type of missional calling. John Wesley is known for stating that the world is his parish. This

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<sup>1</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Kingdom Come: Why We Must Give Up Our Obsession with Fixing the Church and What We Should Do Instead* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, Issue 5.

<sup>4</sup> Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 27-28.

sentiment conveyed to the early Wesleyan movement that they were not to be satisfied to minister only to those who were inside the walls of the church. Instead, he took the gospel into the streets, the coal mines, and on the open road, wherever it was that the spirit of God directed him. As part of the missional project, church leaders will be asked to identify where they are being called to go in the community. They will then be sent to connect with those outside of the church. The missional practice challenges the church to address its rigid self-serving structures. The church will need to realign its resources to live into God's mission rather than its agenda of institutional survival. Rather than asking church leaders to serve on church committees to serve the church, the missional project will recruit, train, resource, and send people to go out from the church.

### **Relational**

The relational trait emerges from God's relationship within the trinity and with the world. The Bible affirms that God is love and can be known in relationship. One example of this is God's self-revelation to Moses in on Mount Sinai, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6). The Hebrew word for love in this verse is *hesed*, which describes a loving relationship between two persons.<sup>5</sup> It cannot be said of one person alone; it requires a relationship. Accurately, it describes the loving relationship between God and God's covenant people. God rescued them from slavery "God's loving-kindness is that

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<sup>5</sup> Norman H. Snaith, as reproduced from Alan Richardson *ed.*, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: MacMillan, 1951), 136-7.

sure love which will not let Israel go.”<sup>6</sup> Essentially, God’s love is the foundation on which the covenant relationship is established. It is a core nature of God demonstrated through many loving actions toward people, even though they may act in ways that tear at the fabric of their relationship.

Jesus’ ministry employed a strategy of loving relationships. He intentionally developed friendships with the disciples through which they experienced God’s love. He described love this way, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13). As they spent time eating, drinking, walking, and talking together, they grew in their friendship and love for one another. Jesus gave the disciples only one command “Love one another” (Jn 15:12). Jesus also taught his disciples the relational strategy when he sent them in pairs to the nearby villages to connect with a person of peace. They stayed with this person in their house, eating and drinking what was offered. This was a strategic step in their ministry. Through these critical friendships, they developed opportunities to connect with that person’s family and neighborhood. The social network of family and friends that a person has is sometimes referred to as a person’s *oikos* coming from the Greek word for household. Missional leaders such as Roxborough encourage churches to utilize these natural social networks as they connect with their communities in ministry.

The church is called not only to receive God’s love but also to extend love to others. As TCUMC church leaders move out into the community, it makes sense to consider their natural networks and affinities as starting points for ministry connections.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

These relationships may very well be the first people with whom God invites them to do ministry. Developing intentional relationships confronts the church's isolation and the challenge of culture. Through the project, they will come to know the diverse people who make up the community. Approaching new neighbors with an attitude of love rather than distrust begins to open the bridges toward a brighter missional future. Missional churches develop relationships with the people who live in the community rather than asking them to come to the church.

### **Incarnational**

The doctrine of the incarnation is essentially a description of a missionary God who will go to any length to reach people. God joins in the human journey throughout the scriptures. In the incarnation, God completes what was begun when mankind was created in God's own image. This physical act irrevocably joins God to the human story. Roxburgh notes that the incarnation is "the key to understanding all God's activities with, through, in, and among us. It points toward an answer to the question of where God is to be found."<sup>7</sup> The Apostle John describes the incarnation saying, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). He is intentionally alluding to the tabernacle that God instructed Moses to construct as a way for people to know that God was with them. Additionally, Paul describes the incredible humility of God, who is willing to be constrained in the human form of Jesus (Phil 2:6-8).

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<sup>7</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, Chapter 2.

Jesus is the embodiment of the incarnational trait of God. In the person of Jesus, God came in the flesh and into the mess of our world so that we might see him and know who he is. God enters into the very real spaces in which we live. Through Jesus, God experiences firsthand the ordinary struggles of life. During the first few years of Jesus' life, his family experienced homelessness, fled to a foreign country as refugees, were oppressed by military occupation, and dealt with poverty. These realities put an end to the idea that God is removed from our suffering. Through the incarnation, God re-establishes the divine link with humanity through the person of Jesus.

Jesus taught the disciples to practice incarnational ministry. As Jesus sends the disciples into the villages, he instructs them to stay in the house of the person of peace and not to move around from house to house (Lk 10:6-7). By entering into someone's home and staying with a receptive person, the disciples became intimately aware of the issues that the people were facing. It gave them a chance to experience life with them and to share in their common meal. By not moving, from place to place, the people in the household got to know the disciples as they shared in life together. Their incarnational ministry was the basis from which they engaged in ministry.

Paul highlights two important characteristics of incarnational ministry. The first is adaptability. Using his life as an example, he declared, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:22). Incarnational ministry requires church leaders to adopt the ethically neutral customs, behaviors, and cultural distinctiveness of the people group they are reaching. Secondly, Paul reasons, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:20). Ambassadors do not represent themselves, but instead, they are

representatives of their home country and its leader. As the Church, believers have the privilege of representing God and God's kingdom to the world.

There are several significant implications of the incarnational trait for the church. Missional church leaders are attentive and adaptive to the context in which they live. Early Church leaders understood that "The Incarnation was political because it made plain that the God we meet in Christ cannot be separated from the concrete realities of how we live in our particular place, time, and culture."<sup>8</sup> Missional leaders study the context in which they are engaged for insights and opportunities to connect with people and share God's love. God's incarnational trait sends the Church to be present in the lives of the people in every community. Believers are to join in with the various groups and circles of friendships that surround them.

The incarnational trait will cause TCUMC to deal with a challenge of the heart. As leaders of the church join with the people groups in the community, they will need to leave the isolation of the church institution and connect with the lives of those in the community. Incarnational ministry is at odds with institutional survival strategies that market the church worship services and programs to entice new consumers. It also is contrary to efforts that duplicate community events and programs within the walls of the church buildings. Instead, it challenges the church to be present in the lives of others. Missional leaders use their gifts, talents, and interests to make meaningful connections in the community. One of the best ways to show care for somebody is to just be present with

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<sup>8</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, Chapter 6.

them. TCUMC leaders will be encouraged to join in with a group of people who meet outside of the church and are doing something that they also enjoy.

### **Vital**

God is a God of life. God desires for people to experience abundant life as part of the kingdom of God. The theme of life can be traced throughout scripture. In the beginning, God created life. God intimately breathed life into humanity. The introduction of sin into the world, limited life as humans, were denied access to the tree of life (Gn 3:20). The human saga on earth is a journey to joyfully return to paradise, a place with a river of life that flows from the throne of God (Rv 22:1). Those who have received salvation have their names written in the book of life. McNeal asserts that “In the end, all of this discussion boils down to the good news about the life-giving power of the Kingdom. It is life that God desires for us.”<sup>9</sup>

The Gospel of John testifies of Jesus that “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind” (Jn 1:4). John uses the imagery of light, pushing back the darkness as a description of the life of God in the person of Jesus that overcomes death. In the same way that darkness yields to the power of light, so death gives way to life in Christ. Jesus came to give life to all who would believe (Jn 3:16). His healing ministry brought new life to those he touched, particularly those who were considered untouchable in his day. The blind were made to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk. Each of these healing experiences dramatically improved the life situation for each one. Jesus

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<sup>9</sup> McNeal, *Kingdom Come*, 180.

summarizes this as he explains that the reason that he came was so that people would have life to the fullest (Jn 10:10). Jesus' resurrection confirms God's promise of eternal life. The prophetic description of his ministry (Lk 4:18) describes Jesus' ministry as bringing "good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, sight for the blind, and liberation for the oppressed, and to bind up the brokenhearted" (Is 1:1-2). Those who experienced his life, his touch, his words, were invigorated by the life of God. The disciples may have marveled at Jesus' words, "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25). He also imparted this life-giving ministry to them, "proclaim the gospel, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give" (Mt 10:8). Jesus expected his disciples to participate with God in bringing life to the communities where they were sent.

