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THE PRACTICING CHURCH

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OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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## **Dedication**

Rich, I could not have made it through this program had you not been my partner and cheerleader. Much of what follows comes from many, many conversations between the two of us and the congregation of Vineyard Community Church (VCC) in Shoreline, Washington.

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## Abstract

The real-world ministry problem discussed in this dissertation is: The Evangelical Church's mission predicament in the context of ministry in North America that resides in a post-Christendom, postmodern, pluralist society. The problem will be addressed by: using several case studies to help view the church's mission centered in the *missio Dei*.

Chapter 1 will discuss the problem of what I have called *mission drift*, the context for ministry found in the midst of a global cultural shift, the background of the project, the contribution to Transformational Leadership, and one proposed solution. Chapter 2 will discuss other proposed solutions by reviewing literature that reflects on both the problem and other proposed solutions. Chapter 3 will look at the biblical and theological basis of the *missio Dei* using N. T. Wright's five-act-play model. Chapter 4 will outline the case study research method using Vineyard Community Church's narrative of the past six plus years of navigating a transition to a congregation active in mission. Chapter 5 will discuss my thesis: The Practicing Church, an in-depth narrative of the VCC story. Chapter 6 is the postscript telling my story of how the Bakke Graduate University doctoral program has influenced my ministry context, the impact of Transformational Leadership, and conclusions.

## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

### Problem

I am studying the nature of church as mission, because I want to discover how a congregation transforms to a mission focus so that my readers understand how to navigate transition.

### Cultural Shift

Western society is in the midst of a massive cultural shift raising a multitude of issues for the church. Church leaders and members alike are confused and frustrated with the change going on around them. Peter Drucker notes,

Every few hundred years in Western society there occurs a sharp transformation... within a few short decades, society rearranges itself—its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions ... fifty years later, there is a new world and the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. We are currently living through such a transformation.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of this time of rapid societal transformation, many church leaders, members, and non-participants are having trouble adjusting to what such a massive cultural shift means for the mission of the church. I will discuss the problems many

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<sup>1</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *The Essential Drucker: Selections from the Management Works of Peter F. Drucker* (New York, NY: HarperBusiness, 2001), 37.

church leaders, members, and non-participants are experiencing as they adjust to what the current cultural shift means for the mission of the church.

### **Audience**

The intended audience consists of pastors, leaders, and church members who are frustrated with what may be called *the conventional church*. In over twenty-four years of service in four different local churches, I have not seen such confusion, frustration, and disillusionment in both church leaders and church members as I have witnessed in the last ten years. Also, included in my audience are the twenty-million, born-again Christians in the United States of America for whom the primary means of spiritual experience and expression is not the local church. This project will add to the conversation mainly in the area of praxis. Praxis, which I contend, and my research will flesh out, is the main area of frustration.

### **The Context of Ministry**

It is my belief that the church is living in a time that will be a hinge point in history: a time that can be defined as *in between* one of great societal change with an old world passing and a new world coming into being. Some are calling the old world that is passing in the West, Christendom, and assert that the church is entering an increasingly post-Christian context they are calling Post-Christendom.<sup>2</sup>

It is within this current climate that my dissertation project will address what it means to define the church's primary nature as mission, what the practices are of a

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004).

church defined by mission, and how such a redefinition impacts the practices of spiritual formation, mission, and leadership. The church in the United States has found itself in *mission drift*<sup>3</sup> and greatly needs a course correction.

### **The Background of the Project**

Frost and Hirsch say, “Christendom is the name given to the secular culture that has dominated European society from around the eleventh century until the end of the twentieth.”<sup>4</sup> The Roman Emperor Constantine signed the Edict of Milan in A. D. 313 ending the persecution of Christians and granting Christianity a favored position within the Empire.<sup>5</sup> Christianity went from secretly meeting in homes and catacombs to being completely tolerated and accepted, and favored.

In the fifth to tenth centuries, Christianity grew into adulthood throughout Western Europe and emerged by the eleventh century as fully grown and at the center (as well as in control) of culture. By the Middle Ages, the church-state relationship was put together in such a way that it was governed by the pope and the ruler of what was then called the Holy Roman Empire. Church and state were in essence interdependent in an institutional partnership that became the pillars of the culture, each supporting the other.

Christendom had by this stage developed its own distinct identity, one that provided the matrix for the understanding of both church and state. It effectively became (and still

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<sup>3</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel and our culture series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

is the primary definer of the church's self-understanding in the West) the story that claims to contain truth applicable to all people at all times in all cultures.<sup>6</sup> Christianity moved from being an organic, dynamic, revolutionary, social, and spiritual movement to being a religious institution with its ecclesiology formed around a place, an event, or a person, i.e., "I go to Shoreline Vineyard" or "Church is what happens on Sunday morning" or "I go to Rose Swetman's church."

Although there is no consensus among historians as to whether the rise of Constantianism was a positive development or not, they do agree that the church was decisively changed by the decisions taken by Emperor Constantine after A.D. 313 that ultimately led to Christianity being recognized as the official religion of the Roman Empire in A.D. 380 under Emperor Theodosius I. Christianity was transformed from a movement located on the margins of society into the official religion of the Roman Empire, from being perceived as a threat to the security of the empire into a guardian of the status quo. Such a profound change in the identity of the church could not fail to have far-reaching implications. Indeed Europe would be known as Christendom until the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

In Hauerwas and Willimon's *Resident Aliens*,<sup>8</sup> similar pictures of Christendom in the mid-twentieth century are found: Christendom was a time where children grew up to be Christian simply by growing up. What was taught at home, school, church, community,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> W. R. Shenk, "New Wineskins for New Wine: Toward a Post-Christendom Ecclesiology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Connecticut: Overseas Ministries Study Center* 29, No. 2 (2005): 73-79.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 15-17.

and even the media, all contributed to Christian formation. Christendom was a time when biblical faith and society lived in a symbiotic relationship, when society was eager to receive the moral fruit of the church.<sup>9</sup>

Since the time of the Enlightenment, attempts came to moderate or restrict the public role of religion. Public policy was to be formed using reason, positive law, and individual human rights. Theology was welcome at the public table, as long as its voice conformed to the truths of reason, and could be validated by social consensus.<sup>10</sup> As long as the consensus remained nominally Christian, theology continued its potent public role, but with the growth of secularization and the final fall of Christendom, this positive reception was lost. Although the right of Christian theology is protected by the democratic principle, and, therefore, Christian theology has the right to take part in public conversation, its voice is tolerated, not welcomed. On a tacit level, a Christian consensus remained part of society until the 1960s, but churches continued to operate within this supposed Christendom-consensus well after this time. Even today attempts at a continuation of Christendom are found.<sup>11</sup>

Hauerwas and Willimon speak of the night in Greenville, South Carolina, when a Fox theatre opened its doors on a Sunday evening and the church suddenly had to compete with the theatre for the worldview of the youth.<sup>12</sup> Although the end of Christendom didn't happen overnight, the picture they sketch does ring true for anyone

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<sup>9</sup> G.R. Hunsberger, "The Mission of Public Theology: An Explanation in Swedish Missiological Themes," *International Journal of Public Theology* 93, No. 3 (2005): 315-324.

<sup>10</sup> G. Drew, "The Gospel as Public Truth in a Pluralist World," *Stimulus* 13, No. 3 (2005): 21-30.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 21-23.

<sup>12</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 16.



who has experienced this shift, like the sudden shift in much of the United States when youth sporting events were scheduled on Sundays. Looking back, certain events can be pointed out, which should have warned us that this symbiotic relationship was over, but for a long time church and society were still perceived to be one, since our eyes were trained to see them as one. Whether church and society ever could have been one, or were one, is open for debate, but by the time it was impossible to see them as one any longer, it wasn't a slight move apart, the whole image was scrambled.<sup>13</sup>

Today, however, the post-Christendom era is not characterized by the victory of secularism, of philosophical materialism, over religion, as was predicted. Rather a pluralism of spiritualities is available, but none are allowed public control.<sup>14</sup> The secularization thesis predicted religion's demise, but as studies appeared to be proving this thesis, others pointed to the failure of religion to disappear, or even to remain completely privatized.<sup>15</sup>

And just as the adoption of the church into the cultural center in the fourth-century radically changed the nature of its existence, the recognition of its end has created a radical sense of loss and marginalization to which the churches are responding in a variety of ways. The fourth and twentieth centuries form bookends marking transition points in the history of the church. Just as the fourth century adoption of Christianity by Constantine forced the church to struggle with its self-understanding as the new center of the culture, twentieth-century Christians must now struggle to understand the meaning of their social location in a decentered world.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hunsberger, "The Mission of Public Theology: An Explanation in Swedish Missiological Themes," 315-316.

<sup>14</sup> Drew, "The Gospel as Public Truth in a Pluralist World," 23.

<sup>15</sup> M. Maddox, "Religion, Secularism and the Promise of Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1, No.1 (2007): 84.

<sup>16</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 7-8.

The end of Christendom cost Christian theology and the church their privileged position in the public conversation. Within the public conversation, both had to take part using the rules of modernity, and were tolerated as long as they supported the consensus. The church mostly remained tied to this irrelevant self-understanding, found in a former authoritative role within Christendom.<sup>17</sup> If Christian theology, on the other hand, with the demise of Christendom and the shift in consensus, claims that it has public relevance, a new approach towards the public conversation needs to be found.

Contemporary Western culture is being described by historians as both secular and Christian. What many are now calling a *post-Christendom* culture changes how the church in Western culture now defines itself in terms of mission. While in reality the church is in a post-Christendom context, much of the Western church is still highly predisposed by Christendom's theological, missiological, and ecclesiological conceptions. My research and work will address the problem of how to understand mission in the context of a local congregation that is in a specific place and time and will describe the morphing of a conventional church based on the theological, missiological, and ecclesiological concepts of Christendom into a mission-focused church.

### **The Outcome of the Project**

The project will use case studies built from the life of Vineyard Community Church, Shoreline, Washington, which is re-imagining and living out the transition from a conventional church mindset and praxis to a mission-focused church with a mission-focused mindset and praxis. My hope is that these case studies will evolve into the

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<sup>17</sup> Drew, "The Gospel as Public Truth in a Pluralist World," 21.

writing of a book with the working title: *The Practicing Church: Morphing a Conventional Church into a Mission-Focused Community*.

### **The Contribution of the Project to Transformational Leadership**

By developing a mission-focused congregation, the environment shifts from *here is our vision come and help us* to *our vision is to incubate your passion*. Leadership shifts from the work of getting people on board with the vision to the work of releasing people in their gifting and passions. Case studies will demonstrate that a mission focus is designed to equip leaders to empower others, so it is transformational leadership at all levels.

In the context of Vineyard Community Church (VCC), we have and are developing mission groups that serve low income and marginalized people. Here the concept of Transformational Leadership plays a big part in our understanding of stewarding our power in service. Both in exerting power to bring resources to those without access and because we bring resources (social services) to people that are in need, we have had to readjust our view of evangelism. Some evangelistic methods of serving disadvantaged people use power in a way that seems manipulative, i.e., a person gets food in the soup line *only* after she hears a presentation of the gospel. Jesus' example as a transformational leader invites the church to use power to bless others regardless of whether they listen. Jesus fed people, invited them to the table, included outcasts, and gave them the choice of listening. Jesus invited people to "follow him." Following Jesus is important, but, on the other hand, "being sent by Jesus," has different implications that will be part of the contribution to an understanding of Transformational Leadership.

## **Stakeholders**

Every project needs stakeholders. These are the organizations that have a stake in the outcome of the project. The stakeholders in this project are:

1. Several of the churches from very diverse traditions located in Shoreline have gathered to pray and hear what one another is doing, to serve and pray for the city.
2. The Human Services Department of the City of Shoreline is currently working with the city to organize all sectors of the city to provide for youth development to youth that are transitioning from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school.
3. The Community and Resource Team of Shoreline—made up of the Shoreline School District, Social Service agencies, the city of Shoreline, King County agencies, and more—this is a monthly meeting I attend as an incarnational presence to the city. This team discusses the needs of the city and the resources to make for a healthy city.
4. The Back to School Consortium of Shoreline—includes the school district, social service agencies, and the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA)—we belong to this consortium that provides school supplies, clothing, haircuts, etc., for the 2,000 kids on free and reduced lunch in the Shoreline School District.
5. The Center for Human Services (CHS)—the leading social service agency in Shoreline provides substance abuse counseling, family support, and early childhood development. Our partnership with this agency puts us in a position to touch and be the presence of Christ to those living in poverty within our city and county. We serve alongside others in the community, working with at-risk youth made up of primarily immigrant families that practice Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and those that are of no faith.
6. HopeLink is an agency that houses the largest food-bank in Shoreline along with providing family services for people living at or below the national poverty line.
7. The WORKS, which is the local clothing bank operated by the Shoreline School District PTA. We partner with them to bring gently used clothing to the families living at poverty levels, as well as serve side by side as members of the Back To School Consortium.

## **Solution**

There are many solutions to the stated problem of which this dissertation is one.

It appears that the “Practicing Church” is a viable response to the problems facing the church in this time of cultural shift and that this project will demonstrate a way through the muddle.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have shown that the problem of cultural shift is significant for church leaders and my project proposes a solution to this problem and will contribute to an understanding of Transformational Leadership in the context of moving a congregation from a conventional model of church to a mission-focused community. In the next chapter, I shall review literature that reflects on both the problem as well as some proposed solutions.

## CHAPTER 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

### Literature Review

In order to address the problem of what the current cultural shift means for the mission of the church, one must be familiar with the academic literature discussing the current cultural shift, its implications on the mission of the church, as well as literature proposing solutions for the church. In this chapter, I will discuss some of the relevant literature that addresses the problem from historical, theological, sociological, and ecclesiastical points of view. Some offer solutions, some offer critiques, some offer both. All have contributed in some significant way to my understanding of the problem and influenced the direction and implementation of the project. I will divide this chapter into three sections:

1. Literature primarily relevant to the problem of cultural shift
2. Literature focused on proposed solutions
3. Literature that moves readers toward a missional ecclesiology

### The Cultural Shift Problem

#### *Friedman on a New World Is Emerging*

In *The World is Flat*,<sup>1</sup> Thomas L. Friedman offers a journalist's view of the massive cultural changes going on in the world around us. Friedman examines the political and technological changes that have flattened the world and made it a smaller place. He

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

relates a convergence that happened around the year 2000. He divides it into three realms of globalization:

4. Globalization 1.0: From 1492, when Columbus opened up trade between the Old World and the New World, until around 1800. The world shrank from large to medium.
5. Globalization 2.0: This period lasted from about 1800 to 2000. During this era the world shrank from medium to small.
6. Globalization 3.0: This phase is shrinking the world from small to tiny and flattening. Friedman traces this convergence to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the explosion of the Internet, to the dot-com bubble and bust, and the outsourcing of jobs to India and China.

Friedman believes globalization has evened the playing field for many emerging economies. He writes this book to enable himself and others to understand how this flattening process happened and discusses the implications for countries, companies, and individuals. He also makes plain how these changes could affect social and religious organizations. He argues that his message is not one of doom and gloom, rather, it is a message about financial and political realities that require change to stay on top of these entities.

Friedman's personal stories and the stories of the places he visited while doing his research take the reader with him on a personal discovery. *The World Is Flat* documents the rapid-fire change happening in our world. Taking this information, contextualizing it to one's own ministry and leadership is invaluable for the ability to understand how the church responds in times of great cultural and societal shifts. One point in particular strikes me in thinking about how the world is changing before our eyes: the horizontal collaboration across the globe, what might this mean for our churches and parachurch organizations? At VCC and Turning Point (TP), we place a very high value on collaboration. The flattening of the world, as Friedman describes, makes collaboration

more doable and will shape the emerging church as we partner with others who are doing similar things in similar contexts in different places.

Friedman misses the mark a bit when he does not address the areas that could bring potential trouble from rapid globalization, namely, he sings the high praises of “capitalism” without addressing the implications of capitalism for harm. The biggest weakness of the first half of *The World Is Flat* is that Friedman does not express sufficient concern over the darker side of globalization. He uses the example of the state of Indiana attempting to hire an Indian consulting firm in order to deride those who worry that outsourcing and off-shoring can result in exploitation.<sup>2</sup> But it is a straw man, only created to be easily dismissed. Educated, skilled workers may be getting the opportunities of their dreams as a result of globalization, but that doesn’t allow us to ignore the environmental degradation and worker exploitation that takes place as corporations seek to evade United States regulations by moving their operations to the desperate, developing world. Overall, Friedman offers an engaging historical summary of the changes leading to the emergence of the global connected society, which the church now finds itself living in that helps us understand the global context of the problems we are facing as a church in the midst of rapid cultural change. While Friedman offers a global perspective on some of the issues involved in the current cultural shift, the church in America faces some unique challenges, not completely unrelated to globalization, but certainly specific to our United States American church context.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 242.



### ***Kinnaman on How Christianity Is Perceived by a New Generation***

Along with experiencing the effects of globalization and technology changes, the church in America is faced with an image problem, according to David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons in *UnChristian*.<sup>3</sup> The findings in *UnChristian* are the result of extensive polling by the Barna Group. Large portions of the American population, ages sixteen to twenty-nine, view Christianity as anti-homosexual, judgmental, hypocritical, too involved in politics, sheltered, and insensitive to others<sup>4</sup> with some interesting variations.

Kinnaman takes a blow-by-blow look at the descriptors, analyzes the stats, and makes suggestions for corrective action that are largely circumspect and wise. He avoids cultural posturing and points out that Christians will never be popular, but ought to be giving offense for the right reasons. The church needs to choose its battles, learn the culture, and put money and muscle behind its good intentions.

A variety of contributors weighs in with short essays at the end of each chapter—among my favorites are Rev. Jannah Scott, Margaret Feinberg, Andy Crouch, and Jonalyn Fincher. Their contributions aren't voluminous, but the multiplicity of voices adds to the book's rounded perspectives on how the church is viewed from a generation ready to lead the church into the future.

The book's weakness is probably its individualistic emphasis. Kinnaman's vision is for the church to fix its *image problem* via real, personal change. What he doesn't really address is how current, institutionalized forms of church may be inadequate to the task.

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<sup>3</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

The research offered in this book defines specific areas where the church can affect change. My project shows how the image of the church as anti-homosexual may not be changed across the board, but one church can present a different image and affect change one person at a time.

Kinnaman suggests that the image problem we have as Christians is possibly an accurate representation of the way many of us truly are—and in this sense, we have more than an image problem, we have an integrity problem—we are not consistently representing Christ as he truly is. Most Christians have some familiarity with the concept that the church is supposed to be representing Christ and are in some way personally being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). But the research reveals that many are sorely missing the mark. In a sense *unChristian* is calling the church to return to God, a calling that others like Alan Roxburgh in *The Sky is Falling* are amplifying and clarifying.

### ***Roxburg on the Challenge Facing Church Leaders***

In the preface to the *Sky is Falling*, Alan Roxburgh states, “This book is about the challenges facing church leaders who want to embark on the missional quest to return the God we encounter in Christ back to the center of what being a Christian is all about.”<sup>5</sup> He goes on to state that we, church leaders, are navigating what the above statement means in such a time of great change as we are living in today. He also believes that the false dichotomies between *organized* and *organic* churches is nonsensical and that the church

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Roxburgh, *The Sky Is Falling: Leaders Lost in Transition* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006), 13.

needs to take the best and go forward, not throwing the proverbial baby out with the bath water.

Like many other church leaders and current writers in the missional world, Roxburgh believes we are in a time of liminality, a condition of being on a threshold or at the beginning of the process.<sup>6</sup> The book's thesis encompasses a leadership framework for the church in North America during a time of discontinuity and change.

The author identifies two groups in the midst of uncertainty: *liminals*, church leaders who have the skills and titles that have trained them to be experts, mostly found in what is known as the *institutional* church and *emergents*, those leaders who have been experiencing a different kind of change and stress and have, for the most part, given up on existing church structures, believing them to be archaic and out of touch with the demands of today's culture.

The problem with these two groups, according to Roxburgh, is that they don't think they need each other. The book is an attempt to unpack the challenges facing these two *tribes* and facilitate renewed dialogue between them. It is the author's conviction, "that without dialogue and cooperation between these two tribes—the *Liminals* and the *Emergents*—we will never be able to discern the communities God truly wants to call forth."<sup>7</sup> Developing a model for change, which includes both tribes in dialogue and community, shapes the majority of the book. The five phases of change described in the book is not a linear movement, rather phases that often are overlapping in transition.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 22.

