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Missional Interim Ministry Processes a Case Study

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MISSIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY PROCESSES

A CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

Missional Interim Ministry Processes: A Case Study

by

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A case study of conducting an interim missionally. Presents theological and theoretical bases for missional interim processes and description of an actual interim period in which the interim was approached missionally. Units of analyses are environment/context, power/leadership, conflict, organizational restructuring, trust, and conventional interim tasks. Interpretation of data is by time-sequence analysis and explanation building.

Charismatic power yielded to democratic expressions through process of legitimization. Political organizing within congregation was method for power transformation. Goal was communicative action that discerned the mission of God, determined congregation's calling within that mission, and described congregation's ministries to carry out its calling.

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We have this treasure in earthen vessels . . . the power belongs to God.

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Christopher E. Hagen

to Norman and Mary Hagen, my parents,
who raised me with love and faith

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Topic

Church leaders have long observed that pastors often serve a congregation only a few years if they follow a situation in which there was significant trauma or change in the congregation. Rather than beginning in such congregations on a basis of trust and hope, succeeding pastors have to address the lingering mistrust and hostilities. Pastors who begin unaware of unresolved issues quickly lose credibility, and their efforts are resisted when they stumble on these issues. Trained to preach, teach, administer sacraments and provide pastoral care, they are often ill-equipped to address conflicted group dynamics. Even if the succeeding pastor does begin well with a troubled congregation, transitioning from a period of recovery to renewed ministry is difficult. Such a transition requires shifts in roles, expectations, authority, ministry purpose, and goals. Lingering mistrust and hostility contribute to the succeeding pastor's ministry ending early.

Synod staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (hereinafter ELCA) and similar staff in other denominations have taken the lead to intervene in those situations where pastoral transition is problematic. An effective approach has been to interpose a specialist with transition skills between a former and a succeeding pastor for a brief interim period. The skills required for leading such transitions vary greatly by circumstances. Synod staff have generally taken a pragmatic approach to each situation and to the abilities of available pastors.

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However, little research has been done on determining what skills, processes, methodologies, and indicators of success are best for interim transitions in congregations. Most often a congregation's transition is determined by several factors:

- the congregation's own interpretation of its situation,

- the congregation's level of motivation for change,

- the synod staff's knowledge of the congregation's culture and values,

- the synod staff's perception of the circumstances leading to the interim, and

- the skills of the interim pastor.

Numerous and varied lists exist on desired qualities for interim pastors, including innate leadership traits,[1] skills that can be learned,[2] and specific behaviors.[3] There is, however, little quantitative or qualitative validation of the lists. Few of the lists specifically draw on biblical or theological sources.

Also, little research has been done on what constitutes a *successful* interim. Success is generally understood to mean the congregation is sufficiently ready for ministry with the next pastor. However, such readiness is not well defined and is usually framed in organizational development terms. Rarely is readiness measured as whether a congregation has clearly identified the Spirit's work in the particular ministry environment, whether the congregation has communicatively discerned its role in the Spirit's work, and whether the congregation has made the adjustments needed in order to engage and be engaged by the Spirit's work. As a consequence, outcomes and

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[1] Robert S. Hoyt, "The Gifts of Leadership in Ministry," (Unpublished manuscript emailed to author, November 22, 2005).

[2] Paul N. Svingen, "Intentional Interim Ministry within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" (D.Min. Thesis, Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools, 1990).

[3] Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1996).

expectations are as varied as congregations and their members. From only providing regular worship services, to improving current practices and procedures, to engineering fundamental transformation of identity and purpose, what constitutes a *successful* interim varies by congregation, context and church leader.

Several studies have identified particular skills needed for interim ministry.[4] Others have elaborated on the conventional interim tasks[5] or have described different approaches to interim ministry.[6] In addition, there have been numerous case studies about the effects of intentional interim ministry on congregations.[7] The studies for the most part are based on organizational development models or health models. There has been little research to date on the effect of intentional interim ministry that pursues a *missional strategy*.[8] Such a strategy looks to what God is already carrying out in a particular context, discerns what the congregation's role is in that divine activity, and designs ministry around carrying out that role in God's mission.

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[4] Richard Clinton Diehl, "Between the No Longer and the Not Yet: The Impact of an Interim Minister on an Urban Church in Transition" (D.Min. Thesis, Hartford Seminary, 1986); Terri Lee Young, "Disseminating an Understanding of the Importance of the Role of the Interim Pastor as Healer and Transformer in the Small Churches of the New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ" (D.Min. Thesis, Hartford Seminary, 1995); Leon Charles Zinkler, "The Interim Pastorate as a Means of Shepherding a Congregation to Find Its Way: A Study in Intervention and Renewal " (D.Min. Thesis, Drew University, 1990).

[5] Roger Nicholson, ed., *Temporary Shepherds* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998); Svingen, "Intentional Interim Ministry within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."

[6] Mark Frederick Bents, "Intentional Interim Ministry: The Development of a Tool to Assess Needs During Pastoral Transition" (D.Min. Thesis, Luther Seminary, 2004); David Charles Miles, "Pastoral Strategies for Effective Interim Ministries" (D.Min. Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999).

[7] Center for Congregational Health, "Report on the Post-Intentional Interim Ministry Research Project," (Winston-Salem, NC: Center for Congregational Health, 2006); Joe T. Loughlin, "The Impact of the Intentional Interim Ministry on the Participating Churches of the Baptist General Convention of Texas" (D.Min. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001); David Lawrence Odom, "The Effects of the Intentional Interim Ministry Process in Two Southern Baptist Congregations One Year after the New Pastor Has Been Installed" (D.Min. Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1997).

[8] Sally Stockley Johnson, "The Missional Church as a Resource for Interim Ministers," *The Journal of the Interim Ministry Network* 3, no. 1 (1999).

In early 2006, this researcher conducted a mixed-methods study on the relationship between the training of interim pastors, the level of experience in interim ministry, and the effects of those two variables on the practice of interim ministry. A quantitative survey was done on 35 congregations in the St. Paul Area Synod (ELCA), of 10 people each. The congregations had all experienced an interim period in the previous five years. The sample consisted of congregations served by trained, non-trained, experienced, and/or inexperienced interim pastors. At the same time a qualitative study was done on three respected, skilled interim pastors and the congregations in the Minneapolis Area Synod (ELCA) that they served.

An unexpected result from the 2006 study was an *inverse* correlation between interim training or interim experience, and the missional elements of the interim process. In other words, those *not* trained and *in*experienced in interim ministry tended to be more missional in their approach to interim ministry. Congregations served by untrained and/or inexperienced interim pastors were more likely to say that God informs their decisions, and that the congregation's ministries make a difference in the neighborhoods in which the congregations are located.

In exploring the possible reasons for these results, it seemed that interim training was a major factor. Training for interim ministry is largely about organizational development, borrowing concepts from the corporate world. Biblical or theological insights tended to be *add-ons* to support organizational development themes. The organizational development model had become so ingrained in conventional interim practices that even those who did not go through formal training but had experience in interim ministry, had learned the conventional interim ministry methods.

It was those pastors who did not have formal interim ministry training *and* did not have prior interim ministry experience who most likely incorporated missional approaches in the interim period. A possible explanation for this is that they were not encumbered by organizational development methods, and did not have other developmental methods on which to rely. As a result they did what congregations have historically done, turn to God and look for the Spirit's lead.

From that initial 2006 study, this researcher asked whether the same outcomes from untrained, inexperience interim pastors would occur if a trained and experienced interim pastor would pursue a *missional* interim agenda. What a missional approach to interim ministry would look like, how conventional approaches support and inform a missional approach, and what outcomes would occur if a trained and experienced interim pastor led the interim process missionally, were some of the questions raised.

The present study addresses those questions. This research is a case study of a congregation that experienced an interim ministry approach based on a missional model. Critical assumptions in this interim were, first, that the Holy Spirit is an active participant in the interim process and in the congregation's functioning, and that the developments of the interim period could not have occurred without the Holy Spirit's direct engagement. Second, grassroots missional organizing was necessary in order to move authority and leadership from the pastoral office into the whole congregation. Third, the congregation's ministry environment was too unpredictable and too rapidly changing to allow for traditional strategic planning and goal setting. Instead, a culture of experimentation, innovation, and cooperation needed to be encouraged. Rather than planning into the future, it was necessary to seek present opportunities and quickly mobilize to take

advantage of them. *This research explains how a missional approach to interim ministry prepared a congregation for its next ministry in God's mission.*

Prevailing Interim Models

Interim ministry theory has been in a process of formulation for only two decades. In 1986, Loren Mead published *Critical Moments of Ministry: A Change of Pastors* in which he outlines five developmental tasks of the interim period.[9] The tasks, in Mead's own terms, are

- coming to terms with [the congregation's] history,

- discovering a new identity,

- allowing needed leadership change,

- renewing denominational linkages, and

- commitment to new directions in ministry.

The five tasks have since become foundational for the accepted practice of interim ministry.

However, Mead's tasks are based on an *organizational model* of ministry. The assumption of this model is that if processes and procedures are improved, then the interim period itself and the transition to the next pastor are successful. The five tasks are meant to bring about *technical* rather than *adaptive* change. Technical change is applying current know-how to improve effectiveness or efficiencies in a stable environment. Adaptive change is learning new ways to minister in a changing environment.

Early on it was realized that the five developmental tasks were not enough. Even when the tasks were accomplished, congregations often functioned in ways that impeded

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[9] Loren B. Mead, *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1986), 36-50.

ministry. Old behaviors repeated under new leaders. To supplement the organizational model, systems theory added a *health model*, analogous to that of an organism of inter-related parts. The two models, organizational development and congregation health, continue to be used simultaneously for interim ministry, though in practice they do not dovetail or merge into a coordinated approach.

Both models assume that congregations in an interim period are in need of some kind of correction, commonly phrased as *health.* The assumption is that if a congregation is experiencing an interim, then something within the congregation needs to be rectified. Specialized, intentional interim ministry has taken on a *functional* purpose of restoring emotional health and engineering organizational fixes. The interim specialist applies skills and knowledge *to* the congregation. The congregation is objectified and assumes a passive role in its development.

This researcher has participated in several interim pastor colleague groups in four synods of the ELCA. Almost all conversations of the groups tend to emanate from a health model, with management issues cropping up from time to time. Rarely is God mentioned and nearly never is the Holy Spirit consulted during the conversation. God has become a commodity delivered by the church and has been neglected as an active partner in ministry. The interim period recently experienced by the congregation of this study was an attempt to rephrase the interim process so as to expect the Spirit's active lead in what happens through the church.

Missional Model

A missional model discerns what the Holy Spirit is doing in the environment around the congregation and discerns what the Spirit is calling the congregation to be and

to do in participation with the Spirit's work. It begins with *God's* activity in the world. Rather than the membership deciding what the congregation shall become, it attempts to understand what the Lord is asking of the congregation. Organizational improvements (such as *Natural Church Development*) and congregational health (such as *Healthy Congregations*) make sense only when the purpose and identity of the congregation is aligned with God's mission in the surrounding world. Healthy congregations or well-functioning organizations are pointless in and of themselves, for while they manage well, their reason for being is seldom pursued. Success, health, efficiencies, and effectiveness have meaning only when the congregation is participating in God's redemptive work.

A missional approach to interim ministry does not begin with the assumption that something about the congregation needs to be rectified. Just because a congregation is experiencing a short period between relatively permanent pastors does not mean something is amiss. The Lord might be upsetting current practices so as to do a new thing. Therefore a key task of the interim period is to read what the Spirit might be doing in events and circumstances affecting the congregation. A second task then is to discern what the Spirit is asking of the congregation in response to conditions or events, how the congregation is to engage God's work in the surrounding environment. Turmoil, conflict, and anxiety are not necessarily problems to be solved but could be evidence of God's activity that needs to be discerned.

Secondly, a missional model *does not* assume that the primary task of the interim period is preparing the congregation for the next pastor. *A missional model assumes that the primary task of the interim period is preparing the congregation for its part in the next phase of God's purposes.* The interim period is not about transition from one pastor

to another; the interim period is about identifying and reconnecting to God's mission in the current context, a context that includes but is not exclusive to preparing for the next pastor. This is a major shift in interim ministry theory. The goal is not the best possible beginning with the next pastor. Transition to the next pastor is only one part of the larger picture that the Holy Spirit holds out to the congregation.

In other models, the interim pastor provides skill, knowledge, and processes to a congregation in transition. The congregation is an object to which interim ministry is applied. Transition is assumed to be a linear progression, moving from a position of loss to a position of new beginning.

In the missional model the congregation is an acting subject, along with the interim pastor and the Holy Spirit. The movement is not so much transition as it is rediscovery. Jointly the congregation and interim pastor wonder and wander and discover the movement and invitation of the Spirit. The interim pastor is not so much a specialist but a fellow explorer. Certainty comes not through competent leadership that solves problems, but through acknowledging and experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in tangible ways.

A missional approach to interim ministry has as a primary function the discernment of what in the world God is doing and what in the world is the congregation's role. It is a time of listening again to God, of discovering what the Holy Spirit might be doing differently among and around us. It is a time of taking another look at what God might be doing differently from previous perceptions. The missional work of the interim period is journeying together in a strange place, counting on the Lord to lead,

and being attentive to what the Spirit might be saying. The major activities of the missional model are

- *discerning* what the Holy Spirit is doing within and around the congregation,

- *determining* what the Holy Spirit is asking of the congregation, and

- *describing* what the congregation will be in response to the Holy Spirit's calling.

Importance to the Church

This research describes an interim process that is an alternative to commonly practiced interim ministry. More than change in method, it begins with different fundamental assumptions. These assumptions are:

- The circumstances leading to the interim situation are not necessarily a problem to be solved.

- Conflict might indicate internal organizational structure or behavioral problems, but, on the other hand, might indicate the Lord taking the congregation in a new direction.

- Public conflict is often *ritual struggling* rather than interpersonal contest.[10]

- Interim pastoral leadership is primarily about identifying the acts of the Holy Spirit in the current congregational context, and about assisting the congregation in engaging the Holy Spirit's lead.

- The goal of the interim process is preparing the congregation for its part in what the Lord is doing, which includes transitioning to the next pastor but does not end with that transition.

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[10] Patrick Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 126.

- Change is seldom linear and seldom subject to planning. Thus experiment, reflection, correction, listening, and conversing are the primary activities for addressing change.

- The interim pastor is not so much an expert with answers, but rather a fellow explorer who asks questions that lead to deeper insight into the ways of God.

- The Holy Spirit is an active participant in the interim process who is to be engaged in decisions and actions.

- God's purposes are best discerned through collective conversation.

- Mistakes are welcomed as opportunities for learning, forgiving and correcting.

The assumptions also pertain to ministry outside an interim period, but are particularly pertinent to interim ministry.

Leadership in the missional church resides not in a person or office called "pastor," but resides in the congregation as a whole, exercised by different people as the Spirit requires, much like the biblical judges. This eliminates the need for hierarchy in which lower levels cede authority and power in exchange for relief from responsibility. Leadership shared among the people also reduces the chance of a charismatic figure dominating the group.

By flattening hierarchical power structures, the missional church recognizes better the community of saints of which we are members by virtue of Christ's grace in each of our baptisms. The community of saints becomes a deliberative and mutually serving body, rather than an organizational structure of channels through which directives are given and actions taken.

This study describes a 2,000-member congregation that is becoming aware of how much we each are a part of one another, belong to each other and need each other *in order to be church*. The church exists not in its structures or functioning but in the *communal identity* that consists of individual, group and God. The congregation's struggles and disappointments are connected to the biblical narrative of God's redeeming work in the world, and the congregation's identity is an extension of that biblical narrative.

Definitions of Key Concepts

Interim period is that event in a congregation's experience from the time a pastor announces his/her resignation until the start of the replacement pastor. It is usually marked by heightened anxiety among church members, uncertainty about the future, and confusion about the present. It also is an opportune time for the congregation to reassess its calling and purpose, and to make needed changes in its self-understanding, structures, and behaviors.

Interim pastor or *interim minister* is that person who serves a congregation temporarily during the interim period. The terms are used for several different types of pastors. Some are specially trained to assist congregations with interim transitions. Others are called interim pastors but have no specialized training, with the appellation referring only to the fact that they are not to be considered for permanent call to the congregation. The terms also are sometimes used to describe those who serve only until they secure permanent placement as a called pastor elsewhere, thus akin to temp services. The terms as used in this study refer to those pastors who are trained for the specific dynamics of interim ministry and are committed to this type of ministry.

Settled pastor refers to the pastor who is formally called to serve a congregation, usually with an unspecified term. Often the position is referred to as *called pastor* to distinguish it from interim pastor, but this use of the term is incorrect since interim pastors are also called to parish ministry. Settled pastors are those who are serving a congregation, but are not interim pastors.

Missional refers to intentional engagement of the Holy Spirit. It assumes that the Spirit is presently and dynamically acting in the world as we know it, contrary to deism's assertion that God has no further involvement in the world after creation. Missional assumes that the Holy Spirit's activities and intentions are knowable to the general public, contrary to Gnosticism's assertion that the ways of God are known only to those given special knowledge. It also assumes that the kingdom of God has already come to all the world, and does not take the view that the church somehow inaugurates that kingdom for others. It asserts that the church is *drawn into the world* by the Spirit of Christ who is already in the world, rather than driven by an internal purpose. It asserts that the direction of ministry is not to bring the people of the world into the church, but that *the church is sent out to engage, redeem and renew the world*. In other words, the primary task of the church is not to bring the Monday-Friday world into the church to encounter Christ. The primary task of the church is to send the Sunday crowd out into the Monday-Saturday world so as to encounter Christ *there*.

Grassroots discernment is a process of grounded theory by which concepts and understandings are formulated from among the congregation as a whole. This is in contrast to top-down formulations of ideas and definitions. It assumes that the Holy Spirit

speaks more often and more clearly through the conversations of the group than to individuals who then convey the Lord's message to the group.

Communicatively discerned is that process by which insight into God's ways is achieved through conversation that explores events and ideas. Expertise on a topic or hierarchical flow of information, or the role of a group director are not required. This is contrasted with a *communally discerned* process that also seeks insight into God's ways but takes place within a social structure, with a leader or facilitator guiding the group.

Panentheism is a broad category of thought in systematic theology that seeks to explain how the Lord is active in creation without identifying creation with God. It rejects classical attributes of God, such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, which tend toward a static understanding of creation occurring once in the past. Panentheism attempts to explain the on-going, present, creating activity of the Holy Spirit. God is not the physical world (pantheism), but God is intimately and incarnationally involved *in* the world. I take the position that God's presence in the world occurs as *relationship*. It is in the gathering of two or three in Christ's name that God appears. This view is supported by the concept *perichoresis.*[11]

Experimentation as used in this study is application of the cyclical tasks of action, reflection, and adjustment. It refers to trying an idea before knowing the outcome. In a rapidly changing environment, pre-planning is not always possible. Opportunities are fleeting and new situations arise for which there is no good history on which to fall back. Experimentation is a process of acting on an idea and then assessing its impact for learning and further action.

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[11] Perichoresis refers to an understanding of the Trinity in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit mutually indwell. The concept is based on John 17:21. Rather than focusing on the distinctiveness of each person of the Trinity, it attempts to describe their relationship. However, it preserves individual distinctiveness, avoiding loss of self to group homogeneity.

Adaptive change, as mentioned on page 7, reorients an organization's very purpose. This is in contrast to *technical change*, which is improving the efficiencies and effectiveness of an organization's current functioning. Adaptive change from a missional perspective is identifying the specific activities of the Holy Spirit that change the congregation's purpose—and sometimes identity—to carry out the mission of God.

Research Design

Research Method

This elaborated case study describes a congregation's experience of an interim period which was conducted with the purpose of intentionally preparing the congregation for future ministry within the larger scope of God's creating and redeeming activity in the congregation's immediate context. The interim missional tasks were to discern the intent of the Holy Spirit in the developments of the surrounding communities and in the events within the congregation itself, and to introduce a new imagination of how the congregation might engage in the Spirit's work.

A case study method researches the depth and breadth of a single phenomenon. An elaborated case study reveals what happened, why, and what it means. The goal is not only to find out what happened, but also to understand the underlying customs, attitudes, personal interpretations and values that bear on the research topic. "The hope in an elaborated case study is to be able to generalize to broader processes, to discover causes, and to explain or understand a phenomenon."[12] The research method develops themes and theories from the participants themselves, guided by the researcher's initial assumptions which are revised in response to participants.

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[12] Herbert J. Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 6-7.

This study describes the process of conducting the interim period missionally, contrasting it to common practices arising out of organizational development and health models. Describing and analyzing specific behaviors and activities within a single context reveals their interrelations and mutual effects. This case study describes what happened within the interim process to lay foundation for *adaptive* change that occurred over the ensuing years.

This is not an intervention study or action research. While the methods of reflection, evaluation, conversation, and so on, reinforce key factors and principles of the interim process, and lead to new insights and behaviors, they are not the focus of the study.[13] This researcher's role is that of interpreter of a particular interim process that occurred at one congregation.

Research Subject

The subject of this research is the interim period (January 1, 2006 to January 20, 2008) of a large Lutheran congregation in a rapidly growing suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota. (The congregation is given the pseudonym "Ascension Lutheran Church" in this thesis.) The interim pastor for the period studied was the congregation's fourth senior pastor in three years. Major issues the congregation faced during the interim time were missional identity, conflict, financial crisis, leadership structure, roles clarification, changing ministry environment, loss of members, building construction, and congregational purpose.

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[13]John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003), 91.

Research Process

Several types of observation were used to describe changes in the formal organizational structure of the congregation and in its identity and direction. During the interim time, power, authority, and accountability were restructured both overtly by policy changes and interpersonally by intentionally practicing alternative behaviors. For the purposes of this research, the changes were described through group reflection, group planning and action, solicitation of others' observations, and personal observation and reflection.

The nature of the conflict that was experienced and how the conflict was addressed were also examined. Conflict experienced in the year leading up to the interim time motivated members in ways previous non-conflict efforts did not; for example, as a result of conflict, a number of marginal members committed themselves to assuming official leadership roles. Many of the factors behind staff contributions to prior conflict are the same factors that contribute to new *missional* behaviors now being practiced, notably experimentation and reflection.

Documents were analyzed to describe the financial crisis history as well as to supply other background data. Such historical documents provide correction to researcher bias in the interpretation of phenomena.

Major events in the congregation's history and the meaning members attach to them were gathered through interviews. Focused interviews addressed the pastors' symbolic roles and organizational functioning, the change in the congregation's worldview and identity, and members' understanding of the Holy Spirit's influence.

The Interim Transition Team reflected on the overall interim process, on the use of power during the interim period, and on the activities that contributed to changes in the congregation. The team was directly involved in conducting the interim process at Ascension Lutheran Church. They were consulted on methods used and key decisions made. They advised the interim pastor on approaches to best address issues and problems. They gave feedback to the interim pastor and participated in reflection on actions taken.

Key Theories

Agency Theory

Missional congregations attempt to discern what the Holy Spirit is already accomplishing in their congregations' ministry contexts and then adjust their ministries to participate in the Spirit's missional activity. *Agency theory* underlies such an understanding. The Lord is the *owner* of the mission. It is *Christ's* mission to redeem the world and to reconcile all things to God. The congregation does not have a mission of its own and cannot faithfully formulate a mission statement apart from what the Holy Spirit is doing. Congregations are *agents* that act on the Spirit's interests rather than on their own interests.[14]

The risk in agency theory is that of divergent interests. The congregation's need for self-preservation often leads it to conserve its resources and avoid risky activities. This occurs at the very time the Holy Spirit calls the congregation into bold ministry ventures. Rather than grappling with Jacob's "ghost" (Gen 32),[15] congregations fall back

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[14] Mary Jo Hatch, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 334-37.

[15] All Bible references and quotes are from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

to rehearsing tired theological formulations and repeating ineffective activities. The fear of loss prevents congregations from listening to missional challenges.

Secular organizations attempt to overcome the problem of divergent interests by imposing *contracts* to bring agents' self-interest into alignment with owners' interests. However, the Lord needs no contract with congregations. Instead the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit simply by-passes recalcitrant congregations or the Spirit creates crisis within them. Congregations passed up by the Spirit are those that wither into themselves, with their sole purpose being the preservation of the organization. Congregations in which crisis occurs are those whose inner conflicts drive them to seek a different purpose than that in which they were operating. Conflict often is not so much an interpersonal or organizational problem as it is the Spirit's moving the congregation into different ministry.

<div align="center">Power Theories</div>

Power is commonly understood to be the ability to impose one's will on another. This view has been challenged by numerous philosophers in the last century. The nature, purpose, and expression of power have been the subject of numerous theories. Pertaining to organizations, F. W. Taylor was concerned with a consistent, reliable work force.[16] Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik view power as resource-based.[17] Zygmunt Bauman proposed that bureaucratic rationality made the Holocaust possible.[18] Hannah Arendt

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[16] Stewart Clegg, David Courpasson, and Nelson Phillips, *Power and Organizations*, Foundations for Organizational Science (London: SAGE, 2006), 40.

[17] Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik, "Resource Dependency Theory," (Toronto: York University) www.istheory.yorku.ca/resourcedependencytheory.htm (accessed June 7, 2007).

[18] Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips, *Power and Organizations*, 151.

argues that power is a function of a group rather than an individual possession.[19] Michel

Foucault asserts that power creates regimes of truths.[20] Stewart Clegg argues that power

interprets reality and thereby creates meaning.[21] A social approach to power is people

acting in concert to achieve an outcome. Power is derived socially, exists within

cooperative community, and has direction (a teleological model).

Fundamental to understanding the expression of power in the church is the

understanding of what church *is*. Congregations that see themselves as provider of

religious services that at some level is in competition with other organizations, religious

and not, will seek to consolidate resources and thereby gain power over its environment.

Congregations as communities of people with common values will assert power to

protect their members from external threats and to maintain internal cohesion. However,

the congregations that have identity through their connections with God's mission will

relinquish self-determination and self-preservation as primary motives, for that of being

evidence to the world of God's present and active power working through them.

Resource dependency theory is the idea that power is derived from control of

resources. Organizations have two objectives: to acquire control over resources that

minimize their dependency on others, and to acquire control over resources that

maximize the dependency of others on the organization.[22] One common example of

maximizing dependency on the congregation is parents relinquishing the spiritual training

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[19] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 44.

[20] Michel Foucault and Colin Gordon, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 133.

[21] Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips, *Power and Organizations*, 295.

[22] Pfeffer and Salancik, "Resource Dependency Theory."

of their children to Sunday school and youth programs, under the assumption that these church programs have a better store of spiritual knowledge resources than do parents.

Environmental changes provoke uncertainty. Within a congregation, the ability to cope with uncertainty by manipulating available resources is transformed into power.[23] In other words, those who have the resources to navigate and weather uncertainty are the ones who are able to wield power over others. Uncertainty is accompanied by opportunity, and those who seize opportunity are the ones who gain power. That power then is used to change the environment's uncertainty, i.e., bring order to chaos.

Traditionally, interim pastors are called upon to resolve uncertainty. The ministry by nature is addressing the uncertainty of what will happen next with the congregation. The effectiveness of the interim pastor is directly related to the ability to manage uncertainty and mediate the anxiety that accompanies uncertainty.