The missional church brings life to its community. It blesses people in a variety of ways to bring healing, value, and assistance to those in need. This echoes the intention of Jeremiah living in exile, who is instructed by God to seek the peace and prosperity of the community (Jer 29:7). Too often, churches see themselves as the ones that need to be blessed and create ways to absorb the resources, time, energy, and money of the people in the community. Missional churches reverse this trend by providing life-giving ministry to the whole community, not only to those who are in the church. McNeal argues, "We must realize that the Kingdom saga focuses primarily on the welfare of the community, not on the church."<sup>10</sup> This affirmation provides a helpful corrective to the expanded version of the mission statement of the UMC, which claims that "Local churches provide the most

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<sup>10</sup> McNeal, *Kingdom Come*, 72.

significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.”<sup>11</sup> Often this statement is read to mean that the focus of ministry is on the church campus. However, the statement could more correctly describe a church as a hub or gathering point from which disciples are sent to bless the world. The vital trait points to the need for churches to reverse their practice of discipleship. Rather than trying to get people to join the church and participate in its committees, the church is sent to be a blessing.

### **Transformational**

The essential meaning of the verb transform is to change. God powerfully changes chaos into order and darkness into light. It is in God's nature to be transformational. God changes the broken, dark, and unjust things of our world by divine healing, light, and justice. The kingdom of God is on the offensive, assaulting the powers of the kingdom of darkness. McNeal emphasizes that “The Kingdom of Heaven is an invading force, expanding the rule and reign of God against a dark kingdom that will inevitably collapse.”<sup>12</sup> The authority to drive back the forces of darkness is part of God’s kingship. God’s eschatological victory establishes God’s right to judge humanity and all creation.

Throughout the Bible, God instructs the covenant people to pursue justice. God's laws for the people included instruction regarding the use of honest scales because “I am a just God” (Lev 19:36). Isaiah challenges the people “Is not this the kind of fasting I

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<sup>11</sup> Cropsey, ed., *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church House*, Paragraph 120.

<sup>12</sup> McNeal, *Kingdm Come*, 170.

have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke” (Is 58:6). The people had mistaken the notion of fasting as only an external ritual that somehow satisfied God’s requirements of them. However, what God was demanding of them was to live rightly toward one another and to practice a religion that brought economic and civil justice to all.

Jesus demonstrated the transformational trait in his life and ministry. He announced that his ministry would “proclaim freedom to the prisoners and set the oppressed free” (Lk 4:18). Jesus cast out demons and removed the chains of injustice and oppression. Jesus’ healing ministry set people free from their infirmities. His ministry with Matthew and Zacchaeus set them free from their greed. His forgiveness of the woman caught in adultery freed her from punishment and restored her position in society. His healing of the man born blind freed him from his life of begging for aid. Jesus’ righteous anger at those who were exchanging currency in the temple courts liberated those who were being economically exploited.

Transformation happens both internally within a person and externally in the larger society. At the core of Jesus' message about the kingdom is the action step of repentance *metanoia*. Repentance is a willful and deliberate change from one’s former attitudes and behaviors to align with God’s direction and will. John Kotter recognizes that sometimes the need to change is not apparent except to the leader. In this case, he suggests that a leader needs to reframe the narrative of an organization to present the pressing need for change.<sup>13</sup> The complacency of the religious leaders in Jesus’ time had

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<sup>13</sup> Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 38.

led to a deep spiritual decay among the people. Jesus reframes the narrative of the religious leaders and exposes their need for repentance.

Jesus instructed the disciples to exercise the transformational trait. Bestowing them with kingdom authority over demons, injustice, and oppression, they were sent into the villages. When they returned to Jesus from their mission, they were amazed that as they proclaimed the good news, "even the demons submit to us in your name" (Lk 10:18). Jesus used the metaphors of salt and light to describe the transforming work of his disciples. Salt is a change agent, transforming the things that it touches. It has several profound characteristics: it enhances the soil for growth, changes the boiling and freezing point for water, and enhances the taste of food. Jesus also uses light as a metaphor to reinforce the truth that God's blessings are not just for the disciples. They are to extend these gifts to others, penetrating society. Light exposes hidden things and eradicates the darkness. As long as the light is absent, the darkness flourishes, however, in the presence of even a modest amount of light, the darkness dissipates. Jesus tells the disciples that they are to be as a lamp on a lampstand, not hidden under a bucket (Mt 5:15).

Unfortunately, the light of God's people is often hidden within the walls of the church rather than on full display to the world. McNeal describes God's kingdom as a future reality that instigates a current crisis. The world is in crisis as its temporary authority is being dismantled by the kingdom of God. The church is called to move out of its comfort zones to partner in God's transformation of the world. Missional people have hearts that are sensitive to the things that break God's. McNeal writes that "Kingdom leaders align themselves with kingdom priorities and purposes and allow the kingdom to

focus and guide our lives.”<sup>14</sup> The prophets describe the two primary types of things that lay heavy on God's heart. The first is for people to restore to a right relationship to God. The second is for humanity to live in right relationship with one another. The disparity between persons is seen in various forms of violence, poverty, brokenness, and injustice. God's anger burns against those who would distort justice or use their power to tilt the scales in their favor. Economics and justice are often linked together. Los Angeles County Supervisor, Mark Riddley Thomas, observed that “Involuntary poverty is violence against our fellow man.”<sup>15</sup> The point is that kingdom people are shaped by God’s transformational trait and will not only recognize that these issues break God’s heart, but also recognize that they are sent to participate with God in righting these wrongs. The missional church exposes brokenness and injustice in its community and seeks God’s wholeness for these situations.

TCUMC will need to live into the transformational trait as it transitions into a missional congregation. Methodists are encouraged to pursue this trait from its founder John Wesley. His movement confronted the harsh living conditions of the coal miners in England. Their work helped to end child labor and improve worker’s rights. The practice of the early Wesleyan movement was to gather for accountability both for acts of personal and social holiness. For Wesley, there could be no personal holiness apart from social holiness. Not only did they ask if a person spent time reading the scriptures, but also if they had visited people in the hospitals and prisons.

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<sup>14</sup> McNeal, *Kingdom Come*, 143.

<sup>15</sup> Presentation at the Homeless Symposium at the University Southern California, May 2018.