Again, the author refers to the twentieth century as the century of the expert and professional leadership style, a style that is not working for today's culture. On the other hand, a no-leader structure is not the answer. Here, the author states that cultivating leadership in today's context would look more like and function like the ancient Abbot/Abbess in monastic communities to nurture younger leaders in skills and practices that have been passed down through the generations and can only be developed through a form of spiritual apprenticeship. This cultivation, Roxburgh says, requires a formation of one another as a community of leaders around practice, habits, directions, commitments, and traditions.<sup>8</sup>

Roxburgh finishes the book with a proposal: releasing the imagination of leadership through this time of transition, to move away from the *sola pastora* identity to a plural, missional leadership team that includes the leader as poet, prophet, apostle, and pastor.<sup>9</sup> This typology argues for a plural, missional leadership team. He wraps this up with the oversight of such leadership *communitas* being with an Abbot/Abbess to care for and guide the spiritual development of the people of God as they are formed in a specific place for the *missio Dei*. He advocates for a structure that begins with forming leadership *communitas* that include both liminals and emergent leaders to learn from one another how to be the church in a city or place. The church has much to learn from each other in these times of discontinuous change. I resonate with Roxburgh's call to listen to one another. It is no secret that a major shift has happened in North America. The professional, expert leadership style is not working in the city where I serve, yet what the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 162.

future for church leadership structure fully will be has not yet emerged. In the meantime, honoring the new expressions of leadership and church in all its forms is my sense of what is needed in these times. An honest assessment of the church in North America suggests that the church has much to learn about leadership in today's world. Roxburgh's strength is not only addressing and giving language to phases of change, but also his conviction that liminals and emergents need each other; to that end I agree.

### **Proposed Solutions to The Problem**

#### ***Frost and Hirsch on Missional Engagement***

The authors of *The Shaping of Things to Come*<sup>10</sup> make bold statements about their thesis before beginning chapter one.

... reawaken the latent apostolic imagination which is at the heart of the biblical faith and to exhort God's people to courageous missional engagement for our time—living out the gospel *within* its cultural context rather than perpetuating an institutional commitment *apart from* its cultural context. In writing this book we are advocating a wholesale change in the way Christians are *doing* and *being* the church ....<sup>11</sup>

By their opening statements, the reader understands the authors believe that the ecclesiological mission of the church has been lost and antiquated when looking at the state of the church in the West.

Frost and Hirsch make it clear they are not writing this book for the conventional, established churches and denominational structures that dominate the Western landscape. Rather, they have traveled the world and have encountered a new breed of Christian

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<sup>10</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

leadership that is experimenting with new versions of Christian communities within unchurched subcultures. While they care about existing, conventional churches, they make it clear,

As much as we wish to address existing churches, it is really for such emerging missional communities and their leadership that we've written this book.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the book they define language, such as *institutional*, *missional*, *attractional*, *incarnational*, so they can unpack the present worldview in which they see the church in our culture and context. They present a number of principles (which seems, in my opinion, to be a very modern way of approaching the stated problem) and suggestions for leaders wanting to morph into what is commonly now known as *the missional church*. In a simplistic way, to explain the mindset of missional leaders, the missional leaders will continually ask themselves the question, *What has God called us to be and do in our current cultural context?*<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the book, the authors do just what they stated in their thesis. They lay out a history that will take the reader through the historical change of an old world passing and a new world being birthed. They then lay out what they define as an *Incarnational Ecclesiology, a Messianic Spirituality, and an Apostolic Leadership*.<sup>14</sup>

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

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 12. In summary, Frost and Hirsch describe Incarnational Ecclesiology as not requiring unbelievers to come to some sanctified space to encounter the gospel, but rather the church disassembles to be Christ in the midst of the everyday spaces of society; Messianic Spirituality as adopting Jesus' worldview which they define as more holistic and integrated rather than the dualistic worldview of the Greco-Roman empire which separates sacred from profane; and Apostolic Leadership as abandoning traditional hierarchies in favor of a flat-leadership that unleashes the gifts listed in Ephesians 4.

For a leader wrestling with an ecclesiology for the current context in the West, this book is not only instructional, but is true to its purpose of giving the reader a new imagination for what it means to *be* the church in your local community. It is not a formulaic methodology for church growth. Rather, it is an honest look at Western culture and the organic, alternative ways the church is forming, in nature, purpose, and structure to be the sign, agent, and witness of the kingdom of God in our time.

The strengths of this book are numerous. For example:

1. the reader's understanding of what it means to be incarnational
2. the very presence of Christ to those in their host communities to those who don't know him yet
3. an understanding of how the church and Western Christians have become dualistic in their spirituality

The book does an excellent job of illustrating how dualistic spirituality has become the norm, handed down from the Greco-Roman world. Instead of seeing the world as divided between the sacred and religious, the book sees the world and God's place in it as more holistic and integrated.

The weakness is in the author's theology of the fivefold ministry concept. First, what is known to some as *the fivefold ministry* from the Book of Ephesians can and has been translated as four gifts, rather than five (Eph. 4.11-13). While one could agree that leadership that unleashes the gifts of evangelism, apostleship, prophecy, and pastor-teacher is the environment conducive for a missional church, it could be argued that the structure of that leadership can look very different in different models of church. The authors argue for one style, *flat leadership*, and state that this is *the* biblical model. Many models of leadership can be *proven to be consistent* or thought of as biblical and the model these authors propose may be one among many models of leadership that may be

discovered in Scripture. However, this weakness is not enough to stop church leaders or students of current mission of all backgrounds from reading this book. Frost and Hirsch have definitely contributed to the overall work and lead in thinking and practice in the area of church and mission for the future of the Western church. One last thought, this book contributes to the overall discussion and questions for those in conventional churches and denominational structures to look at how to support untried, disorganized church planters who often reject a corporate model of structure. Many do not fit any modern paradigms for church planting, which begs the question: how is the church to be faithful to how the Spirit might be forming *New Wine Skins*?

### ***Hirsch on The Forgotten Ways***

Alan Hirsch follows up on *The Shaping of Things to Come* with *The Forgotten Ways*,<sup>15</sup> which is divided into two sections addressing his own experience of shifting focus to a more missional ecclesiology followed by an invitation to join the missional journey. Section One is “The Making of a Missionary” where Hirsch tells his own story. It is a path that many of us would recognize, that starts with him in the “come to us” attractional model of doing church that has defined evangelicalism since it became part of the establishment, and moves towards a missional incarnation.<sup>16</sup> Section Two is titled “A Journey to the Heart of Apostolic Genius.” There I explore what Hirsch calls Missional DNA.<sup>17</sup> But first, Len Sweet opens up<sup>18</sup> with a great forward using the metaphor of

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 24ff.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



occasionally having to defrag our computers and get all of the bits and pieces put in their proper places. Not only do followers of Jesus have to do it with their computers, but also with their minds. He uses the metaphor in relation to how church leaders think about the attractional model of doing church and how we might need to rearrange and make room for a missional model.

The discussion starts with a good question. How did the early Christian movement go from roughly 25,000 members in A. D. 100 to roughly twenty million by A. D. 300? More importantly, the early Christian movement grew without all of the things that today's church defines as vital for ministry, e.g., buildings, a defined Scripture, and a professional clergy. Not only was the church *deprived* of the *essentialism*, it was also under persecution. It isn't just a discussion of the early church, the church in China had a similar growth rate under the same kind of persecution. He also writes about the Methodist revival in England. So how do they do it? Hirsch identifies six elements of what he calls Missional DNA or mDNA.

1. Jesus is Lord
2. Disciple Making
3. Missional-Incarnational Impulse
4. Apostolic Environment
5. Organic Systems
6. *Communitas* instead of community<sup>19</sup>

This book has important concepts that need to be considered for those who are trying to envision a different model, but *need to see it* or want to *know where it is working*.

Hirsch provides theological depth and an imagination for constructing a view of how the church in the West can think about living out an incarnational, missional identity. Hirsch

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 17.

proposes that what the church needs today is “a new paradigm – a new vision of reality, a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions, and values, especially as they relate to our view of the church and mission.”<sup>20</sup> I agree with Hirsch on many points, but especially that the church needs to change and adopt a missionary stance in relation to our cultural contexts or face increasing decline and possible extinction.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Cosby on The Call to Commitment***

One story of a church that successfully adopted a missionary stance toward its cultural context inspired me more than many others. It is the story of Church of the Saviour in Washington, D. C. Gordon Cosby and his wife, with a membership of nine and a treasury of thirty dollars, began their work with the Church of the Saviour in 1946. Disillusioned with many of his past church experiences, Cosby, an American Baptist minister, wanted to find a more viable form of the church of Jesus Christ. Today the Church of the Saviour has created and launched several mission groups that include, after school programs, elderly housing, job training, substance abuse intensive care, transitional housing, a medical clinic, and home for AIDS patients.

Elizabeth O’Connor in *Called to Commitment*,<sup>22</sup> documents the story of Church of the Saviour (COS) in an honest account of the relational challenges and the many, many theological and philosophical conversations that this small congregation worked through to be what they felt God was calling them to be. The difficult task of clarifying vision,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth O’Connor, *Call to Commitment: The Story of the Church of the Saviour, Washington, D.C* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1963).

structure, and discipleship make this book a must read for any congregation wrestling with what it means to be the church that is being true to the mission of God.

The COS theological development would be encompassed in a more progressive, ecumenical theology than many Christians might embrace, but, theological differences aside, this is one of the most inspiring stories of our time for the church of North America to understand what it means to incarnate the message of Jesus into our very neighborhoods. The marrying together of mission and authentic, committed community is a present-day view of what it means to love God and love neighbor. As Elizabeth O'Connor writes,

We would say that the church of Christ is never an experiment, but wherever that church is true to its mission it will be experimenting, pioneering, blazing new paths, seeking how to speak the reconciling Word of God to its own age. It cannot do this if it is held captive by the structures of another day or is slave to its own structures.<sup>23</sup>

One of the unique features of this congregation is its strict membership requirements and the disciplined life of the individual. Training and instruction over a period of one-and-one half years is required for membership. Also, the applicant must participate in a rigorous school of Christian living, which is comprised largely of biblical studies. An annual recommitment to the service of Christ as a working member of the church is also mandatory.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 53.

## ***Barna on Revolution***

George Barna, in *Revolution*,<sup>24</sup> describes and promotes a new form of church that recently developed in the United States. Not satisfied or content with local churches, twenty-million *revolutionaries* created forms of spirituality outside organized religion.

This spiritual revolution came about because of seven trends in society:

1. the increase of Busters and Mosaics
2. moral relativism
3. dismissal of the irrelevant
4. advent of technology
5. priority of relationship
6. participation
7. desire for meaning.<sup>25</sup>

Barna writes that American religion will shift dramatically over the next twenty years. Churches will lose fifty percent of their attendance. In their place, alternative, revolutionary *communities* will form.

Although they make up only five percent of the population today, revolutionary-like formations will become thirty-three percent of the American population by 2025. In the conclusion of his book, Barna encourages revolutionaries. He hopes that many will hear the call to be the church rather than go to church.

While I believe Barna is right about changing culture and the vast spirituality of those not attending a traditional church, I don't agree with how he comes to his conclusions. The authors of *Missional Church* and the author of *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*<sup>26</sup> offer a very different view on how the church got to this point in North

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<sup>24</sup> George Barna, *Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989).

America; their description of what is happening in forming alternative church communities and what plausible solutions are to the recalibration of Christianity in the United States of America is very different than Barna's thesis and conclusions.

Another weakness of this book is the way in which Barna uses a very modern formula in breaking down the challenge, problems, and his solutions. I would recommend this book as it is a fast read and describes a sub-culture that is growing in number. The church needs to notice and partner with this sub-culture as followers of Christ wanting to *be* the church in the United States of America. *Revolution* was helpful in offering contrasting views on the nature of the problem as well as offering insight into possible solutions.

The assessment of the problem and proposed solutions offered in these books inspire the imagination for focusing a church around mission, but it is helpful to review other respected voices on this topic from a more theological and ecclesiological point of view.

### **Toward a Missional Ecclesiology**

#### ***The Gospel in a Pluralist Society***

Lesslie Newbigin<sup>27</sup> served as a missionary in India for forty years. Upon his return to England, he found himself in a post-Christian culture. The thesis of his book is how to embrace our faith and live it out faithfully in Western, post-Enlightenment culture, which is on most sides hostile to the gospel.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 3.

In the first five chapters of his book, Newbigin examines the work of Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge*<sup>28</sup> to assess many of the myths of a rationalistic worldview—a worldview which is becoming outdated as postmodern systems of thought come to the forefront of Western culture. Newbigin asserts that all cultures adhere to certain *plausibility structures* or ways of thinking which are unanimously accepted by the members of society. He believes Christians should not feel compelled to defend their beliefs according to a popular secular plausibility structure. Instead, he believes that the Bible is unique and relates to the universal history of all mankind. Christians are to engage in dialogue with other religions, looking for the ways God is working in their lives, willingly cooperating with them in areas that will benefit society. A dialogue, Newbigin suggests, requires listening, developing open, trusting conversation where the Christian has a starting point to enter into the questions of life with those of other faith traditions or no faith at all. Once engaged in such conversation, the Christian can follow Newbigin's example of looking at Christianity in history on the premise that God exists and he has revealed himself through creation and history. Christ is the unique revelation of God in history, and it is faith in this revelation, which lays the foundation for Christianity. He also adds that through dialogue, our own biases come from our own cultural background.

Newbigin's treatment of *election* and *principalities and powers* provide a much needed framework for the Christian community in the Western world. He gives an insightful interpretation of biblical passages such as Ephesians 3:10 and Colossians 1:15-

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

17, claiming that the *principalities and powers* mentioned in these texts are not demonic beings, but rather unjust social structures which can become demonic. Christians have a responsibility to change these structures for the good of all. This structural thinking influenced the direction of this project to include engagement with existing social structures in my community.

In chapter eighteen, “The Congregation as Hermeneutic of the Gospel,” he provides a picture of the congregation as the living, breathing expression of Christ. A picture that emerges as men and women who believe the gospel and live it out in a neighborhood where good news overflows in good action becomes the hermeneutic of the gospel.

Newbigin supports his thesis in the last chapter, considering what kind of leadership is necessary in local congregations to form a people in the way of Christ. He states, “The vision of the church as a body which exists for the neighborhood and not just for its members, as the sign of God’s rule over all, is much harder to sustain.”<sup>29</sup> This is the challenge for anyone leading in the church in America today. It seems like an uphill journey to re-orient oneself and a congregation to exist for the sake of others; such a reorientation is in direct opposition to the cultural milieu of today, which finds extreme consumerism and individualism. Such a reorientation is possible in a pluralist society where the Christian story is told, empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a compelling truth in today’s culture. The book touches on many other issues of how the Christian faith is to be lived out and communicated in a post-Christian society. I would highly recommend

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 236.

this book to those looking for framework and language in an age of reason, doubt, and religious pluralism.

### ***Wright on The Mission of God***

Christopher Wright, in his book *The Mission of God*,<sup>30</sup> does an excellent job of calling for a missional hermeneutic by putting forward such a hermeneutic as a contextual, holistic, coherent framework that finds its center in Christ himself who opened the minds of his disciples so they could understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). In other words, “Jesus himself provided the hermeneutical coherence within which all disciples must read these texts, that is, in the light of the story that leads up to Christ (messianic reading) and the story that leads on from Christ (missional reading). That is the story that flows from the mind and purpose of God in all the Scriptures for all the nations. That is a missional hermeneutic of the whole Bible.”<sup>31</sup>

Wright leads the reader through his theology of mission as he discusses:

1. the Bible and Mission
2. the God of Mission
3. the People of Mission
4. the Arena of Mission.

As part of the Vineyard movement, a movement that adheres to a theology of the kingdom, the following description by Wright was intriguing:

*YHWH is King*. The climax of the Song of Moses is the triumphant acclamation, “The LORD will reign forever and ever” (Ex 15:18). The form of the Hebrew verb is imperfect; it has the flexibility of meaning “he has now demonstrated that he is king, he is now reigning, and he will go on reigning forever.” This is

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<sup>30</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



the first significant time that kingdom of God is mentioned in the Bible, and it comes in the specific context of YHWH's victory over those who have oppressed his people and refused to know him (Ex 5: 2).<sup>32</sup>

One of the themes Wright explores from the Old Testament Scriptures is the theme of judgment. He begs the question, "is it possible to believe in God without believing in judgment?" He brings into light three aspects of God's judgment:

1. What Pharaoh learned in the Exodus judgment on Egypt
2. What Israel learned in exile
3. What we learn from the nations when they are under God's judgment

There are many themes and aspects of the mission of God considered in this book, however, one important section is on the deity of Jesus. When did he know he was God's chosen Son, the Messiah, the Servant of God? How was his own formation greatly influenced from his own Hebrew Scriptures? Wright addresses these questions and others with insight and wisdom.

I would recommend this book for anyone, but especially for those who are leading and teaching in the church today and looking for ways to recover our Story.

### **Conclusion**

The abundance of literature addressing the problem of cultural shift and the implications for the church validate the need for this project. Others are trying to find appropriate solutions to the problems the current cultural shift has shown. The literature reviewed inspires the imagination, gives hope, re-orientes our thinking around mission, and provides much needed encouragement for leaders in transition. I have shown that the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 78.

work I am doing is both needed and an appropriate response to the problem at hand. In the next Chapter, I shall discuss the theological basis for the project.

## CHAPTER 3: THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS

### Introduction

In this chapter, I shall demonstrate:

1. An understanding of the *missio Dei* is found in the overarching Story of God revealed in the Bible.
2. This is what shaped Jesus and his teachings.
3. Hearing Jesus' words and watching his movements recorded in the New Testament with the back story of Israel as the people of God helps us shape what it means for us today to be followers of Jesus.
4. Knowing the Story helps us to discern the work of the Holy Spirit today in validating and affirming renewal and reformation in local congregations.
5. When studying the differences that occurred in the Antioch church from the Jerusalem church, we can see how Paul, being rooted in the story of Israel, was able to discern how the Holy Spirit was forming an *emerging church*.<sup>1</sup>
6. Critiquing the nature and structures of our churches today to see how they measure up to the nature of the people of God throughout the Story can help us with a way forward and faithfulness to be participants in the Story.

### Beginning Theological Basis

The theological basis for my dissertation focuses on how a local congregation lives into the Story of the presence of the kingdom now and kingdom come. How the local church understands its nature, mission, and organization in conjunction with its call to be the sign, agent, and witness of the kingdom will be addressed in this chapter. Some of the questions addressed are:

1. What does it mean as citizens of heaven (the realm in which God's will is done) in local congregations to live out our place in the Story?

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

2. Who is our God, how do we respond to his grace and become his hands and feet, partnering with him to bring healing to the world?

These questions arose as a result of my theological work looking at the biblical story through the lens of mission and how recovering a biblical understanding of the mission of Dei impacts the church.

The theological basis of the project looks at the biblical story of redemption through the lens of mission. After God created the world and whatever happened in what is known as the *fall*, God set out to restore what he had made. What is often missed is that humankind rebelled against God and as a result God's good creation was fractured, broken, and flawed. To that end, God did not turn away from his creation; rather he "turned his face toward it in love."<sup>2</sup> The term *mission* will be used throughout this dissertation using the following definition coined by Christopher J. H. Wright:

Fundamentally, our mission (it is biblically formed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation.<sup>3</sup>

To put it another way, in the words of New Testament scholar N. T. Wright, "... in Jesus of Nazareth ... what happened to him set in motion the Creator's plan to rescue the world and put it back to rights."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 44.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 105.

## The Biblical Story as Drama

Reading the biblical story through a theological framework of Story including both the Old and New Testaments also provides a construction of reading and understanding the mission of God. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* is modeled after N.T. Wright's five-act-play model.<sup>5</sup> Winn Griffin's volume, *God's Epic Adventure: Changing our Culture by the Story We Live and Tell* also takes the approach of N.T. Wright's five-act-play model while stressing the theme of Covenant in the Old Testament and kingdom of God in the New Testament, "which appear to be two ways of saying the same thing: the rule of God has invaded this Present Evil Age."<sup>6</sup>

### *The Five Acts*

An understanding of the biblical story as a story with a shape and a goal that must be examined and to which appropriate response must be made is the underlying thesis of Wright's five-act-play model. The model corresponds to some important features of the biblical story. Wright asks us to suppose there exists a Shakespeare play whose fifth act had been lost. The first four acts provide such a grand story, including brilliant characterization, a climactic moment of excitement within the plot; it is agreed that the play must go onstage. Even so, it is felt inappropriate to actually write a fifth act, finalizing the play. Rather, it might be decided it would be better to give the key parts to highly trained Shakespearian actors, who would immerse themselves in the first four acts, and in the language and culture of Shakespeare and his time, and who would have the

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<sup>5</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Winn Griffin, *God's Epic Adventure: Changing Our Culture by the Story We Live and Tell* (Woodinville, WA: Harmon Press, 2007), 37.

latitude to work out the fifth act for themselves. The first four acts would stand as the *authority* for how the actors improvise their parts. The fifth act would now carry on with its own impetus, its own forward movement that would require the actors to enter the story as it stood and then to speak and act with both innovation and consistency. The five acts are seen as follows:

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Israel
4. Jesus
5. The Rest of the New Testament forms the first scene in the fifth act, giving hints as well (Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 15; parts of the Apocalypse) of how the play is supposed to end.

The church would then live under the *authority* of the existing story, being required to offer something between an improvisation and an actual performance of the final act.<sup>7</sup>

The hermeneutical map laid out in this dissertation takes Wright's five-act-play model and Griffin's expansion of the five-act-play model as the backdrop for God's mission.

### ***The Mission of God***

It has only been in the past half century that a shift has occurred toward understanding mission as God's mission. During preceding centuries mission was understood in a whole host of various ways. In soteriological terms, it was understood as saving individuals from the fury of hell fires. Often, it was understood in cultural terms as introducing people from the East and South to the Euro-centric Christianity of the West.