Missional interim processes recognize that uncertainty is of the Lord's making and remaking. Thus the particular power of the missional interim pastor is not so much in the reservoir of skills and abilities that have been accumulated from experience and learning as it is in recognizing how the Holy Spirit is working in present uncertainty to create a new thing with the congregation, *and in engaging the Holy Spirit* as God calls the congregation into a new future. Rather than gaining control over environmental resources as resource dependency theory proposes, the missional expression of power is discernment and theological interpretation (like that of Clegg's discursive theory). Power, in missional language, is translating the perceived loss and confusion of present experience into a vision of the Spirit acting forcefully through the congregation. It is power that comes from reading circumstances theologically—and inviting the

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[23] Hatch, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 78-81, 288-90.

congregation into conversation over that reading. It transforms circumstances that lead to despair, into circumstances that energize and motivate.

Fundamental to resource dependency theory is that organizations seek to maximize their power, that is, their control over resources and opportunity. Marva Dawn questions whether congregations naturally *ought* to maximize power, i.e. secure their survival in their environment and context. She asserts that the church best fulfills its calling in God's mission when the church is at its *weakest*.[24]

If power is imposing one's will on another, violence, then, is the extreme expression of power. However, Peter Ackerman and Jack Duvall give historical examples of how this is not the case.[25] There is another force more powerful than coercion or violence. Hannah Arendt describes such power in social terms where power is a characteristic of people in relationship, and power is given by the consent or acquiescence of people.[26] Power, therefore, is not a commodity to be garnered and accumulated, nor a personal characteristic of those who exercise it. What Jesus promised his followers upon his resurrection (Ac 1:8) was the *consent* of the Lord Almighty for the people to act on God's behalf. It is a social arrangement between the Lord and the Lord's followers. In the same way, leaders of congregations have power only to the extent the congregation allows them, regardless of whether they are elected, commissioned or ordained. Legitimacy is then the process of people publicly declaring who gets to exercise the power that they bestow.

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[24] Marva J. Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001).

[25] Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

[26] Arendt, *On Violence*, 44.

Power as a social arrangement also applies to the Biblical notions of powers and dominions. The Pauline concept of powers are those forces, created by Christ (Col 1:16), acting on the Lord's behalf in the earthly realm. God is in highest heaven, stars and moon and sun run their lower courses, below which are the forces that carry out God's will on earth. The powers and principalities had God's consent to rule until they became gods unto themselves.[27] Christ's redemption extends to the powers and principalities, restoring them to their proper place in God's creation.

Key Questions from the Research

This is a case study of one congregation at one period of time in its history. It describes a missional approach to interim ministry and the state of the congregation following the interim period. However, further testing is needed on whether a missional approach prepares other congregations better for their ministry into the future, and whether it prepares congregations better for ministry with their next pastors.

It is argued in this thesis that a missional model for interim ministry is more theologically sound than health or organizational development models. The theological basis for a missional approach as presented here needs further debate, and the theological basis has other dimensions not addressed here, such as the role of the individual prophet, revelation given to an individual for the benefit of the community, and personal responsibility for the well-being of the group.

Leadership requirements for conducting an interim period from a missional approach are not well-defined. Some are noted here. Further clarity on the nature of

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[27] H. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 2d ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), 30.

leadership in a missional approach to interim ministry will also lead to a re-examination of any specialized training that might be needed for interim pastors.

The phenomenon studied was a movement toward conducting an interim process missionally. Organizational development and health approaches were not abandoned. Elements of those two approaches were also necessary. How a missional approach integrates the organizational development and health approaches is far from clear. An unfortunate outcome would be that the missional approach becomes one more *add-on* to the other approaches.

Most at stake for interim ministry as a specialty is the question of whether a missional approach to interim ministry is fundamentally different from the missional functioning of congregations *outside* an interim period. Are the roles and activities of the missional interim pastor different from those of a settled pastor? The assumption underlying interim ministry for the past two decades is that there is a fundamental difference between the ministry of an interim pastor and that of a pastor called for the long-term. The difference is more than specialized training. The difference is in the *role* an interim pastor plays that is different from a called pastor, and in the *congregational processes* that are unique to transitions between settled pastors. Whether those assumptions are valid needs further study.

Ethical Issues Raised by the Research

This study describes the decisions, actions, and behaviors of people in an actual congregation. Difficult decisions were made that exposed people to criticism. In the confusion and conflict, motives were questioned. To not expose people any further, a pseudonym is used for the congregation and individual identities are concealed.

However, as much information as possible is revealed so that readers might apply other knowledge they might have about similar situations so as to augment the interpretation given in this study.[28] Also, as much information as possible is revealed so that the few who know the congregation and its interim history might cross-reference the information and conclusions.

This researcher was also the interim pastor who served the congregation during the period studied. Thus to some extent this was a self-review and evaluation. To minimize bias, reflection and interpretation from members themselves were solicited. Outside third parties also contributed to the study to reduce bias by both researcher and congregation members.

The missional approach used with this congregation was different from the conventional methods of interim ministry. While the congregation's leadership was regularly consulted for direction and appropriateness, the missional approach was not yet tried and recognized by specialists in interim ministry. Attempts at accountability included regular reporting to synod staff on activities and outcomes at Ascension, soliciting the counsel and guidance of an Interim Transition Team chosen from among the congregation's leaders, and clear, written, regular reporting to the church council of the interim senior pastor's activities and plans. Further, the conventional tasks expected during an interim transition were accomplished, though they were not give prominence.

Generalizability is a problem with case studies. Generalizability is that quality that justifies inferring that a specific observation represents something more.[29] This was a

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[28] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed., Applied Social Research Methods Series, vol. 5 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 157-58.

[29] Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1979), 578.

study of one congregation, in one context, in one religious heritage, at one period of time. Some observations were made that are common to other congregations. While many of the experiences of this congregation, including those as a result of the missional approach, were similar to that of other congregations, it is not implied that the processes and outcomes of this interim period will be the same for others.

Intersubjectivity is that quality "whereby two different researchers, studying the same problem, arrive at the same conclusion."[30] The majority of the observations in this paper were interpreted by this researcher. Attempts to offset the problem of subjectivity included third party observation and peer review. Also, an outside advisory board was consulted by the researcher for comment and critique.[31] The description reported here is more than one person's perception or evaluation.

Summary

As a case study this research describes the interim period of a large, suburban, mainline denomination congregation that experienced multiple challenges simultaneously. Rather than approaching the interim process from the traditional organizational development and health models, the interim process was approached missionally, that is, assuming that the Holy Spirit was an active participant in the events and experiences. Characteristics of a missional approach to interim ministry are the main tasks of discerning God's mission in the congregation's particular context, determining the congregation's role in that mission, and describing what the congregation will be in carrying out its role in God's mission.

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[30] Ibid., 580.

[31] The advisory board consulted throughout this doctoral course of study is the Rev. Susan Miller, the Rev. Robert Hoyt and the Rev. Dr. Lawrence Hand.

Discerning, determining and describing are functions of power. It is argued here that biblically faithful expressions of power within congregations are as agents of God. This view corresponds to the role of God's stewards given to people in creation, to the blessing given to Abraham and his descendents, and to the concept of communion of saints. The power of the Holy Spirit is given to the community—not to individuals—and it is to the community that power is accountable, a community that exists as Holy Spirit incarnate.

How a missional approach to interim ministry differs from the long-standing organizational development approach that is often cobbled together with a health model is the subject of the next chapter. Each model is described. Other influences beyond congregational ministry are briefly reviewed. Identity is then explored at length for identity is at the crux of mission. What a congregation is in relation to God and to God's activity in the world, determines what the congregation does in ministry. Outcomes of ministry (success) and methods of ministry (power) are two dimensions of ministry that depend on how a congregation's identity is understood.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interim ministry has arguably been around since the beginning of the Christian

church. The Apostle Paul had concerns for the church at Thessalonica and so sent

Timothy to minister with them temporarily (1 Thess 3:1-10). Throughout history and

across traditions, congregations have been served by pastors who are appointed for a

short period to guide ministry until another pastor is called. However, not until recently

has there been recognition that such ministry is of a different nature and requires different

skills than that of long-term *settled* ministry. With modernity's rationalism and the

application of management processes to congregational life, interim ministry became

intentional, a specialized ministry.

Organization Development Model

Prior to the move toward specialization, interim ministry was primarily that of

maintaining congregation functioning until the calling and start of the next pastor. The

goal of the interim period was to find the next pastor as soon as possible. In 1973, Loren

Mead challenged that goal with the publication of a booklet titled *The Developmental*

Tasks of the Congregation in Search of a Pastor. He later refined the challenge in

Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors.[1] Every congregation experiences

periodic leadership change. Rather than merely maintaining ministry through changes in

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[1] Loren B. Mead, *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1986).

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leadership, Mead asserted that the between-pastor-times were opportunities for strengthening congregations and redirecting ministry.

The early years following Mead's publication focused on distinguishing interim ministry from that of settled pastors. Articles and studies continue to be published enumerating the benefits of interim ministry and the benefits of conducting such ministry with a trained interim specialist.[2] Ministry specialization is still not widely understood by most church members. Along with chaplaincy, campus ministry and other such ministries, interim ministry continually has to define its differences and justify its purpose from that of what most people experience as settled parish ministry.

Since the early 1990s, attempts have been made to find an appropriate theoretical framework for interim ministry. Intentional interim ministry developed out of an *organizational* need for ensuring the long-term ministry of succeeding pastors. Early approaches to interim ministry were based on organizational development models, originating in The Alban Institute.[3] The organizational model as used in interim ministry draws heavily from secular business management, adapting management principles to the context of congregations. Often church members are more quick to grasp the connection than are church leaders because of their familiarity with management concepts and practices.

The organizational development model endures in the practice of interim ministry, particularly in the generally recognized five developmental tasks of the interim

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[2] Nola Deffenbaugh, "Benefits of an Intentional Interim: An Interim Pastor Can Turn a Church with Problems into a Church Ready for Progress," *Leadership* 14 (1993); Center for Congregational Health, "Report on the Post-Intentional Interim Ministry Research Project," (Winston-Salem, NC: Center for Congregational Health, 2006)

[3] In particular, Mead, *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors*.

period[4] that are written into most employment agreements of interim pastors. The

assumption of this model is that if the developmental tasks are done completely and

thoroughly, then ministry with the succeeding pastor will begin well and endure.

Achieving financial stability, reorganizing staff, stabilizing membership, instituting

controls and procedures, clarifying the congregation's purpose and ministry scope,

identifying ministry opportunities, aligning resources with ministry initiatives are

common tasks that occur during the interim period that address the organizational needs

of the congregation as it prepares for ministry with the next settled pastor.

Health Model

Almost immediately it was realized that the organizational development model

did not fully account for the dynamics of the congregation, and that the approach was not

enough to prepare a congregation for ministry with its next pastor. The five

developmental tasks did not include conflict resolution or give attention to interpersonal

processes. An organic model was added to the organizational development model, and

was expressed in health terms. The two models, organizational development and

congregation health, are used simultaneously in the practice of interim ministry, but are

not functionally integrated and are not mutually reinforcing.

With a health model, the interim period came to be viewed as a time of bringing

an *unhealthy* congregation back to appropriate functioning. Systems theory as developed

by Murray Bowen and Edwin Friedman served as the basis for the health model as

applied to interim ministry.[5] In Lutheran churches and a few other denominations,

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[4] See chapter one, page 6, for a list of the tasks.

[5] Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. The Guilford Family Therapy Series (New York: Guilford Press, 1985).

systems theory appears as *Bridge Builders*, a conflict intervention process, and as

Healthy Congregations, a process development tool, both created by Peter Steinke.[6] The

health model assumes that congregations which are experiencing an interim period are in

some way *unhealthy*. The interim pastor's role is to assist the congregation in regaining

health, acting much like a therapist.

However, health in this model is not well-defined. Steinke offers some indicators

of emotional health in the interpersonal behaviors of congregation members,[7] but the

indicators do not apply to the congregation's identity, to its missional purpose, or to its

ministry performance. The health model did not replace but rather supplemented the

organizational development model. Because the two models are not integrated,

disagreements often arise over which best assesses an interim transition. Synod staff tend

to operate from the organizational development model, while practicing intentional

interim pastors tend toward the health model.

Interim Research Methods

Most research on interim ministry has been qualitative, primarily case studies

exploring the benefits of intentionally conducting an interim process.[8] Most studies

concentrate on the results of the interim period from the perspective of congregation

members. Others are interviews with succeeding settled pastors. The case studies affirm

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[6] Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1996).

[7] Peter L. Steinke, "Healthy Congregations: Facilitator Manual," (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran Brotherhood, 1999).

[8] Richard Clinton Diehl, "Between the No Longer and the Not Yet: The Impact of an Interim Minister on an Urban Church in Transition" (D.Min. Thesis, Hartford Seminary, 1986); Robert Allen Hobus, "Evaluation of Interim Ministry: Perspectives of a Parish Pastor" (D.Min. Thesis, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1988); David Lawrence Odom, "The Effects of the Intentional Interim Ministry Process in Two Southern Baptist Congregations One Year after the New Pastor Has Been Installed" (D.Min. Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1997).

intentional interim ministry as being of benefit to congregations, but they do not

determine precisely what the benefits might be or in what specific ways a congregation is

better served by an intentional interim pastor, and the studies for the most part do not

recognize the particular role of the Holy Spirit in the interim transition.

Recent research has included attempts at quantifying the advantages of interim

ministry served by trained specialists. Using an organizational development model, Joe

Loughlin attempted to measure the difference in ministry outcomes between

congregations who engaged in an interim process and those who did not have an interim

period between pastors.[9] The *Center for Congregational Health*® conducted mixed-

method research from a health model. The Center study was unique in that it surveyed

congregations two to three years after the interim period ended to assess the *enduring*

benefits of intentional interim ministry performance. It found that congregations that

experienced an "Intentional Interim Ministry" compared with those who did not in their

transitions between pastors, had increases in overall membership, increases in worship

attendance, increases in Sunday school attendance, and increases in budgets.[10]

Mark Bents researched methods by which to quantify interim ministry *while it is*

being conducted rather than after the interim period had ended.[11] Instead of giving

attention to the benefits or results of the interim period, he attempts to measure the

progress of the transition from one pastor to another. He identifies three phases that a

congregation experiences with a change of pastors: the separating of pastor and

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[9] Joe T. Loughlin, "The Impact of the Intentional Interim Ministry on the Participating Churches of the Baptist General Convention of Texas" (D.Min. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001).

[10] Center for Congregational Health, "Report on the Post-Intentional Interim Ministry Research Project" (Winston-Salem, NC: Center for Congregational Health, 2006), 14.

[11] Mark Frederick Bents, "Intentional Interim Ministry: The Development of a Tool to Assess Needs During Pastoral Transition" (D.Min. Thesis, Luther Seminary, 2004).

congregation, the ensuing uncertainty, and integration. His tool, *Transition Intervention Analysis*, identifies at which point is the congregation in the transition, with implications on how best to assist the completion of the move toward the next settled pastor.

Secular Influence

Extensive research has been conducted on organizational performance and outcomes in manufacturing and service-related businesses.[12] While they do not specifically address the interim situations of congregations, these theories and methods are often applied to congregation functioning. Manufacturing-type industries focus on consistently meeting customer specifications, reducing input costs, reducing production time, and ensuring on-time delivery. Service-type industries focus on customer satisfaction, return rates (customer loyalty), and pricing strategies (low pricing as *commodity* or high pricing as *specialty*). Both focus on low overhead and production costs, on maximizing profit for owners, and on maintaining organization viability.

Congregations are seduced into focusing on the same objectives. Applying business concepts to church functioning leads to goals such as meeting member expectations, reducing ministry costs, reducing staff time per ministry project (often as increasing number of projects per staff), delivering services on time (such as hospital visits), member satisfaction, worship attendance rates, financial giving rates, and maintaining the congregation's financial viability. Perceiving congregations as a service-related industry results in a *functional* understanding of ministry, that of *providing some service.*

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[12] Elaine Morley, Elisa Vinson, and Harry P. Hatry, *Outcome Measurements in Nonprofit Organizations: Current Practices and Recommendations* (Washington, DC: Independent Sector, 2001), et al.

In contrast, thinking of congregations *missionally* begins with what has God created the congregation to *be*. God's intent is the congregation *being* a testimony of the kingdom that has come for all people. A missional understanding of congregation is grounded in the concept of *being* the people of God, a sign of what God intends and accomplishes for all people. More than providing services for paying customers, the congregation is evidence of God's mission of redemption and reconciliation—redemption and reconciliation both within the congregation itself and for the neighborhoods to whom the congregation is called.

Missional Model

A missional model for interim ministry has been introduced in the last few years.[13] This model begins with recognizing that our Lord is a missionary God who engages the world by continually creating, constantly nurturing creation, redeeming what goes wrong, and reconciling relationships. "From this perspective, the church, as the people of God in the world, is inherently a missionary church."[14] Mission is not a function of the congregation's ministry but is its very nature. The church is missional because its people in community *are the very body of Christ in the world*, carrying out Christ's redemption of the world (Eph 1:23). The church is evidence of God's kingdom that has now come to all creation.

> A missional church is a community of God's people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very nature, God's missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all creation in Jesus Christ.[15]

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[13] Sally Stockley Johnson, "The Missional Church as a Resource for Interim Ministers," *The Journal of the Interim Ministry Network* 3, no. 1 (1999).

[14] Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 31.

With an *organizational model*, interim ministry is that of improving procedures and managing the process of change to another pastor. The goals of such a model are efficiencies in costs and ministry delivery. With a *health model,* interim ministry is that of restoring proper processes or systems that promote spiritual and emotional maturity. Minimizing conflict, restoring proper organizational functioning, reestablishing rational and mature behavior are its goals.

But a *missional model* for interim ministry does not automatically assume that unrest and disorientation a congregation might experience are marks of something gone wrong. Instead, they might be symptoms of the Lord doing a new thing with the congregation. Disruption occurs whenever the Holy Spirit calls a congregation into circumstances different from its past. *The crisis is not a problem but an invitation.* The interim pastor's role

> is not to escape the crisis through a BHAG [big, hairy, audacious goals] but invite people into a place of dialogue and engagement amid crisis. It is there that people (God's people among whom the Spirit is present) begin to discern and imagine a different future for themselves.[16]

A missional model moves beyond adjusting the functioning of a congregation, to addressing the fundamental issues of a congregation's identity as the people of God, the congregation's role in God's mission of redemption, and the congregation's existence as testimony to God's reign on earth. A congregation's identity defines its purpose. How a congregation defines and understands itself determines its ministries, function, and organization.

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

[16] Ibid., 55.

Identity

Non-religious businesses attempt to identify themselves apart from competitors. Identity serves as a quick way to begin a transaction with a customer. Identity draws the attention of the prospective buyer. In emerging markets, the very fact of a new product or service is enough to give the business identity, for there are few competitors and the newness is still a unique experience for the buyer. In mature markets two strategies are available, niche marketing and branding. Niche marketing is that special feature or service that is different from the competitors. Branding is necessary when products or services are indistinguishable from one company to another. Instead, the company's *name* or the product *name* is marketed as somehow unique or valued.

Congregations operating from an organizational model create identity in the same way as do businesses. For emerging markets, congregations might specialize in hip-hop worship style or provide worship as a coffeehouse experience. Meeting a particular felt need is a version of niche marketing, as is recovery ministry and other ministry methods. Branding ministry occurs when a congregation's name is promoted as something unique and set apart from others, with the intent of drawing *customers* into the worship experience.

Identity in an organizational model is either functional or promotional. Identity serves to distinguish what the congregation offers or to attract users of the congregation's services. In either case, identity is shaped by market forces, shaped by what attracts the user's attention. In contrast, missional identity is God-given and creation-derived; missional identity both shapes the world and is shaped by the world.

Missional Identity

Walter Brueggemann categorizes many of the Psalms as *orientation* (such as Ps 8), *disorientation* (Ps 13), *or new orientation* (Ps 30).[17] The categories express the psalmist's relationship with God. Brueggemann suggests the categories are a progression from a former blessed relationship with God, through disorder and danger, to a new situation of blessed relationship.

Mark Bents identifies these same elements in the experience of congregations in an interim transition. Bents' schema of *ending*, *extension of ending* and *integration* correspond to Brueggemann's orientation, disorientation and new orientation.[18] Ending is experienced as the well-ordered, reliable life of the congregation with its familiar pastor coming to a close at the pastor's leaving. Disorder and uncertainty ensues in the extension of ending phase. As the congregation begins to understand its calling and prepares for ministry with the next pastor, it enters the integration phase.

Bents recognizes that along with loss of orientation and the ending of relationship with a pastor, there occurs a concomitant loss of identity.[19] Identity is self-understanding that is derived from one's traditions, environment and experiences. Loss of identity occurs when experiences no longer can be understood by one's current world-view and self-understanding. Loss of identity is part of every congregation entering an interim period as it loses a pastor who to varying degree symbolically represents the congregation's identity. New identity is creating another identity out of experiences that

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[17] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg Old Testament Studies (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 10.

[18] Bents, "Intentional Interim Ministry: The Development of a Tool to Assess Needs During Pastoral Transition," 14.

[19] Ibid., 16.

now include the interim period. Often that new identity is forged by the efforts of congregational leaders formulating a "mission statement" that summarizes the congregation members' understanding of themselves. However, the integration phase of Bents' *Transition Intervention Analysis* is more than a congregation's self-understanding condensed into a statement.[20] It is recognizing the congregation's place in God's mission.

Instead of developing a new identity from within the congregation's experiences and the interpretations of those experiences, the proper outcome of the interim process is *missional identity*. Missional identity is how we understand ourselves through a process of reflecting on what the Lord is doing when intervening in those experiences of disorientation and loss of identity. It begins with Christ on the cross who changes the circumstances of our relationship with God. Missional identity comes to us in baptism when God makes us new, claims us, and *re-establishes* our place in the kingdom of God. Missional identity is expressed as we participate in the Spirit's creative, nurturing, redemptive, and reconciling work in the world.

There are two ways a congregation loses connection with what the Lord has called it to be. First, the congregation goes astray from the identity and calling for which the Holy Spirit created it. This is sin experienced at the congregational level. Outside forces and inside fears draw the congregation's attention away from what God intends for the congregation.

The second way a congregation loses its connection to the Lord is when *the Lord* moves away (Ps 13, 22, Hab 1:1-4, et al.). Circumstances change, the congregation's ministry context changes, and the Holy Spirit does a new thing. Congregations that lose sight of what new thing the Spirit is about then also lose sight of what the congregation is

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[20] Ibid., 60-62.

to be in those changed circumstances. The congregation may remain faithful to its

original forms and calling, but the Holy Spirit has moved in a different direction.

Missional identity depends on recognizing what the Holy Spirit is doing currently in a

particular context and what the Holy Spirit asks of the church in that current missional

activity. It requires the congregation to constantly evaluate, reflect and adjust its ministry

as the Holy Spirit acts anew.

Missional identity is not achieved by the congregation creating its own identity.

The interim task of discovering new identity is commonly practiced as members

engaging in exercises that result in a *member-derived* image of what they want to be.

Discerning what *the Lord* might want is often neglected. Missional identity is God-given.

The congregation is a people gathered by God, not an organization built by members.

Missional identity is the congregation being a particular sign of the Spirit's work. It is

being evidence of the kingdom of God present to and appearing in the world. As the

congregation carries out its ministries, it reveals the Holy Spirit incarnate in the

congregation. Missional identity precedes anything a congregation does, and begins with

what God created the congregation to be—evidence of God's kingdom come. Missional

identity is peculiar to a congregation's context and location.[21]

Where Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church*

to Reach a Changing World, see the world as having only a detrimental influence on the

church, a more thorough missional understanding recognizes the Holy Spirit preceding

the church into the world. In other words, the world has something to reveal about God to

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[21] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 6.

the church. The revealing of God's ways and of God's kingdom is not solely the role of the church, but also occurs in the world beyond the church.

"The congregation exists for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society."[22] Because it is a people who in their very being reveal God's kingdom to the world, a congregation's success is not primarily in its viability or organizational expansion. A congregation's success is its ability to bring awareness to others of the presence and reign of God in their lives, in their circumstances, and in the world around them. "The church is God's demonstration plot in the world."[23] The church is both sign and instrument of God's grace and redemption.

Jesus is the revelation of God to the world and within history. Jesus is God and Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed, ". . . that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:21). Jesus beseeches the Lord for this perichoretic identity to include the followers of Christ. The purpose is for the world to believe and live according to God's kingdom come. The scope of God's agency is not limited to congregation membership or ministry. Here it is clear that the scope of God's mission is the entire cosmos. The congregation is a clear, visible sign of that kingdom come to all creation.

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[22] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 233.

[23] Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*, 100.

Ministry Success

Success in a Business Model

Success in the realm of business is measured most commonly as the monetary profit remaining after the cost of doing business. The assumption is that the social value of the business is reflected in what society is willing to pay for its products or services. Nonprofit organizations operate under the same assumption; the social value of the organization's services is reflected in the donations and grants it attracts.

The business model is often brought into congregational ministry as the assumption that congregations that minister well to people's needs will be supported by people's money. The seldom-spoken corollary is that those congregations experiencing inadequate funding are those that are not providing necessary ministry services or not providing them well enough. If the Lord is part of the equation at all, it is the assumption that the Lord provides for what the Lord approves. Rarely is the position taken that the hardships a congregation experiences are part of what it means to be doing the Lord's work, of what it means "to take up your cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

Businesses attempt to increase their success in three major ways: increasing efficiency, increasing effectiveness against investment, and innovation. As applied to congregation ministry, efficiency is increasing the ministry return on member contributions. On the expense side it is streamlining staff, replacing paid staff with volunteers, cutting costs of operations, all under a narrowly defined concept of *stewardship*. On the revenue side, it is supplying the kinds of services that attract donor dollars. The Lord does provide, but through people's pockets. The congregation becomes

a vendor of wanted services. The assumption rarely questioned is whether people's felt

needs are truly God's missional desire. Not taken into account is that what people feel

they need might be *contrary* to the Lord's mission—that what people feel they need is

precisely what the Lord might be *withholding* so as to turn them in another direction.

Increasing effectiveness so as to maximize investment return, is enhancing

excellence in business performance toward specific outcomes. But maximizing the

business's impact is another measure of success. Financial return is a measure of success

from the owner's point-of-view, but success from the recipient's point-of-view is the

degree of benefit or change that comes from the operation of the business. Management

concepts such as the balanced scorecard attempt to integrate the two views.[24]

In the congregation, success as effectiveness is expressed as how meaningful was

the worship experience, or how satisfied a person is with the spiritual service received

from the pastor or other professional staff. In some religious traditions, effectiveness is

measured by the number of conversions, or some change in social circumstances. Seldom

questioned is the assumption of whether effectiveness is even what the Lord expects, and

– if it is – *what* that effectiveness might be, both scripturally and missionally.

Innovation is another way business attempts to be successful. This strategy is not

to be the best at some product or service, but to be first in the market. Financial return is

highest when the product/service is still rare. As products become commodified,

manufacturers and suppliers compete either by cutting profit margins and/or by

maintaining brand loyalty. America's economy has matured to the point that most

products are now commodities and thus the need for massive advertisement to attract and

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[24] Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton, *The Balanced Scorecard: Translating Strategy into Action* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996).

hold customers to a particular brand, and the need to add value in the form of customer service.[25] Innovation has become risky and costly for there is little left materially that Americans seem to need.

Innovative congregations are those that experiment in providing some new spiritual experience. Experiments that succeed in attracting religious consumers will quickly be adopted by other congregations in order to also increase their share of the religious market. But even while the innovation might theologically be in line with scriptures or with a congregation's traditions, it still does not guarantee that a particular innovation is what the Holy Spirit is accomplishing in the congregation's environment or situation. Just because it works or is popular does not mean it is of God.