The transformational trait confronts the church's sense of security and authority. Having enjoyed a partnership with the city founder for its past, TCUMC needs to shift to trusting in God's power and authority for its future. TCUMC must address a much broader scope of concerns than its institutional growth. Rather than counting how many people attended a particular event. The missional church might count how many people's lives are improved in its ministries. The transformational trait may push the church to be at odds with civic leaders, but the missional church cannot align itself with the powers of the world and bear faithful witness as a sign of the kingdom. The church bears witness to the authority and power of Christ rather than for itself. Newbigin points out that "The Church is not authorized to represent the reign of God, his justice, and his peace, in any other way than that in which Jesus represented it, namely by being partners with him in challenging the powers of evil and bearing in its own life the cost of the challenge."<sup>16</sup> The missional church bears the responsibility of being the messenger and agent of God's reign that has and continues to break into the world. This new posture calls the church to live into new kingdom relationships with people, values, society, and justice. Some might question if believers have the authority to confront the evils of our day in each of our communities. It is common to think that the church and the community are very separate and distinct spheres of influence that should not overlap. However, this separation is a modern idea and would be a very foreign concept in Jesus' day. Jesus fully expected that his disciples would go forth under his authority as they taught and accomplished what he had commanded them to do. This authority is further emphasized by Jesus' affirmation

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<sup>16</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 135.

that he will be with the church until “the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20). The church will need to take on its proper authority in a broken world rather than seek its own security.

### **Revelational**

God’s revelational trait emphasizes that God is not silent. The fact that God speaks is an essential part of God’s nature. God communicates for God’s benefit and that of creation. God has continued to speak even from the first moment of creation. The word revelation means to reveal or uncover something previously unknown. Isaiah records God saying, “my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Is 55:11). When God chose to make humanity, God said: “Let us make mankind in our image” (Gn 1:26). God is talking in the first person plural, meaning that God communicates within the trinity.

God chooses to reveal God’s self to humanity. The scriptures are a witness to the experience of God speaking to humanity. They record a thread through the history of God’s interactions with humanity. God speaks to individuals: Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Hagar, Isaiah, just to name a few. These conversations define the patriarch’s understanding of God, themselves, and God’s will for the people. The prophets also uphold the communicating nature of God. God worked through Elijah to demonstrate power over the Baals, reveal that God is real and that God speaks. Similarly, Isaiah contrasts the “mute and dumb idols” to the true God who speaks (Is 44).

Jesus is the revelation of God. John recognized the revelatory nature of God in Jesus when he described Jesus as the word or *logos* of God that became flesh (Jn 1:14).

He identifies Jesus as a quintessential part of the creation story by which God speaks all things into existence. *Logos* is the base for the English word logic and relates to God's divine reason. Essentially, it is the underlying principles and governing laws that hold the universe together. John explains that everything is made according to *logos*. He continues to explain that *logos* took on human form in the person of Jesus. Jesus did not just preach God's words, or do godly things, but is the revelation of God's self. John became convinced that Jesus is God as he experienced him in their travels together.

Jesus reveals the will of God. "In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1-2a). There can be no doubt that Jesus came to preach the gospel. In the first chapter of Mark, Jesus preached the good news with the accompanying signs of healing and casting out demons. So many people came that it felt that the "whole town gathered at the door" (Mk 1:33). Jesus could easily have stayed there and continued this work as the disciples expected him too. However, Jesus instructs the disciples, "Let us go somewhere else - to the nearby villages - so I can preach there also. That is why I have come" (Mk 1:39). Jesus understood that preaching of the gospel was his central mission. As Jesus preached, people were invited to repent of their sin and enter the kingdom of God. Through Jesus' preaching, those elements that were contrary to God's kingdom were expelled. The proclamation of the kingdom put the world on notice that God's sovereign authority is breaking into our world.

Jesus sent the disciples ahead of him to preach the good news to all the places that he was about to go (Lk 10). The message they shared connected with the people who had welcomed them into their homes. They conveyed the gospel in ways that were relevant to

the hearers. They preached after first connecting with context by way of the other missional traits of relational, incarnational, and vital ministry. The disciple's ministry of proclamation is infused with power at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. They began to witness to the power of God in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). On the day, they learned that God speaks in every language. The powerful manifestation of the speaking in tongues reveal God's desire for all people to know the message of God's works. Coincidentally, the creation story and the birth of the church are both initiated by proclamation.

Excellent communication connects in a meaningful way with the intended audience. When the church communicates the gospel, it reveals God's truths in concert with missional traits of God. Proclamation explains God's kingdom work, which is best understood in the context of holistic ministry. Building trusting relationships provide opportunities for sharing the message. The church needs to be creative in the ways that it engages people with the message of the gospel. Just as Jesus and the prophets used a wide variety of styles and approaches to convey God's message, the church needs to utilize every available tool to communicate the gospel, such as art and technology. The missional church seeks ways of expressing God's invitation to experience the love and power of God in their lives. It does not seek to invite people to a church building to experience God.

The revelational trait addresses the challenge of theology for TCUMC. Rather than perpetuating a propositional gospel message, it will express the kingdom gospel as it discovers the relevant language through relationships in the community. The gospel is not only verbal, but it also has the power to transform lives in every aspect of life. It is not

limited to the arena of the personal salvation experience. Missional theology provides the church with a kingdom centered gospel that invites people to become citizens of God's kingdom, not simply to be forgiven of sin. The missional gospel has implications for the whole of life. This shift moves the congregation to consider God's work beyond the personal moral sphere. Instead, the kingdom Gospel places the people of God in partnership with God to bless, transform, and bear witness to God's love for all people.

As the participants in the missional project develop meaningful relationships in the community, there will be opportunities to share their life stories, values, and beliefs. The process of discipleship can only happen as one allows their life to be shaped toward Christlikeness. This process happens through times of intimate communication with God through scripture reading, prayer, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines. Participants will be able to provide a clear connection between their life struggles, and the revealed love of God in ways that engender a thoughtful and empathetic response. They will be encouraged to participate in the practice of daily scripture reading to encourage spiritual reflection and maturity.

### **Missional Structures and Leadership**

TCUMC has developed structures and leadership styles that are focused on utilizing people and resources to support its institutional growth and survival. The church will need to change these as it transitions into being a missional congregation that connects with God's mission beyond its walls. McNeal's book on changing the scorecard for the church provides three congregational shifts: from internal to external ministry focus, from programs to people development, and from church-based to kingdom based

leadership.<sup>17</sup> Applying these three shifts to the structure of the church will affect a transition in three areas: mission orientation, people development, and leadership.

Missional structures creatively send people into ministry with the hurting world. For this shift to happen, the church needs to look beyond itself to consider and prayerfully imagine where God is sending them to connect in the community. Rather than using a top-down approach, this reorientation engages grassroots efforts from a select group of leaders. TCUMC needs to support its members to experiment with developing relationships in new locations with new people. The initial phase may need some funding from the church to support people who are willing to step out of their comfort zones and connect to the community in meaningful ways. One example might be for two people to join a cooking class to develop new relationships. The church could cover the costs for this class. The small group experiment could provide the evidence and influence needed to shift the vision of the church toward a missional mindset.

Rather than developing new programs at the church, TCUMC will need to find ways of encouraging personal development for its members and the community. Each person in the congregation is uniquely called, positioned, and gifted for missional ministry. This charismatic orientation for the church is not be based on a person's status or rank but on God's unique gifting of that person. The church will need to help each person identify and grow in their missional ministry. Church members also need to be retrained in the basics of making new friends and community immersion. As members connect with their new friends, it is expected that they consider vital and transformational

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<sup>17</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, Table of Contents.

ministries. One example may be to support young mothers who desire to form a parenting support group.