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<sup>7</sup> N. T. Wright, "How Can The Bible Be Authoritative?," [http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Bible\\_Authoritative.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm) (accessed September 8, 2008).

Frequently, it was perceived in ecclesiastical groupings as an expansion of specific denominations.

After the First World War, however, missiologists began to take note of recent developments in biblical and systematic theology. In a paper read at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, Karl Barth ([1932]1957) became one of the first theologians to articulate mission as an activity of God himself.<sup>8</sup> German missiologist Karl Hartenstein coined the term *missio Dei* in 1934 as a way of summarizing the teaching of Karl Barth.<sup>9</sup> The phrase originally meant *the sending God* — in the sense of the Father’s sending of the Son and their sending of the Holy Spirit. Human mission is then seen from this perspective, as participation in the divine sending of the Trinity.

“The phrase became popular after the Willingen world mission conference of 1952, through the work of George Vicedom.”<sup>10</sup> Vicedom connected mission to the theology of the Trinity, an important theological gain. In some circles the expression became weakened when it was interpreted to mean that *missio Dei* simply referred to God’s involvement with the entire historical process and not to any specific work of the church. Theological distortions resulted in a theology that excluded evangelism.<sup>11</sup>

Since Willingen, the *missio Dei* concept gradually underwent modification—a process traced by Rosin.<sup>12</sup> Since God’s concern is for the entire world, this should also be

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<sup>8</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> “Missio Dei,” Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missio\\_dei](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missio_dei) (accessed November 3, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 63.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 391.

the scope of the *missio Dei*. Mission is God's turning to the world in regard to creation, care, redemption, and consummation. It takes place in ordinary human history, not exclusively in and through the church. "God's own mission is larger than the mission of the church. The *missio Dei* is God's activity, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church may be privileged to participate."<sup>13</sup> As suggested, the Bible presents itself to us fundamentally as a narrative, a historical narrative on one level but as a grand narrative (metanarrative) at another level. To read the whole Bible through the hermeneutic of the mission of God is nothing more than to accept that that the entirety of the narrative locates us in the midst of the Story of the universe and all that is within it behind which stands the mission of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

### **The Biblical Story as a Back Drop for Mission**

What was God's intention before Creation? Todd Hunter provides one possible answer. He suggests that God is a person, and that in his personhood is the very implication of intentionality. There is no way to think of God as a person without him having intention. So, Hunter asks the question, "What was God's intention for humanity? What was God's intention for Adam and Eve?" His conclusion, "a cooperative friendship with them. They were to work with God and serve his creation, ruling and reigning with God in his amazing creation." That, says Hunter, "was God's intention for humanity."<sup>14</sup> Whether you agree with Hunter's pre-Creation intention of God or not, it could be proposed that in the creation account, God did have an intention for humankind to *rule*

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Todd Hunter, *Missional Church: Always Right, Now Urgent and Strategic* (Vancouver, WA, 2008), Lecture: Northwest Region National Conference.



and *reign* with him in his good creation.<sup>15</sup> The care and keeping of creation is our human mission.

### **Act 1: Creation**

In the very first act, the reader is introduced to the great work of creation. The creation story reveals the creation of humankind: man and woman created in God's image and entrusted with the mission of caring for the earth and enjoying God's blessing while fulfilling their mission.

### **Act 2: The Fall**

The Story changes when God's human creatures choose to rebel against their Creator, disobeying his commands, and disregarding the boundaries he had set for freedom sake. The result of this disobedience and moral failure is a thorough fracture in all the relationships established in creation. Adam and Eve hide from God in fear. Men and women can no longer face one another without shame and blame. The soil comes under the curse of God and the earth no longer responds to humans as it should.

The narratives contained in Genesis 1-11 combine in a climax of human sin alongside an act of God's divine grace. The serpent's head will be crushed. Adam and Eve are clothed. Cain is protected. Noah and his family are saved. Creation is preserved under a covenant. Things are not right, in fact, badly blemished and damaged, but God's purpose is moving forward.

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<sup>15</sup> "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Genesis 1:28).

### **Act 3: Israel God's Elect Chosen for Blessing**

Against the backdrop of humanity's creation and sin and rebellion in Genesis 2-11, the story continues in Act 3: Israel. Beginning with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12, Israel comes into existence as a people with a mission assigned to them from God for the sake of God's wider intention, to bless all nations. In the call of Abraham, the concept of *election*, which means God's chosen, is encountered. God chose Israel not to exclusivity but to responsibility. Israel's mission was to show the world, the nations, what it meant to be God's people and in doing so to be a light to the nations.

God called Abraham and made a covenant with him. God promised him a people and a land in which they would live and fulfill their vocation as the light of the world. Israel's election or Israel was chosen for the following purpose as seen in Genesis 12:1-3:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

"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.

I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you."

The people of God were blessed to be a blessing for the sake of the world. Blessing for the nations is bottom line theologically God's promise to Abraham. Genesis 12:1-3 is a turning point in the book of Genesis. It moves the story forward from the previous eleven chapters of Genesis that primarily dealt with God's dealings with all the nations up to the patriarchs leading to the creation of Israel as a distinct nation. It is a pivotal

point in the whole Bible because it announces the good news of God's action. It asserts that despite all that has been read in the previous eleven chapters about individuals and nations failing, it is God's ultimate purpose to bless humanity.

A new world begins in Genesis 12:1-3, a world that is being recreated, bursting out of the womb of the old world of Genesis 1-11. Christopher Wright describes this womb as barren. The calling of Abram with a promise of an heir seems impossible. History, like creation itself prior to the transforming word of God, seems shut up to futility and shrouded in darkness.<sup>16</sup> Just as the text reads, "And God said" in Genesis 1:3, so here in the calling of Abraham, the text reads, "And YHWH said to Abram" in Genesis 12:1. The same God who spoke into the darkness now speaks into barrenness with good news. God's mission of redemption for the entire cosmos begins anew with Israel.

### ***Go and Be a Blessing***

The words that God uses to call Abraham are both imperatives. Both have the nature of a mission charged to Abraham. The first mission was geographical and limited. He was to leave home and go to the land God had promised. The second mission is limitless—*be a blessing*. Its scope is unlimited in time and geography. Blessing here is a command; as a task, a purpose, and goal that stretches far into the future. It is missional.

It is the third missional command that is seen in the Story so far. First, in Genesis 1-2, God charges human beings with the task of ruling over the rest of creation through serving the earth in which he has placed them. Second, in Genesis 9 after the flood, God

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<sup>16</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*.

renewed his original covenant and mandate with Noah and his family to go forth, be fruitful, and fill the earth.

Finally, in Genesis 12 with the call of Abraham and the creation of Israel, the redemptive mission of God is seen. “Mission is the address of God’s blessing to the deficit brought about by human failure and pride.”<sup>17</sup>

God narrows his redemptive focus on one man, one nation. But his ultimate plan and purpose is to bring redemption to every nation, to the whole earth. From the beginning of the story, it can be observed that God’s people are to be a part of the *missio Dei*.

Abraham’s promised son Isaac becomes the heir to the promise. Genesis 25-36 tells the stories of Isaac and his sons, Esau and Jacob. From Jacob’s sons, the twelve tribes of Israel emerge. God came to be referred to by his own words, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6). By the end of the Genesis story, God’s promise to Abraham, concerning his seed would be like the sand, has partially been fulfilled. Jacob’s children have become a large, growing group in Egypt.

### ***Exodus – By an Act of Redemption The Nation of Israel is Formed***

Four hundred years after Abraham, the story continues in Exodus. Joseph and his brothers have died. Exodus 1:8 states, “a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” In the opening scenes of Exodus, a new pharaoh has come to power who does not know Joseph, fears the multitudes of Israelites, subjects them to slave labor, and institutes a policy of killing male newborn Israelites. The vast oppression of the Israelites

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 212.

becomes the very impetus for the Israelite's exodus from Egypt. When they cry out to God from their oppression, God hears their groaning and remembers his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. (Ex. 2:24). Into this environment, Moses is born. In order to escape the death of her newborn son, Moses' mother puts him in a waterproof basket and places him in the Nile River. He is rescued by Pharaoh's daughter and Moses is taken to Pharaoh's palace, raised, and educated there in all the ways of Egypt.

As a young man, Moses observes the harsh treatment the Israelites must endure. He witnesses an Israelite being beaten by an Egyptian. In a rage, Moses kills the Egyptian. Pharaoh tries to have him killed, but Moses flees to the Midian desert and becomes a shepherd. (Ex. 2:11-17).

While working as a shepherd for his father-in-law near a mountain named Horeb, Moses has a powerful encounter with God. God speaks to Moses through a burning bush. (Ex. 3). God tells Moses he has heard the cries of his people and he is now sending Moses to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt and lead them into the Promised Land.

Through God's redemptive power, the Israelites with Moses leading are miraculously delivered from Egypt. The Exodus recounts God's action in redemptive history that leads the Israelites to the Sea of Reeds and miraculously holds back the waters so that they cross on dry land. Pharaoh and his armies in pursuit, following the Israelites through the sea, are drowned as the waters held back for the Israelites come crashing down. Exodus 3:14-17 records that God's promise to Moses came to pass:

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you."

God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

... I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land ... a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Rob Bell has proposed that many scholars believe the focal point of the Hebrew Scriptures is the Exodus.<sup>18</sup> God heard the cry of his people and in response to their cry delivered them from darkness, slavery, and oppression.

For Rob Bell and others, the story begins in Egypt with the following flow. God brought Israel out of Egypt to Sinai. At Sinai, God gave them mission and identity. He wanted them to be his hands and feet in the world. He is the God that brought them out, which was a pure act of God’s grace. He brought them out to be his people. The Covenant was made with them in which God gave them mission. In essence, he told them how to live and as they go, to do all that he has commanded. The mission was how they would keep their story alive. God told them that he was the LORD who brought them out of Egypt. He rescued them, not just so they would be rescued, but they were rescued for a purpose. Israel was brought out of Egypt by the grace of God and was to extend the exodus to others.

At this point according to Bell, Egypt is seen as the place of rescue, redemption, liberation, and salvation. Then, Sinai can be seen as the place where mission and identity are given and the Covenant is established.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rob Bell, “Jesus Wants to Save Christians,” <http://vineyard-cc.org/podcast/2008/04/15/rob-bell-jesus-wants-to-save-christians/> (accessed April 15, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## *The Covenant*

The Covenant was given to the Israelites after the Exodus in the form of an oath, often called a Lord-Servant (Suzerain-Vassal) Treaty.<sup>20</sup> God had heard the Israelites' groans and cries for help under the oppression of slavery to the Egyptians; he had delivered them in an extraordinary act of liberation. The Covenant was now a way for the redeemed people of God to relate to their God, to each other, and to the world, demonstrating what being the people of God was like. It was a Covenant that would help them in being the light of the world, a blessing to the nations.

Redemption came first, then the Covenant. The Law was never intended to provide salvation/redemption: rather, because they had been saved/redeemed, the Law gave the way to know how to be in relationship with this saving, liberator God.

Exodus 20:1-17 records what is often called the Ten Commandments. These commandments show Israel and the world what it means to be the people of the One True God. The first four commandments focus on a relationship with God and the last six focus on relationship with others. The following is a list with a short commentary.

1. *You shall have no other gods before me.* Obeying commands is difficult for everyone. Submission doesn't come easily. Everyone submits to something/someone; the question is to whom or to what? "God knows that Israel, left to its own devices in the wilderness, is prone to reestablish Pharaoh's rule in different forms. So the commandments are given as a basis for a radically alternative society that is counter to all that the empire demands."<sup>21</sup>
2. *You shall not make yourself an idol.* God is not a mere necessity. He is to be worshiped. Turning one's life over to God brings freedom from idolatries that

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<sup>20</sup> Griffin, *God's Epic Adventure*, 118.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley M. Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Truth About God: The Ten Commandments in Christian Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 27.

threaten us. Idolatry is failure to trust God. Punishment comes from disobeying God. Sin leads to punishment for not being who individuals were created to be.

3. *You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.* There is power in calling someone by name. In Genesis, God gives humans power to name animals. In Exodus 3:13-14, “I am who I am” requires us to use his name properly.
4. *Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy ...* Sabbath keeping is countercultural. Babel is an example of human busyness. Recognizing Sabbath is re-taking time in God’s name. It shows the world that time is not its possession. Time is a gift from God. Time is accountable to God.
5. *Honor your father and mother.* Parents are evidence that children are created; created to need one another. Obey parents when parents honor and obey God, keeping his commandments. The fifth commandment ends with a blessing, *days will be long.*
6. *You shall not murder.* Taking life is God’s job.
7. *You shall not commit adultery.* The sanctity of marriage, the home, and human sexuality are all found in this commandment.
8. *You shall not steal.* The eighth commandment cuts to the heart of deceit. Stealing is commonplace, not only when things are taken, but also when giving does not occur. Respect for property.
9. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.* Speaking truth to one another. Respect for your neighbors’ reputation. Honesty.
10. *You shall not covet.* In Hebrew *covet* means to lust. Commandments nine and ten are about desire, contentment. The Commandments are about loving God. When love is directed toward something or someone else, disorder is the result.

The Ten Commandments are good news. They tell the people of God how to live in a way that they can fulfill their mission to be the light of the world.

### ***The Tabernacle***

The Tabernacle was a visible sign that God’s presence was with them and it provided Israel with a place to worship and make atonement for their breaking the Covenant stipulations.<sup>22</sup> The tabernacle’s significance was that God’s occasional appearances to Israel now give way to his permanent presence in their midst. He has come to dwell in the midst of his people. The tabernacle moves with them, wherever they go; God journeys

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<sup>22</sup> Griffin, *God's Epic Adventure*, 119.



with his people. The tabernacle also suggests more: it is a symbol, a sign of the full restoration of God's presence within the whole of his creation. God's mission is still in forward motion as he dwells with his people; the glory manifested there with them is to stream out to the rest of the nations.

### ***Holiness***

Leviticus is all about the protocol for maintaining a right relationship with God. It describes how his people are to relate and respond to his presence in the midst of their camp. It provides instructions for how to live daily in relationship to a holy God. Behind all the laws and rituals in Leviticus is the point of what it means to be holy, or *set apart*: again, not set apart for exclusivity but set apart for responsibility; for the purpose of bringing God's blessing to all nations, to be a light to the world.

### ***Reaching the Promised Land***

As the Story continues, Moses' death ushers in Joshua as the Israelite's leader who will lead them into the Promised Land. The book of Joshua tells the stories of conquest of the land and has all the underpinnings of a present-day novel. The storyline in the book of Joshua begins with crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land, an echo of the Exodus. It continues with the story of the prostitute Rahab, who hides the spies and is drawn into the mission of God entering into the story of salvation history. Everyone's favorite story is the wall of Jericho falling down, on to Ai, the taking of the South and then the North of Canaan. Finally, at the end of the book of Joshua, Joshua calls the Israelites to remember the Covenant and the mission of God.

### ***Exile and Return***

In Act 3, there is a motif that will continue over and over again through Israel's story, i.e., exile and return. The Jewish storytellers of the Old Testament see going-away-and-coming-back-again as their main motif. The majority of the Hebrew Scriptures, more than likely, found their final form during the Jews' exile in Babylon, living with the sorrow of being away from their homeland and from the presence of Yahweh in the temple. The irony of Abraham's family now living in the land of Babel is not to be missed. At the close of the book of Joshua, Joshua exhorts the Israelites to *remember* their story, to *remember* their God.

The Jewish people in exile had hope. They did remember that they had been in exile before. In fact, exile has become a common theme in all their stories.

Abraham, as part of his nomadic life, goes to Egypt and almost gets stuck there. Frightened for his life, he lies about Sarah, his wife, and tells the Pharaoh that she is his sister. He is then allowed to go. That story is told almost immediately after receiving the promise.

The pattern repeats itself in many of the stories thus far. Jacob cheats his brother Esau and has to flee. He eventually returns home to face his brother and to wrestle with God. (Gen. 32). The main story with the exile and return theme is the story of Joseph. He is taken to Egypt and sold as a slave, but he ends up earning favor and becomes a very successful man in the house of the Pharaoh. A famine strikes the land and his entire family ends up in Egypt where he is in a position to help them. Within a generation after Joseph's death, the favored status of the family changes and they are now slaves in Egypt. When things seem to have reached their worst, their conditions unbearable, they

cry out to God, and as seen earlier, God hears their cry for help, and promises to lead them out of slavery, and give them freedom in their own land.

The motif of exile and return is an important theme in the Grand Narrative of God. Immersing ourselves in the Story of Acts 1-4 and seeing how the resolve of this theme will take place in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth informs how we, the actors that are living out our part in Act 5, are to remember that everyone is invited to participate in the *missio Dei*.

### ***The Exile Motif Continues Through Kings and Prophets***

Once Israel reached the land they had been promised, things went well and badly. Local tribes ruled over them and other liberators rose up to set them free. It was out of this period of cycles of chaos that the people asked for a king. Saul was anointed as the first king over Israel, but after Saul's mistakes, David emerged as king. Like Abraham, David also followed his own heart with enormous consequences. What was meant to be the story of his kingdom being established was instead the story of him running away from his son, Absalom, who was trying to kill him. The pattern of exile repeats itself again: David goes into exile but returns with great sadness and with great wisdom.

Within two generations the kingdom is divided. Two hundred years later, the largest segment, the northern kingdom that took the name Israel, had been devastated and emptied by Assyria. In this exile, there was no return home.

The southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, continued on in Jerusalem. As Assyria became weaker, another super-power emerged: Babylon, which conquered Judah, destroying the temple and carrying away the people of God once again into exile. But it

happened again, after seventy years passed, Babylon fell to the next world super-power, Persia. The new Persian leader decided to send the Jews home. The Jews returned home, rebuilt the walls of the city, and rebuilt the temple. The people sang a song of deliverance. “When YHWH restored the fortunes of Zion,” wrote a poet, “we were like people who dream, our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy” (Psa. 126:1-2). Exile and return, the theme of Jewish storytelling from that day on was grounded in the Jewish consciousness. As the people returned to Jerusalem and were able to resume worship at the temple, they were assured that God’s rescue mission was still on course.

N. T. Wright correctly underscores the picture of Israel’s return from captivity. He states:

But it wasn’t the same. At least, not the same as it had been in the world of David and Solomon, when Israel was free and independent, when the surrounding nations were subservient, when people came from far away to see the beauty of Jerusalem and to hear the wisdom of the king. Israel had come back from Babylon; but, as some writers of the time put it, they were still slaves—in their own land!<sup>23</sup>

One world super-power after another conquered the people of God: Persia, Egypt, Greece, Syria, and finally Rome. The Jewish people wondered how God would fulfill his promises, how the mission of God to bless all the nations would come to pass. How would God put the world to right?

The book of Daniel is compiled somewhere in the midst of the Babylonian captivity. It is full of stories about Jewish heroes and visionaries that are in captivity, conquered by the then world super-power. The book, named after its main character Daniel, emphasizes

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<sup>23</sup> Wright, *Simply Christian*.

the undying hope that the entire world will one day be brought under the rule and reign of the true king, the Creator God, YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The book gives the Israelites perspective, making it clear that the promise of God has taken much longer to fulfill than they would have ever imagined. They had come home from Babylon, but at one level and in a very real sense their *exile* would last until God became the one true king of the world. Then their exile would be over, then God would rescue them and the nations and put everything right.

The Book of Daniel weaves this belief into the storyline of Israel's exile and restoration, going away and coming back home. When God brings the final act of deliverance, overthrowing all of Israel's oppressors and Israel is free at last—that will be the time when God fulfills all his promises, judges the entire earth, and puts all things right. The *missio Dei* will be completed. The one who will judge Israel's enemies will be a strange, human figure, “one like the son of man” (Dan. 7). He will represent God's people and bring vindication. That will be the coming of God's kingdom, God's sovereign rule over the world.

Isaiah 19:24-25 says, “In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.’” Christopher Wright writes that this Scripture is one of the most breathtaking pronouncements of any prophet and one of the missiologically most significant texts in the Old Testament. The allusions to the Abrahamic promise are unmistakable:

...(1) the use of the piel of *brk* in verse 25 (“The LORD Almighty will bless them,” matching the same form as “I will bless you” in Gen 12:12b), and the phrase “will be a blessing” (*hyh* with *bērākā* [v24]). In Genesis 12:2d this combination is in the form of an imperative with intention (“be a blessing” or, “so that you will be a blessing”). In Isaiah

9:24 it is a prophetic affirmation about Israel, Egypt and Assyria combined (they will all together “be a blessing in the midst of the earth”).<sup>24</sup>

This is a profound statement in the biblical Story. The nations will not only experience God’s blessing, but they too will *be* a blessing on the earth. God’s dynamic movements in his promise to Abraham are at work. The recipients of the Abrahamic blessing become the agents of the promise to Abraham. The agent motif runs through the entire *missio Dei*. Those who become recipients of God’s promise, his purposes then in turn become agents of the mission. Later, the “agents of God” theme will be noted in the context of the kingdom of God. This text is profoundly important and brings home God’s original intention that Israel would be a light to the nations and were not chosen to exclusivity. The blessing of others would not be confined to Israel alone, but the promise would be a self-replicating gene whereby those who receive it are transformed into those whose mission is to pass it on to others. This story is good news! Salvation history continues through the era of the prophets with the prophets calling God’s people to remember: remember their story, remember their God, remember God’s mission.