<center>Success in a Health Model</center>

Successful healthy congregations are those that are similar to flourishing, nurturing families. Health is emotional and functional balance where the individual members are nurtured and the congregation flourishes. Health is characterized by the maintaining of one's distinct identity (self-differentiation) while at the same time remaining in community (connectedness).

Nurturing and flourishing, however, are not well defined and tend to pertain to those who are already part of the system, excluding those who venture in as strangers. Success under a health model has no ready connection to involvement outside of its own system, such as participation in the Spirit's acts in the world outside of the congregation's membership. By definition, health is the ability to resist invaders of the system, or being strong enough to tolerate the dis-ease that is introduced. Stresses on the system are a

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[25] Tom Peters, *The Circle of Innovation: You Can't Shrink Your Way to Greatness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

normal, acceptable, needed part of existence in the way that the stress of exercise strengthens muscle. But stress serves to strengthen *defenses* and the agents of stress are resisted rather than welcomed. This is antithetical to the missional understanding of the church as being sent into the world, the church existing for the sake of the world.

Keifert asserts that instead of a stable, warm family where members are nurtured, congregations are faithful (or as suggested here, "successful") when they are "characterized by hospitality to the stranger, especially the socially marginalized. It will mediate a purely private faith and one open to the public in an outward-directed mission. . . ."[26] When a stranger (stress agent) upsets the system, when self-differentiation is challenged, health suffers but the church succeeds. When an alien resides in the land, connectedness is interrupted, yet it is then that the church is called to carry out the will of God (Ezek 47:21-23).

Alternatively, when the church finds itself disconnected from its surroundings, and its former identity no longer gives meaning, the Lord intercedes to provide new meaning and identity.

> . . . in *Jeremiah 29* the prophet brings a *letter* from God calling them to settle into Babylon with all its threats, confusion and dislocation. It appeared that only by living into this liminal place would it be possible to discover and imagine an alternative future that was being shaped among them by God. Babylon became the location for reframing of Israel's identity and sense of mission as a people.[27]

This leads to a missional model for success.

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[26] Patrick Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 72.

[27] Alan J. Roxburgh, "Reframing Denominations from a Missional Perspective" (paper presented at the Missional Church and Denominations: Engaging the Challenge of the Denominational Church, St. Paul, Minnesota, Nov. 4, 2006), 89.

Success in a Missional Model

Where the business model looks at market opportunities and member satisfaction, and where the health model focuses on behaviors and social processes within the congregation, the missional model intentionally discerns the Spirit's activity in the congregation's context and engages the congregation in what God is doing, whether or not the members benefit directly and whether or not the religious market demands it. Success is not in congregation growth but in the congregation's ability to reveal the present Kingdom of God and the extent of the congregation's participation in the Spirit's creating, nurturing, redeeming, reconciling work.

The tasks of congregations living out of a missional model are:

- discovering the divine forces and influences affecting the lives of people in the local community,

- connecting people in the congregation with people in the congregation's neighborhood and community,

- maintaining the connection so that missional imagination becomes ingrained in people's thinking,

- constantly connecting what is happening in the congregation and in the community with the biblical narratives of God's purpose.[28]

Assumptions of the missional model are that the Spirit of God is presently and intimately involved in creation, that the Spirit moves in the whole world and not just in or through the congregation, that the ways of God can be discerned and known, that the church is a

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[28] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 180-82.

community that "exists for the sake of those who are not members, as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society."[29]

Craig Van Gelder contrasts the denominational church and the missional church. The denominational church is "an organization with a purposive intent to accomplish something *on behalf of God* in the world."[30] As an organization, it is established by people who voluntarily join together for a common purpose. The church exists to do something for God, to promote the ways of God in the world.

The *missional* church "exists as a community created by the Spirit that is missionary by nature in being called and sent to participate in God's mission in the world."[31] Rather than doing something *for* God, the missional church exists *as God* for the sake of the world. Yet, rather than assuming that God's will is done on earth only when the church does it, the missional church recognizes the on-going creation and redemption of the world by the Holy Spirit beyond the church as well.

The congregation's role in God's creative, nurturing, redemptive, reconciling work always takes place in particular circumstances and places. The church's challenge is faithfully carrying out God's mission while having to discern for itself the best way to do that. As limited humans, we will make mistakes. As sinful creatures, our motives and methods will be less than pure. As we carry out God's redemption of the world, we ourselves depend on that very redemption.

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[29] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 233.

[30] Craig Van Gelder, "The Ecclesiastical Geno-Project: Unpacking the DNA of Denominations" (paper presented at the Missional Church and Denominations: Engaging the Challenge of the Denominational Church, St. Paul, Minnesota, November 3, 2006), 33. [Italics mine.]

[31] Ibid.

The missional church embraces trial and error, welcomes experimentation. People have best intentions but *will* fall short of the glory of God. Congregations already on the brink of disaster financially have little room for failure, and the world's creditors have little tolerance for those in debt. Tolerance of failure is beyond many congregations' threshold of anxiety, for it *requires trusting the Lord* to provide the necessary resources and necessary correction. Congregations operating from an organizational model can tolerate failure only when there are financial reserves to cover unforeseen costs, and when risks do not jeopardize the organization.

Congregations grounded in scriptures, exercising biblical principles, but neglecting to exercise faith in the Holy Spirit, have difficulty allowing failure that accompanies experimentation to be a spiritual practice. Yet the Lord we worship is one who forgives, redeems, and gives new starts. Failure is part of faith. Failure strengthens faith as one experiences the Lord's intervention and redemption (Ro 5). Correction that follows failure is, in theological terms, redemption. It is experiencing God's grace. Followers of Jesus are then *doubly* blessed: engaging in experimentation that explores and engages God's mission, and in correction when experimentation fails.

The missional church is one that encourages member-initiated ministry. In the organizational model, professional staff are hired to identify and organize ministry. Members are then recruited to join in and carry out what has already been decided. The missional church assumes that the Holy Spirit blows where it will and uses those it chooses, regardless of training or experience (John 3:8). Church staff are *resources* for member-initiated ministries, not professionals delivering a specialized service. At times

church staff might even be organizers and leaders of ministry, but at the initiative and direction of spirit-led members.

Experiment marks the missional church. Trial and error is a way of learning. Risk and uncertainty are acceptable realities whenever people assume they act according to God's will, for we never are certain that our perceptions accurately reflect God's ways. Discernment is acting boldly while constantly evaluating and questioning one's motives, methods, and purposes. At times what seems so surely godly work, in reality is contrary to God's intent (as Paul noted in Athens, Ac 17:22-31). There will be times when what the Spirit asks of us seems unnatural. The missional church accepts uncertainty. It addresses uncertainty by experimenting, reflecting, and adjusting as it begins to experiment all over again.

Success in the missional model is not measured by the impact or change in the recipients of the church's ministry activities. Often the context in which the church is called to witness is unresponsive to God's Word. Nor is success in the missional model measured by the internal preparedness of the people. Often the Lord uses what is weak or foolish or of no account (1 Cor 1:27-29). The successful congregation is not even one that creates faith. Faith is a gift of God. At most the church encourages and nurtures faith. Sometimes all the congregation is called to do is to open the possibility for another to experience the Holy Spirit. The church cannot cause faith but only provide the context in which someone comes to faith by the Spirit's work. The two who came to inquire about Jesus (Matt 11:3) were not instructed on how to lead John the Baptist to faith in Jesus but were simply commanded to witness, being the voice by which *the good news of Jesus itself* brings John to faith.

Criteria for church success is always the missional imperative, mediating God's love for the world.[32] The successful missional church is one that reveals and delivers God's redemption and God's reconciliation of the world, reconciliation both to God and to one another.

Success in the missional church requires cultivating room to explore and wonder together what the Spirit might be up to within the congregation and out in the surrounding community. Such congregations will call into conversation the stories and events of the community with the stories of scripture, connecting the community's experiences with the history of God's people. Successful missional congregations will act out of identity that is grounded in scripture, and in what God has established them to be in their particular locale and time, rather than out of identity shaped by the activities and programs a congregation provides. Missional congregations will succeed in moving from anxiety and immobilizing fear to naming that which they fear and declaring the Lord's dominion over the causes of fear. Missional congregations are adept at recognizing the good and beauty and wonder in the ordinary events of life, and naming them as evidence of the Spirit moving in creation. Success in a missional congregation will be marked by capacity to see the on-going work of God in the world, to identify the particular way in which that congregation is to participate in God's work, and to organize and carry out the work the Lord calls it to do—for the sake of the world.

Power Theory

In 1992 the situation looked more ominous. More than 10 years earlier, Egypt's Islamic Jihad had assassinated President Anwar Sadat, using members of the Egyptian Army it had managed to recruit. A key leader of the organization was

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[32] David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 494.

the Egyptian doctor Ayman al-Zawahiri, who went on to become Al Qaeda's No.2.

In the 1980s, that group and the Gamaa Islamiyah (GI), whose spiritual leader is the blind sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, currently serving a life sentence in the US for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center attack, continued to target officials for assassination, and in the 1990s moved into large-scale terrorist attacks.

In 1992, Sheikh Jabir Mohammed Ali, a firebrand leader of the GI started telling reporters that his men had "liberated" Imbaba [a neighborhood of Cairo] from the Egyptian state. He vowed the rest of Egypt was next. The government of Hosni Mubarak had had enough; that December, thousands of troops rushed to seal off the neighborhood and for a month, they moved door to door, arresting hundreds.

At the time it appeared to some observers that Egypt was at the precipice of an Islamic revolution. But in fact, the violent tactics of Sheikh Jabir's men had turned off many devout Egyptians and that December was the beginning of a crushing defeat for the militant revolutionaries.[33]

Power is a characteristic of people in community, without which power cannot exist. *Power is people acting in concert to achieve an outcome*.[34] Without people's cooperation, power does not exist. Thus the vulnerability of tyranny and coercion is people's refusal to submit. Gamaa Islamiyah lost power, not because of government crackdown, but because the government crackdown made it easier for Egyptians to act in concert in support of a different outcome. There could have been an Egyptian civil war between GI and government forces. Instead the citizens of Egypt gave their power in support of the government.

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[33] Dan Murphy, "Jihadis Slip Further from Political Goals," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 11, 2007, 11.

[34] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 44.

Peter Ackerman and Jack Duval give a history of non-violent action,

demonstrating that its power is greater than that of violence, particularly military

violence.

> People power in the twentieth century did not grow out of the barrel of a gun. It removed rulers who believed that violence was power, by acting to dissolve their real source of power: the consent or acquiescence of the people they had tried to subordinate.[35]

Dictators and juntas, as well as school bullies and overbearing foremen, have power to

act only to the extent they are allowed it by the people they oppress.

Thus when Jesus turned to the weeping woman who anointed his feet and said to

her, "Your sins are forgiven," (Lk 7:48) it was not only her acts and behaviors he

forgave, it was also her assumptions about her oppressors' rightness and authority that he

forgave. In other words, by that pronouncement of forgiveness, Jesus overthrew the

Pharisees' social power over her. The woman was a sinner (7:37). In fact the entire city

was sinners. The only one not was Jesus. But in the story, the social power structure

identified only her as sinner. Jesus removed her from the power structure that labeled and

isolated her. It is apocalypse in the present, upending pretend powers that separate and

dominate.

The acts of the Egyptian government in suppressing the GI in 1992 did not result

in a civil war and did not develop into tyranny because Egyptian Muslims chose to retain

their power to select their leaders, and chose a different outcome. Ackerman and Duval

are careful to assert that violence and power has its source in people:

> Violence may have coaxed colonial masters to leave, but military action to assume control is not the same as civilian action that develops the ability to

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[35] Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 505.

govern. . . . Shooting your way to power may destroy the old order, but you cannot free your people until they give you their consent.[36]

Concepts and Definitions

Hannah Arendt distinguishes between power, strength, force, authority and violence. While often interchanged in common usage, they are different phenomena, and the very practice of interchanging the concepts is itself a subtle way of reinforcing one's power over another.

Power is an agency derived from community, functioning on behalf of the community.

> Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name.[37]

Power exists only in the relationships of people. It is a social phenomenon and not a personal characteristic. This is essential to remember in congregations dominated by a person; once others behave differently, the person's power evaporates.

Strength refers to a quality of character equivalent to will, or to a physiological quality. Yet the strongest individual can be overpowered by the combined power of the many. Indeed the many "often will combine for no other purpose than to ruin strength precisely because of its peculiar independence."[38] Arendt, however, neglects the ability of individual strength to change the group (cf. systems theory). Strength might not "win

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[36] Ibid., 468.

[37] Arendt, *On Violence*, 44.

[38] Ibid.

over" the group, but it certainly can influence direction, perception, or the group's understanding.

Force is often mistakenly used as a synonym for violence, particularly the kind unleashed in war. Arendt suggests that force

> should be reserved, in terminological language, for the "forces of nature" or the "force of circumstances" (la force des choses), that is, to indicate the energy released by physical or social movements.[39]

Thus, force is *the outcome* of applied power or strength, or an environmental influence outside of human or social control.

Authority is the right to exercise power on behalf of a group, a right given without coercion or persuasion. "To remain in authority requires respect for the person or the office. The greatest enemy of authority, therefore, is contempt, and the surest way to undermine it is laughter."[40] Although Arendt does not make the point, authority is a *right and expectation* vested in a person or office that is recognized by another person. Whereas power is the ability to act, authority is the moral imperative to act. One can, and often does, exist without the other. Arendt's definition that power is acting on behalf of the group at the acquiescence or consent of the group tends to render authority redundant. However, authority is the intentional assigning of power to an individual or office through a process of legitimization (defined below).

Nathaniel Fick distinguishes between authority that is assigned by office and authority that is earned by leadership. Nowhere is it more clear than in the military the distinction between power, strength, force and authority.

> Every young officer quickly learns the difference between legal authority and moral authority. Legal authority is worn on the collar—the gold and sliver rank

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 45.

insignia that garner salutes and the title "sir." It doesn't win fire-fights. Moral authority is the legitimacy granted to a leader who knows his job and cares about his men. In combat, I learned to rely on moral authority much more than on legal authority. . . .

   Strong combat leadership is never by committee. Platoon commanders must command, and command in battle isn't based on consensus. It's based on consent. Any leader wields only as much authority and influence as is conferred by the consent of those he leads. The Marines allowed me to be their commander, and they could revoke their permission at any time.[41]

Military power is derived from the consent of citizens. Strength is the quality of soldiers and the integrity of the unit. Authority is the officer's imperative to act on behalf of the soldiers under him/her, a formal but tenuous right bestowed by rank and a charismatic but loyal right granted by those led.

Martha Stortz equates authority with legitimate power which she defines as "bureaucratically sanctioned power."[42] Legitimization "may be social convention or law or custom or tradition" that institutionalizes power.[43] Authority is a type of power "that is externally recognized, publicly validated, and often institutionally conferred."[44] This definition, however, is too restrictive. In contrast, non-bureaucratic charismatic power also can be legitimate when people recognize a leader as having a right to represent them in the exercise of power.

Legitimacy, then, is the public act of recognizing authority and bestowing power. Acquiescence is an individual act that *allows* another to assert dominance. Public consent

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[41] Nathaniel Fick, *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 276.

[42] Martha Ellen Stortz, *Pastorpower* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 63.

[43] Ibid., 79.

[44] Ibid., 32.

is organizing individuals so that in concert they *bestow* power to another. *Legitimacy is an intentional act of moving from a state of acquiescence to that of consent.*

Talcott Parsons originally defined legitimacy as only that which contributes to an organization's goals.[45] His interest was in the efficiency of organizations. According to Parson's view, a congregation's actions and decisions toward achieving its ministry goals are its only legitimate functions. The problem with such a view of legitimacy is, first, *who* decides what the congregation's goals ought to be, and, second, why are the *congregation's* own goals ultimate? It is missionally possible that what might be rationally detrimental to the congregation, is actually legitimate ministry. An example is giving money to benevolent causes outside of any direct benefit to the congregation itself.

Much of the organizational development work at Ascension during the interim period was creating legitimacy by making it possible for and motivating members to give appropriate consent to the various expressions of power. While acquiescence allowed the interim pastor to act initially, the interim pastor used the acquiescence to establish policies, expectations, reporting and review that led to conditional consent. Allowing acquiescence to prevail is not acceptable, even though it is easier for the community to carry out, and it is efficient in that it allows the empowered person great latitude to act. Acquiescence is unacceptable because that very latitude too easily slips into violence. Acquiescence is a short step from the dissolution of community that creates and bestows power.

Violence is not power. It is commonly assumed that the ultimate expression of power is violence.

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[45] Stewart Clegg, David Courpasson, and Nelson Phillips, *Power and Organizations*. Foundations for Organizational Science (London: SAGE, 2006), 120.

. . .There exists a consensus among political theorists . . . that violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power. "All politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence," said C. Wright Mills.[46]

Arendt contrasts this view of violence and power with a tradition arising from Athenian city-states where rule of law would render needless the expression of violence. Laws are actually the *consent* of citizenry, whereas violence is the absence of that consent.[47]

Where power is a social phenomena of people acting together, violence by necessity is instrumental.[48] Violence relies on technology and machinery when people do not cooperate, i.e. grant power. "Indeed, one of the most obvious distinctions between power and violence is that power always stands in need of numbers [of people] whereas violence up to a point can manage without them because it relies on implements."[49] Violence is the absence of power and evidence of bankrupt authority.

Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power.[50]

Violence is substituted when real power is lost. Wars are waged when people no longer cooperate. And terror, whether by tyranny of government or by terrorism of factions, depends on the complete breakdown of power, depends on the extreme atomization of society.[51]

Legitimacy intentionally and actively abandons acquiescence so as to take action in granting consent. Consent of the group to empower a person to act on the group's

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[46] Arendt, *On Violence*, 35.

[47] Ibid., 40.

[48] Ibid., 46.

[49] Ibid., 41-42.

[50] Ibid., 52.

[51] Ibid., 55.

behalf guards against violence. The best consent is always conditional and monitored, ready to reclaim power when necessary.

Manipulation is a particular type of violence. Its instrument is information. Manipulation occurs when the consent of people is not forthcoming. Controlling, withholding, and parceling out information does violence to the integrity of open, cooperative community. Manipulation is especially tempting to waning charismatic power (described below). When adulation starts to wear, the charismatic leader becomes anxious or even panics. They then look to instruments to bolster their influence, such as misusing information.

<div align="center">Power Forms</div>

Stortz describes three categories of power: *powe- over* which is sovereign, parental or bureaucratic power, *power-within* which is charismatic power, and *power-with* which is "coactive" power or communal power. When any form of power is exercised in leadership, three critical aspects are available for action:

1. the power to define a situation,

2. the power to name those involved in it,

3. the power to delineate space.[52]

Defining a situation is deciding for the group whether the situation is threatening or safe, and determining for the group what is happening to the group in the situation. This is tremendous power available to pastors through interpreting congregation experiences theologically. Declaring the actions of the Holy Spirit in the events of people

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[52] Stortz, *Pastorpower*, 20.

thus defines whether an experience is divine, and connects a person with God in tangible ways.

Naming those involved in a situation has two dimensions, that of who gets included and that of what inclusion or exclusion actually means. Naming gives a person a place in relationship to the group. An example of naming is baptism where the person is claimed by Christ and given the name "Christian." The person is declared a member of God's kingdom and is given the status of forgiven sinner.

Delineating space is not only deciding what uses a physical space will have, but also what meaning is given to those spaces. A traditional chancel with altar railing surrounding it is given the meaning of holiness from where the gifts of Christ's body and blood come. As long as the pastor enacts that drama, the space is sacred. When the altar is brought out of the chancel and stands alone amidst the people, the chancel space's holiness is deemphasized. Delineating space is not only determining room use but also is determining equipment use. Who gets to use microphones and musical instruments within a space, for example, is an exercise of power.

Power-over, sovereign, parental or bureaucratic power, is "coercion, control, or domination. Defined in this way, power is the ability to influence the behavior of others, and it is gained and exercised by tradition, force, consent, law, or authority."[53] The role God assigned men and women in Genesis 1:28 has often been interpreted as power-over creation. (A compelling argument can be made that in reality the form of power God grants in creation is *power-with*.) Power-over is imposing one's will or the group's will onto another. Such power is crucial in times of crisis when swift action and quick coordination is needed. It also is crucial when rules and restraints are unknown, such as

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[53] Ibid., 50.

that of a parent's power-over a child when the child does not yet know how to behave properly in society and in the world.

Bureaucratic power-over is that which is assigned to an office or position. Pastors often are uncomfortable exercising bureaucratic power that is bestowed upon them in ordination and instead turn to charismatic power that comes through friendship and the relationships formed by pastoral care.

Power- within, charismatic power, is that which often comes through congeniality, but it also can be the trust gained from people through sheer boldness and confidence. Charismatic power "is validated through the personal force of the one possessing it,"[54] and "legitimates itself."[55] When it works it is very efficient for it foregoes the necessary community organizing associated with power-over.

But in this also is its weakness; "with no external grounding, it depends doubly upon the leader's ability to continue to impress and the people's willingness to continue to be impressed."[56] Charm is only effective to the extent it delivers what is expected. As the charismatic leader's shortcomings are exposed, the ability to act on charismatic power begins to diminish. At that point a charismatic leader has two options, resort to tyranny such as withholding affection or imposing threats, or engage in legitimization which transforms charismatic power into bureaucratic power. Legitimization had been key to Ascension's interim period for its leadership had for the most part functioned with charismatic power. During the interim period, much of that had been bureaucratized through policies, reporting structures and procedures.

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[54] Ibid., 77.

[55] Ibid., 79.

[56] Ibid., 80.

Power-with is defined by Stortz as coaction or friendship, and "is sometimes known as the power of solidarity."[57] It is that of grassroots organizing before the organizing becomes institutional, often called "empowerment." Although qualities of charismatic leadership are necessary for initiating power-with, if personal charisms give way to group decision-making then power-with occurs.

While power with distributes power within the larger group and in this is its virtue, power with has the danger of functioning in opposition to another group.[58] Grassroots organizing is driven by a problem held in common. But when a problem is identified with someone else, power with can become exclusionary. Generosity, grace, suspension of judgment are all difficult practices, yet they are what Jesus calls the church to do. The Pharisees and scribes murmured, "This man receives sinners and *eats* with them" (Lk 15:2). As Volf describes it, embrace confronts exclusion in the parables following Luke 15:2, and on the cross Christ is in solidarity with victims as well as atoning for perpetrators.[59]

Power of God

Jesus promises at his resurrection that the apostles would "receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon [them]" (Ac 1:8). That power is the Lord granting the apostles the ability to act on the Lord's behalf. It is power that arises from community consisting of God's Holy Spirit abiding with God's people. Power-with is expressed perichoretically in the Trinity. That same power-with is given to the church. The church

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[57] Ibid., 106.

[58] Ibid., 110.

[59] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 23.

acts as agents and stewards of God's power. All forms of power are derived from the

Trinity's power-with.

Lee Snook equates power with the particular manifestation of the Holy Spirit in a

specific situation.

> The Spirit is God's power in the world. . . . *Spirit—in modern imagination—had come to have no connection with real powers in the secular realm*.
>
> . . . Christians can be so completely captured by the so-called modern imagination that they cannot deal with the simple idea that the Spirit is the secular form of God's power in the world.[60]

 In other words the Holy Spirit is God's power contextualized and particularized. This

then allows him to assert pan*en*theism, that the Spirit of God is in every living creature

that exhibits any kind of power, or *force* in Arendt's definitions.

The particular manifestation of the Spirit's power promised in Acts 1 comes to the

apostles by the Lord's consensus. Because it is by *the Lord's* consensus, no earthly ruler

or power or principality can take it away. And it is this particular *divine* power that is

greater than any violence or human-bestowed power, making possible *embrace* that

Miroslav Volf eloquently explores in *Exclusion and Embrace*.[61]

Summary

The history of the development of interim ministry began with an organization

development model out of an organizational need of securing longer tenures of pastors

serving congregations. Layered on top was a health model to compensate for the

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[60] Lee E. Snook, *What in the World Is God Doing? Re-Imaging Spirit and Power* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 6. [Italics his.]

[61] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*.

organization development model's inadequacy in addressing conflict and interpersonal dynamics.

Only recently has a *missional* model for interim ministry been introduced. Rather than focusing on congregation *functioning*, as do the organization development and health models, the missional model is grounded in congregation *identity*. That identity is derived from what God is doing specifically in a local context, how the congregation is to engage the work of God, and what shape the congregation's ministries are to be in order to carry out the congregation's calling to engage God's work.

God's activity in the world is the expression of God's power. Congregations are agents of God for the sake of the world, and thus exercise the power of God. That power is not a commodity to be used at the whim of congregations. That power is perichoretic manifestation of the Holy Spirit in creation.[62] As such, the church and church people individually exercise power at the will of God and are accountable to God.

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[62] Perichoresis refers to the relationship within the Trinity by which each "person" dwells in the others. This relationship extends by God's grace to the people of God, as described in John 17:21. Western catholic Christianity has traditionally emphasized the distinct persons of the Trinity. Perichoresis balances that emphasis with attention to the connectedness of the persons and the necessity of understanding each person in relationship to the others.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Missionally, legitimate power is founded on the words of Jesus to the apostles just before his ascension. In The Acts of the Apostles, Jesus tells them, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem . . . to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Power that comes from the Holy Spirit acts through *the church*. In Greek, Jesus speaks the plural "you," thus power comes not to individuals but to the gathered group. The group is bestowed with power as agents of God. The purpose of the Holy Spirit's power is to witness to Christ. The church's identity is to be Spirit-powered witnesses throughout the world, "to the ends of the earth." The congregation's identity is an extension of the biblical narrative of God intervening in history to save and redeem the world through Jesus Christ.

Agency is understood two ways. First, the agent presents the content of the author's message or carries out the author's directive. The agent acts on behalf of the author. In this sense, the church delivers God's good news and carries out the gracious acts that God commands.

In another sense, though, the agent is the *authority* of the author. The agent is an extension of the author, represents the author. The church is God incarnate in a particular place and time within the course of history and within existing social structures. The church is an expression of God.

Identity in Community

The American culture of individualism and self-determination leads to a tendency of reading scripture from a personal point of view. The message of scripture is applied to one's own personal life. But because the Bible is a story of God, scripture is not about oneself. When the Bible tends to be read as a set of principles or lessons that are applied to one's personal life, the overall story of God is overlooked. The Bible becomes an instruction book, the church becomes a vendor for methods of self-improvement, and the people of God are little more than satiated citizens.

David Tracy in *Blessed Rage for Order* describes five models of contemporary theology. Each theological model "attempt[s] to interpret the Christian tradition in the context of modernity."[1] One of them, the *orthodox* model, understands that the claims of modernity have no theological relevance, that the role of the theologian is only to express the beliefs of a particular church tradition. The Bible supplies a set of beliefs and principles that are to be applied to individual faith and life. To the extent that the Bible has relevance to context, the biblical principles are *imposed* on society, e.g., the perennial insistence on posting the Ten Commandments in places of government. Society and experience do not inform theology, but are expected to *conform to* theology.

Tracy's *neo-orthodox* model "is radically experiential."[2] The reference for the neo-orthodox is not some set of beliefs as with the orthodox believer, but "basic existential attitudes of Christian faith, trust and agapic love."[3] Again, it is the individual

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[1] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 24.

[2] Ibid., 28.