Leadership for the church needs to shift from committee responsibilities to kingdom priorities. Kingdom-based leadership is polycentric rather than hierarchical. Utilizing the work of Ross, the committee structures of finance, facilities, and staffing, which exist for the maintenance of the church, need to be consolidated into a single board to reduce the expected amount of energy and hours that church members spend maintaining the structure of the institution. Restructuring the administrative council develops stewardship as God's gifts are directed toward God's mission rather than institutional survival. New accountability structures are needed for the congregation to understand the expectations for ministry. Rather than measuring attendance and membership, emphasis needs to shift toward documenting the evidence of the inbreaking of God's kingdom. An example might be a record of lives that are changed and a desire for spiritual growth. Church resources are reallocated from institutional support to resourcing persons for ministry in the community.

### **Bounded Verses Centered Sets**

A final element for missional transformation is a shift from membership to belonging. Anthropologist Paul Heibert describes two specific ways that people are considered to be members of a group: bounded centered and sets.<sup>18</sup> Bounded sets define

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<sup>18</sup> Heibert, Paul. *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), 112.

membership according to one's agreement with a set of static definable boundaries such as doctrines, behaviors, and attitudes. Bounded set thinking not only determines who is in but also clearly identifies those who are outside the community. Individuals who do not agree or who exhibit behavior that is determined to be wrong are not permitted to be in the community. A person becomes a member of the bounded set type of church when they agree to live according to the defined perimeters. Bounded set thinking is the grid by which TCUMC understands the requirements for membership to the church. There are several deficits in this way of thinking. It limits the church's focus to those who agree with them, thus negating those whom God would ask the church to reach.

In contrast, the centered set model defines belonging by one's aspiration toward a centered set of values or ideals. Centered sets are dynamic. Persons belonging to a centered set do not all have the same behaviors or agreed on doctrine. They can have differences in opinion and behavior while belonging to the same group. Belonging in this group is identified by moving in a central direction, such as toward Christ, rather than away from Him. Centered sets are fluid, living, interactive, and transformative. The missional church invites people to participate with them as a community even before they might agree on a set of beliefs and practices. Belonging rather than membership is a distinguishing mark of a missional church.

### **Traditional to Missional: The New Ministry Project**

The project initiates the transition of TCUMC from a traditional to a missional congregation. A small group of people from the church called Missionaries In Training (MIT) will learn the six missional traits and engage with each other in weekly missional

practices. Each meeting will be comprised of several consistent elements. Participants will take missional steps each week with people in the community. The intent is to begin the change from traditional to missional with this group.

The group will consist of eight to twelve people within the TCUMC congregation who are faithful, available, and teachable. Individuals can sign up to participate in this project after a missional presentation is made at the weekly worship service. The pastor can also invite individuals of different ages and ethnicities to participate to ensure that the group is representative of the broader community.

The hope for this first experimental group is to begin a strategic shift from within the leadership of the congregation toward becoming a missional congregation. The decision to start with a select group of people is an intentional decision to follow God's strategy of calling on the small to accomplish great things. This strategy is also found in Wesley's holy clubs that instigated social transformation in the communities of England. These echoes support for the idea of using a small group to begin transforming the whole congregation.

The group will spend thirteen weeks together, walking through a process of discovery. Each week the participants will be asked to read a short description of one of the six missional traits in preparation for the group meetings. During each two-hour meeting, the group will use the weekly readings, *lectio divina*, missional imagination, accountability, and instruction to change the theology and practice of the church. The gathering will also be a time for the group to check in with one another and share their missional progress. The group will provide encouragement and accountability as each person applies the missional callings to their own life and practice. Each week the group

will read the scriptures regarding the sending of the disciples from Luke 10:1-11, or Matthew 10:1-20.<sup>19</sup> This practice allows for the group to hear and center their practice on the scriptures. We will utilize personal reflective questions for these readings generally used in the practice of *lectio divina* (see Appendix C for the weekly handout sheets).<sup>20</sup> There will be a time of teaching and experimentation that will explore the six callings of the missional church. These training sessions will be geared toward brainstorming, play, and encouraging missional imagination. Each person will be tasked to engage in a missional experiment that develops along the lines of each of the weekly lessons. When the project is completed, the various missional experiments will be shared during the church worship service. The hope of celebrating their work is to encourage the whole congregation to understand and appreciate missional engagement. Participants will be invited to provide feedback at the end of the three-month process regarding their experience with their missional project. This feedback will help provide adjustments to the design of the project and shape the next cycle of the missional experiment. The team will have an opportunity to consider how they have been changed through this process. They will also be asked how the church might move toward being more missional.

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<sup>19</sup> Adapted from Roxborough, Alan. *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Adapted from Law, Eric H. F., *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 1993).

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

The missional to traditional project is a crucial part of an effort to change TCUMC into a missional congregation. The project recruited and equipped eight congregants who engaged in missional experiments in the community. This chapter provides the details for the development, implementation, and assessment of the project.

#### **Implementation**

The traditional to missional project took eleven months to complete and covered four phases: preparation, launch, project, and evaluation. The first phase was a time of preparation that took six months. This phase officially began the first week of January 2018 with a presentation to the church council about the project and its objectives. The church council is a single board that represents a missional consolidation of the management functions of the church (finance, staffing, facilities, and programs). These functions were consolidated into a single board the year before as part of the missional structure and leadership changes. The presentation to the council kept in mind the initial steps for leading change, as presented by Kotter. A sense of urgency was generated by describing the six challenges that the church is facing. It was demonstrated that without

changing the current church direction, the congregation would need to close its doors by the end of the decade. The need for the project was further emphasized by stressing the failures of the attractional mentality. Secondly, a vision for the missional transformation for the congregation was presented. This vision highlighted the potential for greater faithfulness to God's missional call and increased capacity to connect with people who are not presently part of the congregation. The council approved the project with the launch phase to begin in July. The preparation phase was a busy season of seeking church council approval, writing materials for the weekly primer, creating themed series graphics and banners, recruiting church leaders, and preparing for the next phases. Sermons were prepared to present the six missional callings to the whole congregation. Leaders were trained to facilitate conversations on each of the missional traits as part of the worship service. One month before the launch phase, banners and bulletin announcements were displayed to build excitement for the missional transformation project.

The launch phase began July 1st and lasted for one and a half months. During this phase, the congregation was introduced to the six missional traits by way of weekly sermons, and opportunities to discuss the ideas in small groups of three to four people during a reflection time on Sunday mornings. This phase concluded with a celebration in mid-August. During this season, people in the congregation were asked to sign up to be part of the missional team that would put these six callings into practice.

The primary phase for this project was an intensive three-month practice by a team of dedicated congregants. People were recruited to this group by self-selection and pastoral invitation. Those who participated were expected to be faithful, available,

teachable as well as having a heart for the community. Initially, twelve people signed up to be part of this team, but four were unable to commit to the project. The MIT team met weekly and followed a similar agenda (see Appendix C). When the team gathered, they shared one high point and one low point from the past week. The group then participated in a *lectio divina* style scriptural reading of the sending of the disciples from Luke 10:1-11. The pastor then presented the week's missional trait and a practical exercise such as brainstorming and experimenting with ways to initiate conversations with new people. The group would then consider how each of them would apply that week's lesson to their context. Each person would then plan for one or two experimental steps to engage their *oikos* community during that next week. During the third session, a therapist was invited to help the group process the internal barriers of connecting with new people. The meetings ended with each person praying for another person in the group. The MIT group read a weekly primer, which further explained each of the six missional callings. The group began meeting the second week of August and concluded in November before Thanksgiving.