Rob Bell likens Solomon’s<sup>25</sup> reign as one of a new Pharaoh. Solomon is building terraces, palaces, and the temple to the God who liberates from slavery, using slaves and their labor to do so. This building project is an indication that Solomon has forgotten his story. The Story continues in Israel by asking the question, what is Israel going to do with its blessing? Will Israel maintain justice and righteousness, take care of the widow, the orphan, the stranger? Will Israel veer toward *empire* mentality and implement the priority

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<sup>24</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 235-236.

<sup>25</sup> Bell, “Jesus Wants to Save Christians.”

of preservation? Will Israel use its resources to protect what has been accumulated or will Israel remember its story and live the way God intends?

God sends the prophets to remind Israel of its story. The prophets continually speak of Egypt. They continually speak for God asking Israel, “have you forgotten your story?”

Essentially when nothing more can be done, Israel goes into exile to Babylon. The Psalmist tells us their condition, “by the rivers of Babylon we hung our harps on the poplars and we wept” (Psa. 137:1). Israel was a slave in a foreign land crying out for deliverance from exile.

### ***The Mission of the Servant of the Lord***

We are introduced to a mysterious figure in the book of Isaiah. He is known as the Servant of the Lord, but not before the prophet first applies the term to Israel. Israel was God’s servant.

But you, O Israel, my servant,  
Jacob, whom I have chosen  
you descendants of Abraham, my friend,  
I took you from the ends of the earth,  
from its farthest corners I called you.  
I said, “You are my servant”;  
I have chosen you and have not rejected you;  
So do not fear, I am with you.  
do not be dismayed for I am your God  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isa. 41:8-10).

When the Servant is announced in Isaiah 42:1, in terms of an individual, there is a connection with the identity of Israel. Many of the things, which are said about the Servant figure in the Servant Songs, are also implied about Israel as God’s servant. For example, being chosen by God and upheld by God’s right hand is said of both (see Isaiah

42:1, 6). Both are called to be witnesses to God in the midst of and to the nations (42:6, 43:10, 21, 49:3, 6).

The historical context in which these prophecies of Isaiah 40-55 are heard was the exile.<sup>26</sup> The entire section is a tremendous word of challenge and encouragement to the Jews who had survived the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B. C. and were now part of the second generation in captivity in Babylon. They knew all too well why they were there: their continued sin, disobedience, and failure as a nation, the people of God, which had been so denounced by the pre-exilic prophets. Israel, the servant of God, for all the blessings and privileges listed in the quotation above, were at that particular time in history frozen, useless as far as their fulfillment of their mission was concerned. They were stuck, living in exile once again under powerful oppressors. In the same chapter, the anointed Servant is introduced with his worldwide mission (Isa. 42:1-9). Listen to the words of this piece of poetry:

Hear, you deaf;  
    look you blind, and see!  
Who is blind but my servant,  
    And deaf like the messenger I send?  
    Who is blind like the one committed to me,  
    blind like the servant of the LORD?  
You have seen many things, but you have paid no attention;  
    your ears are open, but you hear nothing?’  
It pleased the LORD, for the sake of his righteousness  
    to make his law great and glorious.  
But this is a people plundered and looted,  
    all of them trapped in pits  
    or hidden away in prisons.  
Who handed Jacob over to become loot,  
    and Israel to the plunderers?

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<sup>26</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 166-167.



Was it not the LORD,  
against whom we have sinned?  
For they would not follow his ways;  
they did not obey his law (Isa. 42:18-22a, 24).

These are significant words because the prophet calls Israel God's servant and puts this word of rebuke almost immediately after his description of the character and mission of the servant in 42:1-9. Although there is clearly a certain amount of continuity and identity between the Servant individual and Israel, the above passage also demonstrated that there is some of discontinuity and distinction between them as well. The nation of Israel at this point in its history is far from fulfilling its part in God's mission—to be a light to the nations as his witness—rather, the nation of Israel is under his judgment. Far from him both spiritually and geographically, they are blind, deaf and incapacitated. They need to be brought back to God (exile-return motif), not just back to Jerusalem. Cyrus will serve one of God's purposes by providing the political liberation that will bring them back to Jerusalem. Who then will restore them spiritually? The Servant figure, which is probably implied by 42:3 and 7. The bruised reed and the smoldering wick, the blind captives sitting in darkness, more than likely meant Israel. The Servant would have a mission of compassionate restoration. Listen as he tells us of this mission in the second "Servant Song."

And now the LORD says—

he who formed me in the womb to be his servant,  
to bring Jacob back to him  
and gather Israel to himself, ... (Isa. 49:5a).

The Servant has a mission to Israel. It is the Servant of God who will bring the restoration of Israel from its spiritual captivity. But how would that restoration be accomplished? Isaiah 49:4 lets us know but not in the way one would expect.

But I have said, “I have laboured to no purpose;  
I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing” (Isa. 49:4a).

Apparently the Servant faces apparent failure. This breakdown is magnified in Isaiah 50:5, where the Servant experiences rejection and physical abuse. God’s answer to the Servant’s seeming failure is to entrust him with an even greater mission—not just Israel but the world!

And now the LORD says (verse 6 is God’s answer to verse 4)

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant  
to restore the tribes of Jacob,  
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.  
I will also make you a light to the Gentiles,  
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth

The Servant not only has a mission to Israel but also a mission to the world. The universal mission does not cancel or replace the mission of restoring Israel. This particular “Servant Song” is actually addressed to the nations in 49:1.

In summary, Israel was the servant of God, chosen and enabled by God with the purpose of being a light to the nations stemming from the original call and promise to Abraham. Historically, Israel was failing in its role as servant and in its mission to the nations. Israel as the servant of God was actually *blind* and *deaf* and under God’s judgment. The individual Servant is at one level distinct from Israel because he has a mission to Israel, to challenge them and call them back to God out of their spiritual exile. Nothing less than the restoration of God’s people, Israel, is the task of the Servant. At another level, the Servant is identified with Israel and similar language is used of both. In the universal purposes and mission of God, the Servant enables the original mission of Israel to be fulfilled. That is, through the Servant, God’s justice, liberation, deliverance,

and salvation will be extended to all the nations. The universal *missio Dei*, the original election of Israel, is to be fulfilled through the mission of the Servant.

The figure of the suffering servant in the book of Isaiah was somewhat of a messianic picture. What is clear from Isaiah 53 is that the Servant of the Lord would not only suffer—but he would die—be brutally killed—and his death would be a sacrifice for the sin of many (Isa. 53:10). The Servant was told by God: in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8, that he would be “a covenant for the nations.” Isaiah 61:1-2a gives us a succinct picture of the mission of the Servant:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor

The Hebrews are looking for the one like Moses to come – the Messiah who will complete the final redemption and fulfill Isaiah’s prophecies.

### **The Intertestamental Period**

As the First Testament period comes to a close, many of the people of Israel are living back in Palestine and in some degree of peace under the Persians who have allowed Israel to return to Jerusalem. But as the Second Testament story opens, its context has changed dramatically. The Persian Empire has collapsed and Israel now lives under the brutal super-power of imperial Rome. Only a remnant of the people of Israel live in Palestine—the majority of people are scattered throughout the Roman Empire and even beyond its borders, where they too are subject to foreign powers. The Jewish people are once again longing for God to act, to lift them from the oppression of evil regimes.

They are once again captives dreaming of the day when God would rescue them once and for all, defeat their enemies, and put all things right.

The Intertestamental period, four hundred years of Israel's history between Malachi and Mathew, is important to the biblical story and to the mission of God, because it gives us a context for the world that Jesus of Nazareth lived in and also the context for what that world meant for the people of God at the time of Jesus' life and ministry.

During the four-hundred-year span, the Jewish people make continuous attempts to reconcile their faith in the promises of God, the promise of blessing with the experience of being oppressed by one world super-power after another. Even though the Persian conquerors allowed the Jews to return to their own land from their exile in Babylon, only a remnant did so. By the first century A. D., Jewish communities were in almost every city of the world. These Jews, who were living in the Diaspora, were called *the scattered* (from two Greek words meaning *among/throughout* and *seeds*, as of a farmer scattering seeds across his field).<sup>27</sup> These Jews believed that Israel as a whole was still living in exile, so they were highly intentional about living out their identity as the people of God, especially by keeping their religious observances. The Torah remained foundational for their lives. It was through keeping the Torah that they remained faithful to God while they longed for his mighty act of deliverance. In order to keep their distinctiveness as the people of God, the Jews, both in Palestine and in Diaspora, created synagogues for Sabbath worship, prayer, and study of the Scriptures. The synagogue system provided an educational, judicial, social, economic, and political center for the Jewish people in the

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<sup>27</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*.

midst of a foreign or alien culture. For the Jewish people the synagogue could not replace the temple. They continued to pay temple taxes and on important festivals would make pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen write of this time:

Five fundamental beliefs, the product of Israel's two-thousand year journey with God from the time of Abraham, shaped Jews' life during the intertestamental period. The first of these was *monotheism*: Israel believed in one God, the Creator of the world and the Ruler of history. The second belief was *election*: God had chosen Israel for a special purpose: through this nation and no other he would work to rid his creation of the evil that had marred and thwarted it since the sin of Adam ... The third belief concerned the Law or *Torah*: God had given Israel the Law to direct its way of life as God's holy people and promised that the Israelites would be blessed if they continued in steadfast faithfulness to this Law. The fourth belief concerned the *land* to which God had brought his people through Moses and Joshua, and the *temple* that had been built there. For Israel the *land* was much more than merely a neutral piece of real estate, more even than the home they lived in and the garden that sustained them. The *land* was *holy* because it was here God dwelt with Israel (Zechariah 2:12) ... Israel's *hope for a future redemptive act of God* was the fifth belief that ruled its life as a nation during the intertestamental period.<sup>28</sup>

In 331 B. C., the Greek armies led by Alexander the Great conquered the Persians, the control of Palestine and the rule of the people of Israel fell to the Greeks. During this time Greek ideas and practices began to seep into every aspect of Israel's culture, even the Greek language which was used to translate the Torah into Greek; the Septuagint all began to undermine Israel's own cultural and religious integrity.

The Jewish people resisted the Greek attempt to destroy their distinctiveness and survived as Rome came to power in Palestine in 63 B. C. The Romans now were ruling and would rule Palestine and the majority of the then known world for five hundred years.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 87.

The Romans proved to be worthy oppressors of the Jews. The Romans ruled by force, fear, and intimidation. They heavily taxed the Israelites and gave them brutal punishments for any resistance. Under this oppressive regime, from time to time the Jews longed for God to act and destroy their oppressors and begin his rule. These Jewish zealots would start small rebellions against the Romans. These were immediately and violently put down, ending with mass crucifixions of the rebels, a public showing of the price that would be paid for opposing Rome. All the while, the people of Israel were waiting for Messiah to come. During this period, the people of Israel thought of history as comprised of two very distinct periods: the present age and the age to come. In the present age, which had begun with Adam's sin, the entire creation was affected. Evil would grow throughout the world during this present age, even among the people of Israel, which can be observed time and time again. But in the "age to come," God would intervene to cleanse and renew his creation. This renewal mission would begin with Israel, many of whom were living in exile, whether geographically or spiritually, it didn't matter anymore. Before this great act of liberation could occur, God would need to deal with his people's sin. Many of the Israelites believed that any great act of liberation would not happen until God brought his final judgment on his people. This judgment would be the darkest hour they would know. Then after that judgment God's great renewal would dawn, a new world would be born, and Israel would be forgiven, cleansed, and renewed.

## **The Different Expressions of Israel's Faith**

### ***The Pharisees***

The Pharisees were devoted to God and to keeping the Law. For them, separation and obedience were essential truths. They came to emphasize aspects of the Torah law that kept them as distinctively Jewish, i.e., circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath keeping. These became boundary markers that showed the world and the Jews if they were faithful or not. Many among the Pharisees were ready to advance God's kingdom with political activism and even with violence. They were successful because they gave voice to some of the deepest longings of the people of Israel: their longing for liberation, their loyalty to Torah, and their unending hope for a renewed kingdom that God himself would rule and reign.

### ***The Essenes***

This group came into existence mainly during the Maccabean revolt and was fueled by the desire to not only stop, but also reverse the assimilation and compromise of the Hellenistic culture that engulfed the people of Israel. In order to do so, the Essenes chose the path of separation and withdrawal. They believed that their faithfulness to the Torah would bring God back to restore Israel. They did not participate in revolution, because they believed God was sovereign and would come back at a time of his choosing, sending a priestly and kingly messiah to lead them in a war against the Gentiles and any compromising Jews. They believed the time was close but waited in withdrawal, practicing ritual purity and prayer.

### ***The Sadducees and Priests***

These were the official teachers of the Law and would be the recognized leaders of mainline Judaism. With the Pharisees, they were members of the ruling council, the Sanhedrin. They were in the good graces of the Romans and stayed that way in order to keep their influential positions in society. They were not interested in revolution and were fine to collaborate with Rome to maintain the status quo.

### ***The Zealots***

These were a subculture within the nation of Israel, representing a number of different peoples with differing interests. By the time of Jesus, there were many different groups of Zealots, some acting as terrorists. They were eager to participate in armed revolt against Rome to liberate their people and cleanse the land and the temple. The Roman authorities would crush any attempt of a Zealot's revolt usually by crucifying the leader and savagely punishing the followers.

### ***The Common People***

Most of the Jews of this time period were not members of any party. About half a million lived in Israel, with perhaps three million others scattered across the Roman Empire.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 127.



## **Act 4: But When the Time Had Fully Come, God Sent His Son**

### ***The Birth of Jesus***

The climax of the Story happens in Act 4: Jesus. Jesus is central to all that has been studied up to this point. Jesus is central to everything we will study beyond this point. Put simply, Jesus of Nazareth was born of a virgin, raised as a good Hebrew, and all the while as he was growing, he was becoming the one for whom everything, everything hinged on. The birth narratives of Jesus are found in Matthew and Luke. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in approximately 6 or 4 B. C. Approximately two years later, Jesus and his family flee to Egypt and become refugees in Africa to escape Herod's genocide of infant boys in Palestine. "Jesus birth is the incarnation of God into humankind, a picture of the Tabernacle in flesh."<sup>30</sup>

### ***The Life of Jesus***

Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God. The entire biblical narrative points to this time. Jesus believed that it was the Creator God's intention to deal with the problem within his creation caused by Adam through his servant, Israel. Israel would thereby be the means by which God would save the world. Jesus also knew that the vocation of Israel would be finalized within the history of Israel in some grand act of redemption in which Israel herself would be saved, and God, the LORD would put it all right. His love and his justice would produce the renewal of his creation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Griffin, *God's Epic Adventure*, 184.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

Jesus came onto the scene preaching the kingdom of God was near. He chose twelve disciples (Mark 3:13-19), which was seen as a symbol of reinstating the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus became the visible picture of the *missio Dei*, he was sent into the world to show the world what the true image of God was like. He was also sent as the one who would be Israel, and also be fully human. Jesus is the picture of Israel the way God meant Israel to be and he is the picture of what it means to be truly human, the way God intended humanity as the image bearers of the Creator God.

Jesus' message became the message of the good news of the kingdom. He made it clear that there was one LORD and it was not Caesar.

Jesus' ministry began out of the ministry of John the Baptist. John's ministry was calling Israel to repentance in preparation for the coming of the Lord. John's ministry was a prophetic ministry calling Israel back for the very restoration of Israel. Jesus used this ministry of John the Baptist as the foundation of his own ministry. Jesus earthly ministry was launched by a movement that was aimed at the restoration of Israel. Jesus' own movement was launched as a movement for the ingathering of the nations. Remember the Servant figure in Isaiah. Here is the beginning picture of just who Jesus of Nazareth is and what his mission might be. Here is the ultimate salvation plan of God playing out in history in first century Palestine.

The Gospels present the story of Jesus, how he deliberately limited his ministry and that of his disciples to the "lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 10:6; 15:24). The Gospels also present several engagements with Gentiles, showing the kingdom of God was for all people and portraying God's ingathering and blessing of the nations. Here is a summary:

1. the Roman centurion's servant: Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10
2. the Gadarene demoniac: Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39
3. the deaf and mute man in Decapolis: Mark 7:31-35
4. the SyroPhoenician woman: Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-31
5. the prophetic sign in the temple: Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46
6. the parable of the tenants of the vineyard: Matt. 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19

Jesus broke many of the cultural conventions of the day to include *outsiders* and fulfill his mission. He was often accused of breaking the boundary markers by eating with sinners and tax collectors. Jesus was often called *teacher* or *rabbi*. We have every reason to believe that he studied the Scriptures and that he allowed that study to shape what he knew he had to do. His mission was to bring the great story of Israel to its decisive climax. The ultimate plan of God, to rescue the world and put everything right at last, was going to come true in him. His death, which would be the final exile, would also be the moment the prophet Isaiah had said, Jesus would be “wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:5). God's redemptive plan, his salvation history, would reach its climax and be accomplished through the suffering and death of the Servant—Jesus himself. The powers of evil would be rendered neutral, the world would be rescued from evil by evil doing its worst to Jesus, the Servant.

It is not by accident that Jesus' confrontation with the powers happens on the feast of Passover. His whole vision was for God to act in one final, great *exodus*, rescuing Israel and the world from the super-powers that enslaved them. The healings that Jesus performed were signposts of the new creation into which he would lead Israel and the world into a new Promised land. All the Jewish festivals are packed with meaning, and for Israel, Passover is the most meaningful of all where the dramatic retelling of the

Exodus story reminds everyone of the time when the Pharaoh was overthrown, when Israel was set free, when God acted powerfully and decisively to save his people.

Jesus celebrated Passover in the upper room. He spoke of the Passover bread as his own body that would be given for his friends. He spoke of the Passover wine as containing his own blood. Like the sacrificial blood in the temple, it would be poured out to establish the covenant—a new covenant spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah. The time had come, when at last God would rescue his people and the entire world from evil, from sin, which had enslaved the entire creation. His death would be the ultimate putting things to right that the temple and the sacrificial system only pointed towards but could never accomplish.

In meeting the fate which was rushing toward him, he would be the place where heaven and earth met, as he hung suspended between the two. He would be the place where God's future arrived in the present, with the kingdom of God celebrating its triumph over the kingdoms of the world by refusing to join in the spiral of violence. He would love his enemies, turn the other cheek, go the second mile. He would act out, finally, his own interpretation of the ancient prophecies which spoke to him of a suffering Messiah.<sup>32</sup>

Jesus wrestled in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was arrested and put through the legal procedures, convicted of blasphemy, and sentenced to death by crucifixion. At the point of his death, God's future was poured out into the present, the forgiving love of God's future was poured out into the present, justice was meted out, and it was *finished*. The death of Jesus of Nazareth as the bearer of Israel's destiny, the fulfillment of God's promises to his people is the fulcrum around which history turns. Three days later, on Sunday, the first day of the week—Jesus was bodily raised from the

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<sup>32</sup> Wright, *Simply Christian*, 110.

dead. It was the crowning victory of God over all the forces of evil. The resurrection of Jesus confirms and completes the victory of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of Satan. It was the heart of the message of the early church. It was the final announcement to all the powers that God's victory was complete and through it the Age to Come had arrived. Jesus ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God where he is engaged in the ministry of intercession.

### **Act 5: The Church as the Light of the World**

The New Testament continues the story of the *missio Dei* as it unfolds to the whole earth. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, God's new age has dawned. With the coming of a new expression of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the people of God were commissioned to continue the work of mission, joining with God as he continues reconciling all things in heaven and earth to himself. In the opening story of Acts, Jesus commissions his followers to be his witnesses ... to the ends of the earth. Empowered by the Spirit, the people of God, who now included both Jew and Gentile, are to join in the mission of God, restoring all things.

After Jesus' resurrection, the Gospels end with the Story of Jesus' many appearances to the disciples. Luke continues the Story through the book of Acts as he narrates how the coming of the Spirit to a few and then to thousands spread the good news that God's new world had arrived. The Holy Spirit enables those who follow Jesus to take into all the world the good news that Jesus of Nazareth is LORD, that he won the victory over the powers of evil, that a new world has come into the present, and that the church is to help make that happen. The Spirit is given so that the church can share in the life of the continuing work of Jesus, the work of making God's future real in the present. The

presence of the kingdom of God is now here in the “now but not yet.” When Jesus returns, the kingdom of God will come in its fullness. Until that time, the church lives by the rules of God’s future world even as it continues to live in this “present evil age.”

The message of Jesus spread from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. The story of Saul (Paul) and his conversion is told as the early followers of Jesus come under persecution by the Jews. Gentiles are included in the story when Peter is sent to an Italian centurion named Cornelius. The good news spreads through Asia Minor and Europe as Paul takes center stage as the main character in the book of Acts. He leads three missionary trips and many are converted. A church planting movement is in forward motion as the mission of God spreads throughout the Roman Empire. By the time Paul’s final mission trip is completed, churches have been planted and established in cities throughout Asia Minor and Europe. Many of the New Testament letters are pastoral letters dealing with the issues these churches face in living out the Story of which they are now a part. The early church faced many issues. Paul’s letters contain the reality of the tension of how the church is to live and act in this present evil age, the now and the not yet. Paul says:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in the pains of childbirth right up to this present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved (Rom. 8:23-24).