[3] Ibid., 29.

who is the focus of faith, and scripture is used in personal reference. The Bible informs

what is the *individual's* faithful expression of love, mercy, justice, obedience.[4]

American culture leads to a personal application of scripture and identity

understood in individualistic terms. For many, this culminates in a conversion experience

that radically changes an individual's self-understanding and faith identity. While not to

minimize the significance of such experiences, the experiences rarely are connected to

the congregation's identity and God's mission in the world beyond the individual

experiencing the event. This tendency, for example, is to read the Apostle Paul's

conversion as Paul's *personal* experience instead of recognizing the purpose of the event

in God's greater plan and its importance to the larger church (Acts 9:1-31). Yet the Bible

is clear that the purpose of Paul's Damascus experience was not for his own edification

or even his own salvation. *Paul's conversion had a social and historical role in the*

future of the church:

> So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was
> built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit
> it was multiplied. (Acts 9:31)

Paul's conversion began the Holy Spirit's process of evangelizing beyond the Jewish

believers unto the ends of the earth.

Rather than a resource for personal life and identity, reading the Bible as the story

of God provides *communal* identity and insight into the community's place in holy

history. First Peter 2:9, "but you are a chosen race," does not refer to the individual

reader. The writer refers to the *congregation*. The Greek verb form is plural. It is the

group, the congregation, that declares the wonderful deeds of God. Individuals have

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[4] Tracy's other models, greatly simplified, are *liberal* (faith claims are subject to modernity's rationalism), *radical* (liberated humanity necessitates abandoning traditional concepts of God), and *revisionist* (reinterpreting both modernity and Christianity so as to reconcile the two).

identity insofar as they recognize themselves as part of the group. Missional identity thus is not that of the person's place in God's work but that of the person as part of a community which is the body of Christ. Rather than the modern American idea of identity as inherently unique to an individual, the biblical concept of identity is social, contextual, and historical—the individual's *relationship* to others, the world, and God gives the individual identity.

Congregational Identity as Proposed by Others

Identity derived from traditions, especially those that have origins in a particular reading of scripture, is exemplified well by J. Dirk Reek in his thesis, *Theology of the Divine Call and Intentional Interim Ministry in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*.[5] He describes how the Missouri Synod's identity and the synod's influence on congregational identity is grounded in Lutheran Reformation theology and the resulting confessions. Scripture is interpreted within the paradigm of "God's justifying grace for Christ's sake."[6] Congregation identity is derived from Lutheran tradition, Lutheran Reformation theology, and from scripture read within the perspective of that tradition and theology. The Holy Spirit's *present* work in a congregation's environment, through its people in their *current* context, is not considered. Although the Synod of which he writes has experienced and continues to experience dramatic change, that change is not part of identity formation.

Warren Schulz defines *transition* as "the process by which we must deal with the inevitable changes of life," and *transformation* as "the new shape that occurs after

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[5] J. Dirk Reek, "Theology of the Divine Call and Intentional Interim Ministry in the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod" (S.T.M. Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2000).

[6] Ibid., 19.

transition, toward which change is aimed."[7] Grounding change in a theology of the cross, transition then is the act of Jesus on the cross and transformation is the resurrection reality given to all congregations. This understanding is so strongly Christocentric that it does not account for *creative* change, the kind of change that is God doing a *new* thing. While describing transformation in a congregation as redemption, Schulz does not identify what the particular nature of a redeemed congregation might be. He describes "Jesus donning the role of an interim pastor" in Luke 24:13-35 and 48-53. The parallels he draws are strained; interim pastors do not vanish from sight quite the way Jesus did. More to the point, the formation and transformation of the disciples did not occur after the resurrection of Jesus, but began earlier with their calling, and took place as they watched and listened and followed Jesus. Redemption occurs in congregations in varying degrees and ways, but it does not fully account for the shaping of a congregation's identity and ministry purpose.

Identity of the congregation that is derived from particular *behaviors* is described in Paul Svingen's thesis, *Intentional Interim Ministry within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*[8] Drawing from Eph 4:15-16, the church is identified by the characteristic of "speaking the truth in love." Influenced by systems theory, Svingen reads these verses as not applying primarily to the individual, but to the congregation as a whole. Identity is formed from *principles* derived from scripture and shaped by a health model of the church. The actions of the Holy Spirit in creation are not accounted for

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[7] Warren Schulz, "The Biblical and Theological Basis for Interim Ministry," In *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*, ed. Roger S. Nicholson. (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998), 121.

[8] Paul N. Svingen, "Intentional Interim Ministry within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" (D.Min. Thesis, Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools, 1990).

except as they guide the interpretation of scripture for the shaping of inter-personal relationships.

The behavior of the lead pastor as example and symbol for congregational identity is explored by David Charles Miles in his thesis, *Pastoral Strategies for Effective Interim Ministry*.[9] The spiritual issues of many congregations today are idolatry, rebellion, and poor leadership. He uses *The Letter of Paul to Titus* as the theological model for interim ministry.[10] In that model, the behavior of the pastor shapes the culture and identity of the congregation. Specific issues of the congregation's experience are addressed, but the scriptures are used as principles that are applied to the congregation rather than as story that sees the congregation's experiences as part of God's history of salvation. Identity is created by *church functioning* instead of explicitly by God's action.

Source of Missional Identity

Lutheran tradition has emphasized the cross as fundamental to church and Christian identity. The Reformation was a struggle over the means of salvation and the authority to bestow that salvation. The Reformers insisted that salvation comes to us only by the grace of God through the cross of Jesus. It is Christ who makes us right with God. It is the cross whereby Christ once and for all has established our place in God's kingdom: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8-9). Our identity as a Lutheran church comes through an act of God. We are a people who live by grace. There is nothing a person or congregation *can do* to secure salvation.

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[9] David Charles Miles, "Pastoral Strategies for Effective Interim Ministries" (D.Min. Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999).

[10] Ibid., 36.

For this reason, ever since the Reformation, the Lutheran church has had difficulty recognizing the role of good works in God's kingdom. The difficulty lies with ending at verse 9. *Grace alone* has been the identifying mark of Lutheran congregations. The common resulting practice of living that grace has been for people to remain *passive* recipients. The Lord acts for people to overcome human sin. Nothing is required for justification or salvation, and this is taken to mean that nothing is required of people *at all.* Largely absent is an understanding of the church's participation in and as an agent of redemption.

Yet we read in verse 10 the reason for God's gracious act: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works . . . that we should do them" (Eph 2:10). Justification by grace through faith is given to us *so that* we might engage in God's good works. We are made right with God *so that* we might continue the purpose for which God placed us in Eden. The Lord's intent is to restore us to that original role in which we are partners with God in creation (Gen 2:19). Redemption, along with being a correcting of behavior or a repairing of relationship between God and sinner, is also restoring the sinner to his/her role as steward in God's creation.

Thus the church's existence is legitimate to the extent it participates in the Lord's work in the world. The church's identity is authentic to the extent it reflects the identity and mission of God. Identity of the congregation is shaped by divine promise and not by present circumstance or ideal principles. Patrick Keifert writes, "the church as a company of strangers engaged in evangelical conversation is defined more by its center than by

some criteria of who is in and who is out."[11] The church's defining center is the triune

God.

Miroslav Volv asserts that Matthew 18:20 is the foundation for the church's

identity and its external manifestation. "*Where two or three are gathered in Christ's*

name, not only is Christ present among them, but a Christian church is there as well."[12]

The church is an assembly of saints, people of Christ in relationship with one another in

such a way that the presence of God is revealed.[13] Matthew 18:20 read in this way is not

simply a promise of Jesus that he will be with a follower through thick and thin, but that

whenever they come together in a Christ-like relationship, there Christ is present and the

church exists.

The identity of the church is thus *relational* rather than rational or functional. The

church's identity comes out of the way it manifests Christ's presence through its very

existence, as well as through the interactions of its people with each other and with the

Holy Spirit. Its identity is not determined by theological concepts apart from

experiencing those concepts in community. Principles and definitions do not give it

identity; the Holy Spirit living through the community gives it identity.

Inagrace Diettrich writes that the church is a "social incarnation of God's

inbreaking reign of love and reconciliation, joy and freedom, peace and justice."[14] The

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[11] Patrick Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 91.

[12] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 136. [Italics his.]

[13] This is not contrary to Lutheran confession, specifically, where Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly, but goes further. See Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 32.

[14] Darrell L. Guder, ed., *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 Pub., 1998), 158.

church is an embodiment of the reign of God and thus its identity is that which the Spirit accomplishes within or through the congregation. Relationship qualities reveal the presence of God. A church then is an entity in which God's love, reconciliation, joy, freedom, etc. are expressed, where God's kingdom is most evident.

However, the church is more than the *place* where the Spirit of God is manifest. The church is *itself* a manifestation of God. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ continues in the church, which is the body of Christ (Col 1:24). Not as some mystical union of Christ's Spirit with our individual "spirits," but the Holy Spirit is present *as* relationship between people.

The Gospel of John begins with God as Word, "and the word became *flesh* and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth . . ." (1:14). Jesus is God who has entered creation as human being, joining in relationship with creation from within creation. God dwells in creation and thus is part *of* creation. With this step, God becomes present as relationship not only between people, but relationship also with the natural world.

Panentheism has a variety of forms.[15] An oversimplified definition is that it does not identify creation as God, but that God includes the natural world as part of God's identity and being. For example, Lee Snook describes the force, the "power" that moves through creation as the very breath of God, God's *Spirit*.[16] That breath breathed into Adam is the Spirit that animates, empowers all creation.

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[15] Panentheism (not pantheism) attempts to account for God's presence and activity within creation (Psalm 139:7-12). God includes creation as part, but not the whole, of God's being. God is not identified *as* creation, which is pantheism, but God is immediately involved *in* creation. Lee Snook describes it as "God's power and Spirit as pervasive of all creatures, and to think of all creatures as present and alive within the power and Spirit of God." Lee E. Snook, *What in the World Is God Doing? Re-Imaging Spirit and Power* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 21.

[16] Ibid., 22.

Rather than Snook's empowering Spirit, what is described here is the presence of God in relationship. The incarnation of God is a continuing of God's identity into creation. God's identity as Trinity is identity existing in relationship. God is a community of three. To describe God is to describe a perichoretic relationship. That relationship was extended to creation when God became flesh. The perichoretic relationship continues through the church, which is Christ's body (Eph 2:23) at the behest of our Lord (John 17:21).

The social implication of three is not to be overlooked. God is not a community of two, *you and me*. The relationship described so far is not that between two entities, for that is a closed system. Instead, the relationship of God is three whereby two must always recognize another. Thus in a divine relationship there always is acknowledgement of another besides *us two* who must be included in any definition of *us*. When Jesus declared that "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20), Jesus was calling attention to the other person present, himself. Should two gather in Christ's name, Jesus attends as the third. Always. In every gathering of two Christians, Jesus is to be acknowledged.

Because "God so loved the cosmos" (John 3:16), the world outside of a church's membership is also dear to God. Therefore the church is never about *us* in contrast to *them*. That is a devilish community of division. *Us* and God must always recognize *them* as part of us. Only then is the church *one, holy, catholic*. This understanding of church describes the relationship of God with people of faith, and with the world outside those of faith. *Us* and God are never against the world; *us* and God exist for the sake of the world, in holy relationship with the world, even as God seeks to redeem the world.

The Spirit of God incarnate in the church then sends the church into the world, for neither can be without the world. Jesus commissions the church in John 20:21-22. The Trinity of God becomes a Trinitarian relationship between God, the church and the world. *The church then is a community of saints that is sent into the world*. The church dwells in the world with all its loveliness and ugliness and wonder and banality, just as Christ dwelt among us full of grace and truth. The church exists not for the edification of those inside the fellowship. The church exists as community of saints living *in* the world and living *for* the world, even while not *of* the world.

The Pentecost event in the second chapter of The Acts of the Apostles is often referred to as the birth of the church. However, Jesus foretells the event in Acts 1:8. The power of the Holy Spirit that came upon those early believers in Acts 1:8 was not the ability to know God's actions prior to their occurring so as to announce what is *about* to happen. Witnessing is not announcing the kingdom of God and then waiting for the Lord to act. Witnessing is calling attention to what the Lord *is already* accomplishing among believers and nonbelievers alike. The Pentecost event was the Holy Spirit acting among all those present. The Spirit spoke to *all* those present, both followers of Christ and those not yet (Acts 2:5-8). The power promised by Jesus and then given at Pentecost was that of being able to identify and declare what God is doing in the world and for the sake of the world.

Missional Church Identity Characteristics

Describing the church missionally as a group of fellow believers that gather as church and are empowered by the Pentecost Spirit, reveals the particular way the congregation relates to the surrounding community. The congregation is a community of

saints that exists for the sake of the world. The congregation is aware of its missional role in the social structure in which it exists. The surrounding community contributes to the identity of the congregation by asserting its expectations of the congregation's function and purpose in that social system. Yet the congregation will also have the perspective of *God's mission* as it interprets its role in that community. The world's expectations are the congregation's entry point for expressing the congregation's role in God's mission, thereby beginning society's transformation.

Ministry of the congregation will be conducted not *to* others or *on behalf of* others. Ministry is not so much a delivery of services as it is engagement of people. Ministry will be conducted *with* others, for the practice of ministry is mutually edifying. The blessings flow both from and back to the church as it exists in the world. Thus, the world also has something to reveal about God to the church. For example, theories and discoveries of science reveal creation to be wonderfully complex, yet with order. The Creator of such wonders cannot be reduced to shallow platitudes. The world of science demonstrates to the church the glory and grandeur and purposefulness of the Creator.

A missional congregation looks for the Holy Spirit's presence in the *engagement* of ministry rather than looking for the evidence God's presence in the *results* of ministry. In this sense, ministry is seen as participation in the Spirit's on-going creating, rather than as a project to be completed. As participation, one ministry engagement grows out of and builds on that before, often going in directions unforeseen.

Ability to maneuver in such an unpredictable environment requires continuous communication between people within the congregation, and between the congregation and the Spirit. Communication is more than transmitting information. It is connecting the

biblical story, the congregation's history, and the congregation's present situation into

one long continuous story of God's mission in the world. Alan Roxburgh describes it:

> If God's imagination for a congregation is among the people then they are the source (and resource) for the congregation's missional imagination. Leadership is therefore about this capacity to cultivate conversation of imagination and hope rooted in the biblical narratives, but without manipulating people into a prearranged plan or prepackaged program.[17]

Holy conversation is imaging and thereby seeing the movement of God in present

circumstances. Holy conversation reflects on the ministry taking place so as to discern the

Spirit's accomplished blessing, while at the same time anticipating the Spirit's next

move. Out of that kind of conversation, the congregation creates with the Spirit its own

identity and role in God's mission.

As a community of saints sent into the world, the congregation understands itself

as missionally connected to those outside its membership. The congregation's identity is

derived from the relationship it has with the world outside its doors and membership. The

church building is often referred to as "the Lord's house," and thus the worship that

occurs in that building is *public* worship of a God who belongs not to one nation—or

membership—but is Lord of all people.

At the dedication of the temple, Solomon declared the intent of what had been

created. Included in the dedication was the claim:

> Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of thy people Israel, comes from a far country for thy name's sake (for they shall hear of thy great name, and thy mighty hand, and of thy outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to thee; in order that all the people of the earth may know thy name and fear thee, as do thy people Israel, and that they might know that this house which I have built is called by thy name. (1 Kgs 8:41-43)

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[17] Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 115.

The foreigner was included in the missional purpose of the temple. The stranger and outsider continue to have a place in the public worship of the congregation. They are to be expected and necessary if the church is to have identity as a community of saints that exists for the sake of the world. "Where there is no space for strangers, there can be no public." [18] A congregation that is not public, is not a church of Jesus Christ. Such a congregation might be a family or support group or cult, but it is not a church. A congregation, empowered by the Pentecost Spirit, existing for the benefit of its surrounding neighborhoods, is a *public* community.

In holy communion, we experience again the church where strangers kneel side-by-side in common prayer and expectation. Again, the Lord is host and we are welcomed guests in this public sacrament. It is communion of people with God, but it is also communion of people with one another. It is a meal eaten together, a Trinitarian relationship of person with person and both with God. The gift of grace in the bread and wine is for all people for the forgiveness of sin, stranger and foreigner included. The congregation is a *public* community where people might not know others and cannot be intimate with all, and yet is still *community* because the Lord who knows all and welcomes all is host.

Congregations as agents of God who bear the authority of God and reveal the presence of God, also thereby exercise the *power* of God. The common cosmology of the Apostle Paul's time envisioned the earth flat, with the dome of heaven upon the earth like an upturned bowl. God reigned in the heavens beyond the dome. People went about their business upon the earth. In between heaven and earth were thrones, dominions,

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[18] Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism*, 8.

principalities, or authorities who ruled on behalf of God above earthly doings.[19] They were the forces affecting people, but which people could do nothing about. They were behind circumstances "beyond our control." God created them and they were accountable to God. Yet, because of The Fall, they too rebelled against God and would make themselves gods. The insurance industry calls them "acts of god." Mothers exasperated by too many questions say, "I don't know. It just *is*." Well intentioned elected officials are boxed and shackled by political bureaucracy bigger than the accumulated souls herded therein.

Jesus bypassed the renegade powers. He is God come to rule on earth directly. *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together* (Col 1:17). Jesus was before the powers and principalities, etc. even were created, and he was before them in authority. With the incarnation, Jesus now pulls together heaven and earth, holding all together in one divine will.

The power promised to the church in Acts 1:8 is Christ come and incarnated in church, with its purpose described in Colossians 1:27-28 (and elsewhere):

> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ.

The church reveals the presence and acting of God on earth. The church is the authority of God acting on earth. The church's power is God acting on earth to shape and direct those forces previously beyond control. No longer is it "just the way things are" (Jn 11:1-44). No longer do the privileged define the place of others (Lk 7:36-50). No longer do

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[19] H. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 2d ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), 28.

physical challenges determine destiny (Jn 9:1-38). The church bears the power of God to redeem.

Summary

The church as agent of God, *servants of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God* (1 Cor 4:1), acts on behalf of God, and acts *as* God who is incarnate in the church. Agency gives the church both identity and power. God acting through the church makes the church a witness of God's kingdom come for the world. In this is its identity.

Agency also gives the church power to act on behalf of God and as God. The church is established by God to be God's redemption and reconciliation for the world, both as God's instrument and as God's presence. How a particular congregation rediscovered its missional purpose is the topic of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

This thesis re-conceptualizes interim ministry, demonstrating that the primary task of the interim period is preparing the congregation for its part in the next phase of God's purposes. This shifts the outcome of the interim period from *transition to the next pastor* to that of *new missional purpose*. The research explains how a missional approach to interim ministry prepared a congregation for the next phase of its ministry within God's mission in a particular context. What occurred within the congregation from 2006 to 2008 —and to what effect—is the focus of the research.

Type of Research

This case study describes a congregation's experiences of an interim period which was conducted with the purpose of intentionally preparing the congregation for its future ministry within the larger scope of God's creating and redeeming activity in the congregation's immediate context. The interim tasks were *to discern* the intent of the Holy Spirit in the developments of the surrounding communities and in the events within the congregation itself, and *to introduce a new imagination* of how the congregation might engage in the Spirit's work. The study describes what happened, why events and changes happened the way they did, and what the changes and constants mean. [1]

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[1] Herbert J. Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 6.

As a qualitative study, it attempts to identify the factors and characteristics of the way the interim period was conducted, with a particular congregation during a particular time in its history. The intent is to reveal the principles and themes that can be generalized to a missional approach to interim ministry, to discover causes to changes that occurred, and to provide insight into the activity of the Holy Spirit in the transformations and transitions of interim ministry in other contexts.[2] In addition to describing events and processes, the study seeks to understand *the congregation's perception* of those events and processes.

Of particular interest to practitioners of interim ministry is the extent to which the conventional interim tasks were accomplished within this missional strategy. Organizational development was not precluded and interim developmental tasks were not abandoned with the missional approach. Included in this study is an examination of the connection between organizational development and missional process.

Conducting an interim period missionally is the focus of this research, contrasting it to common practices arising out of organizational development and health models. Describing and analyzing specific behaviors and activities within a single context reveals their interrelations and mutually reinforcing effects. The case study also identifies how interim ministry can lay foundations for long term adaptive change.

Research Subject

The subject of this research is a period in the history of a large, suburban, Midwest congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (herein given the

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[2] Ibid., 7.

pseudonym Ascension Lutheran Church). In January 2008, the congregation came to the end of its second interim in four years.

The congregation had a history of clergy-led functioning, along with a history of leadership-related conflict. Internally and externally the congregation had experienced rapid change. Adaptations to organizational structures and processes, as well as leadership models, had not kept pace with the changes.

The interim period, from January 1, 2006 through January 20, 2008, addressed issues of the congregation's identity, purpose and functioning from a missional perspective. Key to the missional approach was the concept of *the congregation's calling* to a particular ministry within God's redeeming mission.

Research Design

This research is that of a single-case embedded design, the study of one congregation at several units of analysis.[3] The primary rationale for such a design in this study is that it reveals a phenomenon that has not previously been addressed thoroughly.[4] The phenomenon studied was the conducting of the interim process with the understanding that the Holy Spirit was a *participant* in the interim transition, and that the congregation explicitly engaged the Holy Spirit in discerning the congregation's identity, purpose and functioning. A single-case embedded design also is appropriate as a critical case testing a theory, here the theory being that a missional approach to interim ministry prepares a congregation better for its future than organizational development or health model approaches.

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[3] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed., Applied Social Research Methods Series, vol. 5 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 40.

[4] Ibid., 42.

Propositions To Be Studied

Propositions are roughly analogous to hypotheses in other research methods. They indicate what should be addressed in the scope of the study.[5] The following propositions for this case study frame the research topic, that of demonstrating that the primary task of the interim period is preparing the congregation for its part in the next phase of God's purposes.

1. *Divine Participation*. The Holy Spirit is an active participant in the interim process. This stands in opposition to *deism*, the notion of a Creator that disassociates from creation, leaving the world to its own devices like that of a watchmaker that winds the clock and lets it tick out its time.

2. *Divine Evidence*. The Holy Spirit's participation in creation is identifiable in specific, ordinary ways. This stands in opposition to Gnosticism, the belief that knowledge of God and of God's ways is hidden to all but those with special insight.

3. *Theological Interpretation of Context*. Not only is the Holy Spirit's participation identifiable in specific, time-delimited events, it is imperative for the church to recognize the Spirit's participation. A congregation that is responsive to God's mission as it is carried out in the congregation's context, must identify precisely how that mission is being accomplished so that the congregation might engage in the mission with specific ministries. This includes the task of *coming to terms with history* in the conventional formulation of interim ministry.

4. *Congregational Role.* Congregations have unique roles in God's mission. This is sometimes mistakenly called *the congregation's mission* and formulated as a

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[5] Ibid., 22.

mission statement. The mission is God's. The Holy Spirit is carrying out its mission in the congregation's context and, hopefully, in the congregation itself. If it is faithful, the congregation does not have a unique mission apart from God, nor does it create its own mission and expect God to cooperate. The congregation seeks to understand what God's mission is in the congregation's particular context, and what the congregation's role in that mission is to be.

5. *Congregational Calling*. It is critical to the interim process that the congregation

    a. discern God's mission as it is carried out in the congregation's context, and

    b. discover its unique calling in God's mission.

This is a re-interpretation of the conventional interim tasks of *committing to new directions in ministry* and *discovering new identity*. For the congregation to begin its next phase of ministry with another pastor, it needs to know what is its own unique calling in God's particular mission within the congregation's environment.

6. *Discernment* is a communicative effort. The pastor might give language to experiences or events, and the pastor might teach members how to discern the ways of God, but discernment depends on the insights and efforts of people in community to give the most complete and clear picture possible of God's purposes. The discernment process often takes place reflexively as experience, interpretation of that experience, shared reflection on the interpretation, and then repeating the cycle of experiencing again, new interpretation, and so on.

7. *Wisdom*, as insight into God's ways, is a product of the whole community. Wisdom is for the benefit of the community, not to set apart an individual who might possess it. The prophets brought their message to the community, and when

they would not, the Lord forced them (1 Kgs 19, Ezek 33:7-9, Jonah 2:10-3:3, et al.). Wisdom is revealed as people, gathered in the name of God, listen to one another as they engage in holy conversation. Insights often come from different people at different times in different ways, and thus it is important not to let preconceived notions of who is "wise" direct the listening. *Understanding* of insights into God's ways has grounding in a congregation's theological traditions. This grounding recognizes the need for the conventional interim task of *renewing denominational linkages*.

8. *Missional Interpretation*. The congregation is drawn to seek God's mission (apart from any leader prodding it to do so) as experiences are interpreted missionally. A key role of the pastor is to name or describe a phenomenon in ways that enable the congregation to connect their experience to the Holy Spirit's intent. As the congregation understands the phenomenon within the context of God's mission, the congregation will seek further instances and examples of God's mission occurring.

9. *Divine Normalizing*. Members want to do what is right by God and for the congregation. Gary Wilkerson describes two understandings of what is normal.[6] In the common understanding, normal is what a congregation usually does. Wilkerson gives a second understanding of normal: *that which Christ redeems creation to be*. What is *abnormal* is sin, dysfunction, fear, self-determination, and so on. Congregations seek that normality which comes from Christ, normality that is defined by God. Because people want to do what is right or normal, it is helpful

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[6] Gary A. Wilkerson, "Forgiven and Forgiving in the Dynamics of Parish Life," *Word & World* 27, no. 1 (2007): 38.

to approach an interim period with the assumption that others have the best intentions at heart.

10. *Congregational Engagement*. Congregational functioning within God's mission depends more on engagement of the Holy Spirit than it does on leaders' behaviors (systems theory), organizational development, organizational structure, theological principles, or charisma of the pastor.

11. *Congregational organization* is shaped by its particular calling within God's mission. This means that effective congregational structure should not be determined by traditional forms or by the latest, popular church-growth method. The congregation's calling shapes the ministry, and the ministry determines what organizational structure will best support the accomplishment of ministry. Included in this proposition is the conventional interim task, *allowing needed leadership changes*. The congregation's calling in God's mission determines what are the needed leadership skills and responsibilities.

Units of Analysis

This case study, as a single-case embedded design, looks at one congregation from several angles. The different angles are distinct issues or *units of analysis*. The issues explored in this study are as follows:

- *Environment and context,* those forces and circumstances internal and external to the congregation that influence its identity and ministry,

- *Power and Leadership*, how power is procured, how it is used, how it is understood,

- *Conflict,* the issues of and the players in any contest,

- *Organizational Restructuring*, how the congregation organizes its ministries to

    carry out the congregation's calling,

- *Trust*, the nature and location of trust prior to and as a result of the interim

    process, and what factors and activities increased trust levels in the

    congregation and staff during the interim period,

- *Conventional Interim Tasks,* those outcomes traditionally assumed to be

    necessary by the practitioners of interim ministry.

These topics, and how the Holy Spirit acted in them, were central to what had occurred

during the interim period as the congregation engaged in its transition within a missional

perspective.

Sources of Evidence

In a case study, sources of evidence are identified, along with the strengths and

weaknesses of each, in lieu of the instrumentation of experimental or survey designs.