Beginning with the first session, each person was asked to specify one particular group that they felt God was sending them to in the community. Each week they were asked to consider how they would put into practice the missional traits through practical experiments. I not only led the team as the pastor but was also an active participant in the group. The following descriptions of each person's efforts will provide a narrative analysis of the successes and failures of the project.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Wayne felt called to connect with people who were homeless in the community. He chose to pursue a connection with a homeless person whom he had gotten to know recently. Wayne's friendship with this homeless man developed as he met with him and his friends at the local park. On one occasion, one of these homeless friends mentioned that he would be interested in going to church, but felt uncomfortable attending because of his wardrobe, lack of religious upbringing, and bad experiences with church people. Wayne reported that they asked him where homeless people might go to have spiritual conversations. This question propelled him to collaborate with them to develop a weekly experience in the park in which Wayne would provide a simple meal of hot dogs or hamburgers, and the homeless friends would come to chat and connect around spiritual questions that they had. This venue became known as a place for people who were displaced to gather and find new friends as well as get a quick bite to eat. In an unexpected turn, housed people from the community began to attend this gathering as well. Housed people would bring food items and other donations to share. Local church leaders who heard about this gathering also started to show up and brainstorm about how they could provide practical solutions for their new homeless friends. As things progressed, there were many challenges that Wayne faced. He became aware that some of the homeless friends were coming to the gathering intoxicated, incapacitated, or were only interested in the food. The MIT team encouraged Wayne to consider ways to provide safety at the gathering while embracing the individuals who came regardless of their past behavior. The other difficulty was that the number of housed community volunteers began to outnumber those who were homeless. Their presence changed the dynamics of the gathering, pushing it toward becoming a meal program rather than a

spiritual community. This tension still exists for this gathering. Wayne's efforts yielded the most significant number of people impacted through this missional project.

Greg went to people who were in a twelve-step group. This was a natural connection for him as he is also a recovering addict. Greg identified his sponsor as his person of peace. Greg faithfully participated in the twelve-step meetings and found ways to be of service and support to those in the group. He was open with the group about his spiritual discoveries and was sensitive to listening to the struggles of his new friends. He shared that many in the twelve-step group approached him to discuss spiritual things. Although there were many opportunities within this recovery program to discuss spiritual matters, Greg was sometimes frustrated by the ways that others would try to force their point of view on others. He also struggled to help others while keeping healthy boundaries for himself.

Sean connected with the people in his workplace. He had a difficult time identifying one person with whom he connected. However, Sean listened when his coworkers expressed an interest in growing as leaders. He developed a lunchtime gathering once a week that walked through the chapters of the book "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" by Steven Covey. Through these gatherings, Sean engaged with the questions and concerns of the people in the workplace. He shared that his coworkers would often ask him to pray for their concerns. One of them asked to join him outside of work so that he could share with him about his marital concerns. Sean's efforts demonstrated fruitfulness in the relational, incarnational, and vital traits.

Carol decided to develop relationships with young parents who lived nearby. As an introvert, she had a difficult time initiating conversations with new people. However,

the few times that she did move past her comfort zone resulted in good conversations and the beginning of new relationships. These friendships resulted in a few child play dates. As it took some time to gain the courage to connect, Carol's progress was delayed. However, the fruitfulness of these relationships has grown significantly after the MIT team completed its time together.

Mary decided to attend a book club in the neighborhood. Her person of peace was an old friend who had started the book club the year before. Mary enjoyed getting to know the group of women in this group. However, the group met only twice during the time of the MIT project. Mary's continued involvement in the book club may still demonstrate fruitfulness, but it will take more time to tell.

Gail attempted to connect with a quilting club but decided that she preferred quilting on her own. She was not willing to participate in a group of people who were not Christians. In brief, there was no growth or fruit from her participation in this project.

Ron decided that he would connect with people at the nursing home where his mother was receiving care. His mother had two friends at the facility. The three of them welcomed Ron and were very receptive to his weekly visits. Ron was very eager to share his biblical knowledge with these women and began a study group with them. As the project progressed, however, it became clear that Ron was glad to share his Bible knowledge with these women but was not interested in getting to know them as people. When he was challenged to spend time listening to their stories, he dug in his heels and refused to develop reciprocal relationships. His reluctance became even more apparent when he was encouraged to spark a conversation with a new person at the nursing home.

After several weeks of encouraging him in this way, he stopped coming to the team meetings.

I decided to focus on connecting with the parents of my son's water polo team. My person of peace was the mother of my son's best friend. As we watched the kids during practice, she would share her life story and hopes for the future. The group of parents who usually stood separately with their smartphones slowly began to enter into the conversations as well. The conversations often turned toward spiritual matters with parents asking me to pray for their families and other concerns. When they discovered that I was also a pastor, they invited me to lead a group prayer before the team competitions. Parents had begun to invite me to their homes or out to eat together. The fruit of these relationships was still developing when the project ended.

The final group session was a time for celebration, encouragement, and evaluation. The group enjoyed a pot luck dinner with a delicious chocolate cake. Each person in the group was given a project evaluation form that was turned in at the end of the evening (see Appendix D). The group also took turns providing positive affirmations for each person and their contributions during the missional experiment. Everyone had an opportunity to share how they felt about their experience.

### **Evaluation**

There are two levels for evaluating the success of this project. The first level is an assessment regarding the transformative value of this project in moving members of TCUMC from a traditional to a missional orientation. The second level evaluates the quality of this particular experience of the project and whether the project reached its

intended outcomes. This project will have demonstrated merit if it has addressed the six challenges that were identified in the first chapter.

### **First Level Assessment**

Regarding the first level, McNeal's work creating a new scorecard for the church provides three vectors that are useful for evaluating this project. A vector is a term that indicates movement in a particular direction. As a traditional church moves toward being a missional congregation, it would increase its score along these three vectors.

#### **From Church Centric to Kingdom Focus**

The first vector measures the shift from church-centric to kingdom focus. McNeal's challenge is to align resources, values, personnel, and programs with God's kingdom agenda rather than a church centered agenda. There are several identifying factors in a movement toward a kingdom focus. One indicator will be if church leaders joined in the lives of non-church people. A kingdom focus would orient the church toward blessing others rather than recruitment. Another indicator would be lives that are directed by God's agenda as identified by the six missional traits rather than the church's challenges. It should also be possible to gather evidence that people in the community are experiencing something of God's kingdom in its interactions with missionally minded congregants.

The project significantly moved both the MIT group and church members forward toward a kingdom focus. A recent visitor who had heard about our outward focus was delighted to connect with a church that is moving beyond its buildings. The MIT group

spent time each week looking for ways to mobilize themselves in this direction. Each person was asked to incarnate the gospel by living into a particular social network in the community. The team brainstormed ways that each one could be a blessing in their *oikos* relationships. One practical example was a team member who blessed his community by creating a new team t-shirt logo.

These strides forward were not without struggle. There was constant tension with some of the longstanding members who pulled the group toward church centric thinking. These would ask when and how these new relationships might eventually result in new church members. There was also some resistance toward developing meaningful new relationships with people outside of the church. Although most of the MIT team grew in this area, two did not. These seem to have a general discomfort with making new friendships with non-church people in the community, and the unwillingness to let go of their perceived positions of authority and respect as church leaders.

### **From Program to People Development**

The second vector focuses on people rather than program development. Instead of creating church programs for people to attend, this vector seeks to identify ways to encourage people to grow and develop in their lives. This vector measures how people's hearts are motivated by God's agenda rather than the institutional survival. Growth along this vector would be evidenced by people making positive life choices and a reduction of self-defeating behaviors.