The church lives in hope, between the times, and this hope is what compels us to join God in his mission.

In Jesus, the purposes of God’s cosmic redemption of creation were accomplished. The grand narrative of the Bible tells the story of the forward movement of God toward this final restoration. It also reveals what that restoration will look like in all its fullness. Glimpses of the conclusion of human history are shown to us in the final book of the

Grand Narrative, the Revelation of John. The kingdom of God is best seen in the person, words, and actions of Jesus, yet other parts of the Story open portholes to show what God's ultimate mission and intention for creation has been from the beginning. In the last chapters of Revelation, God reveals his final purpose. John receives a vision of the new heaven and the new earth. The earth is cleansed of all sin and evil. A loud voice from God's throne proclaims:

Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away (Rev. 21:3-4).

### **Conclusion**

Understanding our Story as told through the Grand Narrative of the Bible must include a lens toward the *missio Dei*. God had intentions from the beginning at creation that humankind would enter into his creation for the purpose of joining with him in serving, ruling, and reigning in his good creation. The larger context for our Story must begin in the intentionality of God. The mission of God, as in the above text, does not end in people going to heaven when they die. Rather, the ending is the new heaven and new earth interlocked forever. All humankind will rule and reign with Christ. The Story ends in a Greek New Testament term called *telosmos*, which means "the end" in the sense of completion. Our Story starts in the intentionality of God and is going to be completed when what God wants done is done.

In Mark 1:14-15, Jesus announces the kingdom of God is here! He tells the first hearers, "change your life and believe the message." To enter in and receive the kingdom means beginning to live the life that God intends for us and they were to align with God's intention.

Anyone here who believes what I am saying right now and aligns himself with the Father, who has in fact put me in charge, has at this very moment the real and lasting life. (John 5:24, *The Message*)

Eternal life is not a spatial issue, it is not out beyond the moon or the stars. Neither is it chronological, somewhere out in time. In the New Testament, eternal life is a qualitative term, it means having a different kind of life. Jesus has provided for us eternal life in the present, which is life lived in a different story as our lives become aligned by living in his story. Alignment to his story brings a new kind of life, a truly human life. If the church thinks that the mission of God is to get people to heaven when they die, then it may be preaching a gospel of death. If the church can understand the mission of God through the lens of the kingdom of God theme of the “now but not yet” which it is invited to participate in now, then it will begin to enter and receive eternal life now. The kingdom is here now. The church is invited, no, compelled to join with God in his mission of reconciling the entire cosmos to himself.

What are the signs that the kingdom is here? What are the ways the church can join in God’s mission today? Every time the church prays for the sick and stands with those who are oppressed and marginalized; when the church participates in the crushing of injustice and engages in care of the creation, the church participates in God’s mission. When deliverance is meted to those with addictions, compulsions, and to those who are enslaved, the church participates in God’s mission.

A text that has become a guiding image for the life of our faith community to join in God’s mission comes from Isaiah 58:1-12 from *The Message*:

“Shout! A full-throated shout! Hold nothing back—a trumpet-blast shout!  
Tell my people what's wrong with their lives,  
face my family Jacob with their sins!  
They're busy, busy, busy at worship,



and love studying all about me.  
To all appearances they're a nation of right-living people—  
law-abiding, God-honoring.  
They ask me, 'What's the right thing to do?'  
and love having me on their side.  
But they also complain,  
'Why do we fast and you don't look our way?  
Why do we humble ourselves and you don't even notice?'

"Well, here's why:

"The bottom line on your 'fast days' is profit.  
You drive your employees much too hard.  
You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight.  
You fast, but you swing a mean fist.  
The kind of fasting you do  
Won't get your prayers off the ground.  
Do you think this is the kind of fast day I'm after:  
a day to show off humility?  
To put on a pious long face  
and parade around solemnly in black?  
Do you call that fasting,  
a fast day that I, God, would like?

"This is the kind of fast day I'm after:  
to break the chains of injustice,  
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,  
free the oppressed,  
cancel debts.  
What I'm interested in seeing you do is:  
sharing your food with the hungry,  
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,  
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,  
being available to your own families.  
Do this and the lights will turn on,  
and your lives will turn around at once.  
Your righteousness will pave your way.  
The God of glory will secure your passage.  
Then when you pray, God will answer.  
You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'

"If you get rid of unfair practices,  
quit blaming victims,  
quit gossiping about other people's sins,  
If you are generous with the hungry  
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,  
Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,

your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.  
I will always show you where to go.  
I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—  
firm muscles, strong bones.  
You'll be like a well-watered garden,  
a gurgling spring that never runs dry.  
You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew,  
rebuild the foundations from out of your past.  
You'll be known as those who can fix anything,  
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,  
make the community livable again.

Todd Hunter has said, “the goal of the Christian life is spiritual transformation into Christ-likeness for the sake of the world.”<sup>33</sup> The text from Isaiah is a road map for how this looks as the church joins God in his mission to reconcile all things.

When Jesus says, “take up your cross daily and crucify yourself and follow me” or you can't come with me, he is telling each and every person to align to his Story and *missio Dei*, then a person can be the humanity that God intended. Jesus offers each person an invitation. “Follow me” is a way of life, aligning yourself to the reality of God's intention. Right now, right here each responder receives eternal life, not somewhere out in the stars, not somewhere out in time, but right now there is a different kind of life available to every person.

As a faith community on a journey, we exist to join in and actively participate in the mission of God. There is an old African proverb that goes something like this, “when you pray move your feet.” The church as part of the mission of God is a church that is active

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<sup>33</sup> Hunter, *Missional Church: Always Right, Now Urgent and Strategic*.

in the work of the kingdom. Being active in God's world brings signs of hope. The best hermeneutic of the gospel is a local congregation who lives and breathes it.<sup>34</sup>

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that God's intention for the church is full participation in the *missio Dei*. Any ecclesiology that neglects the mission of God will likely end up in "mission drift" even when cultural shift is not happening.

In the next chapter, I shall demonstrate how embracing a mission-focused ecclesiology is one solution to the problems the church is facing in the midst of our current cultural shift.

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<sup>34</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, paraphrased. Source unknown to this author.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH

In this chapter, I shall briefly share two areas:

First, the case study method. I will offer a definition and explanation of how the case study method will be implemented in this dissertation. The case study method is adapted from the Harvard case study approach. Second, I shall discuss sources. The basic statistical data that my research revealed came from four research sources.

1. Vineyard Community Church (VCC). The primary research is from the observations of the change at VCC.
2. The Barna Group is “a visionary research and resource company located in Ventura, California. The firm is widely considered to be the leading research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture. The Barna Group offers a range of customized research, resources and training to serve churches, non-profits, businesses and leaders.”<sup>1</sup>
3. The Pew Research Center “is an independent, non-partisan public opinion research organization that studies attitudes toward politics, the press and public policy issues. In this role it serves as a valuable information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars and citizens.”<sup>2</sup>
4. *Pioneers in Practice*. This research into the great cloud of witnesses in church history whose witness demonstrates that “practicing” is not a new fad.

### Case Study Method

The Case Study Method can be defined as:

A case study is a written description of an event or series of events presented in such a manner as to elicit from the reader(s) an analysis of the situation, and

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<sup>1</sup> George Barna, “About,” <http://www.barna.org/about> (accessed December 3, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Pew, “About,” <http://people-press.org/about/> (accessed December 3, 2009).

isolation and evaluation of available options, and a concrete commitment to a specific course of action.<sup>3</sup>

Case studies are accounts of real or fictional problems that help readers/students discover a solution or solutions to that problem. Case studies should be organized into several sections:

1. The focus should introduce the presenting problem and tell the reader what the presenting issues are.
2. The setting will present the relevant information about the people, context, and explain events which provide a background for the case.
3. The body or plot is an account of the actual events, interviews, and research during the course of the case study.
4. The conclusion will restate the focus.

Basic principles of a good case study will detail an actual situation and will allow for alternative solutions. A good case study will generate discussion around specific issues of the presenting problem.

The strengths of a case study research method are:

1. Students deal with a real life ministry situation with hands-on, practical experience in both the problem and possible solutions.
2. They learn by experiencing the complexities involved in identifying the problem and alternately finding possible solutions in the midst of the problem.
3. Case studies help the student integrate theology as praxis rather than theory, as if the case study was a laboratory.

With strengths come possible weaknesses. Case studies:

1. Can be seen as a substitute for a traditional research method.
2. Can produce confusion between the teacher-student roles.
3. Studies have posed questions about their effectiveness of presenting theological content.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Case Study Method: Short Term Institutes* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979), 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-4.

## **Vineyard Community Church**

The research material for VCC is written in six narrative case studies in “The Practicing Church” chapter. These narrative case studies trace how VCC made the transition from a conventional church to a church with a missionary ecclesiology to the degree that the church understood a missionary ecclesiology at this time and in this particular context. I tell the story beginning in 2004 when my husband and I and a handful of people began a journey to discover what it would mean to organize ourselves and our congregation around mission rather than growing a Sunday morning meeting. They are told in first person narrative because of my own participation in each of them. The “we” language includes me as part of the community of Vineyard Community Church.

## **Barna Research**

The current discussions on ecclesiology within the context of North American Evangelical tradition must take into consideration church size. According to Barna’s 2003 research,<sup>5</sup> most (98 percent) Protestant Americans attend churches that are 300 adults or fewer. “Forty-one percent of adults who go to church attend a church with a hundred or fewer adults.”<sup>6</sup> How a church of fewer than one hundred adults form an ecclesiology that is mission focused is of utmost importance.

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<sup>5</sup> George Barna, “Church Size,” <<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=148>> (accessed June 9, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> George Barna, “How Faith Varies by Church Size,” <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/289-how-faith-varies-by-church-size> (accessed November 3, 2009).

## **Pew Research**

The Pew Research indicates large numbers of folk leaving the church, which produced a decline in membership:

The Landscape Survey confirms that the United States is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country; the number of Americans who report that they are members of Protestant denominations now stands at barely 51%. Moreover, the Protestant population is characterized by significant internal diversity and fragmentation, encompassing hundreds of different denominations loosely grouped around three fairly distinct religious traditions - evangelical Protestant churches (26.3% of the overall adult population), mainline Protestant churches (18.1%) and historically black Protestant churches (6.9%).<sup>7</sup>

Another indicator that a fresh look at a missionary ecclesiology in North America is needed is the rate at which people are moving into the unaffiliated category:

To illustrate this point, one need only look at the biggest gainer in this religious competition - the unaffiliated group. People moving into the unaffiliated category outnumber those moving out of the unaffiliated group by more than a three-to-one margin. At the same time, however, a substantial number of people (nearly 4% of the overall adult population) say that as children they were unaffiliated with any particular religion but have since come to identify with a religious group. This means that more than half of people who were unaffiliated with any particular religion as a child now say that they are associated with a religious group. In short, the Landscape Survey shows that the unaffiliated population has grown despite having one of the lowest retention rates of all “religious” groups.<sup>8</sup>

## **Pioneers of Practice**

The annals of church history are filled with people who practiced their faith and made a difference for the cause of Christ. The following are a few pioneers of practice, who not only give inspiration for the work the church is doing, but by way of comparison

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<sup>7</sup> The Pew Report, “Summary of Key Findings,” <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> (accessed November 3, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

offer an evaluative tool to discern the credibility of the work as well as the hope of future kingdom impact:

### ***Barnabas of Cyprus***

Barnabas<sup>9</sup> is one of the first examples found in the New Testament who helped focus the church as a mission to outsiders. His name means “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36), as he was able to inspire the apostles and early Christians to believe the power of the gospel message to change hearts, even the heart of Saul, persecutor of Christians, who was converted and became what some consider as the last apostle (Acts 9:26-27).

Barnabas’ influence in helping the early church to accept Gentiles without requiring them to convert to Judaism (Acts 15) sets him up as an example for us to follow in not requiring outsiders to first convert to a “Christian sub-culture” before they can be accepted in Christ. Barnabas convinced the apostles to accept Paul as a co-laborer in Christ and invited Paul to go to Antioch with him to strengthen the Christians there. The church in Antioch was likely inspiration for Paul’s words, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3.28). Barnabas’ example of helping to remove the differences between Jew and Gentile validates our value of accepting those who are different into our community.

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<sup>9</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Saints* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2001), 236-237. See also: David Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 42.



### ***Fremenius of Ethiopia***

Fremenius<sup>10</sup> and his brother Edesius were taken captive and enslaved in Ethiopia as children after their uncle and his entire crew were massacred at a harbor on the Red Sea. The two boys were taken as slaves to the King of Axum and soon became trusted favorites of the king and given positions of trust in the kingdom. They were granted their freedom shortly before the king died, but the Queen begged them to remain and educate young Prince Ezana and help administer the kingdom until the prince was old enough to take his place as King. During their time of service, Fremenius used his influence to spread the gospel of Christ.

Once Prince Ezana came of age, Fremenius and Edesius returned to Alexandria, yet Fremenius was so passionate about the work of the gospel in Ethiopia that he begged Athanasius to send missionaries to Ethiopia to continue the spread of the gospel. Fremenius impressed Athanasius and was consecrated as bishop of Axum, the capital of the northern kingdom in Ethiopia. King Ezana was converted to Christ and Fremenius continued the work of planting churches and spreading the gospel throughout Ethiopia. Fremenius has inspired our focus on reaching others through involvement with existing organizations within the community, even when the leaders of those organizations are not yet Christians.

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<sup>10</sup> McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, 287-288.

### ***Patrick of Ireland***

Patrick<sup>11</sup> was captured and enslaved in Ireland at the age of 16. Yet, after escaping and returning to his family in Britain six years later, he was ordained, then later consecrated as a bishop in A. D. 432 and returned to Ireland as a missionary bishop. Patrick is known for his solidarity with the Irish, embracing the life of a commoner among the common people. His example of living life with and for the common people is an inspiration for us to live life with the people around us and join them in solidarity. Our One4One mission group draws deeply from the wisdom of Patrick's example as they seek to serve the homeless community.

### ***Boniface of Germany***

Boniface<sup>12</sup> experienced miracles in his quest to bring the gospel message to the Germanic tribes in the eighth century A. D. He was consecrated as a regional bishop with jurisdiction over Germany in A. D. 722. Boniface confronted the gods of the Germanic people by chopping down a tree dedicated to Thor. He called upon Thor to strike him down for cutting the "holy" tree, but instead a mighty wind blew the tree down and Boniface was not struck down in the process. As a result, many converted to Christianity. One of our values as a Vineyard church is in the possibility of miracles in the realm of mission. Boniface's courage to stand up against the gods of his age and expect miracles reminds VCC to expect miracles in its context as it confronts the gods of the various cultures encountered in mission groups. Our Go the Second Mile mission group has

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 412-413. See also: Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 134-135.

<sup>12</sup> McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, 66-68. See also: Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 227-230.

experienced miracles in their travels and it is expected that GO will continue in this great tradition.

### ***Francis of Assisi***

Francis<sup>13</sup> is well-known as the founder of the Franciscan Order and for the Prayer of St. Francis. Born into a life of luxury, he experienced a mystical call to “follow the Master rather than the man”<sup>14</sup> and committed himself to a life of poverty while serving the poor. Many chose to join Francis and before long the Franciscan Order grew and spread across Italy. While the Franciscans led lives of poverty, they were deeply involved in the life of the world and the church. Francis had a deep love for creation, which led the Franciscans for being unwilling to completely separate themselves from the world and distinguished them from other Orders during the thirteenth century. Francis was also known for his criticism of the behavior of the Crusaders and for advocating for change within the existing structures of the church. Francis is an inspiration as the church seeks to serve the poor and advocate for change in the conventional church.

### ***Las Casas of Spain***

Las Casas<sup>15</sup> was influential in the cause against slavery during the time of Christopher Columbus. He witnessed the beginning of the slave-trade and genocide of many native families during explorations to the New World. He was convinced that such

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<sup>13</sup> McBrien, *Lives of the Saints*, 203-205. See also: Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 404-407.

<sup>14</sup> Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 404.

<sup>15</sup> David Brading, “Prophet and apostle: Bartolomé de las Casas and the spiritual conquest of America,” in J. S. Cummins, *Christianity and Missions, 1450-1800. (An Expanding World)*, J. S. Cummins. Ashgate Variorum Series, vol. 28 (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1997), 117–138.

actions were a great injustice, willingly gave up his own slaves, and advocated for others to do the same.

In 1550 a famous debate took place between Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepulveda, who argued that the native people were inferior and should be pacified forcefully. Although no formal decision was handed down from the commission, the majority favored Las Casas and the New Laws were in the end upheld. The writings of Las Casas and the New Laws he helped implement were the beginning of international law and are very similar to the United Nations declaration of Human Rights.<sup>16</sup>

The work of Las Casas inspired many anti-slavery efforts and continues to inspire our Go the Second Mile mission group to advocate for justice around the globe.

### ***Shaftesbury of London***

Lord Shaftesbury<sup>17</sup> was a member of Parliament in England during the early nineteenth century and integrated his personal faith with public policy in hopes of combating evil in society and changing the modern world. He is known for continuing the anti-slavery work of William Wilberforce as well as advocating for the education of commoners. “Shaftesbury in the Parliament and Spurgeon in the pulpit symbolize two sides of the urban ministry coin in London’s nineteenth century: laity and clergy in partnership to preach the Word and transform the world.”<sup>18</sup> Shaftesbury validates our efforts to partner with those who are in positions to influence public policy and to work to advocate for change in public policy in hopes of overcoming the evil of this present age. Our One4One mission group is inspired by leaders such as Lord Shaftesbury and

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<sup>16</sup> “Bartolomé de las Casas,” Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartolom%C3%A9\\_de\\_las\\_Casas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartolom%C3%A9_de_las_Casas) (accessed January 10, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Ray Bakke, *The Mission Trail of Bakke Mountain* (Acme, WA: Bakke Graduate University, January 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

encouraged in their work with the city of Seattle and their policies regarding homeless people.

### ***Teresa of Calcutta***

Mother Teresa<sup>19</sup> founded the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India, in 1950 and served the poor, sick, orphaned, and dying in India until her death in 1997. Teresa devoted her life to missionary service as a nun joining the Sisters of Loreto at age eighteen. By age thirty-six she received another call—to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them. By age seventy she was nationally recognized for her humanitarian efforts as she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 and India's highest civilian honor, the Bharat Ratna, in 1980. Mother Teresa is an inspiration to all and has influenced the work of hundreds of missions all over the world, including hospices and homes for people with HIV/AIDS, leprosy, and tuberculosis, soup kitchens, children's and family counseling programs, orphanages, and schools. Her work validates our continuing efforts to live among those VCC hopes to serve.

### **Summary**

Over 2,000 years of church history give us examples of a “Practicing Church” full of people that lived their lives in devotion to Jesus, putting their beliefs into concrete action that forever changed the world.

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<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, “Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997),” [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20031019\\_madre-teresa\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20031019_madre-teresa_en.html) (accessed September 16, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have reviewed the case study method and the basic statistical data that my research revealed which came from four research sources:

1. Vineyard Community Church
2. The Barna Group
3. The Pew Foundations
4. Pioneers of Practice

## **CHAPTER 5: THE PRACTICING CHURCH**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I shall offer six case studies, which suggest a solution to the problem of cultural shift and mission drift in the context of one particular church: Vineyard Community Church (VCC) in Shoreline, Washington. I shall offer one picture of a church that views itself as part of the mission of God and its transition to that focus.

The case studies will demonstrate the thesis that an appropriate response to the cultural shift from Christendom to Post-Christendom is embracing the *missio Dei* as detailed in the theological basis for this work. Post-Christendom has been defined as “the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.”<sup>1</sup> This is descriptive of the culture in the Pacific Northwest and this thinking inspired the first questions about what it means to be a Practicing Church, a church that participates in God’s mission for the world in the midst of an increasingly post-Christian context.

### **Brief History of Vineyard Community Church, Shoreline, Washington**

It would be helpful to set the stage for the case studies by providing a brief history of our church and my leadership role in the community. I have been in the pastorate in one

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<sup>1</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 19.

form or another since the mid-1980s. In 1996, I was ordained and set in as the Associate Pastor of Vineyard Community Church (VCC). In 1998, the lead pastor who I served alongside resigned. My husband Rich and I stepped into the role of co-pastors, sharing the lead pastor role.

Prior to our installation as lead co-pastors, our church's journey had been quite diverse. When we first planted the church in 1992, we were very active with the Servant Evangelism<sup>2</sup> approach to evangelism. The model of church that we were working and trying to grow as "seeker sensitive" could be defined as a conventional church. Success was often defined in training, as measuring how many people attended Sunday morning worship gatherings, how large our budget was, and if we leased, rented, or owned our own building. Mild success at that time consisted of 150 adults in attendance on Sunday mornings. The church had a pretty lean budget and we did not own, rent, or lease a building other than the room we rented once a week at the Community College. We were pretty content until February 1995 when the wind of the Holy Spirit blew our way in what was then called "The Toronto Blessing."<sup>3</sup> The leadership of the church went to several meetings where they encountered a powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. This particular season of the Spirit's presence came with some intense manifestations such as shaking, sometimes violent shaking, bouncing, what has been described as "jack-hammering," and more. When these manifestations took place in our Sunday gathering, many were afraid and left the church. As leaders, we regretted not preparing the people

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<sup>2</sup> Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness: A Refreshing New Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus With Others* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> James A. Beverley, *Holy Laughter and the Toronto Blessing: An Investigative Report* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).



enough for what they were seeing and experiencing. All of the leadership team had past experience with Charismatic or Pentecostal expressions of the Spirit. Several months later the leadership disbanded the Sunday morning worship gathering and broke the church into several groups as house churches. This experiment only lasted a few months as it became clear the majority of the congregation was not taking to the house church format. In August of 1995, the leadership team rented a basement room and some offices from a church in our area, having decided to resume a Sunday morning worship gathering that again had a “seeker sensitive” focus.