This case study will examine the following evidence:

1. *Documentation* includes 316 pages of notes kept by the interim pastor throughout

    the interim period, emails retained over the course of the interim, reports,

    schedules, and other forms of recorded communication. Such information is stable

    and retrievable, unobtrusive in that it is not generated by the study itself, exact,

    and gives broad coverage over a long span of time. The shortcomings of

    documents are that they might not be easily retrieved if they are sensitive,

    confidential or misplaced, they might be biased should the document collection be

    incomplete, they might be biased by the author, and access to them might be

blocked (an important consideration when this researcher's term as interim pastor ended). [7]

2. *Archival records* are those official records of the congregation, such as annual reports, council minutes, personnel records and statistical reports. The strengths and weaknesses of this type of information are the same as for documentation.[8]

3. *Interviews* were conducted by the researcher at the start of the interim period for the purpose of determining key issues, key players, political power loci, and temper of the congregation as a whole. Later, over several weeks in September and October, 2006, the researcher met with 39 neighborhood groups of the congregation in 19 meetings to listen to concerns and to mobilize the members further for engagement in Advent's ministries. During June of 2007, the researcher interviewed the Interim Transition Team on the topic of power changes and influences during the interim period. Interviews of members also were conducted by an independent consultant in June 2007 to evaluate changes that occurred during the interim period and to what extent the congregation engaged the Holy Spirit. The strength of interviews is that they can focus directly on key topics, and can provide more detail than other methods. The weaknesses of interviews are possible bias caused by poorly constructed questions, bias introduced by those interviewed, inaccuracies due to poor recall, and reflexivity— those interviewed reporting what the interviewer wants to hear.[9]

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[7] Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 86.

[8] Ibid., 89.

[9] Ibid., 92.

4. *Direct observations* are information gathered as the researcher observes the process of the interim period unfold. The advantages of direct observation are that the information is about events in real time and about events in the context in which they occur. One weakness is that direct observations require an extraordinary amount of time, and necessitate selecting which events to include. Another weakness is the Hawthorne effect in which events may occur differently because they are being observed.[10] Committee meetings, ministry events, social gatherings, decision-making processes, power-plays, communication and other phenomena were observed for this study.

5. *Participant-observation* is the kind of information gathered when the researcher not only observes but also takes part in the event being observed. The researcher as interim pastor of the congregation studied was for the most part a participant-observer. The strengths of participant-observation are similar to that of direct observation, with the addition of insights into the participant-observer's influence as well.[11] The weaknesses, too, are similar to direct-observation, with the addition of the participant-observer's manipulation of events and outcomes, particularly if the participant-observer becomes an advocate for a position or a group as a result of the participation.[12]

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[10] The Hawthorne Effect refers to a phenomenon observed at the Hawthorne Works, a factory of the Western Electric Company in Cicero, IL, between 1924 and 1932. It was observed that productivity of factory workers temporarily improved whenever conditions changed, for better or for worse. This was due to the *attention* that the researchers were giving the workers rather than to any specific condition of the work environment.

[11] Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 94.

[12] Ibid., 96.

6. *Physical artifacts* are those items that lead to a better understanding of events and changes that occurred during the interim period. Some of the artifacts included in this study are the three sanctuaries of Advent, their history, appearance and function; the newly constructed kitchen; the garden spaces; paraments and projection system in the main sanctuary; bulletin board items; and changes to office spaces. The strengths of artifacts are that they provide insight into the congregation's culture, functioning and technical operations. The weaknesses of physical artifacts are that they can be used selectively and that they might not be available for study.[13]

Analytical Techniques

Operationalization of variables in case studies takes the form of analytical techniques. The general strategy of analyzing case study evidence is to follow the theoretical propositions outlined at the start, to address rival explanations, and to develop a case description.[14] Of several techniques widely practiced, two are used in this study, time-series analysis and explanation building.

Time-series analysis attempts to understand the order in which events and decisions occur. The order in which they occur might imply influence or causality. It begins with the position that in any transition the order of events is important and that the order of events cannot be reversed and still achieve the same outcome. Time-series analysis can give insight into why certain outcomes happened they way they did.

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[13] Ibid., 86.

[14] Ibid., 111-15.

The method of *explanation building* is "to stipulate a presumed set of causal links about [a phenomenon]."[15] These causal links are similar to independent variables in other research methods. In this study, the eventual explanation is the result of repetitive steps that build on others across the various units of analysis. The steps are making an initial proposition, comparing the findings of one unit of analysis to the proposition, revising the proposition, comparing findings of another unit of analysis, revising the proposition again, and so on.[16]

Validity and Reliability

The credibility and trustworthiness of case studies depends on four criteria: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. Several tactics have been applied throughout this study to assure the validity and reliability of the research.

Construct validity determines that when collecting data, correct and adequate operational measures are used rather than subjective judgments. Two steps are necessary to meet the test of construct validity:

1. *Select the specific types of changes that are to be studied . . . and*

2. *Demonstrate that the selected measures of these changes do indeed reflect the specific types of changes that have been selected.[17]*

Construct validity is assured by the use of multiple sources of evidence in ways that duplicate and converge on lines of inquiry, by establishing a chain of evidence that demonstrates interconnections, and by having the draft case study report evaluated by

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[15] Ibid., 120.

[16] Ibid., 121-22.

[17] Ibid., 35.

key, informed reviewers who are independent of the study.[18] Multiple sources of evidence

informed this research, as noted above. The outside advisory board identified in chapter

one, and the Doctor of Ministry cohort provided regular review of this study.

Internal validity is correctly establishing causal relationships, and avoiding

spurious influences.[19] The key tactics used in this study to assure internal validity are

explanation-building, described above in *Analytical Techniques*, and adequately

addressing rival explanations.

External validity is whether the findings of this study can be generalized to other

situations.

> Critics typically state that single cases offer a poor basis for generalizing.
> However, such critics are implicitly contrasting the situation to survey research, in
> which a sample (if selected correctly) readily generalizes to a larger universe.
> *This analogy to samples and universes is incorrect when dealing with case
> studies.* Survey research relies on *statistical* generalization, whereas case studies
> (as with experiments) rely on *analytical* generalization. In analytical
> generalization, the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results
> to some broader theory.[20]

For this study, the test of external validity is met by the use of theory and of propositions

being repeatedly tested across units of analysis.

Reliability is the extent that the operations of this study can be repeated with the

same results. *The goal of reliability is to minimize the error and biases in a study*.[21] To

assure reliability, *interview protocol* was used to guide interviews, and a database of

information is kept that could be accessed for later tests of reliability.

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[18] Ibid., 36.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 37.

[21] Ibid.

Summary

This study is a single-case embedded design of one congregation at several units of analysis, at one period of time in its history. Rather than testing a hypothesis as in other research methods, themes are stated as propositions, which then are studied across several units of analysis. The units of analysis in this case study are environment and context, power and leadership, conflict, organizational restructuring, trust, and conventional interim tasks. Evidence was collected from numerous sources, and examined by the techniques of time-series analysis and explanation-building. Measures were taken to assure validity and reliability.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

On February 12, 2006, a Special Congregation Meeting of Ascension Lutheran Church was held to consider the motion, "In lieu [sic] of all that has happened with Pastor _____'s resignation we would like the council to start new. Those currently on the council or running again would remove themselves to start with an all new council."[1] In the previous weeks several members of council had resigned. The senior pastor had resigned the previous December after serving only 18 months. There was much anger and hurt among members over the sudden departure of their pastor and what appeared to be the council's role in his leaving. The previous fall the congregation's dire financial situation came as a surprise to members. The mortgage on the new sanctuary rankled many, and the financial crisis brought this unresolved anger to the fore. Staff was disillusioned and was pressured to choose alliances. Bill collectors hounded the church office. God's mission to redeem and reconcile the world was lost in the cacophony of demands, directives, and disappointments.

As the interim period came to a conclusion in January 2008, people of the congregation were cheerful and hopeful. Worshippers would stay after worship for coffee and to socialize. There was much laughter and good-will. People readily volunteered and

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[1] Minutes of the Special Congregation Meeting of Ascension Lutheran Church (a pseudonym), February 12, 2006.

initiated new ministries. There was a sense of purpose and direction. The church council no longer functioned as a regulating body but moved toward primarily functioning as spiritual leaders of the congregation. This was evident in meetings permeated with prayer and reflection. Staff worked as a team, with weekly meetings mostly devoted to prayer and scripture. Congregation finances stabilized, more members were tithing, and the council looked to engage in a long-range stewardship emphasis to strengthen member giving and reduce the congregation's debt. The Holy Spirit was an obvious and intentional force in what was happening at Ascension Lutheran Church. Members easily identified works of the Spirit in their midst. Direction and organization were sought from God. There was renewed energy and excitement in the congregation that was coupled with awe and wonder at where God will take them with the next senior pastor.

What led to the changes between January 2006 and January 2008 is the focus of this chapter. How did Ascension make their adjustment in mood, spiritual temperament, organizational functioning and leadership? Why did events turn out the way they did? How was the Holy Spirit acting in the events? There are specific circumstances and outcomes during that year that are clearly acts of God. This chapter attempts to describe and explain what happened.

Perspective of the Interim Pastor

The following are some assumptions and perspectives of the interim senior pastor both upon entry as well as during the interim period. The first assumption was that God had not abandoned Ascension Lutheran Church. Even more, the Lord was calling Ascension to a particular and dramatic ministry in the Lord's mission in the immediate area, to joint ministry with a congregation in the City of Minneapolis, and to ministry in

specific ways to the world beyond the congregation. Christ's redemption is for all people, not only for those who somehow respond positively to the Gospel. Christ's redemption occurs not only in the individual person, and not only on a moral level. Christ's redemption also comes to the community called a congregation. This redemption is more than change in moral behavior. It also is about change in circumstance, change in worldview, change in relationship with God, change in organizational functioning, and change in definitions and understandings.

The Lord has provided all that a congregation needs to engage in God's mission as the congregation's specific calling. All the resources and skills are already available within the congregation. The Lord does not call a congregation to dramatic, grand ministry and then leave people to conjure up or jerry-build ways to do it. The Lord already gives what is needed.[2] Therefore, a major task of leadership is identifying where among the congregation are the Lord's resources located, and then organizing and employing those resources.

There is more than one right answer and more than one right way to do things. God is not stingy. God provides multiple ways of carrying out God's mission. Often, disagreements are over two *right* ways to accomplish the same purpose! Key to resolving such disagreements is a measure of generosity that allows the other person a turn at doing things the way he/she sees best.

It was assumed that most often people want what is best for their church and for God. People have best intentions at heart. Church people *want* to live in response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and *want* to be a community that is evidence of God's kingdom on earth. Sin is not so much a personal moral failing as it is an intolerable condition both

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[2] See Luke 9:10-17 regarding the feeding of the 5000.

socially and individually.[3] People know their sin, know what is intolerable and desire what is right for themselves and for their church.

The interim pastor during this period of study was highly skilled and experienced. Yet all his ability cannot account for the change in the congregation or restore the community. What occurred at Ascension Lutheran Church was an act of redemption by Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was incarnate in the community called Ascension, reconciling people with one another and reconciling the congregation with the Lord and the Lord's mission.

The Lord raised up leaders and servants with specific necessary skills at the moment they were needed. The Lord created and used the cooperative spirit that was kindled in the forge of trauma. The Lord provided numerous circumstances for learning and becoming the congregation to which the Lord called them. The Lord provided the resources necessary to carry out God's work. All was done *through people*. It was not magic or serendipity. It was people of faith using sound judgment, good reasoning, and desire to do what was best for others.

Key Events and Processes

Entering the Interim Situation: February-March, 2006

Interim pastors enter interim situations in various ways, depending on their skills, experience, theoretical orientation, and theology. Some have prescribed programs that are applied uniformly to all situations. Some have little intent or plan and rely solely on intuition and/or luck.

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[3] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 72.

This interim pastor began by eliciting themes and actionable directions from among the congregation itself, trusting the Holy Spirit to reveal God's ways from within the community, and engaging in action based on the information elicited and revealed. Each interim situation is different and the conducting of the interim processes is tailored to the specific circumstances of a congregation. However, the method of determining the specific themes, issues, culture, theology, power structures, etc. follows similar patterns.

The first days of the interim pastor in office are critical for establishing behaviors for the rest of the interim period. Great attention is given by the members and staff as to whether the interim pastor can be trusted, whether the pastor will value them and their contributions, whether the pastor can deliver on their hopes. There is a narrow window of opportunity, of three or four days, in which the interim pastor establishes the nature of leadership for the rest of the interim period, either intentionally or not.

Events at Ascension had thrown into question the role and influence of the senior pastor position. The senior pastor's scope of responsibility, the senior pastor's proper functioning within the congregational system, and the senior pastor's relationship with staff and leaders had become muddled. The interim senior pastor did not know his political standing with the numerous factions that had formed. Staff relationships had become strained and the interim pastor did not know what to expect. The tack he took was the counsel of Ps 37:5, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act." If any good would come of the interim period, it would be by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The interim senior pastor at Ascension Lutheran Church began by *listening* to people and attempting to understand them and the Lord's calling. Listening took the

forms of intentional interviews and casual conversations. However, even casual conversations were intentional, if not planned. Casual conversations do not "just happen" but are actively engaged as opportunity arises. The interim pastor could not afford to wait for people to strike up conversation. He approached people during coffee hour, in hallways, in their offices and in other places to initiate conversation. Such conversations must move within seconds past general comments on the weather or sports to initial levels of significance on topics that matter. Such casual conversations in the first days created a setting of courage and safety for addressing sensitive and emotional topics. The interim pastor's key objective in casual conversations was to create a strong base of trust and confidence on which to act later.

Extensive, intentional interviews consumed most of the initial weeks of the interim pastor's term. Planned, strategic interviewing is an efficient way to accomplish numerous objectives. Although initially time consuming, interviews are able to do in a couple of weeks what would take months or years by other methods.

This interim senior pastor began by interviewing key leaders who were identified by their official public roles, were identified by others as leaders, and who self-identified. An invitation was made for anyone to come to the pastor's office to talk or to call to meet elsewhere. The pastor's office door was left open almost always to suggest availability, and the office was arranged so that the pastor faced the door and was able to greet anyone who passed by the open door. When anyone came into the office for even the briefest of conversations, the materials on which the pastor was working were pushed to the side of the desk to leave bare space on the desk between pastor and visitor. This too was to suggest that the visitor had the full attention of the pastor for even the briefest moment.

Those who self-identified by voluntarily entering the office or calling to set up meetings were often unofficial leaders, people who did not hold a public office in the congregation but had influence and power to some degree. Some were former council members. At first, many of those who self-selected to talk with the interim senior pastor were angry over some decision or issue. Those conversations were extremely helpful in identifying core issues and key players of the congregation. There were very, very few instances of trivial interruptions because of the open invitation and open door.

The interim senior pastor also had very few instance of people dropping in for counseling-type conversations. The reasons were two-fold. First, the interim pastor did not have time to create a level of trust necessary for that kind of relationship. Second, the associate pastor had been serving the congregation for five years, had built relationships that encouraged counseling, had the traditional pastor role, and thus performed the counseling function most often. In this way, the associate pastor was an important asset to the interim process by performing essential pastoral functions so that the interim senior pastor was able to focus on the interim processes and transitions.

Strategic interviews were conducted with the public congregation leaders, namely council, officers, and staff. They were specifically invited to make appointments for one-on-one conversations with the interim senior pastor. The reason for open invitations first was to sort out those who tended to initiate action. Such leaders want things to happen. They provide the impetus for change. Most of them took up the invitation within the first three days of the interim pastor's start. Other council members and staff had to be called to set appointments for interviews. These leaders tend to be those who want things done

well and give careful attention to detail. Given direction, they carryout their projects thoroughly and loyally.

Then there are leaders who will not respond to invitations to meet. They tend to be those who are at odds with perceived direction or goals. Although they provided a variety of excuses to avoid officially meeting with the interim senior pastor, it was necessary to engage them anyway. Entering *their* office space or meeting on neutral territory such as restaurants was effective for most. For other resisting leaders, it was necessary to start with seeking them at the Sunday coffee hour for initial light conversation to build a trusting relationship from scratch.

In all the initial interviews, the interim pastor asked for names of others with whom it might be helpful to meet. These were leaders who were not in official roles and who often did not consider themselves leaders, yet held influence in the congregation. Many of those named were people who were very upset with the state of affairs in the congregation, but who were unwilling to address them directly. It was critical to engage them, for their anger would be counter-productive if undirected or not acknowledged. By asking for names of others, the interview schedule filled quickly.

One-on-one interviewing had an agenda similar to grassroots organizing. The goals were to identify common issues and gain commitment from one another in addressing those issues. To a great degree it was political organizing. Those interviewed stated what was important to them, the interim pastor stated what he needed from them, and the rest of the conversation was working out what each would contribute. In these first weeks of the interim period, the interim pastor's requests in interviews were vague, amounting to the commitment and participation of the interviewees. In a second round of

interviews with neighborhood groups six months later, the interim pastor's requests were more specific.

Interviews served numerous functions simultaneously. As indicated, they identified key players and leaders in the congregation, and the quality and scope of their influence. Motivation, pet issues, personality, values, and abilities were identified within a few minutes of pointed conversation. People in congregations are usually quite willing to talk about what is important to them, especially with someone in a pastoral role. The pastor identity can be leveraged in ways unavailable to other community organizers. But the interviews are not pastoral counseling, although that happens to some extent. At the outset the intent is to identify issues, engage others and find common ground for action. The interviews are structured and intentional.

Key issues were identified through the interviews at Ascension. At first numerous, seemingly unrelated issues were named. Yet key issues emerged after the first few interviews. Subsequent interviews clarified and refined the issues. Through interviews and reviewing official documents, within the first three or four days of the interim period the core issues of the congregation became quite clear. The core issues at Ascension that the interim senior pastor elicited from the interviews were

- Authority and exercise of power,

- Disconnection from the Holy Spirit,

- Fear due to their financial situation, and

- Role confusion.

Interviews began the process of building trust. Every interim situation requires the interim pastor to quickly gain the congregation's trust. Trust is not earned, but is given.

People are willing to grant their trust to pastors (unless previous pastors have abused the trust placed in them). However, every interim situation requires the interim pastor to demonstrate *trustworthiness*, regardless of the behavior of previous pastors. Once sufficiently demonstrated, *then* people are willing to grant actual trust. Interviews play an important part in demonstrating trustworthiness.

Even where agreement was not possible, the interviews contributed to respect for the other and demonstrated the ability to listen and disagree with the other without cutting off the relationship. Identifying the points of disagreement can be invaluable for the purpose of providing an experience of holding divergent opinions while remaining in community. An example of this was one member who was a leader in one of the ministries of the congregation, but who also was part of a close-knit group in another area. He was quite disappointed with the interim senior pastor's performance leading worship. Although quite upset with the interim pastor, he did not make this public until a telephone conversation with another member. That other member then informed the interim pastor. The interim pastor initiated a telephone interview with the disgruntled member. The member had values and interests different than the interim pastor, but also was angry at the events of the previous several years. The conversation was pointed and difficult, ending without resolution to the topic, but it did accomplish establishing a relationship of disagreeing while affirming the place of each other in the congregation community. Over the course of the interim period, the relationship between the interim pastor and member grew into mutual respect and appreciation, *while not requiring agreement* for the relationship.[4]

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[4] See Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, for insights on differentiating and belonging, particularly chapter one.

Interviews provided the initial forum for organizing for action. Along with gaining information and garnering trust, the first steps leading to congregation transformation were taken in those first weeks of the interim. Chief among them was getting initial commitment from people without necessarily defining clearly to what they were committing. Assuming people wanted what was best for their congregation and God's mission was critical in gaining their commitment to the congregation without a clear idea to what they were committing.

The second part was the interim senior pastor committing himself to working with those being interviewed. He was not asking for blind commitment from them, but asserting that whatever the objective might be, it would be defined through mutual conversation. This established a key element of the interim *program*, that of communal decision-making.

Further, the key themes arising through interviews contained in themselves ideas for action. Just by *naming* issues, problems were given boundaries, and the very fear they engendered was contained. Elements of solutions are included in the act of naming and defining. Identifying and framing problems is a function of power that provides the springboard for strategizing and planning.

The staff were among those initially interviewed. Special mention of them is necessary for they are instrumental in much of what happens in the congregation's ministry and were in the middle of events. The year prior to the interim period, the senior pastor had laid-off two other staff members. The act was not handled properly, which added unnecessary animosity between him, the remaining staff, and involved congregation members. All the staff at Ascension are also members of the congregation,

and many previous staff remain members. While the interim pastor could not guarantee there would be no more lay-offs, he had to reassure staff that any changes would be handled differently than in the past. The initial interviews were followed by frequent private conversations with staff in the initial months to clarify job responsibilities, job scope, and performance. Every meeting with each staff had to reinforce a caring, professional approach to staff management.

Redefining the supervisor-staff relationship was a second task. The congregation had a tradition and culture of pastor-dominated decision making. Reshaping that culture was critical from the very start of the interim period. Rather than a top-down relationship, a team model was practiced. The senior pastor as supervisor had expectations of and gave directions to the rest of the staff. Yet the staff's expectations of the supervisor were recognized and solicited. At every initial interview with staff, the senior pastor/supervisor asked what the staff person needed from the supervisor in order for them to do their job well. This question reinforced the team model, acknowledged the supervisor's accountability to the staff, opened opportunity for staff to contribute to the nature of the relationship, and clarified expectations.

While extensive interviews were being conducted during the first weeks of the interim senior pastor's start, the pastor also read all the available minutes of congregation meetings over its forty-year history, read all available council minutes, with particular attention to the previous five years, analyzed financial data for trends that corresponded to decisions and events noted in the congregation and council minutes, noted changes in membership and member giving, read what local and regional history was available, analyzed census and other similar data specific to the area, read local government

development plans, and charted the information to see connected trends and events. Along with analyzing records and printed information, the interim senior pastor also drove throughout the community observing developed and established areas, noting types and locations of businesses, noting types of homes, and observing flows and interactions of traffic and people.

As happens in every congregation, changes and trends in the surrounding community directly impact the congregation's ministry and stability. The history of the surrounding community shapes the congregation's character and its forms of ministry. Ascension was established just at the start of the area's rapid growth in businesses and homes. The area was rapidly transitioning from farming to suburban culture, skipping the common intermediate stages of small town and town adjoining city. All the attending factors shaped the beginning of Ascension and the congregation's culture and ministry.

With every start, people want to know what to expect and what will be their relationship with the new pastor. Therefore, it was necessary to intentionally communicate the interim process, what kinds of activities and changes might take place, and what is the role of the interim pastor as distinguished from a long-term pastor. Content of such communication is not remembered well and needs frequent repeating, but the fact *that* it is communicated early contributes to enhancing trust and reducing anxiety. Outlining the interim period, giving a timeline and plan, assures people that things are under control, that there is direction, and that people are taking responsibility.

While relationships were being established with staff and other congregation members, and while information was being gathered and analyzed, the interim senior pastor also began to intentionally and methodically organize his power. What happened

and how it occurred will be described more fully in the later section, *Units of Analysis*.

Interim ministry is different from that of long-term ministry in that everyone knows that

the pastor will be leaving within a few months. A pastor's influence based on

relationships developed over time does not have time to occur in an interim setting. The

interim pastor's primary form of power therefore is not based on intimate connections

with people, but must be derived from either personal charisma or formal,

institutionalized roles. Charismatic power is always contained in one person. If the

interim pastor's power is charismatic, then the effects and patterns of that power leave

with the end of the interim period. Power based on institutionalized roles will have

impact lasting beyond the interim pastor's leaving.

The interim pastor serving Ascension during the time under study operated what

overtly seemed to be bureaucratic power,[5] yet was essentially communicative action.[6] The

congregation had a history of pastors operating out of charismatic power. It was

necessary to organize and strengthen the institutional power of the senior pastor in the

first days of the interim period. Unprecedented moves were taken to formalize the

supervisory role of the senior pastor over all staff. The organizational chart was flattened

and all staff were directly accountable to the senior pastor. The relationship between the

previous senior pastor and staff had deteriorated to such an extent that some staff were

beginning to transgress the limits of their authority. Steps were taken to strengthen the

interim pastor's position as supervisor before staff could effectively organize in response

to the new supervisor's start. Yet all this was preparing a condition in which the interim

senior pastor could participate in communicative reason and action. Bureaucratic power

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[5] Martha Ellen Stortz, *Pastorpower* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 63.

[6] Gary M. Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 100.

over was used initially, with the end being eventual communicatively determined use of power.

<center>Time-Sequence Analysis of Key Interim Events</center>

Events that directly impacted the interim process at Ascension are described as follows. They were in addition to the usual activities of church life, which continued as well during this time. This particular interim process was more dramatic and dynamic than most. The size and resources of the congregation certainly contributed to the many events and changes that occurred. Organizing and coordinating those resources required strong leadership to accomplish the many changes listed. However, there was another element at play, indicated in the kinds and chronology of events during this interim time. That other element was the action of the Holy Spirit.

It must be noted that the information and analysis presented here is not a judgment or assessment of any individual or their performance, and does not presume to suggest motives. Attempts to identify individuals or to critique their actions are gross misreads of this thesis. Time-series analysis and explanation building only describe events and phenomena, and identify causal links and influences.

January 2006

On January 1, 2006 the interim period formally began. The previous senior pastor resigned as of December 31, 2005. His departure came as a shock to most of the congregation, and the church council was the target of much of the congregation's anger. The negotiated terms of the pastor's resignation gave him severance pay long into the following year. The bishop of the synod and his associate relating to Ascension became extensively involved in addressing the conflict between council and senior pastor in

2005. Late in 2005, an outside consultant interviewed the congregation leadership on behalf of the synod and made a report to the council, which was not well-received.

At the end of December and early January, several members of council resigned over the decisions and events leading to the senior pastor's resignation. Details of council's involvement in the decision of the pastor to resign remained confidential. Other members of the congregation demanded information and explanation on what transpired between the council and the senior pastor, but terms of the resignation stipulated that such information would not be made public. Reasons for council members resigning included disagreement with the role of council in the events leading to the pastor's resignation, and pressures to release information to other members of the congregation.

On January 7 and 8 a Special Congregation Meeting was held to consider refinancing the congregation's mortgage.[7] The meeting was planned and announced in the months prior to the pastor's resignation. The congregation was in a financial crisis that had roots in the construction of the new sanctuary five years prior. Mortgage payments were crippling the funding of ministry. Refinancing would allow for lower mortgage payments, along with additional borrowing for replacing part of the building's roof and for construction of a long-desired kitchen. However, refinancing depended on political and financial stability of the congregation. The congregation voted to approve the refinancing.[8] However, there was pressure to address the wide-spread anger over the senior pastor's resignation.

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[7] It was a practice at the time for congregation meetings to be held following the Saturday evening service, adjourn for the evening, resume following the first Sunday service, adjourn and then resume following the second Sunday service. The intent was to include as many members as possible.

[8] Congregational Meeting Minutes, January 7-8, 2006.

On January 14 and 15 the congregation held its regular annual meeting. The usual reports were presented. Some council members' terms were completed with the end of the congregation meeting, and elections were held to fill the regular vacancies, along with those positions vacated by resignations the previous weeks. A motion was made to ask the remaining members of council to resign.[9] The council had lost the confidence of many of the membership. Since the motion was outside the published agenda of the meeting as stipulated in the congregation's constitution, a second congregation meeting was announced, to be held 30 days from this meeting.

February 2006

On February 12 a Special Congregation Meeting was held to consider the motion to remove the remaining 2006 council members. Much anger and disappointment was expressed at the meeting. Two of the bishop's associates were in attendance and provided background information. They were not well-received by many at the meeting. Then from among some of the members, concern was brought up over how the congregation request for council resignations would affect the chances for refinancing the church's mortgage. Concern was expressed over how the motion would be perceived by the loaning institution. This seemed to sway decisions. The vote outcome was 41 in favor of requesting the resignation of remaining council members, and 173 against the request. Four of twelve council members from 2005 remained through 2006 to complete their terms. One resigned three months later and transferred to another local congregation.

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[9] Congregational Meeting Minutes, January 14-15, 2006.

On February 13 the day after the special congregation meeting, the interim senior pastor began (six weeks into the interim period). His first interview of the day was with the newly elected council president.