The project certainly provided opportunities for MIT members and the whole church to move forward along this vector. The MIT group responded to the struggles and

pains of the community. These struggles caused the team to prayerfully consider how there could be growth in these areas of life. Rather than turning these concerns into programs to bolster the church, the team considered ways of encouraging development for the people in the community. MIT participants were also encouraged and supported in their personal development each week as they came together for prayer and sharing not only as they pursued God's missional traits but in the whole of their lives. One of the team members took to heart the encouragement to become a more life-giving person by attending classes at the local community college. Sean demonstrated people's development through the weekly meeting to review Covey's book with his colleagues. This weekly gathering not only provided opportunities for personal leadership growth, but it also created occasions for deeper friendships and conversations. Carol's experiment was instrumental in helping a young couple work through a few relational difficulties.

Within the MIT group, the principle struggle with this vector was the danger of acting in ways to try and fix other people's problems rather than support others in their life development. This danger was born out in Greg's connection with the twelve-step community. He began to become excessively burdened as a few unhealthy dependent relationships developed. His desire to bless others started to work against him. Through this experience, the group recognized that there is a difference between caring for others and enabling them. The team recognized that while it is good to care for another person, it is ultimately God who does the transformative work.

## **From Church to Kingdom Based Leadership**

The third vector is a shift from church to kingdom-based leadership. This vector encourages leadership beyond the established church structures. A primary indicator would be a growth in people's desire to participate in God's *missio Dei* in the world rather than the work of the church itself. Spiritual hunger is a principal driver for this vector. A measurable indicator would be the number of believers who are released into ministry beyond the local church. Kingdom leadership would also reflect Jesus' relational style of hands-on, debriefing with the disciples rather than a top-down lecture-style directive. This vector also encourages kingdom leadership from people in the community who are not members of the church.

There were some notable steps forward along this vector. The team meetings fostered a weekly practice of spiritual reflection and prayer. Team members were asked to pray daily for one another and the people that they were connecting within the community. One person from the team whose faith in God had recently been rekindled mentioned that he found the Bible was becoming more interesting to him. He seemed genuinely shocked at this discovery. More than one of the team found that as they developed friendships with people in the community, they would be identified as a spiritual person and be asked for prayer or counseling. These testimonies indicate a kingdom leadership development with the MIT members and their social networks.

The third vector posed the most difficulty for the MIT team. Some expected that there would be dramatic conversions. One participant asked for an evangelistic script that he could share with his *oikos*. These expectations went unmet during this initial project. Part of the confusion stems from the transition from a propositional gospel message

toward a missional gospel that calls people to follow God's leadership in their lives. Many people within the various *oikos* groups exhibited spiritual hunger and growth. It is expected that this trend would continue with more time. One crucial fact emerges from an overview of this vector; those who participate in daily spiritual practices are more prepared and effective in sharing spiritual insight and scripture with those that they connect within the community.

### **First Level Assessment Summary**

The traditional to missional project for TCUMC demonstrated a significant amount of potential in moving the congregation forward in each of these three vectors. MIT team members experienced the shift from a church to kingdom centered focus resulting in many new relationships and connections with people outside the church. Project participants witnessed real-life growth and change happen in people's lives with their new friendships. There were also a significant number of people who expressed spiritual hunger both among the team members and in the broader community.

The project also clearly revealed several hurdles for traditional church members to overcome as they move toward being missional. Future iterations of this project would need to provide more ways for people to get out of their comfort zones to make new friendships in the community. One way to mitigate this obstacle would be to follow Jesus' example of sending the disciples out in pairs, instead of as individuals. Having partners go into the mission field together would provide supportive accountability as they step outside the safety of the church social network. Partnerships might also provide a safeguard against developing co-dependent relationships.

A second failure of the project was not clearly defining success for the team from the beginning. It was a challenge to reframe success for church leaders from church-centered to missional metrics. Even though there was ample evidence that God was present within the dynamic relationships that developed in the community, a couple of the team members felt disappointed that the project did not result in new church members. This failure could be mitigated by explicitly stating the three vectors as intended outcomes from the beginning.

### **Second Level Assessment**

The second level of evaluation for this project examines how well the project met its intended goals. The project was designed to address six challenges that are limiting the church. The six missional traits were identified to confront these challenges. As the scope of the project focused solely on a small group within the church, the future success for the whole church can only be estimated. Describing the MIT participant's growth in each of the six missional traits indicates the success of the project. There are also qualitative and quantitative elements that could be measured in this project.

### **Relational Trait Indicators**

The relational missional trait addressed the cultural challenge. Each of the team members developed new relationships with people in the community apart from the church. Many of these new friends were not of the same ethnicity, social background, economic circle, or even sexual orientation as the church members. The emphasis on the love of God for all people helped to propel the team toward engaging with a wide variety

of people in the community. These indicators point to the success of this missional trait in addressing this challenge.

About half of the group found it to be very natural to make new friends and begin to get to know new people. However, it was a real challenge for some to make the initial contact. The participant's ability to make new contacts seemed determined by their introversion or extroversion. The group practiced a variety of ways to greet people and start conversations. Carol was able to use these techniques in connecting with her neighbors and other mothers in the park.

### **Missional Trait Indicators**

The missional trait addressed the challenge of rigid structures. The project gave the MIT group the responsibility to go out into the community, the resources that they would need, and the autonomy to do the ministries that they felt were needed. Sean's leadership circle at the workplace and Wayne's homeless dinner ministry reflect the capacity to be creative in reaching new people. The wide variety of new ministries developed in this short time gives hope that the whole church could embrace more flexible structures to engage in ministry.

### **Incarnational Trait Indicators**

The incarnational trait addressed the heart challenge. The heart challenge restricts the impact of the church as it seeking to have people in the community to join the church rather than finding ways for the church to connect with people in the community. Incarnationality opposes the isolationist attitudes of the church. The MIT team joined in

with a group of people in the community and embodied the gospel in that context. This area yielded mixed results. Members who engaged with a people group similar to their life situations outside of the church were the most successful. Greg, for example, connected well with others who were in the twelve-step community. However, Ron found it very difficult to connect with people at the nursing home who were not believers or part of his family. The results also generally showed that deep, longstanding connections with the church worked against the ability to join in with the community. For example, Gail had a difficult time being part of a quilting club that included people who were not Christians. At the same time, Wayne, who was relatively new in his faith, did well in connecting with homeless persons who were exploring faith.

### **Vital Trait Indicators**

The vital trait addressed the challenge of practice. The practice of the church invites people to benefit the church with their time, talents, and resources. The vital trait reoriented the MIT team to consider how they could be a blessing to others. Several team members were able to identify and respond to the struggles and needs in their *oikos* groups. Greg's connection with the twelve-step community provided many opportunities to provide support to people struggling with addiction. Wayne's ministry with the homeless provided short term aid and food to people in need. MIT team conversations about this trait revealed that several members held on to a *quid-pro-quo* mentality. They wanted to give short term aid in exchange for church attendance. This area would need to be addressed more thoroughly for the congregation to shift away from this challenge. One

possibility would be to elevate the stories of those whose lives are blessed outside of the church.