During this time, the lead pastor began experimenting with trying to find ways that ordinary people could get involved in evangelism. He coined a practice called “ordinary attempts” and later a practice called “doable evangelism.”<sup>4</sup> The church continued on with a focus on evangelism and the Sunday morning gathering. It was during this timeframe that I was installed as Associate Pastor and two years later my husband and I took over the role of lead pastors. At this time VCC was renting space at a local high school and the congregation had slimmed down to about sixty adults. Every week the church would arrive early with our half-ton truck loaded with all our sound equipment, information table supplies, and children’s classroom equipment and supplies. VCC was primarily organized around the Sunday morning worship gathering. Outside of the Sunday morning gathering, we had a couple of small groups and a weekly intercessory prayer meeting. The first couple of years the leadership team realized that we had to give people time to see if they would stay or if the pastor change would be too much and some of them would

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<sup>4</sup> “Doable Evangelism,” <http://doableevangelism.com/> (accessed May 18, 2009).

also take this time as an opportunity for change. Within two years VCC was approximately forty adults.

In the following pages are six case studies built on the life and ministry of Vineyard Community Church that will demonstrate that the practice is a significant part of being a mission-focused church.

### **Case Study 1: The Question**

#### ***Focus***

Do you know what is good about the neighborhood in which your congregation is located? Do you know what is broken? If your local church moved locations, would anybody notice?

#### ***Setting***

Vineyard Community Church was planted as a traditional Charismatic/Evangelical congregation in the mid-1980s. By the late 1990s the congregation had taken on what is commonly known as a “seeker sensitive” model of doing church. The congregation was involved in outreach through simple acts of showing kindness to people through free car washes, coke giveaways, and the like. By 2004, the congregation began to question if there wasn’t more involved to “being” the church than simple acts of kindness and meeting for a worship service on Sunday mornings. The demographic of VCC was primarily suburban, Caucasian, middle class individuals and families ranging in age from twenty to fifty year olds.

## The Case Study

At the beginning of our transition, one of the first questions to be asked, while contemplating what it means to be a Practicing Church, was: *If your church moved out of the neighborhood, would anyone notice?* This question has now become the tagline I often use in my writing or talks on “The Practicing Church.” As the church began this journey to discover what it meant to be the church in our context, a real live story became a metaphor to help us shape our imagination. Let me tell you that story.

In July 2007, I was finishing a paper, completing my course work for the Bakke course “Revolution.” Here is an excerpt from that paper:

As I sit in my dining room writing this paper, I hear the voices of people in the parking lot of the Baptist Church next door. My home is located in a neighborhood in a suburb just north of the city of Seattle. I live in a cul-de-sac that is reflective of the ethnic diversity and religious pluralism of our time. Across the street is an Asian family, immigrants from China that practice Buddhism. Next door to them is a family that immigrated from Bangladesh and are practicing Muslims. Our neighbors to the west are a retired couple from Japan. In the seven years we have lived here, the church next door showed very little signs of life. The only person we would see during the week was an elderly man that kept the grounds. On Sundays during their worship gathering, we would see at the most six automobiles. About a month ago, we noticed activity. New messages on the church sign board were changing every week. The messages seemed to be following a sequence of Scripture verses from the book of 1 Peter. The first one I noticed said, “Judgment must begin at the house of God,” the second, “Elders, feed the flock of God,” and this week’s sign, “Your adversary walks about seeking whom he may devour.” I have been asking myself the question, I wonder who this particular church is hoping to serve? I found out that a new pastor had come in to restart the church. The church sign has a website address which is new. Out of curiosity I looked at the website.

What I found on the website<sup>5</sup> did not give me hope that the new church was going to serve the neighborhood well. Our home’s front and backyard borders the church’s back

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1.

parking lot. Our son learned to ride his bike in the church's parking lot. From the time we moved into the neighborhood, the children in our cul-de-sac found a playground at the church parking lot. When we would host events at our home, the overflow of cars would park in the vacant parking lot.

When the new pastor came in, the church immediately put up "no parking" signs and told the children they could no longer play in the parking lot. They advertised Vacation Bible School and various other events. We never saw very many people or cars at the church. Summer came and went. In October, my husband noticed people moving furniture out of the church. When he asked the pastor what was going on, his reply was, "I can't make that information public as of yet, but I can tell you we sold the building to a non-profit organization. You will find out which organization in a few weeks." The whole neighborhood seemed to be curious as to who our new neighbors would be. Two weeks later we began noticing people moving into the building. The neighborhood discovered that the church was now a Buddhist Temple. When conversations with several neighbors occurred about the change, here is what was said over and over, "we are so happy a Buddhist congregation has moved into the neighborhood, we feel safer having the church gone because those people seemed scary."

As this situation unfolded in my neighborhood, it became important to me to ask the question: *If my church moved out of the neighborhood, would anybody notice?* In my neighborhood we noticed when that church moved out, most of us were relieved. The extinction of that particular church reinforced my research that unless the church adopts a missionary stance in relation to our cultural contexts, we will face increasing decline and

possible visible extinction.<sup>6</sup> Every pastor and church leader would do well to ask themselves what the community response would be if their church moved out of the neighborhood. When asking that question, it is hoped they would seriously reflect on how and in what ways they are practicing their faith. Are they taking a missionary stance toward their community or are they living in a delusion that Christendom still exists? Are they reinforcing an unChristian<sup>7</sup> image or are they reflecting the image of Christ who came announcing the kingdom of God here and now?

### ***What If We Moved Out of the Neighborhood?***

As the leadership contemplated the question of whether anyone would notice if our church moved out of the neighborhood, we sensed the need to define for our faith community who our neighbors were. We understood our context as a Post-Christendom context and that we needed new maps to guide us in this Post-Christendom world, but we also needed to understand our specific context—our locality within the larger context of Post-Christendom. How would you handle this question?

## **Case Study #2: A Crisis of Ministry**

### ***Focus***

Have you ever wondered if you were spending your life on what matters most? Do you sometimes get into a cycle of work and ministry that never questions the underlying reasons you do what you do?

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<sup>6</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*.

## *Setting*

Church planting training informed me that in order to be successful, one had to have sizeable attendance on Sunday mornings. This advice seemed to be the highest value as far as measuring success. VCC is part of a denomination that was birthed in the midst of the Church Growth Movement in the late 1970s. The Vineyard Movement had been launched in the suburbs of Southern California and was quite successful. From the mid-1980s on, the majority of conferences and trainings I attended had a heavy emphasis on the numerical growth of your church. The obvious and unspoken standard for success sat squarely on the size of your church.

## **The Case Study**

In 2003, I had what could be called “a crisis of ministry.” My faith did not waiver, however, I could not figure out why VCC was not successful at growing a Sunday morning meeting or a budget. The church didn’t have a building, so all the areas that I was taught to measure for successful church growth, spoke “failure.” Monday mornings became more and more depressing. I began to dread waking up on Monday mornings and, for that matter, I began to dread Sundays as well. I phoned our former VineyardUSA National Director and asked his advice. He asked several questions and then said, “Rose, you are experiencing the clash of two paradigms.” “The old paradigm,” he explained, “was a model of doing church that had its highest value on Sunday morning attendance.” As he heard me talk about my disillusionment, he shared with me that he was hearing this same story from many other pastors all over the country. He suggested that a massive cultural change was underway. This cultural change was causing many people to re-think not only models of church, but the very reductionist view of the gospel that has been

handed down and was being preached that encouraged the very systems of church that is now in place. This conversation with Todd Hunter became a catalyst for Rich and me to begin a journey into trying to understand the larger conversation that was happening all over the world regarding the essence of the church, the gospel, and culture in the midst of our increasingly post-Christian context.

VCC's journey of exploration to find a way forward in its context took a turn in 2003 when the leadership team contemplated for the first time as leaders to lease a building. There is a lot of discussion in the "Missional Church" conversation around the issue of having a building for gathering and functions. There is no right or wrong answer, because this issue must be considered within the context, mission, and vision of the faith community the building will serve.

A building became important in order to carry on our desire to continue to serve a specific community—the neighborhood that would hopefully notice if VCC were to move. In 2004, we took the step to lease a building. Prior to that time, VCC was renting space in the basement from a local congregation for Sunday gatherings and the landlord gave us a year's notice to vacate. The church began asking the hard questions regarding leasing a building. VCC was now at the very beginning of a journey, listening and interacting with the myriad of voices discussing the times we live in. We asked question after question trying to grasp what the tectonic change in world history we (the global community) are living through meant for us to be faithful as a local faith community.

Rich and I began a Tuesday evening dinner and book study. For eight months, attendees met at our home for dinner and discussion. We discussed chapter after chapter

of *Missional Church*.<sup>8</sup> We were trying to wrap our brains around the concepts in the book and understand what those concepts might mean for VCC.

Discussions occurred about the pros and cons, the why's and why not's of taking the step of leasing a building. The biggest fear was that VCC would lose sight of the congregation as the community of believers. When VCC rented a basement room for Sunday worship only, everything else we did as a faith community happened in our neighborhoods, the host community, and in homes. Moving into a leased building, the church would have 24/7 access that could tempt us to put the emphasis on the building as the church rather than the church being the people.

Can you feel our dilemma? Our Bible study group prayed for discernment and direction regarding leasing a building or not leasing a new building. One morning as I was reading through the Gospel of John in Eugene Peterson's, *Message*, I came to John 1:14 and read:

The Word became flesh and blood,  
and moved into the neighborhood.  
We saw the glory with our own eyes,  
the one-of-a-kind glory,  
like Father, like Son,  
Generous inside and out,  
true from start to finish.

My heart leapt as I read these words. I literally felt like something ignited inside. I knew that it was the Holy Spirit saying, "This is why you can lease a building." I knew at that moment that VCC could lease a building and it would be right for us as long as we knew that the building was to be a tool, a gift to serve a specific neighborhood. As the

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<sup>8</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*.



VCC congregation, we were to move into a neighborhood and be the presence of Christ to that place.

Within the first few months of stepping into the function of co-pastors at VCC, Rich and I had a strong sense that one of the primary spiritual practices that VCC must have in place was that of prayer. So, we began a prayer group that still meets once per week. We have continued that practice and have found that prayer has laid the groundwork for much of who VCC is becoming and where we are supposed to be going. Praying became an important point of discernment as to whether we were to pursue leasing a building or not. After much prayer, discussion, and processing with the congregation, decision was made as a community that our next step was to lease a building. We found a potential place. The entire congregation did a walk through, we consistently prayed, crunched the numbers, negotiated a lease, and began a renovation. The largest of three spaces in the facility was leased by VCC. There were two businesses that leased smaller spaces.

The leadership team envisioned the building as a “community center” with VCC as the primary tenant. Our plan was to make the inside welcoming yet versatile so that any organization or group would be comfortable using the facility. Our dream captivated our imagination to wonder, how this community could be served and how to make the facility a welcoming place to use for people not interested or even hostile toward the church.

One morning after our weekly prayer meeting, I told the group that some of us had been brainstorming and that we wanted to call the facility: “The Vineyard.” We would put street signage that read “The Vineyard.” On the rental space, which faced the main street, another sign could be placed with the VCC logo that read, Vineyard Community Church, Sunday 10:30 a.m.

The look on the faces of those attending said it all. It was as if each of them was looking at the other one saying, “You tell her.” Finally, one brave soul spoke up and said, “We know you guys think that is a good idea, but we think it’s not such a great idea. It feels like we would be baiting and switching people and besides that, we are not embarrassed to be a church.” This conversation began a series of sometimes intense discussions about what VCC needed to communicate and why. Changing paradigms about the use of the building in relation to serving a host community did not come easy.

One year after the congregation moved into the building, I received a memo from the property manager that was sent to all three tenants in the building. The memo began with: “To: The Tenants of Vineyard Square.” This was the first time the space was referred to as “Vineyard Square,” which spoke to the congregants about VCC’s influence in the community and it seemed progress was being made toward the hope of being a welcoming place to use for people in the community.

Another issue that came up almost immediately was how the inside of the new facility would be designed and decorated. Some folks wanted to stencil different scriptures on the walls, while others wanted to paint murals depicting Christian symbols and characters on the walls. Then there were those who felt like we might be turning into non-Christian people, but thought it was important to put anything with religious overtones up as completely portable so that literally any group could come in and feel comfortable using the building. The dialog was just as intense as it was about the church signage with eyes rolling, and ruffled feelings mounting as well. Some felt VCC was selling out to the culture, trying to be “seeker sensitive.” Others felt we were being too accommodating to unchristian people and betraying our basic freedom of religion. Still

others thought we were acting like we were ashamed of the gospel. Many long conversations transpired with people who could not “see” where VCC was supposed to be going. By the way, our facility had no lack of art and color depicting our faith, and it was all easily movable.

The debates, the disagreements, and the long conversations, helped us as a community form a philosophy that is still being working out today on why the building can be seen as a gift to the host community in which it is located, as one of the gathering places for the church to worship, to train, and to party.

We have since moved to a new facility. At the time of this writing VCC has been in our new location seven months. The facility is a traditional “church” building with a steeple, pews, and the like. The years that we have worked at changing our philosophy of ministry has enabled us to inhabit this facility with the same intention of using the building to serve the community. Currently the facility is used by various groups in the community six days (and nights) per week, sometimes seven; AA groups, non-profit organizations hold staff meetings and training meetings, and an after school program is run four days a week.

### **Case Study 3. We Have a Building in a Neighborhood—Now What?**

#### ***Focus***

How does a paradigm change from a programmatic church to a church that views itself as mission? How does a building get used for service to the community?

## *Setting*

In much of the Evangelical tradition, the purpose of a building was primarily so that the church could design programs for the congregation. While there is nothing fundamentally wrong with this program design concept, the leadership team became increasingly aware that the paradigm for a people “being the church” could dramatically change once in a building, because the building might start being referred to as “being the church.” The team believed the building should not only serve the church, but had to be used as a gift to serve the community. Many people in our congregation could not see how the building could be used as a gift for the community without somehow losing the essence of who we were as a church.

## **The Case Study**

Our congregation’s heated discussions around moving into a building kept at the forefront of our thinking the need to do things differently than had been done in the past. The temptation to revert to conventional church practices was ever present unless the leadership team created other ways to practice our faith and utilize our building for mission-focused purposes.

As VCC was in the process of changing from a conventional church to a mission-focused, practicing church, I went to a grant writing seminar in Southern California. While at the seminar, another piece of the way forward as a practicing church puzzle became clear. During the seminar, it was revealed that the federal government was giving

out “capacity building” grants under the “Compassion Capital Fund”<sup>9</sup> for faith-based organizations that were either working with marriage education or at-risk youth. This could be a great opportunity because several people in our faith community had been teaching marriage classes for years. In addition, VCC had just begun working with Ballinger Homes, a low-income apartment community in our city, with children who could be considered at-risk. With all the partnering VCC was doing with other organizations in Shoreline (most of them are not faith-based), we could start our own version of “mission groups,”<sup>10</sup> a concept that had been seen at the Church of the Saviour in Washington D.C. Thinking about the idea of mission groups gave rise to a dilemma. What would be VCC’s intention in starting a mission group? Would it be to grow the church numerically through these efforts? These questions led the leadership of VCC to a discussion of church growth that has shaped our growth as a faith community ever since.

### ***Church Big vs. Big Church***

Recent studies show that fifty-nine percent of United States Protestants and other Christian churches have an average weekly attendance of seven to ninety-nine, while thirty-five percent average weekly attendance of 100 – 499.<sup>11</sup> In the Vineyard USA the median size church is 142 weekly attendees.<sup>12</sup> My belief is that the size of your church does not matter in order for churches to “practice.” We decided to take the emphasis off of growing our church numerically and concentrate on growing our church through

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<sup>9</sup> “Compassion Capital Fund,” <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/ccf/> (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> “Seeker Church,” <http://www.seekerschurch.org/coredocs/mission/ch02.htm> (accessed 2009).

<sup>11</sup> “Fast Facts,” [http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast\\_facts.html#sizecong](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong) (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Vineyard USA National Board Meeting, February 2007, Charleston, NC. See Appendix 2.

mission impact. This transitional mindset forced us to think through how the church was going to evaluate success. As a beginning pastor, my training taught me to focus on “buildings, budgets, and butts” in seats. Those three words were, and in many cases still are, the measure for success. Today, VCC focuses on three other words: “conversations, connections, and collaborations.”

Based on concepts from the book *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*,<sup>13</sup> VCC embraced welcoming people into our faith community before they made a profession for Christ. This book helped redefine community as to who was “in” and who was “out” by the following example:

### **The Celtic Way**

Relationship > Conversations > Invitation

### **Traditional Way**

Presentation > Decision > Relationship<sup>14</sup>

Living in the late twentieth century, the prevalent teaching about coming to faith was centered around the concept of “listening.” When someone attended church, she listened to apologetics and maybe responded to an altar call. A person was likely to be invited to attend a crusade to listen to the presentation of the gospel. The concept was that if people attended, they could “listen” their way into faith. Today, it seems that the majority of people either “talk” or “experience” their way to faith. The church’s role should change

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<sup>13</sup> George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

from “talking” to “listening, embodying, and demonstrating” the good news. My experience suggests that people today want to know that faith is real. Belonging to a faith community before believing creates a space for the *Celtic Way* of relationship, conversations, and invitations to faith happen in a natural way.

Conversations at VCC were about cultivating an environment for people to belong before they believe. This helped us view our neighborhoods, workplaces, and the community where our facility is located as our parish. Through our mission group structure, VCC has many people participating in kingdom activity that are still trying to decide if they want to follow Jesus. Many people who would not respond to an invitation to a church gathering, whether on a Sunday in a building or in a small house group, do respond to an invitation to make the world a better place. The mission group structure gives more people a chance to “do the stuff,”<sup>15</sup> another way of “belonging before they believe.” People who are not in crisis, but have a deep desire to have purpose, give their time, talent, and resources to our mission groups.

Because God is at work everywhere, VCC congregants look for connections that are already established. They look for the signs of the kingdom that are already happening and then join God there. John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Movement, used to say that we should “see what the Father is doing and bless it.” We pray quite purposefully for God to guide us into the areas where he is already at work in our neighborhoods. When VCC moved into the leased facility over five years ago, our prayer was to be a blessing to our city. As we prayed, we began to see the many needs around us. As an example, we

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<sup>15</sup> Famous saying by John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Movement.

responded to one of the local non-profit agencies who needed tutors for the after-school program they have in a low-income apartment community. Several of us began tutoring twice a month for two hours. There are over 150 children and youth in this one apartment community. Five years later, VCC has authentic friendships with the agency that runs several programs for folks who are under resourced in our city, as well as with the youth and families. Now as we are in a new neighborhood in the same city, we are beginning to cultivate relationships with our new neighbors while maintaining good working relationships with our partners. Authentic relationships bring partners to work in God's kingdom. Collaborations are a must. VCC doesn't want to reinvent the wheel, so we collaborate with several sectors in our city, such as the school district, social services, churches, and many more.

The result of focusing on conversations, connections, and collaborations in over five years has resulted in mission impact in our city that we could not have imagined. When one moves down the alphabet from “buildings, budgets, and butts” to “conversations, connections, and collaborations,” one counts success differently. Here are a couple of examples, we count:

1. how many people we have served rather than how many people attend our Sunday morning service
2. how many people we are developing, encouraging, and partnering with to be practitioners, who are leading personal, local, and global expressions of God's goodness and justice
3. how many collaborative partners we have in our community and beyond
4. every person that embraces and embodies the fact that each one is a sent person embodying the gospel twenty-four/seven



Recently, the Center for Human Services<sup>16</sup> awarded Vineyard Community Church with an annual award. The award goes to the most outstanding community partner committed to serving others and making a lasting difference in the community. The outstanding community partner award was presented to VCC in front of 400 community members. The Center for Human Services has never before given the award to a faith community. Focusing on “conversations, connections, and collaborations” is how VCC is having mission impact in Shoreline.

#### **Case Study 4. Vineyard Community Church Mission Groups**

##### ***Focus***

What are the ways in which we organize and structure our work to serve the ministry that we do? How is the *essence* of church defined?

##### ***Setting***

After visiting and reading about the Church of the Saviour in Washington D.C., reading the story of Lawndale Community Church, and thinking through the way Roman Catholic orders are formed, we began to have an imagination for a way to structure our work so that we could empower many people in our congregation to do the work they felt impassioned to do. Whether working with local homeless people, under-served youth at-risk, or people that are victims of poverty and injustice beyond our city, we began the process of incubating “mission groups.” Our leadership team, board of directors, and several men and women from our congregation studied materials from the Church of the

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<sup>16</sup> “Center for Human Services,” <http://www.chs-nw.org/default.aspx> (accessed March 3, 2009). The Center for Human Services is one of the largest social services agencies in the city of Shoreline, WA.