In February the congregation's mortgage was refinanced with Thrivent. The new mortgage was $2.2 million for 30 years at 6.75% interest. It effectively reduced the congregation's monthly mortgage payments by $2,000.

Also in February an *Interim Transition Team* was formed to advise the interim senior pastor and the interim process. The interim pastor described the needed skills and responsibilities of the team members along with the requirements of wide-spread congregation respect and confidence, and long history and involvement in the congregation. He then solicited names from council and staff of people who would meet the criteria. A team of four widely respected and knowledgeable people was created. The team assisted the interim pastor in strategizing and planning all major moves of the interim process.

At the same time, the *Human Resources Committee* was revived with all new members. The committee's new scope of responsibility was employment issues, including position descriptions, terms of employment, employee benefits, and performance review.[10] The interim senior pastor was a member of the Human Resources Committee. He referred to the committee extensively throughout the interim period for advice on staff development and management.

February and March, the interim senior pastor interviewed council members, staff and other congregation leaders individually. The goal of the interviews was to identify

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[10] A separate Mutual Ministry Committee would be formed later whose function was primarily support of staff members and communicating staff issues to the supervising pastor and council.

the range of issues present in the congregation at that time, identify the key issues, identify who was involved in the issues, and what needed to happen regarding the issues. A second goal was to identify those who could lead needed changes and to begin organizing them for carrying out change during the interim period. A third goal was to understand the culture of Ascension, what are members' political views in general, at what economic level was the membership, what kind of skills and expertise were present in the membership, and what was the nature and level of commitment of congregation leaders.

In February and March staff development was conducted by the interim senior pastor. This took place primarily in weekly staff meetings. How the staff would work together as a team, what was expected from one another, how they would collaborate, how ideas were generated and implemented, how disagreements would be managed, what were the limits to each person's authority, and other topics were addressed. At first, the interim senior pastor led staff devotions which were tied to the learning themes. But early on, the staff asked to take turns leading devotions. This proved to be extremely helpful in staff development. The different spirituality styles of staff were expressed clearly and revealed much about each person's temperament, worldview, values and experiences.

Staff also were encouraged to ask questions and challenge one another, particularly the interim senior pastor. As noted elsewhere, the congregation had a history of pastor-dominated leadership. For a long time in its history, one of the senior pastors would tolerate no dissent at all, and disagreements were taken personally. While in later years of the congregation's life this attitude was not as strong, the history had shaped the congregation's culture. Therefore it was intentional to encourage debate and challenge in

staff meetings in order to practice disagreeing while still maintaining community and cooperation. Allowing space for conflicting views, dramatically enhanced the teamwork and idea flow of the entire staff.

March 2006

On March 13 at the council meeting, it was decided that employment and staff performance issues be addressed only by the Human Resources Committee, that the Executive Committee of the council would review employment issues and refer them to council only as needed, and that the interim senior pastor be made direct supervisor of all staff. Prior, in 2005, two staff were laid off in a unilateral and unfortunate manner. The events accelerated the ending of the previous senior pastor's term of service. Several council members had become directly involved in staff employment issues, bypassing the senior pastor. Reporting links were not clear or enforced. Some staff had written job descriptions for themselves and other staff. Employee records were nearly non-existent. Previously, some staff had supervising authority over other staff but supervision, directing and reporting took place sporadically and informally. The action of council at its March meeting centered all employee issues under the supervision of the interim senior pastor, with the Human Resources Committee providing extensive expertise and advice. The exception being that hiring and employment termination was retained by council. The outcome was that the organizational chart was flattened and reporting was simplified.

This also had the effect of essentially ending the co-pastor model that had been the practice when the associate pastor was called during the term of the senior pastor two

prior.[11] The implications of ending the co-pastor model were difficult for the associate

pastor and it him took the rest of the interim period to process this change. One of the

congregation's callings, shared leadership (described in detail later), did not mean that the

senior pastor and associate pastor would have *similar* ministry responsibilities. The co-

pastor model, which seemed to be the assumed practice at Ascension the previous few

years, suggests similar pastoral roles. As it was developed during the interim period,

shared leadership meant *different* roles and authority but without an extensive

organizational hierarchy of reporting. This is an example of differentiation within a

community which does not confuse the community's identity, but instead enriches and

blesses.

April 2006

On April 10, at the council meeting, a new Treasurer position description was

approved and a volunteer Treasurer was appointed. In past years, a volunteer Treasurer

had been keeping financial records and providing reports through cash-based accounting.

The financial problems of the congregation had always been public, but the congregation

had seemed to have become inured to them. From its beginning, the congregation had

financial struggles. Financial scarcity became part of the congregation's culture and

attitude. In 2005, the financial problems became a crisis. In response, the council

dissolved the Finance Committee and formed a Business Affairs Committee. The move

essentially stripped the existing Treasurer of all responsibility but recordkeeping. The

Business Affairs Committee met weekly from mid-2005 until the summer of 2007. The

revised Treasurer position created in the spring of 2006, authorized the Treasurer to begin

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[11] The immediate predecessor of the interim senior pastor served only 17 months. The associate pastor was called five years before the interim period of study.

changing the congregation's accounting system to that of accrual-based, and gave the Treasurer great latitude in recommending financial decisions. This demanded tremendous amounts of time from the volunteer.

At the same time, an office staff prepared to retire and her position responsibilities were divided among two other staff people. Part of her position was redefined into a Business Administrator position. The division of authority and responsibility between the Business Administrator and the Treasurer were not clear for most of 2006 and the beginning of 2007, which resulted in conflict and frustration between the two. It took a year to understand and sort out the complications of moving to an accrual accounting system while at the same time of redefining the office of Treasurer and the position of Business Administrator. Both people maintained professional attitudes during this time, which contributed immensely to eventual resolution.

May 2006

On May 14 an office staff person retired after 28 years of service to Ascension. She was not replaced and, as mentioned above, her position responsibilities were added to two other staff people's. The financial problems of the congregation, along with the severance payments to the previous senior pastor, prevented any new hires. One of the three education staff had her employment changed from full-time children's ministry to half-time children's ministry and half-time Business Administrator. One of the two custodians had her employment changed from full-time to half-time custodian and half-time Information Administrator. The amount of work overall did not diminish, and so remaining staff were expected to recruit and utilize additional volunteer help. The staff changes were difficult, with frustration, confusion, and conflict needing much attention.

Division of duties, scope of authority and communication links were not clear. During the

rest of the interim period, these issues were addressed.

The staff changes just mentioned had the unforeseen effect of changing the nature

and value of volunteer ministry at Ascension. Previously, volunteers were needed to *help*

ministry. They filled in where staff were unable to serve. Volunteers had little authority

over decisions or resource utilization. They were aides to staff. However, many members

did not want to engage in activities under those conditions, and thus volunteer

recruitment did not expand much. With staff reduction and the need for increased

volunteer assistance, the nature of volunteer service had to change. Decision-making

authority was increasingly given to volunteers.

Along with new or revived committees, additional task forces and work groups

were developed. They were given clearly defined objectives and scope of operations.

Volunteer recruitment became easier and numbers of volunteers increased. The

Information Manager had the responsibility of maintaining the volunteer database. As

volunteering increased and volunteers increasingly asked for broader authority and

responsibility, the Information Manager recognized the need to go beyond simply

maintaining a database and to begin a ministry of volunteer development.

"Spiritual gifts" was the term used in the earlier months of the change, but the

term did not adequately describe what was happening. Volunteering was changing from

doing pre-defined tasks that supplemented staff ministries, to that of actually developing,

planning and carrying out ministries, with or without staff involvement. There was a

blossoming of member-initiated and member-driven ministry that was unprecedented in

Ascension's history. This in turn led to a calling of *shared leadership* that came out of the

visioning process in the fall of 2006, which will be described later in this chapter. Who

shall lead and how volunteer development shall be carried out were issues requiring

attention the last part of the interim period, which continued into the ministry of the

following senior pastor.

By May 2006 anxieties and anger remained high among members. The interim

senior pastor was still unsure of the extent and strength of his power, and his standing

with the congregation. There was pressure to shorten the interim period to a few months

and expectations of forming a call committee immediately. It had become clear that

leadership had to function differently than it had in Ascension's past, but what new

leadership practices should be introduced was not yet clear. A leadership vacuum was felt

among staff. In the midst of uncertainty, there is a natural urge within communities

toward someone taking a strong lead, whether a person has formal authority to do so or

not. Mature organizations will resist the urge and process leadership identification

methodically and legitimately. Organizations without a history of legitimate and

institutionalized leadership will allow anyone with initiative to take the lead.[12] An

example of this occurred in May 2006.

One of the longer-serving staff had demonstrated in the past a willingness to take

action in the midst of uncertainty and confusion.[13] This staff person saw a need to

enhance the education and spiritual development of the adult members of the

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[12] Power and leadership will be addressed in a following section. Hannah Arendt, *Power*, suggests that any power expression that is allowed by a group is legitimate. This thesis, however, argues for a process of legitimizing power, transforming charismatic power into institutionalized power.

[13] An example is the hiring of two additional staff people in the ministry area she served, during a previous interim period in 2004. The interim senior pastor at the time did not have the portfolio of transforming a congregation during the interim and was essentially maintaining ministry. Hiring practices in the congregation were historically unilateral on the part of the senior pastor. With the interim senior pastor taking a low profile and employment processes not well-developed, the staff person engineered the two hires without the congregation or its leadership requiring adequate accountability.

congregation, an honest and legitimate assessment. A dedicated education hour for all ages and for inter-generational educational experiences between worship services was seen as the best way to accomplish the spiritual development of adult members.[14] This too was arguably correct. However, the decision to introduce an education hour Sunday mornings was not publicly discussed with the wider membership.

Council at the time was still reeling from the January and February congregation meetings and had not attended to the proposal. Council was for the most part left out of the discussion and decision, with the planning occurring at the staff level. A revised fall worship schedule that moved worship times and added an education hour was announced in the July newsletter, which arrived in homes the first days of July. The deadline for submitting articles and announcements to the newsletter was June 14th. Council approved the schedule changes at its meeting on July 10th. The timing was noticed by several non-council leaders of the congregation. For the remaining summer months, much added anger and argumentation ensued. The staff person engineering the changes became targeted for suspicion. As the changes began in the fall, worship attendance and church school attendance dropped, although the precise cause was only speculated.

The interim senior pastor made a mistake in allowing the worship schedule decision to proceed as it did. He did push for soliciting member input in the decision, but the effort was minimal and did not achieve the member buy-in that should have occurred. Worship schedule changes in general are not a necessary part of the interim process, and if they do happen, should take place late in the interim period. The mistake was primarily in allowing a decision to occur that was not *legitimized* by the public, i.e. properly

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[14] Sunday worship times had been changed periodically in the congregation's past. In 2005, the congregation worshipped September through May: Saturdays at 5:00 p.m., Sundays at 9:00 and 10:30 a.m., and Sunday evenings at 6:00 p.m. During the summer months the congregation worshipped on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. and on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m.

institutionalized. The staff acted beyond its authority. The council did not act on behalf of the congregation by achieving adequate member input. The interim senior pastor did not insist on proper decision-making processes. These mistakes assured that the Sunday morning worship schedule would continue to be a controversial issue throughout the interim period. The topic was again addressed in the spring of 2007, but with attention to legitimization and transparency. Addressing the issue was significantly more difficult in 2007 because of the suspicion and anger lingering from the 2006 mistakes.

In May one of the hires engineered by the staff person in 2004 asked to be reinstated to full-time status. In 2005 he had asked to have his hours reduced so as to pursue other employment options. The newly formed Human Resources Committee did not grant the request for financial reasons, yet recognized the staff person's value to the congregation. The decision was not well-received by the person who then voiced his opinion. This event tested the resolve and authority of the committee. Council supported the committee's decision, resulting in the committee's power being greatly enhanced.

During May through August a *Demographics Task Force* was appointed and assembled information about changes occurring in the municipalities surrounding Ascension. The interim senior pastor solicited names of possible members from the Interim Transition Team and council. The interim pastor then narrowed the list along criteria of historical involvement in local politics, length of residency in the community, skills in interpreting demographic data, and general trust of the congregation. A successful businessman, a municipal administrator, and a social activist made up the task force. Their objectives were to assemble as much pertinent information as possible on the suburban communities where most of Ascension's members resided, to interpret and

describe the information in ways best understood by the rest of the congregation, to identify trends and changes in the communities, and to identify possible ministry targets for Ascension. The task force assembled demographic data from census and other sources, gathered diverse information available to local businesses, read several development plans created by local and regional government and businesses, solicited information from local developers, and then assembled the information in a concise report for member use. The report is in appendix 1. This information served as the basis for the town meeting discussions in the fall, and for the visioning process during the winter.

June 2006

In June *Mission: Minneapolis!* started. It was a new ministry of the congregation, and began the transition of moving the congregation's attention from focusing on internal problems to that of being a blessing beyond the membership. The same skills and temperament that led to staff additions outside of the legitimizing process and that initiated the worship schedule changes in early 2006, drove the *missional* impulse of this ministry and the congregation. *Mission: Minneapolis!* began as a ministry of youth outside of the usual congregational efforts, but quickly caught on with many adults who were not closely involved in youth ministry prior. The ministry was designed from the beginning to be a *joint* ministry with an urban congregation, which was a formerly Swedish congregation transitioning to Hispanic-focused ministry.

The Holy Spirit was drawing the congregation of Ascension out of its focus on the members themselves, to that of being a blessing and making a difference in God's kingdom beyond the congregation. The first half of the congregation's history had been

growing the *institution* of the congregation by increasing membership, building bigger

facilities, and serving the needs of members. *Mission: Minneapolis!* was evidence of the

Holy Spirit leading Ascension in a different direction and to a different purpose. The

congregation quickly and positively responded to the impetus of the Holy Spirit with this

and other later ministries.

July 2006

In July *Mission: Minneapolis!* was followed by *Katrina Mission*, a misnomer that

was still better understood than other names. The *Katrina Mission* was a group of

members who went to New Orleans to clean out homes that were devastated by the

storms of 2005 throughout the gulf coast states, of which Hurricane Katrina was one.

This ministry originated with the Property Committee. It did not intentionally seek to

expand the committee's portfolio, but the Holy Spirit moved some of the committee's

members to view their ministry as more than preserving the facilities of the congregation.

Property ministry expanded missionally to include ministry to *other* people's property.

The *Katrina Mission* and *Mission: Minneapolis!* both had effect on the

congregation far beyond those directly involved. Many other people directly supported

the ministries financially. But more, the ministries were widely promoted at worship and

in other ways so that the wider membership imagination moved from focusing on

mistrust, anger and financial problems, to that of what God might be doing with

Ascension to make a difference in the greater world. The effect of this change in outlook

cannot be emphasized enough. These *outreach ministries* had direct if not causal

influence on the dramatic changes that took place during this interim period.

In July the roof was repaired in Grace Hall and adjoining spaces.[15] In 2005 a storm had damaged the roof in the fellowship areas of the church. This occurred during the most acute financial crisis the congregation had experienced, which corresponded to rapidly disintegrating relations between senior pastor, council and staff. There were no reserve funds to repair the roof. The insurance company had been stalling. For a year, the roof leaked and structural damage began to occur. The congregation decision in January to refinance the church's mortgage included additional borrowing to fix the roof. However, the insurance company eventually settled and covered almost the entire cost of repairs. The congregation for the first time in years had reserve funds, although restricted to building repairs. This provided enough financial relief for the congregation's anxiety to lessen and for the start of financial planning rather than financial crisis management.

In July the annual shortfall in member giving to the General Fund once again occurred. Financial support of the congregation's ministries fell below operating costs in July of every recent year. This might even have occurred every year of the congregation's 40 year history. Member giving to the General Fund in this month fell below even the *fixed costs* of the congregation's ministries. It had always been the practice of the congregation's leadership to borrow from the Special Gifts and Memorial Funds and other designated funds of the congregation to cover the shortfall, then restore those funds later. The pattern of the congregation had been to give most of their offering in the last months of the year, allowing the leadership to repay borrowed funds.

Two critical problems occurred that precipitated the financial crisis in 2005. First, the two capital campaigns for the new sanctuary that was built in 2001 did not meet goals, in part because the objections to the new sanctuary were not thoroughly addressed.

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[15] See appendix 2 for the building layout of Ascension Lutheran Church.

Second, although overall giving almost doubled in 2001, some of the giving to the capital campaign was money people had *diverted* from their General Fund support. Giving to the General Fund actually *decreased*, thereby exacerbating the summer shortfall. By 2005 the problem was so extensive that available funds for borrowing in Special Gifts and Memorials and elsewhere were actually depleted. All dedicated funds had been borrowed and were not able to be repaid. The disagreement between the senior pastor and the council on how to address the crisis was the precipitating cause for their conflict and the pastor's eventual resignation.

In the fall of 2005, the church council conducted an in-house fundraising campaign. The campaign was an appeal to the membership to fund the short-term debt of the congregation and replenish dedicated funds that were borrowed. The campaign goal was $180,000, and the actual amount raised was $121,691.[16] Most earlier borrowing was replaced. However prior to this campaign, the congregation was not aware of the crisis. When the conflict between senior pastor and council became known at the same time as the magnitude of the financial crisis, members became both irate and alarmed. Membership participation in the 2005 campaign was not widespread, with the majority of funds coming from a few people.

The giving pattern repeated once more in the summer of 2006, and again the council borrowed from the dedicated funds restored the year before. One of the funds tapped was the annual Garage Sale receipts, intended for building repairs. The Property Committee, who managed the receipts, became so angry that the committee disbanded and one of the members left the congregation. That person had been church council president in the past and had presided over fund borrowings himself, yet now was angry

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[16] "Stewardship Report" in the *Ascension Lutheran Church 2005 Annual Report.*

that it occurred again. The reaction of the Property Committee was a new phenomenon. It was not clear why they saw 2006 borrowing differently from the other years.

Men's Ministry had become primarily weekend retreats for men held twice a year. Those of the group sponsored a pancake breakfast to fund some of the retreats' costs. Over the years, the Men's Ministry had built up some modest reserve funds. In July of 2007, the Men's Ministry resolved to commit most of their reserve funds to emergency building needs that were not funded by the congregation's operating budget. This action thereby made possible other congregation ministry. More so, it was generosity and service to the whole congregation, beyond providing retreats for members of the group.

In July, remodeling of the Fellowship Hall began for the purpose of housing ministry currently in Grace Hall. The Fellowship Hall was the original worship space of the congregation, built in 1967. It was in use until a larger sanctuary was built in 1978. The first sanctuary was then converted into church school and general use space. The second sanctuary was used for worship until 2001, when the current sanctuary was built. The second sanctuary is called Grace Hall, used for the Sunday evening worship service and various ministries. Earlier in the spring, the congregation borrowed additional money as they refinanced the mortgage. The additional money was meant for roof repairs and for construction of a kitchen in Grace Hall. The kitchen was part of the plan to turn Grace Hall into a reception and dining area, though the missional vision for its use was not developed. For construction to begin in Grace Hall, it was necessary to move the existing ministries into the Fellowship Hall. Thus, in order for the Fellowship Hall to accommodate the additional uses, it too had to be remodeled.

The Fellowship Hall changes were not considered in the borrowing plan.[17] There were no funds budgeted and no funds available for borrowing. But the choice was to either remodel the Fellowship Hall to accommodate on-going ministries or to eliminate those ministries. It was obvious that the Lord expected Ascension to continue in God's work and that the Holy Spirit had even greater plans. Signs of the Lord's expectations included the current strength and effectiveness of the current ministries, potential for new ministries not currently possible, and the growing interest and commitment of members for future ministries.

The Fellowship Hall drop-ceiling was removed. Fire-alarm system wiring was relocated. New lighting was installed. A storage room was removed, and two new closets were built. A stage was built and carpeted. The result was a return of the Fellowship Hall to its original worship space appearance, without losing classroom space. The changes allowed greater flexibility in the space's use and thus increased the actual use of that space. No money was budgeted for the changes, and yet the changes made were again evidence of the Holy Spirit acting through the congregation. The Holy Spirit inspired members as well as non-members to give their labor to the changes. The Holy Spirit inspired members as well as non-members to donate materials and money to accomplish the changes. The Holy Spirit gave vision and hope to the possibilities of new ministry efforts never previously possible.

August 2006

In August preparation for the Vision Summit began. The Vision Summit was a day-long event based on a matched-pairs exercise, followed by task forces engaging in a

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[17] Also, the estimates for kitchen construction were far below actual costs. That will be addressed later.

five-part process[18] that led the congregation to a general understanding of the Lord's

plans for the congregation within the Lord's greater mission. The agenda and worksheet

for the Vision Summit are in appendix 3. The results of the summit became the

congregation's *calling*. The process was based on the work of The Rev. Dr. Steven M.

Nelson as partial fulfillment toward a doctorate of ministry.[19] Planning for the November

summit began in August with describing and soliciting buy-in from the congregation

leadership, and formulating initial objectives for presenting to the membership.

September 2006

On September 10, Rally Day, the usual return to the fall ministry schedule began

with the youth presenting to the congregation at worship their various trips and activities

from the previous summer. But in 2006, instead of the usual Rally Day, what was called

"ministry fair" was held that highlighted *all* the ministries occurring through Ascension.

Every ministry and group was invited to host a booth describing their ministry. Many

also provided food that symbolized their ministry. Outcomes from the fair were dramatic

increase in involvement of members in the day, amazed awareness of what ministries

Ascension was still providing in spite of all their problems, and a continuing turn of

congregational attitude from anger and despair toward excitement and hope.

On September 24 a Special Congregation Meeting was held to consider the use of

funds for construction of a kitchen in Grace Hall. Although the congregation gave

explicit approval to use funds in this way when they voted in favor of refinancing the

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[18] John M. Bryson, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 199-203.

[19] Steven M. Nelson, *The Miracle of Vision: Discovering God's Vision for Your Church* (Combined Locks, WI: Christ the King Lutheran Church, 1995).

mortgage in February, there were several reasons for calling a congregation meeting again. First, Ascension's constitution stated that any use of funds over $5,000 that were not part of the budget must have congregation approval. The council was still insecure from the spring challenges.

This was one of many attempts to be as open as possible with decisions and to thoroughly inform members. Also, the original estimate for funding the kitchen construction was based on little more than a quick guess by a contractor. The loan refinanced in February was based on that guess, which eventually proved to be too low.

The special meeting on the 24th presented to the congregation several options on how to finance the kitchen construction. The option chosen was to use the roof repair loan that no longer was needed to supplement the loan for the kitchen, as well as to use remaining Special Gift funds that were designated for Grace Hall repairs and equipment. This meeting then set in motion the formation of a task force to make architectural drawings and solicit contractor bids. The Kitchen Task Force was made up of three members, an architect, a building project manager, and a building contractor, all of whom volunteered their time and expertise.

In September and October the interim senior pastor met with thirty-nine neighborhood groups in nineteen meetings, about 200 people total. A year prior to the interim period, the congregation's membership was divided into neighborhood groups based on proximity of homes. The original intent of the neighborhood groups was to engineer mini-communities within the congregation, but the planning never went beyond the assigning of people to groups. However, the groupings were helpful for this interim purpose. As the fall began and the congregation was once again behind on accounts

payable, and as the call committee was still not formed and the interim process seemed too slow, anxiety and impatience among members began to rise. Town meetings were a way for members to speak directly to the interim senior pastor, let their concerns be known, and be informed of what was happening, all within a group of neighbors in a neighbor's home. The agenda for the meetings is in appendix 4. Meetings were begun with listening to concerns. Then the interim senior pastor outlined the interim process to date, where the congregation was in the process, the progress made and a timeline for the remaining interim period. The interim pastor then presented three things needed from the members: continued financial support of ministries, participation in the upcoming Vision Summit, and members speaking well of Ascension as a church and of persons individually. It was time to move past griping and begin to commit to solutions.

October 2006

In October designated funds were released for purchasing sanctuary wall hangings. Constructing a new sanctuary in 2001 was one thing, equipping and funding the space for use was another. These other expenses were not included in construction plans and were not widely supported by members. One of the additional expenses was decorating the sanctuary space. Paraments and wall hangings were commissioned and designed specially for Ascension. Funding occurred outside of the operating funds of the congregation. Most of the paraments were already purchased by 2006, and a few matching wall hangings were yet to be created and purchased. Funds that were donated and designated for this purpose had been borrowed for operating expenses in 2004 and 2005. Though the fund was repaid at the end of 2005, no further purchases of hangings were authorized because of uncertain cash flow during the summer of 2006. By October

of 2006, giving to the General Fund of the congregation had caught up to expenses, and borrowings from designated funds were mostly repaid. This allowed funds to be released for the purchase of the wall hangings. The significance of this event was its visual sign to the congregation of increasing financial stability. It demonstrated that Ascension was not failing and its ministry was not stalling. It also gave encouragement to other ministries dependent on special gifts and memorials that their efforts were not at risk.

During October and November, the interim senior pastor gave a four-week sermon series on stewardship that informed the congregation of its giving patterns in comparison with neighboring ELCA congregations, its financial history, what the Lord expects of followers of Christ, and the blessings that come with generosity and faithfulness to God's mission. A challenge to tithe and a method of experiencing tithing with no obligation to continue were included. Several families began tithing for the first time, and numerous current tithers increased their giving. The series began a year-long stewardship emphasis and prepared the way for an intentional campaign of funding ministry.

The stewardship message focused on experiencing the Lord through generosity. In addition to appealing to reason and financial information, much attention was given to joining the Lord in God's mission through the work of our money and our compassion. Our Lord's blessings are experienced through giving of ourselves and resources. Presented was the challenge to test God and see whether the Lord would be stingy (Mal 3:10). Some members responded with grumbling that too much time was spent on money. But an overwhelming majority responded with increased financial giving and increased participation in the ministries of Ascension.

The Holy Spirit did not fail. As members increasingly looked to the Lord both for blessing and for leadership, the Spirit moved dramatically through the congregation as the following events testify. Financially, the congregation was beginning to become the most stable it had ever been in its history. The Holy Spirit provided needed funds for Ascension's ministries. While *how* ministries would be funded was not always clear, by following what the Spirit seemed to be asking of the congregation, needed funding always seemed available. Some events might be described as fortuitous, but for those involved it was evidence of God's Holy Spirit at work in the congregation.

During October through January the new kitchen in Grace Hall was built. Although a long-held dream of the congregation and an intended part of the plan for a new sanctuary, the kitchen did not get built until this time because building campaign projections were not met. The kitchen construction came to symbolize that Ascension was not stagnating or declining. A real possibility at this stage in the congregation's development would have been to fall back to a program-size or pastor-size model of congregational functioning.[20] It was what was familiar to members and what they knew they could handle as a congregation. But the Lord had a mission to accomplish and even greater plans for Ascension. Falling back to a prior form of functioning would have been to doubt the Spirit's desire and power.

What did not happen at this time was discerning a clear purpose for the kitchen. What the Spirit wanted from the kitchen was not clear. This mistake led to a power struggle of who would decide how the kitchen would be used. Intentionally moving a congregation to discern God's mission and a congregation's ministries within that

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[20] See Alice Mann, *The in-between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1998).

mission was not a clear, linear process, but more of numerous fits and starts that, by God's grace, coalesced over time.

In October the interim senior pastor began extensive, one-on-one position reviews with each staff person, which continued over the next four months. Prior performance reviews were subjective, general comments by the senior pastor, and at times conducted by other staff. In October 2006, the reviews were conducted as two-way observations and assessments. Job descriptions for staff positions were not uniform, some had several conflicting job descriptions, others had none at all. The performance reviews therefore included discussion on how the staff saw their own positions and scope of responsibilities, along with interpretations of those positions by the Human Resources Committee. Staff rated their own performance. The interim senior pastor added observations and comments. Goals were written for the purpose of guiding individual ministries and for assessing progress in those ministries. At times the conversations were difficult, but the Holy Spirit guided the process to clarify expectations and to maintain staff collegiality.