### **Transformational Trait Indicators**

The transformational trait addressed the challenge of security. TCUMC has been reluctant to address issues of injustice, racism, or oppression in the community, preferring to seek its security and safety. Team members connected with people who are suffering in a variety of ways. They often shared these life stories with the group. The result was an increased awareness of people's stressful life situations and a desire to work toward change. One example was Maria, whose medical needs were being ignored by the local hospital because of her lack of health insurance. This situation raised the issues of systemic poverty, employment quality, and self-care. Wayne was able to help Maria find community health care through a regional case manager. Maria's struggle was not resolved during the short-term project, but it instigated new conversations and concerns within the group. However, her story instigated a change in how the church members understood the concern in the community. Exposing the broader church to the life struggles of individuals in the community could prod the church to move beyond its desire for security.

### **Revelational Trait Indicators**

Finally, the revelational trait addressed the theological challenge. The theological challenge restricted the church's ability to speak to the relevance of the gospel in people's lives. This revelational trait encouraged the team to invite people to say yes to God's

leadership in life as part of God's kingdom rather than merely handing out a message of personal salvation. This theological shift aims to move the church away from thinking of the gospel as a one-time moment in life to understanding an ongoing relationship with God. Group members reported several conversations with community members who were looking for God's help in a variety of life areas that were outside of the field of moral behavior. For example, when a coworker approached Sean about an ongoing struggle in his marriage, he helped his colleague to trust God with his relationship and to ask God for emotional strength. However, it was Sean who asked if a print out of the gospel could be given to him to share with others. The theological shift will be the hardest for the church to grasp. One way of addressing this concern would be to highlight the missional gospel, as seen in the stories of life transformation in the scriptures.

### **Qualitative and Quantitative Measurements**

Things that are valued get measured. An evaluation form with both qualitative and quantitative questions was given to the MIT group members at the end of the project (see appendix D). Quantitative questions asked how many people were reached through this project. Qualitative questions asked how the participants felt that they grew in their understanding of themselves as agents of God's mission. It also asked them how they felt about connecting with their intended *oikos* community, and if they felt accepted by this group. The form also gave space for the participants to share any other suggestions or feedback that they would wish to share.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The project demonstrated great potential for moving TCUMC forward in its transformation from a traditional to a missional congregation. The focused time of engaging leaders in the congregation with the missional traits helped to infuse the congregation with new missional imagination and energy. Early fruit in this project helped to capture the hearts of the congregation. The three-month project showed fruitfulness by creating a new dialogue and language for the church in its mission, values, and vision. New relationships were formed that will continue to bear fruit and opportunities to live into the gospel with the community.

The pilot project's effectiveness is indicated by the sustained growth of the missional traits in the church after the completion of the project. Carol is expanding her friendships beyond her neighbors and is networking with other mothers in the community to form a Mothers of Preschoolers group. The homeless dinner event continues to be a life-giving and transformational point of connection. This dinner event has created ripples throughout the community. Non-churched people point to the dinner as having a significant impact in the area. The parents of the water polo team continue to connect with me on a personal level asking for counsel and prayer.

The project also spurred on spiritual growth within the MIT team. Individual members were supported as they took missional steps into the community. They gained a better understanding of the missional traits and an awareness of their giftedness. Even those who struggled with the project increased their understanding and willingness to allow for missional ministries through TCUMC.

The project also demonstrated some weaknesses. The three month period of time is too short. The MIT team process was just long enough to expose them to the missional process and to sow the seeds of the missional gospel, but it was not long enough for the group to fully see the results of their work. More time is needed. In a longer process, missional leaders would further develop relationships with the people in their *oikos* groups that would provide authentic opportunities for sharing of faith and the revelational calling. Jim Milley of Bridges ministry recognizes that disciple-making relationships generally take approximately two years to develop before initial fruit is recognizable.<sup>1</sup>

The project was challenging for the longstanding members of the church who participated. The weekly encouragements to connect with the community and brainstorming activities were not enough for some to overcome their reluctance to meet new people. The session with a therapist helped unearth some of the perceived barriers, but for those who were not willing, it seemed like just more information. This issue might be addressed by physically going out two by two during one of the MIT sessions as would be in keeping with Jesus' instruction in Luke 10. This might also provide further motivation and accountability for the team members.

One of the shortfalls of this project was the inability of some of the team members to have spiritual conversations in their *oikos* group. A growing relationship with God is essential if one is going to be able to articulate that relationship in meaningful ways. Apparently, longstanding church membership is not a good indicator of one's ability to

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation with Jim Milley, March 3, 2019.

make disciples. Making disciples requires that the disciple-maker have a vibrant relationship with Jesus. In short, to make a disciple, one needs to be a disciple.

### **Next Steps**

This pilot project provided the church with a language for discussing its ministry in the community and a new set of metrics for understanding its faithfulness. It also gained evidence through the example of the MIT team that a new future is possible for the church. For continued transformation to take place, TCUMC would need to take several additional steps for the whole church to experience this change.

One of the first steps would be for the church council to adopt the missional traits as the metrics for success rather than the church centric metrics of attendance, programs, and offerings. The council would also need to continue to communicate the missional traits and celebrate missional activities as indicators for success. New church structures are needed to support missional engagements rather than church committees. Following Kotter's suggestions, a guiding coalition should be formed that helps to embed these new metrics into the fabric of the congregation. The finances of the congregation will also need to be restructured to allocate funds for new ministries outside of the congregation that arise from missional engagements. Lastly, the MIT team project should be repeated with another group of people from the congregation, which would include those who had successful experiences in the pilot group.

One reality that needs to be mentioned is that it may not be possible for United Methodist Church congregations to transition from traditional toward missional congregations. The UMC uses an itinerant system in which pastors are appointed to local

congregations by the Bishop. A pastor's vision and direction to move a congregation toward a missional orientation might end as the pastor is instructed to move to a new church. The missional transformation may not be embedded into the fabric of the local congregation before the pastoral transition. Succeeding pastors generally prefer to implement their vision for the congregation rather than continuing with the previous pastor's efforts. Also, as part of a denomination, it could reasonably be argued that local congregations are not able to live into a new future unless the denominational leaders on a national level have adopted these changes as well.

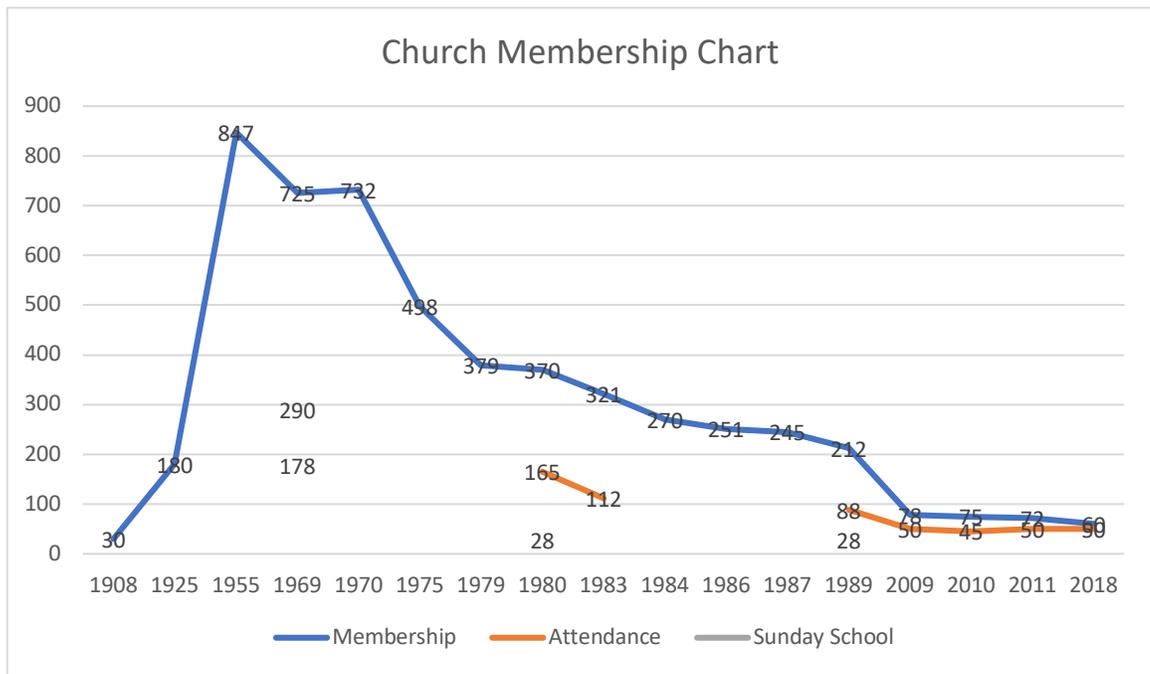
### **Recommendations and Implications**