Saviour and began to think strategically as to how VCC could develop and produce groups that were centered around mission that would be birthed out of VCC into their own non-profit entities or stand alone church plants.

### **The Case Study**

In 2006, the organizational structure of VCC was changed in order to experiment with creating and developing sustainable mission groups. The Vineyard Community Church board of directors has become the governing body for the church and two mission groups: Turning Point and Go The Second Mile, which were in the formation stage. At this stage, VCC is viewed as an incubator for mission. We wanted to come alongside people that had a passion for some type of mission and help them incubate that mission with a process of taking a dream from napkin scribbles through the process of forming and becoming a sustainable non-profit organization. VCC's mission statement reads as follows: "to develop, encourage, and partner with practitioners who are leading personal, local, and global expressions of God's goodness and justice." The church and all subsequent mission groups will have their own stated mission. Before the outline of the mission group process is shared, here is VCC's own philosophy of ministry captured in *The Essence of the Church*<sup>17</sup> by Craig VanGelder.

VanGelder develops three aspects of an ecclesiology that must be defined and related to one another. The interrelationship of the three aspects is clear. The nature of the church is based on God's presence through the Spirit. Therefore:

1. The church *is*, speaks to its nature.

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<sup>17</sup> Craig VanGelder, *The Essence of Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 25.

2. What the church *does* is its ministry.
3. *How* the church structures its work is its organizational structure.

If the nature of the church is that of joining with the *missio Dei*, then the ministry of the church flows out of mission and the organizational structure then is designed to support mission. One starts with the theological framework that the church is a mission rather than the church has a missions department. Every other aspect of the church is then looked at through the lens of mission. Worship, teaching, discipleship, and community happen in the context of mission. When viewing the church's nature this way, the forms and structure can look different depending on within what context the church is located.

For VCC's context, the mission group structure lends itself to empowering and equipping others to do the work of the ministry. Our philosophy of ministry includes:

1. Serving people is a kingdom value even when accomplished through those that do not ascribe to Christianity.
2. The people we serve are our friends, not products or projects.
3. Involving and partnering with non-Christians and Christians alike is the best way to serve people beyond our congregation's finite resources.<sup>18</sup>
4. Not everyone has the desire or capacity to lead a mission group; acting as an incubator for those in-and-outside our church is the best way we can help meet the needs of the community.
5. We will never have top-down missions; our groups come out of each individual leader's interest, call, and passion and our congregation is free to lend their support where they also feel passion.

When a mission group idea is brought to the attention of the leadership team of the church, the idea is first developed and fleshed out with the people who created the idea. Next, a team is created to come up with a strategic plan. Finally, the plan is implemented within the context of the faith community—as a part of the church. Once the plan is

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<sup>18</sup> The mission groups resource their mission with many people outside of our congregation through donations, grants, fundraisers, gifting, talent, and many other ways. This has enabled our church's impact to grow substantially beyond what we could have without including people from within and beyond our congregation.

implemented and the mission group is ready to launch, the mission group is “birthed” as its own entity.<sup>19</sup>

Church big vs. big church does not imply that large churches do not matter. The point is that whatever the size of the congregation, the measure for success for a “practicing church” is the mission impact in the personal, local, and global realms of life.

### ***Personal, Local, and Global***

Several years ago it was suggested that Christianity had an image problem. Dan Kimball’s work, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*<sup>20</sup> and David Kinnaman’s work, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and ... Why it Matters*<sup>21</sup> gave the church language and research that affirmed our assumptions.

In VCC’s context of ministry, it was noticed that non-Christians didn’t so much have a problem with Jesus, but had huge issues with his followers!<sup>22</sup> The focus of creating “mission groups” was to change the non-Christian’s image of the church in Shoreline. When someone in Shoreline is asked, “What do you think of Christians?” VCC hopes the answer might be something like this, “they are the most kind, generous, ‘active in serving’ people we know.” In fact the twenty-year vision statement of VCC reads that: “Followers of Jesus would be known for their kindness, generosity, and service to

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<sup>19</sup> A more detailed outline of this process can be found in Appendix 3.

<sup>20</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not The Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*.

<sup>22</sup> In random interviews over several years, we would ask people what they thought of Jesus. Often the answer was positive. When asked what they thought of his followers, Christians, the answers would range from “hypocritical, narrow-minded, to people who seem angry all the time.”

others.” The goal: every member of VCC will be involved in serving others in the three realms:

1. Personal: family, co-workers, classmates, neighborhood, faith community, in other words, where the bulk of a person’s life is lived.
2. Local: because we do lease a building, we believe we are to be actively involved in serving the local community where we are located.
3. Global: anywhere outside our local community.

As VCC has incorporated this philosophy throughout our congregation, we honor people who serve anywhere and anytime. Members of our congregation that do not lead or belong to specific mission groups at VCC are involved in “practicing” their faith through service to others in a variety of ways.

As an illustration, Dave and Sharon Richards devote much of their time, talent, and money to a micro-finance group called “Unitus.”<sup>23</sup> James and Sarah Lunn have given their lives to serve in a YWAM group in South Africa. Many of our congregants serve at local non-profits that provide food for the hungry and after-school programs. Jeff Greer is an artist who gives his talent away supporting causes such as stopping human trafficking, serving homeless people, and others. JR and Nancy Short give enormous resources to low-income adults in our city. Several folks at VCC have chosen jobs that serve mentally disabled students. The list could go on. The point of fact is that VCC embodies, demonstrates, and announces the good news of Jesus Christ day in and day out by recognizing and honoring the variety of ways congregants have chosen to follow Jesus’ servant model and way of life, whether it is inside the church walls or not. My friend Jim

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<sup>23</sup> “Unitus,” <http://mfi.unitus.com/> (accessed March 3, 2009).

Henderson<sup>24</sup> asks the question, “Is your church more like Club Med or Fed Ex, a destination resort or a delivery service?” “The Practicing Church” sees herself as a sent people living the way of Jesus in their everyday lives. Church is not a place you go only on Sundays, but what it is, scattered throughout the week.

### **Case Study 5. Turning Point**

#### ***Focus***

What is a mission group? How is a mission group structured?

#### ***Setting***

The first mission group to be developed as its own non-profit organization was Turning Point.<sup>25</sup> The process of developing a mission, vision, values, and strategic plan began with a team of ten people from VCC. As the mission group developed, other people that are not a part of VCC joined the team. VCC won a capacity building grant that provided the resources to hire a consultant to guide the team through a strategic planning process and launch Turning Point in October of 2006.

### **The Case Study**

As the leadership team continued to ask questions about how the church in the twenty-first century would form in order to make a corporate witness on a world especially in an urban context that needed the impact of that witness, the mission group structure came to mind over and over again. The “mission group” structure afforded VCC

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<sup>24</sup> “Off the Map,” <http://offthemap.com/> (accessed March 10, 2009). Jim Henderson leads Off the Map.

<sup>25</sup> “About,” <http://www.turningpointseattle.org/about.html> (accessed September 7, 2009).

the opportunity to give away our lives. But, what were the ways that this could be accomplished?

In May of 2004, I was invited to go on a mission trip to Mozambique, Africa, as part of a large team commissioned to spend two weeks at Iris Ministries led by Heidi and Rolland Baker.<sup>26</sup> The Bakers have started orphanages, planted thousands of churches, and have a number of Bible schools among the world's poorest of the poor. I was invited to teach for several days in the Bible school in their main center in Maputo. This mission trip was my first trip out of the United States. I was not prepared for the shock of being in a country where there were people, especially children that lived in the town's garbage dump. The center hosted over five hundred orphans and housed a Bible school that taught men and women who were new to the Christian faith. The impact of this trip was life changing for me. The people I met, the children I held, had literally nothing. The children played with sticks in the dirt, they had no toys. Yet, every morning I woke up to the children singing songs of thanksgiving and love for God. The music sounded like choirs from heaven. I was stunned by the joy that people who had little to nothing could have. After returning to the United States, I found myself broken to the point of weeping for months. This brokenness caused me to question everything. How could the church be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ and not be involved with working with the poor, whether in our own backyards or around the world? Why had I spent so many years of my adult years in Pentecostal and Evangelical churches and never heard a sermon preached on the church's obligation to be with the poor?

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<sup>26</sup> "Iris," <http://www.irismin.org/p/home.php> (accessed March 15, 2009).

On returning from the grant writing seminar in January of 2005, I was convinced that VCC could launch a mission group that would end up being a sustainable non-profit organization focused on the under-served families in Shoreline. At this point, VCC decided to begin the process of forming its first mission group. A professional grant writing group was hired and paid \$5,000 for writing ten applications for grants. The first grant written was to the federal government's Capital Compassion Fund (CCF) asking for a \$30,000 capacity grant to launch a faith-based non-profit. The grant was written in May 2005 and the grant was awarded to Turning Point in October 2005. The CCF grant provided the funds to buy equipment, pay a modest salary to me as the Executive Director, hire a consultant to lead Turning Point through a strategic planning process, and to get training for a couple who would be the facilitators for marriage/relationship education workshops.

VCC was informed about the formation of this "mission group." The mission was simple: "to serve the under-served families in Shoreline. Several people wanted to participate in forming the mission group. These were people who carried the same passion. The newly formed group began meeting with a consultant who took us through a strategic planning process where together our team of eight people worked for hours over several months to set a vision, mission, values, and areas of service. Turning Point began with a focus of serving low-income couples with relationship education workshops. The results of the needs assessment demonstrated that there was no group in our city that was offering relational educational workshops.

Each month I attended our city's Community Resource Team (CRT) meeting. The City of Shoreline's Human Services manager chairs the CRT meeting. Several social



service agencies are represented at the meeting as well as the Shoreline School District, The United Way, and Emergency Services. When I first attended the meeting and introduced myself as the pastor of the Vineyard Church that had just moved into the city, it was not difficult to tell that those people attending were not comfortable with a church being at the table. This reaction slowly dissipated as VCC began to be known for its service to the city. We had become members of the “Back to School Consortium,” a group formed from representatives of every sector of the city and were the only church that was a part of the consortium. Those attending VCC who were interested in the mission group that was forming, contributed time, money, and presence to the underserved families as they attended the once a year Back to School event. Turning Point collected and donated backpacks filled with supplies, hygiene products, and gently used clothing, to be given to each student at the Back to School event where each student also receives a haircut and new underwear. The local Rotary cooks lunch, the City brings jumping toys. It is a great event that serves approximately 600 to 900 students.

Turning Point volunteers also began volunteering at the after-school program operated by The Center for Human Services (CHS),<sup>27</sup> the largest social service agency in our city.<sup>28</sup> I met with one of the program managers from The Center for Human Services and asked how Turning Point could serve their organization. Turning Point began serving in various ways. After two years of continual service to families in one of the low-income apartment communities where CHS runs Family Services, the program director asked for

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<sup>27</sup> “Center for Human Services.”

<sup>28</sup> The Center for Human Services is a community-based, not-for-profit youth and family services agency. CHS has four main programs: Family Counseling, Family Centers, Substance Abuse, and Loving Families.

another meeting. When we met, she asked me why Turning Point had been serving their organization. She told me that when other churches<sup>29</sup> asked to volunteer, they had done so with an agenda. The agenda was to get people converted to Christianity. She told me story after story of families in need that were put under pressure by church members wanting to share their faith or asking if they could pray for them when delivering them a bag of groceries. My answer to her was simple, “we do this because we follow Jesus. Our faith compels us to serve and love people.” She told me that her Executive Director, Beratta, had watched us closely, waiting to see if we would try to impose our faith onto their clients. I told her that honestly we feel our faith is best proclaimed when we are embodying and demonstrating the way of Jesus and that if anyone that we served ever asked us why we do what we do that they would receive the same answer. The meeting with Beratta turned into more and more invitations for Turning Point to partner in the work that CHS was doing, serving the poorest and most marginalized people in our city.

Much of our area of service focused on the Ballinger Homes Community mentioned above. The demographics of this particular apartment community were:

1. Two hundred and seven apartments, 98 percent of them are rented by immigrant families that have come from all over the world; some have come recently. The longest have been here at the most six years.
2. Their religious makeup is Buddhists, Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Hindus, and atheists.
3. Most of the families have six to twelve people living in a two or three bedroom apartment.
4. Most of the parents do not speak English and work two or three minimum wage jobs.
5. The average annual income of the families is \$15,000.

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<sup>29</sup> The program director did not see any difference between Vineyard Community Church and Turning Point, a mission group created by VCC.

6. These families have many challenges, not least of which is their children are being westernized quickly.
7. In most homes there are children, eight to ten years old, having to interpret for their parents. The children feel they are caught between two worlds. Their parents try to hold onto their values from their homeland, while their children are rapidly adopting Western values. These children, especially from ten years on, are at risk for gang activity and other at-risk factors.

When Turning Point received its first capacity building grant in October of 2005, relationships were already being formed with the families living in Ballinger Homes. I had the thought one day, what if Hurricane Katrina<sup>30</sup> had hit our city? Who would have been uncovered, who are the unseen poor in our city? These are the people with whom we want to be. The leadership continued our strategic planning as I continued to build relationships with key people in our city. I realized that the one thing I lacked being a pastor was any concrete experience in running a faith-based non-profit. I needed a mentor. I called the Executive Director of CHS, Beratta, and asked if we could have coffee. We met for coffee and talked for a very long time. Beratta agreed to mentor me in non-profit work and from that time on we met about once a month as our first mission group, “Turning Point,” was in the birthing process.<sup>31</sup> Beratta is a fifty-year old woman. She has given her life to work with the under-served. She is a brilliant woman with a degree in Community Psychology and in Substance Abuse. Over the last few years I have had many conversations. Beratta has been with her partner, Melody for twenty-three years. These two women live a life of service. Beratta told me it was what she was created and called to do. We have had many conversations about spirituality, faith, and

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<sup>30</sup> “Katrina,”

[http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/subjects/h/hurricane\\_katrina/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/subjects/h/hurricane_katrina/index.html) (accessed March 10, 2009). Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, Louisiana on August 29, 2005. Many people had been evacuated, but those who were left behind were the elderly and the poor. The Louisiana Superdome was used to house those that had to be rescued from the flooding and devastation.

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix 3 for more details on the stages of “birthing” the mission group.

human dignity. She has taught me more about loving people who are marginalized than anyone. She has mentored me in the early developmental stages of launching a non-profit. She has become a friend.

Many of the churches in my city will not work with the Center for Human Services because Beratta is a lesbian<sup>32</sup> and because CHS has support groups for gay and lesbian people. I have had several conversations with pastors who have told me they would not let their congregations serve CHS, because they have groups for gay and lesbian people. These same pastors did not like the fact our church was so active in serving CHS. This response is a tragic display of how far off course the church has drifted. If the church is not embodying and demonstrating the gospel to “all” people, then it may have missed the message of Jesus. The other comments that are regularly heard from local pastors, “we will not serve there because they will not let us share the gospel.” Again, these kinds of responses may point to the inevitable fact that part of the church is missing the message of Jesus. When the church serves, when it is loving people, then it is proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

Turning Point’s official launch was on October 19, 2006. The Turning Point team, with the help of our consultant, planned a fundraising event, a dinner and auction. None of our team had ever attended an auction before. On October 16, 2006, I turned fifty-years-old. So, the Turning Point team planned a dinner and auction as a fundraising event as my fiftieth birthday party. Everyone was invited: our friends, family, and co-workers. Many of them are people that would have never responded to an invitation to church. The

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<sup>32</sup> I asked and Beratta granted permission to share this information.

evening was a great success. Turning Point raised \$25,000. Days before the auction, Turning Point won a second capacity building grant in the amount of \$50,000. Needless to say, the Turning Point team was ecstatic and the “mission group” was off to a great start.

The Turning Point leadership team spent all of 2006 and most of 2007 trying to get marriage/relationship workshops off the ground. We could not get people to respond. Even though it was a need, a way could not be found to reach the folks the workshops could most benefit. In the meantime, we were asked by CHS to start a summer basketball camp at Ballinger Homes for youth. The camp was through the summer of 2006 and was such a success that we have continued a once a week, eight-week camp year round. Turning Point has had more and more opportunities to work with at-risk youth. The leadership team had a decision to make. The “workshop” direction was not working, while anything that youth were participating in was taking off. Our team re-evaluated what it was we were being invited to do. We prayed, we asked for counsel from Beratta, our consultant, and others. We made the decision that our mission was to focus on at-risk youth.

Turning Point<sup>33</sup> is still in early organizational development stages but is growing every year. Through this mission group, we have opportunities everywhere to participate with our city. When there are meetings on how to serve at-risk youth in our city, they call us. Turning Point has become a voice at the table in our city and it doesn’t matter that we are connected to a church. Many activities sponsored by us and others are held at our

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<sup>33</sup> “Turning Point,” <http://turningpointseattle.org/> (accessed April 3, 2009).

building. We have a reputation for being a church that serves the city. The Center for Human Services and Beratta opened the door to the city influencers to us. We have watched many people, who might not consider an invitation to church, come alongside and give of their talent, time, and resources to impact our city and beyond. The creation of Turning Point as a mission group is what we imagined when we decided to grow a church big.

### **Case Study 6. Two More Mission Groups**

#### ***Focus***

How are people empowered to see their ministry dreams come to life? Who are the practitioners that lead groups centered around a specific mission?

#### ***Setting***

Almost simultaneously as Turning Point was launching, a second and third mission group were developed. Go the Second Mile led by two single mothers, who are self-employed as Real Estate Agents with a passion for women and children living in poverty around the world, began the process of refining the mission, vision, and values, developing a team and resources, and to date lead a viable non-profit organization, a mission group of VCC. Hands of Love is led by a woman who is a wife and mother of two adopted children from Guatemala and is employed as a nutritionist at a local hospital. She developed a team, a mission, vision, and values and leads an annual medical team to Guatemala.

## The Case Study

### *Go The Second Mile*

Our second mission group, “Go The Second Mile”(GO)<sup>34</sup> was founded and led by two brilliant women. Leigh and Diane are both real estate agents, single moms, and have belonged to VCC for many years. Leigh and Diane have a passion for helping the poor globally and they have spent two years navigating full-time jobs and cultivating GO. They obtained a 501c3 exempt status in 2009. Go the Second Mile advocates for children, women, and families who are victims of poverty and injustice anywhere in the world.<sup>35</sup>

GO has successfully developed a team and investors to create a mission group that is on its way to sustainability. As with Turning Point, through their awareness meetings and trips, GO too has invited people, who would not consider themselves Christians, to participate in kingdom activities. GO has many stories of how people on their trips have been impacted by Jesus and have encountered God in the midst of serving others. GO has captured the essence of the mission group structure and purpose, which is: to afford many people beyond our congregation the opportunity to “do the stuff” and in doing so, encounter Jesus.

### *Hands of Love*

Maureen is a married, forty-something mother of two adopted children from Guatemala. She began Hands of Love after experiencing God’s call to her during a time

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<sup>34</sup> “Go the Second Mile,” <http://go2ndmile.org/about/> (accessed April 13, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Visit Go the Second Mile website for more details about their mission.

of contemplative prayer called Lectio Divina<sup>36</sup> in my living room several years ago. Maureen sensed God call her to serve the widows and orphans in Guatemala. She is a nutritionist working at a Roman Catholic hospital in Everett, Washington. Maureen has successfully organized yearly medical teams to serve the poorest of the poor in Guatemala. The team that accompanies her each year are primarily doctors and nurses that work at the same hospital. She has included many who would not consider themselves Christians and, again time after time, watches as the Spirit unfolds encounters with Jesus while serving the least of these. Hands of Love is completely self-sustaining and has obtained a 501c3 non-profit status.

### **Conclusion**

If a mission group has fully launched from VCC and is a separate non-profit organization, it is still considered a ministry of VCC. One way the relationship remains in tact is in the formation of the board of directors. There is always at least one shared board member between VCC and a mission group board. The mission group leaders share the same vision and values as VCC and stay in a close working relationship.

At the time of this writing, VCC has one mission group in the formative stages. The group “One4One” is led by two young men who are passionate about serving the homeless, stopping sex trafficking, and other justice issues of our time. They are in the process of gathering a team and developing a strategic plan.

Church planting also falls under our mission group structure. We have four couples that are in the early stages of developing a dream and urban strategies for church planting

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<sup>36</sup> “Lectio Divina,” <http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html> (accessed April 14, 2009).



in the Greater Seattle area. We are watching the incubation of groups that will practice their faith as an incarnational presence of Christ in the personal, local, and global realms. In my twenty plus years of leading, leading has never been as rewarding and challenging as it has since we began to rethink what our purpose as a church in a locality was to be about.

### **Other Churches That Practice**

Over the past several years, I have met courageous Christian leaders who live out their faith by practicing what they believe. I know there are multitudes of congregations that would fit into this category that are unknown to me. Let me introduce you to three congregations that are living out their faith in concrete, practical ways.