November 2006

On November 11, 2006, the Vision Summit took place. It was a congregation-wide discernment of God's calling for Ascension. For several weeks leading up to the day, members were individually encouraged to take part in the day. There were 113 members in attendance, about 15 percent of the average worship attendance. The congregation had never before experienced an event of discussing together the Lord's purposes and Ascension's role in God's mission. Members had never before discussed as a congregation what their future might be. Those participating were the most motivated

of the congregation, but were diverse in outlook and view of Ascension, and included both long-time members and many recent members.

The event was conducted with appeal to and expectation of the Holy Spirit's direct participation. It was understood that God would be part of the conversations of the day. Although discussion materials were carefully prepared (see appendix 3), and the process well-planned and rehearsed, from the beginning of the day the Holy Spirit was clearly and manifestly in charge. The animosity, anger, disappointment, frustration, and conflict of the past two years had dissipated in the discussions of the day. People were intentionally paired with those they did not know or with those with whom they disagreed frequently. The process was structured enough to allow for people to disagree and yet find common resolution by the end of the day. The tangible outcome of the Vision Summit was three major callings of God for Ascension Lutheran Church:

- *To be Christ-centered, changing lives,*

- *To be a congregation equipping people for living their faith, and*

- *To be a congregation of shared leadership.*

Beyond those outcomes, participants experienced a strong presence of God's Spirit in addressing difficult issues with those with whom they did not always agree, in negotiating agreement, and in strengthening their respect and appreciation for one another. The results of the day cannot be emphasized enough. It was a powerful experience of God's Spirit forging community and communal discussion, and of the Spirit providing a vision for Ascension's future. It was clearly more than human organization and cooperation. People's relationships with one another were changed.

Attitudes about the future were transformed. A new hope emerged that immediately began to play out in enthused engagement of members for God's ministries.

During November through February task forces were formed and began working around each of the Vision Summit callings. They were commissioned to describe more fully what the callings may be, and to describe specific ways that the callings might be carried out. The *Vision Summit Task Forces* were recruited from participants of the summit. They were trained at a joint event by the interim senior pastor in what they were to do, how they might carry out their work, and what they were to report back to the congregation. The task forces become more than work groups. They were people who previously disagreed about Ascension's direction, but now found themselves mutually supporting as well as challenging colleagues along a common purpose. Rather than like-minded people organizing themselves, they were built of diverse opinions and attitudes who could only function by the grace of the Holy Spirit within them. This experience was testimony of the Lord working profoundly and specifically in the situation and people of Ascension.

In November the Human Resources Committee began updating employee files, rewriting position descriptions and clarifying benefits. Tracking vacation, holiday, and continuing education days also began. Prior, most staff were hesitant to take vacation days because they did not know how much they were allowed and did not want to jeopardize their employment. By the committee clarifying and systematically managing their vacation benefits, the staff noticeably relaxed and morale increased.

December 2006

In December the *Mission Profile Task Force* was appointed by the council to prepare the document that describes Ascension, its ministries and the qualities of the senior pastor it seeks. The task force was formed both by a public request for volunteers and by the interim senior pastor personally approaching individuals for the work. This too was a group diverse in outlook and opinions, but who by the Holy Spirit's direct lead were able to function together in mutual respect and appreciation for individual talents and skills. Although advised from time to time by the interim pastor, the task force independently compiled most of the materials for the profile and prepared initial work for the eventual call committee.

January 2007

On January 21 the congregation held its regular annual meeting. In stark contrast to the previous year's meeting, this one was civil, without controversy, supportive and appreciative of the congregation's leadership. The usual reporting and work was done. The financial report was encouraging. With council elections, every member was new since the resignation of the previous senior pastor and all the attendant controversies. This marked a new beginning for Ascension as a congregation.

February 2007

On February 11 the congregation celebrated again its 40th anniversary. In late 2005, it remembered its past with previous pastors attending. The event in 2007 intentionally focused on the future of Ascension. The reports of the Vision Summit Task Forces were highlighted. Each task force reported ways that Ascension can begin to live out its calling in *being Christ-centered in changing lives, equipping people for living*

their faith, and sharing leadership. The reports further solidified the congregation's direction and informed the congregation of the kind of senior pastor that would be needed next.

Each task force was made up of volunteers from the Vision Summit. Members of the task forces were diverse in their theological positions and spiritual expressions, as well as diverse in their understanding of Ascension and its purpose in God's mission. Yet the Holy Spirit prevailed in each group by inspiring each person to listen to the views of others, by sticking to task of determining ways for Ascension to carry out the calling, and by conducting themselves with respect for others even while disagreeing with them. The activity of the Holy Spirit through the groups resulted in the task forces' reports. It was widely held and stated by the task force members themselves that the Spirit participated in their discussions, that as they discussed with each other the Spirit was speaking within the group. Because of this, they expressed a high level of enthusiasm as they reported to the congregation.

The 40th anniversary celebration included the dedication of the new kitchen along with the task force reports. The kitchen was a visual milestone in the congregation's development, long-awaited by many. More so, it was a visual symbol of a change in the congregation's functioning and identity. For most of its early years, Ascension did not have large fellowship events because they lacked kitchen facilities. Development of the congregation's identity was shaped by this fact, and personal commitment to the larger group as congregation *was inhibited*.

The founding pastor, who served Ascension for its first 28 years, was a strong charismatic leader whose personality and functioning provided cohesiveness to the

congregation. At his retirement, that cohesiveness had to be found elsewhere. A second charismatic senior pastor followed the founding pastor, yet as the congregation grew in members the ability for one person to be the group's stability was beginning to diminish. The congregation's struggles of recent years had its roots in the congregation's difficulty in developing a common identity and individuals' commitment to the larger group. Fellowship opportunities that build such identity and commitment were few. With Ascension's new kitchen, expectations were high for this area of congregational growth. Yet, the struggles over control of the kitchen space threatened to inhibit development of the congregation's identity and communal growth. Maneuvering for control had begun months before the dedication.

In February the plans for renovating Grace Hall, of which the construction of a kitchen was the major item, also included two new offices for staff, construction of a meeting room, construction of storage space, new flooring and new lighting. The planned funding fell short of actual construction costs, resulting in only the construction of the kitchen. In February, donations from an outside source and volunteer labor was able to complete the construction of the two offices. Two long-time employees were able to move into new offices from the inadequate and temporary spaces they had used for many years. The office constructions were accomplished by the willingness and generosity of volunteers motivated by the Holy Spirit. The offices were visual signs of the Spirit moving within Ascension.

On February 12 the newly elected council members began their term. This council was a complete change in members from 2005. The few remaining members from the congregation's special meeting a year prior had completed their terms. Although no

current member had served more than a year, several had prior council experience and several were long-time members of the congregation. This past history of service thus balanced the lack of continuity on the council. A council with all new members since the troubles of 2005, was a symbol of transformation that marked a change for the congregation. That symbol contributed to members' increased trust in congregation leadership.

The *Call Committee* was appointed at this first meeting of the newly elected council. Appointment to the Call Committee was intentionally held off until the new council began so that the Call Committee was seen as part of the new era of Ascension and association with past problems was minimized. However, the former council had begun selecting candidates for the Call Committee early the previous winter, and had narrowed the list of candidates by the time the new council took over.

There were challenges to the new council. Continuity from the past was minimal and so institutional memory was diminished. Council members did not know in depth the previous councils' struggles and issues. The current council did not have an established pattern of working together. On February 24th, the interim senior pastor led a council orientation and training in which expectations, responsibilities, and methods were presented. The training quickly coalesced the council and enabled them to begin functioning quickly and effectively, as was demonstrated in the revival of the Sunday morning worship schedule problem described next.

From February through May the council addressed the unresolved Sunday morning schedule issue along with exploring what is meant by the calling to *equip people for living their faith*. The issues were linked at the education time between services. For

the years leading up to the summer of 2006, the congregation worshipped at 5:00 pm on Saturdays, 9:00 and 10:30 Sunday mornings, and 6:00 Sunday evenings (the Sunday evening worship time changed frequently). On Sunday mornings, there were no provisions for intergenerational education or for adult education other than a periodic forum on selected topics.

With the construction of the most recent sanctuary in 2001, the adults were able to engage in increased fellowship. By 2006, it seemed that the congregation was being invited by the Holy Spirit to grow further by enhancing fellowship with learning. In the summer of 2006, a decision was made primarily among staff to change worship times on Sunday mornings to 8:45 and 11:00 so as to create a time for adult education between services. The reasoning was tied to the need for adults to be involved in the faith formation of children arising out of the philosophy of Youth and Family Institute.[21]

The decision process was not conducted well and met with much resistance, even though the reasons were sound and many members did support the change. The mismanaged decision process resulted in increased suspicion of staff and criticism of council throughout 2006. Some members perceived the decision as manipulation by staff without regard for members' input. It is to be noted that the congregation's calling to *equip people to live their faith*, discerned out of the Vision Summit, was discerned *after* the decision to change worship times. However, it seems the Holy Spirit was already moving the congregation in this direction with the worship time changes, even though the decision *process* was flawed. The Sunday morning education hour provided another opportunity for the congregation to equip adults for living their faith.

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[21] Youth and Family Institute, "Our Mission," (Bloomington, MN: The Youth and Family Institute) http://www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org/OurMission.asp (accessed October 5, 2007).

With the need to make a decision about the fall schedule changes and publicize the fall worship times before summer began, the new council took on the issue by soliciting opinions and information from the congregation members. Listening posts, surveys and direct one-on-one discussions took place over three months. The council linked the discussions of Sunday morning schedule to the calling to equip people for living their faith. Members who felt shunted aside now spoke out; some were quite angry. To strong feelings around worship times was added anger over a mismanaged decision process the year before.

The new council capably and thoroughly explored the worship times with the congregation in light of their calling to equip people, and accepted the heightened anger though they did not deserve it. At their May meeting, the council decided on Sunday worship times of 8:45 and 11:00, with adult education at 10:00. Separate worship for children would be at 8:45, and church school for children would be provided at 10:00 and 11:00. The schedule was essentially the same from the 2006 decision, but it now had the legitimization of congregation discussion and council deliberation.

March 2007

On March 8 the *Grace Hall Committee* had its organizing meeting. Construction of the kitchen in Grace Hall (the second sanctuary in Ascension's history) provided unprecedented opportunity to the congregation for enhanced fellowship and new ministry ventures. The scope of possibilities was literally unimagined. For the first forty years of its ministry, the congregation made do with a galley-size kitchen. A small group of volunteers became very adept and efficient with the available space. It was assumed by many members that the new kitchen was given over to this core group of volunteers and

that they would be able to continue former events, just with more space. But that assumption *excluded* other people who wanted to use the kitchen in new ways. The politics of the kitchen were enormous. The former core kitchen group performed very well in the past and had strong support from many members. However, there were also many members who were excluded from involvement by the practices of that core group, and who were strongly opposed to the core group assuming control of the kitchen ministry.

For several weeks prior to the organizing meeting of the Grace Hall Committee, the interim senior pastor gave written and verbal announcements of the meeting for anyone interested or who had experience in food preparation and service. He also personally invited the core kitchen group people and those he knew were opposed to the core kitchen group. The interim senior pastor then included the leader of the core kitchen group in preparing the agenda for the meeting, so as to include her concerns, to inform her ahead of time of what would be discussed, and to begin the political process of bridging those in support and those opposed to the core kitchen group. With those outside of the core kitchen group but who were interested in kitchen ministry, the interim senior pastor met individually or solicited input through telephone conversations.

From the conversations leading up to the meeting, the interim senior pastor was able to assess the scope and content of issues surrounding the kitchen. He organized the information into a document of *Grace Hall Ministry Tasks*, which was reviewed by the leader of the core kitchen group. The leader then on her own created forms for soliciting volunteer interest, which she brought to the meeting. All the planning for the meeting was also discussed by the Interim Transition Team, with their advice guiding the process.

The interim senior pastor established the organizing meeting agenda and led the meeting. However, it was stated at the beginning that the meeting would be a joint effort in setting up how the entire space of Grace Hall would be managed, not just the kitchen in one part of the hall. A three-tiered managing structure was established, with the Grace Hall Committee having general oversight and policy-making authority over all the space use, under the authority of the church Council. A kitchen manager position would be created at the staff level, who would oversee kitchen operations, and volunteer training and scheduling. The leader of the core kitchen group was selected to serve as kitchen manager, but was now under the supervision of the senior pastor as well as accountable to the Grace Hall Committee that would become a committee of the Council. Several cooking crews would be recruited to actually prepare and serve food at church functions.

The structure was intended to provide several lines of accountability while providing numerous opportunities for volunteers to serve as they were led. It also provided structure by which concerns would be addressed, rather than the usual informal complaining that occurs when procedures are not established. This structure was crucial in September when there was need to address some of the on-going practices of the kitchen manager. The structure was crucial in September for setting policy regarding the use of Grace Hall. The policy issue came up not because of disagreement over the space use, but because the Property Committee wanted to install flooring over the cement base of the hall, and needed to base their decision on the ministries that would occur there. The Grace Hall Committee was officially formed by council at its June meeting. The council also approved the kitchen manager position description, and appointed the kitchen manager.

On March 12 the congregation's Treasurer resigned. Her tenure was marked by increased public reporting of the congregation's finances, significant moves from cash-based accounting to accrual accounting methods, and increased financial controls and procedures, all of which laid the foundation for the congregation's financial recovery in 2007. With her resignation, the separation of duties between Treasurer, offering counters, and Business Administrator were reassigned. Another person then volunteered for the Treasurer position, in part because of its greatly diminished time commitment. The transition to accrual accounting methods took a year of planning, experimentation, struggle, and disagreement, but resulted in money being handled in a safe and responsible manner, in reports that were clear, and in enhanced congregation confidence in the management of its finances. The Holy Spirit used the process of financial changes to restore the congregation's trust in its leadership, and to provide the congregation with financial management as the Spirit began to move the congregation to increased engagement in God's mission.

Also in March, the Stewardship Committee began a special campaign to build up a reserve fund for the annual summer slump in giving. The committee attempted to preempt the cash flow shortage that caused so many problems in previous years and resulted in borrowing from designated giving. The *Feather Our Nest* campaign raised $19,344, enough to cover all the anticipated summer shortfall.

The Stewardship Committee also increased its communication to members on the financial situation of Ascension through letters included with quarterly giving statements, newsletter articles and worship announcements. At the same time, it began conversation

regarding a fundraising service for a comprehensive plan to enhance member regular

giving and to pay down the congregation's mortgage.

In March the Mission Profile Task Force completed its work in compiling

information for the call process. The task force met with the Call Committee to review its

work and transfer the profile over to the committee. While it is commonly assumed that

the Holy Spirit is somehow guiding the call process behind the scenes, the Spirit was

strongly evident in the Mission Profile Task Force work. The task force was made up of

people of very different personalities and insights. A chair of the task force arose from

within the group and had the group's confidence. While strong opinions and perceptions

were voiced, the task force listened to each other and listened to what the Spirit might

have been saying. They cooperated, debated, prayed, and in the end, all were in

agreement over the information they presented to the Call Committee.

April 2007

Through April and May the Human Resources Committee re-wrote staff position

descriptions, which entailed envisioning the staffing needs of the congregation in order to

accomplish the congregation's callings as discerned from the Vision Summit. The work

was necessary to provide the Call Committee a description of the senior pastor's position

in relation to all the other staff. The Human Resources Committee solicited input from

current staff, but was not beholden to existing job scopes. There were some difficult

changes proposed, but the committee was attentive to the congregation's calling and to its

ministry needs. On the surface it might appear the committee was working from a purely

rational approach, but the committee members were grounded in the life of the

congregation, participated in the Vision Summit and follow-up task forces, and were

confident in the Lord leading their decisions. Evidence of the Spirit's guidance and informing is that the committee members made decisions that reflected the congregation's callings, carefully considered the current staff people's ideas, and maintained an attitude of seeking what was best for God's mission and the congregation's well-being.

A new projection system was installed and used for the first time on Easter Sunday, April 8th. As noted above, the new sanctuary constructed in 2001, did not include equipment and services in order to the use the space. One of the items not included was a projection system. For the first six years of the sanctuary's use, worship slides were projected on a portable screen by a portable projector. The quality and versatility of the temporary system was minimal. In the spring of 2007, an elderly couple of the congregation decided to donate the funds for an installed projection system that would use the built-in screens of the sanctuary. The new system shifted worshipper's focus from a far corner of the sanctuary where the temporary screen stood, back to the chancel and the crosses which are framed by the two permanent screens. This literally affirmed the calling of the congregation to be *Christ-centered*, with the focus of attention during worship now back on the cross.

On April 13-14 the new council and the staff went on retreat to explore and establish their working relationships. The leadership challenges of past years, culminating in 2005, often found council and staff at cross-purposes. Unclear were who made what decisions, to what extent could staff make decisions before needing council approval, how would communication occur between the two groups, what was council's role in ministry operations, and how could each group support the other. Along with devotions

that addressed the retreat goals, included was a discussion on the polarity between council's retained authority and staff's delegated authority.[22] One outcome of the retreat was establishing a council-staff task force that would develop recommendations on staff lines of accountability and communication, and a decision-making matrix that outlined the kinds of decisions that would occur at different levels of authority. The task force quickly found that their work was not necessary, as the retreat itself and other mechanisms resolved many of the problems between council and staff.

A second outcome of the retreat was including staff reporting on the council meeting agendas. For the few months following the retreat, staff did take the opportunity to inform the council and to ask questions. After the first few months, this too was needed less. A third outcome was council members taking more active roles in committee activities and reporting back to the rest of the council. This seemed to generate the most trust and communication between staff and council, alleviating most of the past conflicts. Finally, as a result of the retreat, council began to function differently than did past councils, intentionally moving toward being spiritual leaders of the congregation rather than organization managers.

Evidence of this move were the introduction of a candle at council meetings that was lit invoking the presence of the Holy Spirit, designation of a *prayer listener* who would lead the council in prayer before or after significant discussions and decisions, and reflection on how the council functioned as a body of Christ. These behavioral moves significantly changed the atmosphere and conversation of the council meetings from stress and conflict over different views and over financial and political troubles within the

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[22] See Barry Johnson, *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (Amherst, MA: HRD Press, 1992).

congregation, to confidence in the Lord's lead, courage to take on sensitive issues, and deep appreciation and respect for each other even when at odds on issues.

On April 25 the Human Resources Committee met with staff to discuss how staff would be affected by the next transition in senior pastors. In particular, explained was an initial six month period where all employment agreements were up for review, i.e. the next senior pastor would be able to reconfigure staffing instead of inheriting current staff. The members of staff received the information professionally. The fact that the Human Resources Committee took the time as a committee to meet with staff to address this sensitive topic, seemed to reassure staff that all decisions were above-board and would be shared with staff to the extent that would be appropriate.

On April 26 the Grace Hall Committee had its first official meeting. Because the vision of how the space could be used was yet unclear, the committee initially functioned rather weakly. As issues about the space began to rise, the committee became more actively engaged. However, the power and leadership of Grace Hall continued to oscillate between the Kitchen Manager and the Information Manager who scheduled events. Both sat on the Grace Hall Committee.

May 2007

At its May 14th meeting the council approved the position descriptions of staff, following the Human Resources Committee's recommendations. At the same meeting the council made their decision on the times for Sunday morning worship and education, after three months of discussion, discernment and deliberation. This issue was the first major political decision the new council had made. The council members had differing opinions among themselves and had heard strong comments from other church members.

There was not unanimity in the congregation, and the council members understood that their decision that night would disappoint one group or another. Yet their decision would also be an expression of leadership that members had so much been seeking.

The final decision came down to not what did the majority of members want, but what would best accomplish what God seemed to be calling the congregation to be. As predicted, some people were angered by the decision, but because the council boldly acted and because the council reported publicly their decision and rationale, those angered still support the congregation and participate in its ministries. The decision-making event was important in teaching the council and the congregation that people do not have to be in agreement, that people can express their differences and disappointments openly, and yet they are still a congregation in Jesus Christ, still listen to each other, still respect each other's positions, and still find ways of working together for God's glory.

During April through May the Call Committee solicited information from the congregation regarding what kind of pastoral leadership Ascension needs, through listening posts, surveys and private conversations. In June, the committee reviewed the mobility papers (resumés) of eleven candidates and interviewed five of them. Through July, they conducted second interviews.

June 2007

The Rev. Dr. Mark Bents conducted interviews with members of Ascension to solicit their perceptions of the interim process. The interview protocol is appendix 5.

July 2007

Months of July had been historically a challenging time for the congregation leadership as member giving consistently dropped below fixed costs. In prior years the council had to borrow from designated funds to cover operating costs. In July of 2007, for the first time in Ascension's recent history, all bills were paid on time. The *Feather Our Nest* reserve funds were not used until August. Although giving in August repeated previous trends, because July giving remained strong, the financial stresses remained manageable, all bills were current and no designated funds were borrowed.

Also in July *Mission: Minneapolis!* continued ministry between Ascension and the its urban partner. Ascension's side of the partnership was led by the education and youth ministries of the congregation, and involved many parents and other adults. The partnership was marked in 2007 by the senior pastors preaching at the worship services of the other congregation. This brought attention to the partnership for those who do not directly participate, emphasizing that the church is more than the members themselves and the ministry is more than what people get out of it.

August 2007

In August, out of the Vision Summit calling to equip people for living their faith, and out of the council's decision process for determining the Sunday morning schedule, several lay leaders of the congregation developed new education opportunities for adults on Sunday morning. Recognizing that people are at different places in their faith journey, some of the course offerings were basic conversations and inquiries about Christian faith, others were a review of the Sunday worship lessons, still others were in-depth discussions

on topics identified by members. Along with those offerings, also begun was an ongoing, in-depth study of the Bible that was jointly sponsored with the local Catholic church.

In August also, the Call Committee selected a candidate for senior pastor to present to the congregation. As they were completing this part of the interview process, the candidate they had chosen decided to withdraw from consideration. The committee was discouraged for being turned down after so much effort. Their work back would continue another five months as they began reviewing the mobility papers of a new set of candidates and began interviews all over again.

September 2007

In September the new fall schedule began as discussed by the congregation and determined by council in the spring. Little dissent was expressed. Instead, hope and anticipation stood in stark contrast to previous years of anger, distrust, confusion and fear. New to Sunday mornings was *Kids Kingdom*, a worship experience for pre-school children to learn the rudiments of public worship as they praised the Lord. This occurred at the 8:45 worship time, with traditional church school then offered at 10:00 and 11:00 am.

Of remarkable note is that four new adult education courses were offered Sunday mornings starting that September. Three of the courses were taught by lay people, with the other taught by the associate pastor. For most of Ascension's history, Sunday morning adult education was an occasional adult forum with about a half-dozen consistent attendees. The Holy Spirit had been challenging key leaders of Ascension since the previous November's *Vision Summit* to take to heart the calling of "equipping

people to live their faith." Each of the new classes had about a dozen in regular attendance.

During September the nursery was finally moved to what is called "the Fireside Room." When the new sanctuary was built in 2001, a nursery was intended to be located across from the restrooms just off the Atrium (narthex). Unknown politics overtook that space and converted it into a library. The nursery was relegated to the farthest corner of the church building, down two long and winding hallways. Never addressed publicly was what this said about hospitality to visiting young families and member families with children. From that distant exile, the nursery was moved to a space not far off the Atrium and equipped with a paging system. Changing tables were also installed in bathrooms for the first time ever.

Also in September the congregation sponsored a mercy trip to Rushford, Minnesota, in an area that experienced disastrous rains and flooding the previous month. The federal government declared it a disaster area. While awaiting federal funds to rebuild, congregations sent volunteers to clean out homes destroyed by floodwaters. Ascension's team was organized through the Habitat for Humanity ministry of the congregation. The home that the Ascension team cleaned out belonged to the parents of one of Ascension's members. All of the family's possessions in the basement and first floor were lost. The flooding so soaked the surrounding ground that basement walls were caving in. Even though the house structure was salvaged, lost were the furnace, hot water heater, air conditioning system, insulation, siding, kitchen appliances, electronic equipment and personal items. The volunteers were an expression of the congregation's care for people in distress and what it means to be church for one another.

As the Red Cross pulled out and politicians tut-tutted and left town, Lutheran Disaster Relief and congregation volunteers such as those from Ascension continued to clean homes, care for those stricken, and rebuild communities. They were clear and vivid evidence that *the Lord* had not pulled out and that the Lord was still present and caring and changing lives in those communities.

October-November 2007

The Call Committee resumed interviewing, with six different candidates considered. The committee proceeded methodically and thoroughly even though there was additional pressure from members to hurry. By the end of November they had selected a candidate to present to the congregation.

Ascension continued to be financially stable, bills were paid on time and ministries were funded. However, the annual cash flow increase occurring in September in years past had not yet materialized by the end of November. The stewardship emphasis during the fall was modest. But that only partially accounted for the withholding of offering. The reasons why seasonal increased giving did not occur were unknown.

Council changed their agendas meeting to reflect their changed function. They continued to develop from solely managers of resources to spiritual leaders of the congregation. Beginning in October, the council opened with devotions which were led by the council members themselves. Then the council parted into two groups to discuss chapters of books related to church identity and missional focus. The first book of the season was Mark S. Hanson, *Faithful Yet Changing: The Church in Challenging Times.*[23]

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[23] Mark S. Hanson and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Faithful yet Changing: The Church in Challenging Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2002).

The second book was Kelly Fryer, *Reclaiming the C Word: Daring to Be Church Again*.[24] The council discussed selected chapters, applying the ideas to Ascension. The conversations lasted about 40 minutes. All council reports and motions were sent to council members prior to the meeting for thought and prayer so that at the meeting most decisions took only minutes. Appendix 6 is a meeting agenda illustrating the council's new functioning.

December 2007

The Call Committee presented the candidate to the council for information and support. The congregation meeting date to call the candidate was set for January 5 and 6. The interim senior pastor's transition work was for the most part complete except for staff reviews and exiting. The interim senior pastor proposed to the Human Resources Committee the increase in compensation of two staff people so as to bring them up to synod guidelines. Previous compensation decisions were based on the senior pastors' relationships to staff members. The supervising interim pastor began the move to compensation decisions based on more objective criteria.

January 2008

On January 5 and 6 a special congregation meeting was held for the purpose of extending a call to the candidate for senior pastor. The vote passed overwhelmingly.

The first weekends of the month following worship services, forums were held to discuss the 2008 General Fund budget, and on how to meet the 2007 synod benevolence obligation. By the end of the month, enough revenue had been received to pay the synod benevolence in full for the second year in a row. Although cash flow continued to be

[24] Kelly A. Fryer, *Reclaiming the C Word: Daring to Be Church Again*. Lutheran Voices (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

tight, all bills were being paid on time and the credit card balance had finally been paid in full.

The interim senior pastor's last day of ministry at Ascension was January 20, 2008. The event was marked with public relinquishing at the end of worship of authority over baptism, communion, preaching, and leadership of the congregation.

Summary of Time-Sequence Analysis

Beginning with a situation of heightened internal conflict, lack of clarity and agreement on roles and authority, inadequate policies and procedures, and other organizational issues, this interim period was a time of refocusing purpose and behaviors. Initially intentional use of directive power brought order to a chaotic system. Early in the interim, an intentional shift occurred in the form and use of power toward communally generated power. Communicative power was the eventual goal and was attempted to a limited extent, but had not become the norm by the end of the interim period.