The traditional to missional project provides several crucial concepts to the broader Christian community. The six missional traits provide a clear framework for considering missional faithfulness. These traits illustrate God's kingdom agenda for the church as they stem directly from the nature and character of God rather than from church growth models. The articulation of a kingdom centered gospel expands the understanding of meaningful discipleship and missional proclamation. The project provides an example of how traditional congregations can break out of the closed relational church networks in which people in the congregation do not know anyone outside of the church. It demonstrates a practical way of assisting church people in connecting with God's kingdom work in the community. The project is also a model for how a small experimental group project can be an instrumental part of transforming a congregation. I would hope that other church leaders would find this project useful in their congregations as they transition toward missional faithfulness.

APPENDIX A:

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP CHART

In 1981, the pastor reported that the church would host two special programs to reach out to families in the community. They hoped these would stem the tide of decline.<sup>1</sup> Average attendance dropped by 21% that year, and membership by 4%.<sup>2</sup> The pastor spoke of reaching out with the love of God in practical ways rather than winning people over with gimmicks. There is a good chance that these comments were in reaction to the church growth movement.



<sup>1</sup> Charge Conference Report to the District Superintendent, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## APPENDIX B:

### MISSION DEI AND THE COVENANT

<sup>1</sup>The LORD had said to Abram,  
“Go from your country,  
your people and your father’s household  
to the land I will show you.

<sup>2</sup>“I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.

<sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you. Genesis 12:1-3

God’s call to Abram in Genesis 12 provides an example of the connection between the *missio Dei* and covenant. The first part of this covenant is God’s call for Abram to “Go from your people.” Abram is sent away from his people even as he draws closer to God. The second part of the covenant is the promised blessings for Abram “I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing (12:2).” Abram’s blessedness was not for himself alone but is tied to others whom God would bless through him. This covenant further ties into the *missio Dei* in the third verse in which “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (12:3).” God’s call for Abram to leave what is known so that he can experience the abundance of God’s blessings not only for himself but for the world demonstrates the sending missional nature of God’s covenantal relationships. As Abram faithfully lived into this covenant, God blessed him and his family abundantly, making him the father of the people of Israel, a covenantal community for God. Through this covenant and others, God promises that “you will be my people, and I will be your God” (Gn 17:7, Ex 6:7, Jer 30:22). Covenantal relationship not only form the people of

God in community with one another, but it also carries with it the expectation to be faithful witnesses of the *missio Dei* in the world.

## APPENDIX C:

Each week the missional group met together for instruction, brainstorming, and mutual support. The following is an example of the format for the two-hour gathering sessions.

### **Missionaries In Training Weekly Agenda**

**Gathering** — **Share one high and one low from the past week**

**Scripture Reading** (Read and Consider) **Luke 10:1-11**

After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, “The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don’t even greet anyone along the way. <sup>5</sup> Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘May peace be on this house.’ <sup>6</sup> If anyone there shares God’s peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. <sup>7</sup> Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don’t move from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. <sup>9</sup> Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘God’s kingdom has come upon you.’ <sup>10</sup> Whenever you enter a city and the people don’t welcome you, go out into the streets and say, <sup>11</sup> ‘As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God’s kingdom has come to you.’

*(a moment of silence after the reading):*

**Scripture Questions:**

What word, phrase, or image seems to catch your attention today?

Why do you think this is significant for you?

What does *being sent* (changed each week related to the theme) mean to you?

What might God be asking you to do in response?

**Instruction: (Example)**

Over the next weeks, we will walk through the steps that Jesus instructs his disciples:

- 1) **Missional - they were sent**
- 2) **Relational - they develop friendships**
- 3) **Incarnational - they joined in**
- 4) **Vital - they found ways to be a blessing to others**
- 5) **Transformational - they addressed the issues they faced**
- 6) **Revelational - they spoke God’s word in relevant ways**

**Group Exercise:** (This section involved activities and brainstorming related to the theme of instruction for the week).

**Example:** Brainstorming together

Who might be a 'person of peace' in your context?

What does it look like to 'stay' with them?

As you get to know this person:

- How might this person need to know God's healing and peace?
- What would a miracle look like for them?
- How might you intercede to God on their behalf?

### **Missional Check-in**

1) Please share a summary of your discernment regarding connecting with a group in the community. Who are they, where do they live/ hang out, who is the person of peace that you are connecting with, how you are 'joining in' with the group so far.

2) What challenges are you facing as you seek to connect?

### **Questions for Discipleship**

- How is God at work in your life?
- What Joy's or Concerns would you like for us to pray with you about this week?
- What do you feel that you must do this week to be faithful to God's call in your life this week?

### **Action Items:**

This week I will ....

I will pray this week for the following concerns:

APPENDIX D:

**Missional Group Evaluation Form**

Name (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

For each of the following, indicate your preference for each item on the scale from 1 – 4 where a 1 is a strong dislike, and a 4 is strong like.

<b>MIT group elements</b>	<b>Disliked</b>			<b>Liked</b>
Gathering question	1	2	3	4
Scriptural reflection	1	2	3	4
Instruction	1	2	3	4
Group Exercise	1	2	3	4
Missional Check-In	1	2	3	4
Questions for Discipleship	1	2	3	4
Action Items	1	2	3	4
Closing Prayer Time	1	2	3	4
Weekly Booklet reading	1	2	3	4
Therapist presentation	1	2	3	4

Did you read the weekly booklet? Yes No

Did you regularly attend the weekly MIT Group? Yes No

**Experience Elements**

Indicate your agreement with the following statements.

As a result of this experience, I ...	<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Agree</b>	
1. Feel that I can share God’s love with others	1	2	3	4
2. Feel more prepared to reach out to the community	1	2	3	4
3. Know who I can be in ministry with	1	2	3	4
4. Want to participate with God in this community	1	2	3	4
5. Know where I can make a difference in the world	1	2	3	4
6. Want to find creative ways to be in mission	1	2	3	4

**Your Experience Questions**

How do you feel about your connection with your oikos community?

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Did you feel accepted by this group? Why? Or Why not?

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How many people did you connect with in your oikos group?

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How many times during this project were you asked by people in your oikos group to pray for them?

---

How many people's lives would you say were positively affected by your ministry?

---

What is one thing that you have learned or will take to heart from this experience?

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What thoughts, beliefs, or actions have changed in your life through this series?

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Do you think that this experience would be helpful for others in the church? Why?

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Other Comments

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