#### ***Vineyard Community Church of Iowa City***

Adey and Tom Wassink lead this mid-sized vibrant congregation in Iowa City, Iowa. As co-pastors, they set the vision, raise and train leaders, oversee the pastoral staff, help to launch new groups and initiatives, oversee pastoral care of people in the church, and teach on Sundays. Adey is working towards a Doctor in Missiology degree from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California (at a distance), while her husband Tom is bi-vocational, working as a Staff Psychiatrist at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics where he has clinical responsibilities and runs a laboratory performing research into the genetic basis of psychiatric disorders.

Together Adey and Tom have cultivated an environment for their congregation to practice their faith. They have just launched a new area of ministry they call “Hands on Faith.” Here is how they describe it:

Faith is *do*. It is act and risk and spend. It trusts the parachute enough to jump, the beloved enough to wed, and Jesus enough to step onto the water. Paul identified the spiritually faithful as those who—spurred by faith—built, went, chose, conquered, obeyed, shut, and quenched (Heb. 11). When our beliefs compel costly adventures, we have faith; when they don't, we lack all three (faith, belief, and probably adventures).

We've united our most practical, outward-focused faith efforts into *Hands on Faith*. Our overarching *HoF* action is service, enacted specifically as heal, shelter, and feed. We devote each month to one of these service areas, and we go on faith adventures both locally and out into the broader world all year round. Faith-motivated service is thus woven into the fabric of our church culture, as integral to our corporate identity as Bible, fun, Spirit, and coffee and bagels on Sunday morning.<sup>37</sup>

I visited Vineyard Community Church of Iowa City in September 2009 as they were launching “Hands On Faith.” I found the congregation to be bursting with energy and full of desire to be the presence of Christ to their city. The Wassinks and their team have included every age group in opportunities to serve their city and beyond.

### ***Lawndale Community Church, Chicago, Illinois***

Wayne L. Gordon is founding Pastor of Lawndale Community Church and Chairman/President of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA). He is a graduate of Wheaton College and Northern Baptist Theological Seminary and has received his Doctor of Ministry degree from Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. As a local resident of North Lawndale located on Chicago's Westside since 1975, Gordon has accomplished significant change in his community offering real hope for the poor in North Lawndale.

North Lawndale was known as one of the poorest neighborhoods in the United States in 1975 when Gordon moved into the neighborhood. Since then he has played a key role

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<sup>37</sup> “Hands on Faith: Heal,” <http://icvineyard.org/?cat=28> (accessed April 18, 2009).

in a number of community development efforts including founding the Lawndale Christian Development Corporation (LCDC). The Development Corporation is the arm of Lawndale Community Church that facilitates economic development, education, and housing and has accomplished the rehabilitation of over 400 units of abandoned housing. “Wayne has co-authored books and written numerous articles on God's heart for the poor and Christian community development. Lawndale Community Church was given a "Point of Light" award by President George Bush in 1989 and *Chicago Magazine* named Wayne one of the Chicagoans of the year in 1995 for his commitment and creativity.”<sup>38</sup>

### ***Church of the Saviour, Washington D.C.***

If any one church had a major influence on how VCC has navigated its transition, it has been the Church of the Saviour. Elizabeth O'Connor records the amazing story of the Church of the Saviour in her book, *Call to Commitment*.<sup>39</sup> In 2004, when I first read this book and then later visited the Church of the Saviour, I was sure I had found mentors for VCC's way forward.

The Church of the Saviour in Washington, D. C., is a network of nine independent, Christian faith communities and over forty ministries that have grown out of the original Church of the Saviour community founded in the mid-1940s. The current ministries and faith communities are the result of an alternative approach to “church” and church structures, which is the hallmark of the Church of the Saviour. This alternative approach and these structures were formed in an effort to improve Christian discipleship and

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<sup>38</sup> “Lawndale Community Church,” <http://www.lawndalechurch.org/bio.html> (accessed April 20, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> O'Connor, *Call to Commitment*.

“recover something of the vitality and life, vigor and power of the early Christian community.” In that effort, the church’s approach emphasizes integrity of membership, the ministry of the laity, and communal intimacy and accountability. The desire for intimacy and accountability among members of the church is what led the community to break into smaller congregations, rather than try to grow larger as a single church. It has also led to the formation of small groups called “mission groups,” made up of two to fifteen members gathered around a shared sense of vocation or God's calling. These groups became the fundamental unit of community and accountability in the church, and the various groups, each following their own sense of call, gave rise to most of the ministries associated with the church. As a structure, the mission groups have been continued in one form or another in the church's offspring faith communities.

Church of the Saviour continually attempts to embody the essence of church through practices such as prayer, spiritual direction, and community discernment. They are unabashedly courageous in their ability to dismantle structures that do not serve the mission of the church, which is to foster spiritual formation and leadership in service to the poor. I would highly recommend for anyone, wanting to discover what it means to continually respond to God’s mission in an urban context, to study the story of the Church of the Saviour.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have demonstrated the following:

1. In the year 2004, a small group gathered weekly for a meal and discussed chapter by chapter *Missional Church*, edited by Darrel Guder. These discussions began a way for us to imagine “being” the church.

2. Two events that opened our eyes in a new way to see where God was inviting us to follow were a trip several of us took to visit the Church of the Saviour in Washington D.C. and a trip I took to Mozambique, Africa.
3. The practice of prayer and other spiritual disciplines that form us and sustain us. It is our conviction that a life of service can only be sustained by practices such as prayer and meditation on the Scriptures.
4. The 2004 leasing of a facility was discussed and in the leasing of the facility how we formed an imagination for how to use the facility in mission. I discussed the many conversations, debates, and disagreements VCC went through as we wrestled through a paradigm shift from consuming a facility on the church only, to using the facility as a gift for the city.
5. How we began to think about how we were to organize the work to which our church was being invited. I discussed the church, its nature, what the church does, its ministry, and how the church structures its work, its organizational structure. The mission group structure is one of the ways we organize how we do our ministry. I discussed in depth the philosophy of ministry we adopted in order to have mission impact, including conversations about people belonging before believing based on the *Celtic Way of Evangelism*, by George Hunter III, and the resulted parish mentality as a way to view all of life.
6. Using research by Dan Kimball and David Kinnaman to validate my problem statement, I discussed the need for Christians to develop a missionary, incarnational presence in their everyday lives, in the realms of personal, local, and global, which means the Practicing Church is a church of “sent” people.
7. I told the story of the creation and development of the first three mission groups that are now separate non-profit entities but are connected relationally to VCC.

I believe there are many churches that are “practicing churches,” but we don’t hear about them. Maybe it is because they are not large, or because they faithfully and humbly are living out their faith in a mission-focused way without any fanfare. I also believe there are many churches in the United States today who have drifted away from the *missio Dei*. They are concerned more with growing a Sunday morning meeting and a large congregation. In doing so, I believe that many of them are so caught up in the presentation, production, and sheer mechanics it takes to maintain a large church with all its programs that there is not much time or resources left over to practice faith in the way in which I am advocating.

Two years ago, I received a call from a man that is on staff at a mega-church in Southern California.<sup>40</sup> Let's call him Tom. Tom asked if he could meet with me and staff members for an afternoon. He had heard about us from a friend who is a professor at Seattle Pacific University and was told we might be able to help him think about how to activate congregants to *practice* their faith day in and day out. Tom described his congregation of seven thousand people to be typical of Southern California, specifically Orange County that was upper middle class, primarily Caucasian with a very significant percentage of young people. The church holds seven weekend services. As we talked about how we took our church through the transition to discover what it meant to be missional, he was sobered. He told us that even though there were seven thousand attendees throughout the weekend services, the folks that make up the core of the church was approximately five hundred people. These five hundred people were the ones that made the seven weekend services happen with all the programs for every age group imaginable and had no time or energy left to be active outside of the church. He told us that what they had cultivated was a programmatic, consumer-based people. The entire staff was exploring ways to try to take the church through the process of inspiring people to live out their faith every day of the week. They had researched their congregation's practice of faith throughout the week and realized it was minimal. Through the summer, they were talking to churches who seemed to have successfully instilled the mindset that church is not only where you go on the weekend but what you are everyday.

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<sup>40</sup> This pastor has asked to remain anonymous.

After several hours of conversation, I will never forget this most humbling moment. He looked at me and said, “You guys are real Christians, what I wouldn’t give to have a congregation like yours.” I cannot tell you how amazing this is to me. Here we are a congregation of about one hundred and sixty people and the pastor from the outwardly successful (by some) mega-church was envious of what we had.

I have several stories from pastors who have left what they describe as “the machine” of the mega-church in order to pursue a community of people that join with the *missio Dei* and spend their everyday lives loving and serving people.

Churches that practice are highly aware that our world desperately needs to see the witness of the church of Jesus Christ be agents of the kingdom of God bringing heaven to earth. We ask the questions, “What would God have us do in this moment? What do Christians *do* (not just believe) in the midst of our kind of world? How do we spend our days?” I am assuming that whatever we do, we do as part of the community of which Christ is head. Isolated goodness is futile. Every person, to be sure, must be a good human being whenever the occasion arises, but good human beings doing kind acts are not adequate now—not in our kind of world. Maybe they were never adequate in the sort of world we have known. Whatever VCC does, we must do in a representative capacity. When we go to our work day by day, we go as a representative of the people of God, and whatever we do, we do in this representative capacity. We are hoping and seeking to bring people into the Christian community, the church which can nurture them and bring them along until they too have understood who it is God has created them to be and what healing work God has for them to do. They too will understand that their belonging to the people of God takes precedence over every other loyalty, over every other group in which

there is belonging. This kingdom concept is how our time is to be spent, being the conduit of God's grace to bring into existence a people, a practicing church, so that people can see the gospel concretized, so they can see the incarnation fully embodied as some place in time and space.



## CHAPTER 6: POSTSCRIPT

My dissertation has focused on the need for the church in North America to adapt to the context of how the world has changed by telling the story of how the congregation of Vineyard Community Church in Shoreline, Washington, moved from a traditional church to a mission-focused church.

Urban strategies are needed to train missionaries for the global city. Ray Bakke describes this emerging world:

The urban population of the planet is migrating from rural to urban in the multitudes. There are one hundred million “floating Chinese,” part of a planned depopulation of rural China, being relocated to the urban centers. In 1982 there were eighteen cities in the world with a population of one million or more; today there are four hundred and fifty plus cities in the world of one million or more. We live in a world of nations and the majority of unreached people are urban. We live in the day of migration. In 1965 the United States changed immigration laws and opened the door of the U.S. to the world. There are two hundred thirty-nine nations in the Los Angeles school system.<sup>1</sup>

The new urban missionaries must be equipped to handle issues such as sex trafficking, addiction, post-Christians, the rampant exploitation of sexuality, cloning, war, economic hardship, street children, and youth. The gospel must be contextualized to meet the current environments found in the urban centers with new models of “church” being innovated for a specific place. For example, in one urban center you could have a “practicing church” plant that begins as a mission group developing a non-profit, meeting some place of pain in its particular context. You could have a “practicing church” planted

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Bakke, *Overture I* (Bakke Graduate University, January 9, 2006).

in an office building where co-workers gather daily. You could have a “practicing church” start in a house in a particular neighborhood that exists to serve that particular neighborhood. There are many ways that the church in urban centers will need to incarnate the gospel, many of which still need to be innovated. Each church must have a dynamic thrust into its context, so that the church again becomes a serving people, belonging to and inviting others into the community of God’s people. Each church now has a missionary task for its direct context in a locale that could differ from the church just a few blocks away. There is no longer a one-size-fits-all model of how to plant and be the church.

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin of the Church of South India told the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in New Delhi that he hoped:

the churches of Asia and Africa, having studied the spiritual situation of some of the older churches, will be moved to send missionaries to Europe and America to make the Gospel credible to the pagan masses of these continents who remain unmoved by the witness of the churches in their midst.<sup>2</sup>

Bishop Newbigin gave this talk in 1961. As a brilliant missiologist, Newbigin, now gone from this world, is in my opinion, a prophetic voice to our time. He also stated:

It is of the very essence of the church that it is *for* that place, for that section of the world for which it has been made responsible. And the “for” has to be defined christologically. In other words, the Church is *for* that place in a sense that is determined by the sense in which Christ is *for* the world.<sup>3</sup>

His words ring true for the church in North America. The church exists for the sake of others. In many ways, as stated before through this paper, we, the church, have lost

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<sup>2</sup> O'Connor, *Call to Commitment*, 185.

<sup>3</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1994), 53-54.

impact in our witness to the gospel of Jesus. I believe my life's work is primarily to be an advocate for new models of church everywhere in every way, to teach, preach, write, and train anyone who is interested in taking an honest look at the state of the church in North America today and then constructing and dreaming of what it could be and will be in order to bring a reliable witness to the reality of the kingdom of God in our midst.

My work at Bakke Graduate University will not stop when I have finished my degree. In many ways, this degree will be my launching forward into a future where I believe our church, VCC, will lead the way for conventional congregations to gain an imagination for ministry in the twenty-first century. I currently speak four to five times a year at conferences, seminars, and workshops sharing this story. Several different denominations have brought me into their regional and national gatherings to inspire and encourage them that there is a way forward in this changing world. Every young church planter, pastor, and leader we mentor, we know are intuiting that there is a new land to go out into if it is to know renewal. I cherish the time I have had as a Doctor of Ministry student at Bakke Graduate University.

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## APPENDIX 1

### 44<sup>th</sup> Ave Baptist Church Website

A little about us ... <sup>1</sup>

- WE ARE A CONSERVATIVE, family-oriented fellowship desiring to serve God in our families, in our church, in our community, and everywhere else that God leads.
- We are evangelical in our practice of faith and are in substantial agreement with the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689.
- We are traditional in our approach to worshiping God and we praise Him with hymns, choruses, played and sung in a non-contemporary style, and other inspirational music.
- We are affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention through the Northwest Baptist Convention and the Puget Sound Baptist Association.

### Philosophy of Ministry

#### *Worship Style*

The admonition by Paul to believers in Ephesians 5:19 is to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in our hearts to the Lord. The music in church, therefore, can and should be varied. However, the heart focus of our music and singing must be on the Lord, on what would be pleasing to him. An admonition found in both the Old and New Testaments is for Christians to be holy as our Lord is holy, to be in the world but not of the world. While there is no guidance in Scripture that prohibits a specific music style, clearly the audience of our praise and our obedience to God in the matter of holiness must be reflected in our choice of music and singing. Rather than guess

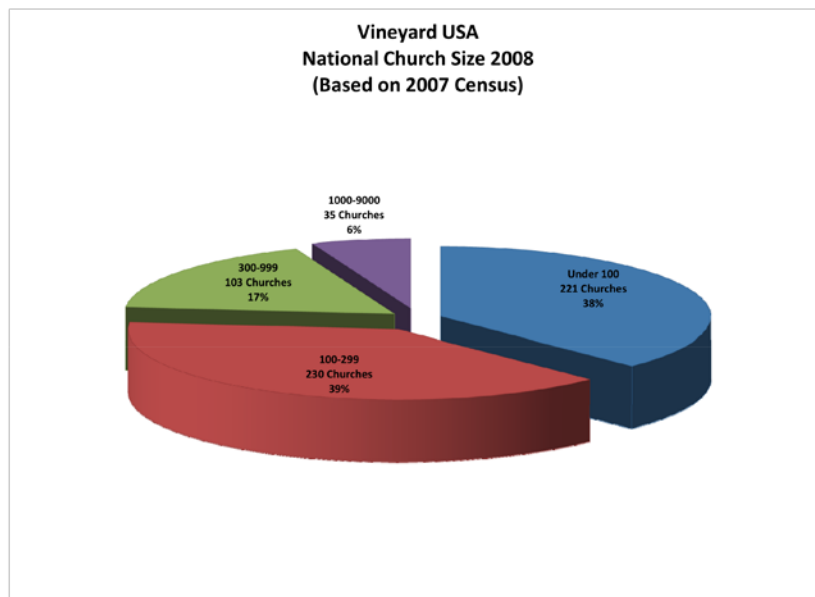
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<sup>1</sup> “44th Avenue Baptist Church Website,” <http://www.44thabc.com/> (accessed July 28, 2007).

what or what is not acceptable music for the church, the church should purpose to exclude those forms of music that are easily recognizable as worldly. Therefore, contemporary Christian music that incorporates the different forms of rock and roll should be avoided. In my view, unacceptable contemporary Christian music is identifiable by its dependence on drums with a significant back beat and driving, repetitious, or sensual rhythms. A blend of hymns, sacred music, and melodious praise choruses that do not incorporate the rock style are certainly appropriate in the church.

## APPENDIX 2

The following chart is from the Vineyard USA National Board Meeting, February 2007, Charleston, NC.



### APPENDIX 3

The following represents a high-level summary of the stages of mission group formation. The following are offered as general guidelines with the caveat that flexibility is key. Each mission group will differ slightly, and the exact timing or order of the steps below may not match the reality of every group's formation.

1. Develop and flesh out the idea
  - Find teammates and a work partner
    - Talk with anyone who will listen
    - Put the call out to the congregation to see who responds
    - Talk to people within your sphere of influence
    - Utilize networking tools, communities, and skills
  - Find a qualified mentor (the VCC board will also be a “background” mentor)
    - Mature
    - Demonstrated success; well connected
    - Understands values of Vineyard, and grasps process and structure of mission group formation
    - Knows what it takes for non-profits to be successful, including fundraising
    - Has a “maverick”/entrepreneurial/start-up personality; an “activator”
    - Willing to liaise with VCC board to provide guidance to mission group leaders
  - Draft initial mission/vision/values/purpose
    - Use mentor's assistance
    - Develop the pitch/elevator speech
  - Present to the VCC board
    - Mentor should work with board to determine if/when this will occur
    - Board will evaluate based on:
      - Strength of proposal
      - Intuition
        - Leaders' temperament /personality
        - Follow-through & task orientation, etc.
2. Develop team
  - Early roles (with the expectation they can and will change over time)

- Expectations/accountability (will also evolve over time)
  - Work plan – how will mentor/board/team/VCC work together?
  - Early action planning – secure funding to launch
  - May choose to look at assessments/team member strengths
  - Invitation to join strategic planning session
3. Strategic planning
- Leverage outside resources
  - Revisit and refine “What we’re about”
    - mission/vision/values/purpose
    - Messaging/Marketing
      - Program target audience
      - Funders target audience
  - Short-term goal setting (1-2 years)
  - Structure
    - Programs
    - Roles, duties, and functions
    - Hierarchies/reporting relationships
  - Personnel
    - Re-assess “early roles” and match strengths to suitable longer-term roles
    - Identify training needs
  - Timelines
    - Milestones
    - Work plan
    - Scheduling (to avoid conflicts with other mission groups)
  - Assessments
    - Community assessment
    - Staff strengths
    - Community mapping
  - Budgeting & Fund Development
    - Determine requirements for annual fund
    - Identify grant opportunities
    - Early donor development
    - Create fund development plan (events, campaigns, annual fund, donors, sponsorships, membership, rallies, etc.)
4. Execute plan
- Address challenges of volunteer staff (adjust their and your expectations)
  - Follow through – create conditions for accountability & success
  - Hold consistent meetings
    - Vision casting
    - Recruitment (volunteers, staff, donors)

- Celebrate successes – don't overwork
  - Attend ongoing training to develop skills and perspective
  - Secure diverse sources of funding for long-term success
  - Evaluate and adjust programs on a regular basis
  - Advisory group/board
    - Mentor should take advisory role – let leaders sink or swim
    - Recruit advisors with an eye on their future potential as board members
  - Begin formal separation process
    - Begin or file organizing papers with WA state and IRS
    - Develop continuation plan
      - including connection to VCC values
      - Paying it forward – sharing resources/contributing to other mission groups
5. “Birth” as separate entity
- Use VCC as guide through incorporation
    - Articles
    - Bylaws
    - 501(c)3 paperwork
  - Board Development
    - Integrate early board members with VCC board
    - Find members outside the church with shared values
    - Strengths/opportunities assessment
    - Criteria/requirements/responsibilities of board members
    - Primary board donations to their faith community, mission group is second priority
  - Formalize strategy for giving back to incubator
    - Funding
    - Grantmaking
    - Mentorship/teaching/modeling
    - Resources
  - Develop plan for ongoing connection with VCC values
  - “Birth” date must be mutually agreeable based on criteria/intuition

## **VITA**

Rose Madrid-Swetman is a pastor, teacher, consultant, church planter, and executive director with the following experiences.

### **Education**

Doctor of Ministry. Transformational Leadership for the Global City. 2010. Bakke Graduate University. Dissertation Topic: “The Practicing Church.”

### **Professional Development**

#### **Service**

Area Pastoral Care Leader. Northwest Region Association of Vineyard Churches. (2008–present).

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Member National Women's Task Force, Vineyard USA.  
<http://www.vineyardusa.org/site/task-forces/women>. (2008-present).

Member Back to School Consortium

Shoreline, WA. <http://www.btsconsortium.org/> (2007-present).

Member Community Resource Team, City of Shoreline Human Services, 17500 Midvale Avenue N , Shoreline, WA 98133-4905, Phone: 206.801.2700 (2007-present).

#### **Affiliations**

Ordination Vineyard Community Church, Shoreline, Washington. (1995).

Associate pastor Vineyard Community Church, Shoreline, Washington, (1995–2000).

Co-senior pastor Vineyard Community Church, Shoreline, Washington, (2000– present).

### **Publications**

Williams, Don. *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church*. Harmon Press: Woodinville, WA. 2010. “Afterword.”



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