A theology of radical incarnation guided the interim processes, with the congregation and leadership actively engaging the Holy Spirit. Human reasoning, actions taken for the good of the community and the glory of God, and careful stewarding of the Lord's resources—human, financial, and so on—were seen as activities of the Spirit. God worked through human effort.

Explanation Building

Units of analysis for this study are central themes underlying the congregation's history and functioning. Introduced here are the themes: *Environment and Context, Power and Leadership, Conflict, Organizational Restructuring, Trust, and Conventional Interim Tasks*. The units of analysis are briefly described as they pertain to Ascension.

The next section builds an explanation of how the Holy Spirit acted in those ways to develop Ascension to the congregation it is becoming.

<div align="center">Environment and Context</div>

In 1966, the suburb in which the congregation is located was still incorporated as a village, with about 2,000 in population.[25] It had no centralized downtown district, but was mostly scattered developments and businesses. However, because of the confluence of major interstate highways, easy access to the metropolitan area, migration of families from both urban and rural areas, and baby-boomers' increasing affluence, the suburb rapidly grew in home construction and business development. The northeast corner of the intersection of I-94 with I-694 and I-494 became the de-facto downtown, only two miles from Ascension's eventual location.

A working gravel mine was gradually being reclaimed as an urban neighborhood. As the rock was removed in an easterly direction, behind was developed shopping areas, town homes, and office spaces. At the time of the interim period under study, the mine was still producing materials that fed the regional building boom.

Potato fields and farms surrounded the gravel mine and new housing developments. Farm land was rapidly being converted from agricultural to residential and retail uses. The common development of rural areas growing into small towns and then progressively larger towns was skipped altogether. Instant buildings and a culture of newness and consumption was one outcome. The building fever also came to Ascension, most noticeably in the construction of the most recent sanctuary in 2000. Just as people were flooding into the new shops and homes of the area, it was a mantra of Ascension,

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[25] City of Maple Grove, "The History of Maple Grove," http://www.ci.maple-grove.mn.us/content/139/159/default.aspx (accessed September 26, 2007).

"build and they will come." All that the congregation had to do was construct an attractive facility and people would flood into the church. This was later shown to be a seriously mistaken assumption.

At the same time, major industrial development was occurring in the surrounding communities. The Target Corporation built a new campus a mile east of Ascension, with office space, new homes, and parks. A new hospital was being built two miles to the west. Housing developments were springing up all around. A corn field across the highway from the church campus was planned to be developed into homes within a few years of this interim period. A sports stadium was briefly promoted a few years previous for the area one mile to the east, and then in 2007 in the community of Blaine a few miles further east.

In mid-2007, the market for high-risk loans bottomed out, dragging down the building boom with it. Development in the suburbs surrounding the congregation was more robust than that of most of the country, so while building did slow down, it did not stop altogether. Employment remained high and home foreclosures were relatively low.

There were eighteen other religious organizations within 2.3 miles of Ascension, including three other Lutheran churches. Therefore, Ascension could not assume it had a captured market as is possible for single churches in small towns. Ascension had to identify and promote its uniqueness in a competitive religious market. The missional approach to this interim period led Ascension members to become attuned to the Holy Spirit's lead, strengthened them spiritually, and increasingly helped them become responsive to needs beyond its own members, an approach that developed Ascension's identity and uniqueness.

Power and Leadership

The expression of power and the formation of leadership in the following sections are described by two types of reason: instrumental and communicative. *Instrumental reason* is where the reasoning subject dominates the object as a tool for the interest of the subject. Action based on this type of reasoning is oriented toward success, toward "attaining a subjectively formulated purpose."[26] Further, the subject itself decides the means by which to achieve its purpose, and it "calculate[s] other foreseeable consequences of the action as secondary effects" of its own success.[27] Even the coaction form of power described by Stortz is founded on instrumental reasoning. The power actors have preconceived goals for acting, as well as preconceived notions of how the actions should occur. Their very intent of acting in concert with others is a *preconceived* framing, formed out of *instrumental* reasoning.

Communicative reason and action seeks a situation free from domination. "In Habermas's proposal, communicative action entails reaching understanding and agreement as well as the social coordination or integration of action that flows from communicatively achieved agreements."[28] The *Vision Summit* in November 2006 was an overt exercise in communicative action, the kind of action underlying the interim process and which preempted clergy domination or Arendt's "violence."

Power and leadership formation during this interim period are first described from the view of *instrumental reason* because it is the most familiar in our culture. However, even Arendt's theory of power does not satisfactorily explain *why* a group would grant

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[26] Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*, 100.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

power to someone. Since it works out of a framework of subject using power on an object, it does not adequately explain consent, and it does not sufficiently demonstrate how power, as it was enacted, was kept from becoming dominating charismatic power. *Communicative reason and action* describes better what occurred during key interim processes in which the basis of authority resided not in an office, or organizational position, or possessed knowledge, or appealing personality, or even revelation, but authority based on those who make decisions being those who directly bear the consequences.

Power and Leadership Understood within *Instrumental* Reason

As described in chapter two, power is a social phenomenon, belonging to a group and bestowed on a leader. Ascension's previous pastoral leaders have all primarily exercised charismatic power even though they also had bureaucratic power. The founding pastor, as missional developer, had only charismatic power until the congregation was formed. By his tireless knocking on doors, visiting new families moving into the area, inviting people to worship, he exercised the power of his own personality and compassion. People came to church in response to him as a person. He led the church by the *relationship* he had with parishioners, rather than by the parameters of the role he held in an organization.

The founding pastor was very effective as a charismatic leader. His methods were the widely-practiced way that Lutheran Church in America congregations were formed in the post-World War II era. Members allowed him the power to make decisions on their behalf because it was efficient and easy in a newly formed congregation. It was also common in the Lutheran Church in America for pastors to dominate decision making,

including being president of congregations and councils by their letter of call.

Congregations founded under such a power-structure tended to have strong

organizational roles for clergy even after merging into the ELCA. This was the case for

Ascension.

But as the congregation grew in membership, a shift in organization and

leadership needed to occur. Ascension rapidly grew into a corporate-size church within a

couple of years of its formation, yet continued to function as a pastoral-size

congregation.[29] Leadership remained primarily that of the pastor making decisions by the

congregation's acquiescence. Church-size theory maintains that pastors function

differently and that decisions are made at different organizational levels, according to

sizes of congregations. Ascension, functioning like a pastoral-size congregation, did not

allow the development of ministries needed in a congregation of its size, most notably in

Christian education, fellowship, and community outreach.

When the ELCA was formed through merger in 1987, congregation constitutions

were rewritten to conform to the new church structure and policies. This meant that for

Lutheran Church in America congregations, lay people rather than clergy were to serve as

congregation presidents. This caused a power shift at Ascension and the beginning of lay

people asserting leadership. The senior pastor at the time resisted the change. The

leadership struggle continued until the 2006 interim period and the Vision Summit

explicitly claiming a congregation call to *shared* leadership.

At Ascension, charismatic power had not been transformed to bureaucratic power,

a move that often parallels a change in functioning from pastoral to program to corporate

size congregations. A charismatic leader inspires and commands through personal

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[29] Mann, *The in-between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations*, 19-28.

magnetism, and is the center of communication and decision-making. "The charismatic leader is the sole possessor of the goods and maintains these under his control at all times."[30] Because of power through personal relationships, each follower is directly accountable to the charismatic leader, with no intervening bureaucratic structure. The leader decides who fills which positions and enforces the decision by recognizing or withdrawing from the relationship. Since decision-making takes place on a relational level and only through the charismatic leader, this enforcement is effective.

Charismatic leadership makes decisions by decree. "There are no formal rules, institutions, or legal-judicial procedures."[31] The leader makes decisions and announces them to followers who have little say in their formulation. Followers give their consent to this structure because of the favors, favoritism, attention and so on that the charismatic leader bestows on them, or they acquiesce under threat of the charismatic leader's wrath.

Charismatic power is limited by the shortcomings of the leader, which sooner or later are exposed. "Charismatic leadership is a temporary and unstable phenomenon, always contingent on the leader's ability to prove his or her charismatic powers to followers."[32] When the charm wears off, the leadership is challenged. This occurred at Ascension at least as far back as the mid-1980s. The congregation had simply grown too large to be managed by one person in an inter-personal manner. The ensuing struggle was founded on a perception that power is limited and thus for another to have power, one's own is diminished. The peculiar nature of power, like love and generosity, that increases as it is shared was not understood by those wielding power.

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[30] Stortz, *Pastorpower*, 85.

[31] Ibid., 86.

[32] Ibid., 87.

The pastor previous to this interim period also had acted from a position of charismatic power. He led by fiat. One example was dispensing with devotions at staff meetings and instead studying excerpts from Kirbyjon Caldwell and Walt Kallestad, *Entrepreneurial Faith: Launching Bold Initiatives to Expand God's Kingdom.*[33] His intent seemed to be to mobilize staff around his vision for Ascension's future, but by removing devotions from the meetings, he unintentionally substituted mega-church philosophy for the Lord's mission.

Two weaknesses to his position became quickly apparent. He acted from a position of charismatic power that is inherently tenuous, and his authority depended on acquiescence. First, the pastor had inherited a history of distrust in senior pastors and did not understand the need to demonstrate trustworthiness. As a consequence, his dependence on charismatic power was limited from the beginning.

Second, he had not *legitimized* that charismatic power with the council and staff, which is moving from people's acquiescence to their overt consent. The process of legitimizing charismatic power comes through celebrating personal achievements and giving public accolades. By dominating communication, he essentially blocked any expression that would lead to public legitimization of his charismatic power by the congregational *leadership*. In contrast, every worship service was public consent of his charismatic power by *the rest* of the congregation. As a consequence, worshippers had overtly given him power, legitimizing his charismatic power among them, whereas the congregation council had not.

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[33] Kirbyjon Caldwell, Walther P. Kallestad, and Paul Sorensen, *Entrepreneurial Faith: Launching Bold Initiatives to Expand God's Kingdom*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2004).

This then developed into two opposing realities: high conflict with council and high favor with the rest of the congregation. The pastor's ending at Ascension was marked by the majority of the worshipping public's support and favor, while the congregation's leadership had lost all confidence and trust in him. Since the *council's* power was solely bureaucratic, its legitimacy granted once per year at annual elections, they did not have the regular, weekly legitimization that came with worship as did the senior pastor. They thus quickly lost the congregation's support when events went badly.

The pastor assumed his power was a *commodity* he possessed instead of a social relationship in which power belonged to the people and is given to the leader in trust. When that power was taken back by the council unilaterally and by the staff through avoidance and resistance, the pastor became shocked and confounded.

Two actions led to power being rescinded by the congregation leadership. The first action leading to his loss of power was his attempt to address the financial crisis of the congregation. Creditors were calling office staff with threats of collection proceedings, mortgage payments drained funding for ministry, and council was slow to arrive at solutions. So the pastor explored securing a line of credit to temporarily satisfy creditors. The council had not authorized the inquiry and would not permit that action without a congregation vote of approval. This was the point at which some of the council conflicted with the pastor, although other factors also played a part.

The other action came out of the pastor's tendency to lead by decree. Out of the construction of the new sanctuary came plans for renovating the former sanctuary (Grace Hall). The previous senior pastor under whom the new sanctuary was built, had left plans for the renovation in the hands of a council member. The arrangement seemed to grant

power to the council member to pursue the plans. However that power was not given by the members to either the council member or the council in general. When the deteriorating financial situation prevented pursuing the plans, the pastor announced that any former plans for Grace Hall would be scuttled. This effectively deflated any power the council member thought she possessed and turned her against the pastor. Out of *charismatic* power, the previous pastor granted custody of the plans, and out of *charismatic* power the succeeding pastor withdrew that custody. In both cases the decisions drew upon an emotional relationship, with strong emotions expressed in response.

Charismatic power can quickly devolve into tyranny. While the senior pastor's charismatic power was strong through the congregation's weekly consent in worship, the pastor's power in relation to the staff and council had been withdrawn. Because he operated entirely from charismatic power, the power of his charm and will, there was no bureaucratic power on which to fall back. His office as senior pastor had little meaning and he had not been given the role of supervisor by any public decision. When power is lost but the position remains, tyranny results. Tyranny is the complete *absence* of power. It depends on the atomization of society, turning individuals against one another.[34] When the group ceases, power dissipates, and the instrumental force of tyranny prevails. While the situation at Ascension never devolved that far, the pastor did begin to show tyrannical behavior by withholding information, intentionally or unintentionally pitting one staff against another, and showing signs of paranoia. He had reason to be paranoid.

One of the primary actions of the interim period at Ascension was transforming a structure based on charismatic power into one based on bureaucratic power. Bureaucratic

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[34] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 55.

power as used here is organized, institutional power that is governed by procedures and policies, with *formal* accountability to the people who bestow that power. Bureaucratic power endures beyond the office holder, but is more difficult to develop. Ascension had previously turned to the charisma of its pastors as the basis of its functioning, rather than develop processes and structures within the congregation that engaged members themselves in leadership. Charismatic leaders tend to be tall, flashy, good-looking, the center of attention. The interim pastor during the period of study had none of these qualities, and thereby was more able to facilitate Ascension's shift from a charismatic to a bureaucratic power structure.[35] *Bureaucratic power structure* is marked by policies and procedures, offices with delineated authority, disseminated decision-making, lines of accountability and leadership acted out of a role rather than relationship.

Missionally, a bureaucratic power structure is accountable to the Lord and carries out the Lord's mission at the direction of the Lord. Ascension discerned its own direction through a bureaucratic structure of communally listening and debating, and then being responsible to each other for results following the debate. There also was an emotional shift from a relationship with God as that of friend and comfort who loves like a benevolent grandmother overlooking misbehaviors, to that of parent who expects better behavior and has chores for people to do.

The interim pastor began with the assumption that power is a social phenomenon that is gained through community organizing. Simply occupying the office of senior pastor had proven to be powerless in itself. Power had to be organized. Not even charismatic power that came by leading worship could be assumed because the very fact

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[35]From the *Interim Period Review*, June 19, 2007, one of the interviews conducted by an independent consultant, The Rev. Dr. Mark Bents.

of the interim pastor's presence in worship meant that the congregation had lost a beloved pastor under disturbing circumstances. The interim pastor's initial action was to establish bureaucratic power, beginning with official action by council to make him direct supervisor of all staff and to whom all staff would be accountable. Enforcing that would be difficult, but he now had legitimate authority for the exercise of bureaucratic power with staff. The rest of the interim would be organizing power through community and private conversations, through establishing policies and procedures, through training and holding accountable staff, council and committee leaders, and through conversations between followers of Christ who were equals before God.

It is asserted that bureaucratic power is given by God in Gen 1:28. Rather than drawing attention to oneself as does charismatic power, it is power that is expressed as agent of another. It is that agent relationship that checks bureaucratic power from becoming autocratic power. It is always accountable to the Lord who consented to the use of power, and who can rescind it. Bureaucratic power continues the creative impulse of bringing order to chaos. It establishes boundaries and makes places safe. It marks out territories and defines their use. It bestows identity through naming, such as creating job descriptions, and thereby shares the Lord's creative power. Bureaucratic power is not a secular substitute for God's reign, but a very expression of God's kingdom come. At its best, bureaucratic power stands in the apostolic and prophetic traditions of seeking God's justice and righteousness. Such power does not promote its own ideas of what is right. Rather, it declares God's intent however imperfectly perceived. Bureaucratic power is a means of the Holy Spirit acting in the world to bring order and propriety and respect to God's creation.

Power and Leadership Understood within *Communicative* Reason

There were two over-arching goals of the interim senior pastor upon entering this interim setting: that of bringing order to chaos and that of introducing a different power paradigm in the functioning of the congregation. Pastoral and lay leadership was being renegotiated but had become mired in conflict. Conducting congregational life when all is seen as *things* to be managed or manipulated (reification) had sucked vitality from community and ministry. The members were seeking a different way of being church.

The congregation was founded in a time of rapid denominational expansion in the Midwest. At the time there was vigorous competition among Lutheran bodies to establish the first congregation in a particular geographical area due to an agreement between the largest of the three national Lutheran organizations that whoever was able to sustain a Lutheran presence in a specified area would be able to develop a congregation there without competition from the others. Numbers of members, dollars, and so on were the criteria for comparison. This drove thinking further into reification. Concepts related to church and ministry became *things* to manage and manipulate. Fellowship, worship, spiritual development, prayer, communal life, calling, and mission all became secondary considerations for they could not be easily measured.

Ascension grew rapidly in membership and built three sanctuaries in forty years. But the secondary considerations were neglected. When all reality is seen as things to manipulate, leadership becomes a matter of deciding what will happen *to* things, including people. Leadership functioning eventually became that of domination with power being the *instrument* by which the will of a leader would prevail—until things fell apart.

The senior pastor just prior to this interim period began at a time when the roles of pastors and lay leaders were already being renegotiated within the social structure of the congregation. However, the pastor (and other leaders) did not recognize this fact. He proceeded to introduce a different model of being church but failed to provide sound reasons for convincing others to accept the model.[36] The fallout cascaded into outright distrust and hostility at numerous levels and with numerous individuals, resulting in his resignation.

The interim senior pastor entered a situation where the power of the previous senior pastor had been revoked by the council and evaded by the staff. While the previous pastor retained *member support*, he did not translate that support into active power. The interim senior pastor had assumed an office that was stripped of power, trust and authority. Power, in Arendt's understanding as the ability of people to act in concert, would have taken years of coalition-building. The interim senior pastor had only weeks. In the meantime, the congregation as community was disintegrating.

The interim senior pastor blatantly and intentionally committed "violence," in Arendt's understanding.[37] He used the instruments of policy-making, community organizing, and bureaucratic reorganizing that included only a few members in the actual decisions and actions. He did not so much *grasp* power in the sense that power is a commodity to have and to hold, but manipulated social structures so as to create a position from which to operate. However, this was not fully *structural violence* whereby those who endure the consequences of decisions are not themselves the makers of those

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[36] Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*, 96.

[37] Arendt, *On Violence*, 51.

decisions. Each of the initial four actions involved others in collaboration, and those other people brought some degree of consequence back upon the interim senior pastor.

The first act was to form an *Interim Transition Team* which guided the interim process and advised the interim senior pastor. The team consisted of four highly regarded, respected elders of the congregation. They were of such character that they were willing to transcend the conflict of the congregation, to listen to various viewpoints, and to work together. The interim pastor solicited names from council and staff and other congregation members of those who fit criteria for this team. Those names mentioned most often were interviewed by the interim pastor prior to his selection of the team. He then presented the names to the council for official recognition. The interim senior pastor instantly had vicarious history with the congregation through the team. The team gave direct insight and feedback from the congregation that bypassed filtering from staff, council, and special interest groups. The team also provided wise, accurate, effective counsel on actions that the interim senior pastor would introduce. Finally, the team assisted in communicating back to the congregation on behalf of the interim senior pastor. Yet the team also served as corrective to the interim senior pastor, critiquing his actions and at times disagreeing with his actions.

A second act was establishing a *Human Resources Committee*. Prior to this, a Mutual Ministry Committee functioned both as personal advocate to council for individual staff members and in an employment capacity. The two roles, advocacy and employment oversight, ran counter to each other with the result that committee did little. The two roles were separated by the interim senior pastor, with Human Resources Committee responsible for employment oversight and Mutual Ministry Committee

responsible for staff support and advocacy. Human Resources then essentially became an *instrument* for controlling staff. It regulated staff behavior by setting limits, institutionalizing procedures, imposing roles and expectations in the form of job descriptions (previously some staff wrote their own job descriptions!), and instituting regular review and other systems of accountability. By these actions, staff functioning began to move from a basis of personal relations with selected, favored people, to a basis of organizational position.

A third act of the interim senior pastor to regain power and authority in the senior pastor position was to make that position the direct supervisor of all staff. Previously, there had been a multi-tiered organizational hierarchy of reporting behind which staff could hide and accountability could be avoided. All sorts of misbehavior resulted because responsibility for supervision was tossed up and down the hierarchy. Making the interim senior pastor direct supervisor of all staff prevented any dissolving of accountability inside the organizational structure. It also served to hold the interim senior pastor accountable to council for the behaviors and performance of the staff.

A fourth act toward re-establishing the senior pastor position was the interim senior pastor conducting numerous one-on-one interviews with congregational leaders. However, the posture of the interim senior pastor was not that of seeking a relationship between the other leader and the *person* of the interim senior pastor. The posture was that of seeking a relationship between the leader and the *office* of the senior pastor. Thus the goal was not that of developing friendships with those interviewed but that of establishing a mutually defined relationship upon which the two people would engage future conversation and action. Personal interviews drew on the historical way the people

related to their pastors' charisma, while responding to them in ways that negotiated a different relationship. Through the interviews the interim senior pastor built political capital outside of the staff, council, and special interest groups, including the Interim Transition Team itself.

It is important to note that these actions were not taken to re-establish and solidify power in the office of the senior pastor, although at some level they did function that way. The purpose of these actions was to create a platform from which future dialogue could take place. As *interim*, the senior pastor already had reduced influence because of being temporary, unknown (at least initially), not called by the congregation, and unwanted (at least by some). This situation had the additional disadvantage of a position stripped of authority and power. One of the core conditions fundamental to communicative action is that of *reciprocity* where all voices get hearing as full participants.[38] The interim senior pastor was not a full participant until the position was re-established. In communicative action, those who take the risks are to be the ones who also make the decisions. If the interim senior pastor was to take on the substantial risks associated with change and with promoting a missional agenda, he needed to also have a position in which to participate in decisions.

Once the interim senior pastor had regained a position by which he could be a *full participant* in communicative action, he then proceeded to initiate numerous events in which members of the congregation engaged in discussions exploring God's mission and the congregation's calling to that mission. The value of fallibility was expressed early on, whereby all propositions, understandings, and truth claims were open "to future

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[38] Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*, 97

confirmation and strengthening, or to critical correction, modification, and learning, or to overturning, redefinition, and new norm formation."[39]

Missional orientation rescues intentional use of power from becoming instrumental. Mission is not a *thing* that a congregation does, but is a relationship of being and participating in the Lord's redemption and reconciliation of all creation. Power is not an end in itself or a commodity for establishing and sustaining one's position in society. Power is the very presence of the Holy Spirit acting in the world,[40] through people in communicative relationship. Permeating the entire expression and engagement of power during the interim time was the sense of the Spirit of the Lord acting within that power, of the Spirit participating in communicative reasoning that led to action, and of the Spirit retaining judicial authority over power.

Conflict

Functioning at one church-size level when another level of functioning is needed always results in conflict. The founding pastor continued to function throughout his twenty-seven years at Ascension at the pastoral-size level. As the congregation grew past that level of functioning, his ministry was marked by increasing conflict. The conflict continued past his term of service because the congregation did not restructure organizationally to reflect its membership size.

The subsequent senior pastor led by the force of his personality rather than developing the capacity of the members to make decisions and determine direction. He led the construction of Ascension's third sanctuary during the building boom of the

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Lee E. Snook, *What in the World Is God Doing? Re-Imaging Spirit and Power* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 53.

surrounding area (see appendix 2). The second sanctuary, built in 1978, had no windows, was dark stone and wood, and had troublesome acoustics. A bright, new, spacious facility was felt needed to welcome those attracted to the bright, new restaurants and homes being built in the area. Decisions around whether to build, what to build and what designs to incorporate was nominally passed through a committee, but the senior pastor dominated the decisions.

Dissent over the new sanctuary was not addressed directly and openly. While decisions to build were efficiently made, the consequence was that problems were not resolved. Dissent has two possible outcomes. When ignored or overruled, it festers into erosion of trust and undermining of authority. But if dissent is allowed expression, addressed directly and given time, it can engage people even while they disagree, and can even strengthening the prevailing decision. The concerns of dissenters were not completely addressed prior to the building of sanctuary. The cost of this error was unmanageable debt and discouragement among members. Before it translated into erosion of trust, the senior pastor resigned.

Ascension's third regularly called senior pastor inherited accumulated problems, including severe financial challenges. He too led by charisma, but by that time, the organizational and financial challenges could not sustain leadership based on personal relationships. A sharing of expertise was essential through joint effort coordinated by key lay leaders, with decision-making occurring at all levels. The third senior pastor had not built the relational base that is necessary for charismatic leadership by the time the crisis hit. It had become critical to build and act out of bureaucratic power. Charismatic leadership was his natural mode and seemed most efficient in the time of crisis, but was

inherently unstable. There were too many relationships to develop quickly. Consequently, messages got mixed up, communication was confused, expertise was not coordinated, and eventually trust was lost. His term lasted eighteen months with members in an uproar and council and staff in retreat.

At the start of this interim period there was intense anger among members, feelings of shock at how so much went wrong so quickly, confusion as to exactly what had happened, distrust of council, and differences among staff. Conflict between members and council was quickly addressed at the congregational meeting of February 12, 2006, the day before the interim pastor began his term, although suspicion and distrust lingered well into the start of the new council of 2007. The interim period was marked by dogged listening by the interim pastor through numerous types of forums for members to express their thoughts and feelings. Comments and positions of others were considered in any actions taken. Leaders responded repeatedly in various ways, such as calling back with information, temple talks prior to worship, special meetings held both on and off site, and so on. Positions were formed with consideration of expressed opinions, and were opened to public debate. Final decisions were processed systematically through communicatively achieved agreements.[41]

All these served to reduce conflict. The turning point from conflict to cooperation occurred through group discernment of God's purposes and Ascension's *calling* to God's mission, which began with the Vision Summit on November 11, 2006. Rallying around the congregation's calling in God's mission drew attention away from persistent problems and gave the congregation direction and purpose by which to proceed into the

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[41] Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*, 100.

future. While problems cannot be ignored, they become manageable when set into the context of the Lord's mission, redemption, and providence.

There is conflict caused by human action and disagreements among people. There is also conflict that occurs when the best efforts and intentions of people stray from God's mission. Ascension experienced this latter source of conflict as well. Construction of the new sanctuary was done for the best of intentions. However, it was not done in fulfillment of any particular command from God. The nominal reason was that more non-members would be attracted to a sparkling, bright sanctuary, but no plan was pursued to invite non-members into the sanctuary in the first place, and little follow-up was done with those who happened to wander in. The latest called senior pastor had plans for increasing congregation membership and making Ascension a force for change in the community, but it was only *assumed* that this was God's purpose for the congregation. Much of the conflict Ascension recently experienced had its root cause in the Lord calling Ascension to a different purpose than that which the congregation was pursuing. The conflict was not so much about members pitted against members as it was congregation against God. The Lord went in a different direction and the congregation was left alone.

> When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed;
>
> when thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
>
> When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created;
>
> and thou renewest the face of the ground. (Ps 104:29-30)

When Ascension began to seek guidance from God first, conflict eased and hope returned. The stage of integration described by Bents earlier, is more than congregation

unity.[42] It is the congregation in alignment with God's mission, carrying out God's

specific purposes for the congregation. It is integration with God's mission being played

out in the congregation's environment at a particular point in history.

Organizational Restructuring

Restructuring has the mechanical aspect of reorganizing roles and responsibilities

of staff, committees, and volunteers. Too often shuffling around chairs and desks and

making charts and forms is assumed to be enough. However, reorganizing fundamentally

addresses legitimacy, expression of power, and accountability. The interim period began

with council action of making the interim senior pastor direct supervisor of staff. The

action *delegated* power from council to pastor, which was an unprecedented act in the

congregation's history. It was a public, formal transition from functioning from

charismatic power to that of functioning within bureaucratic power. It also then made

possible the process of legitimizing the positions and power of the rest of the staff, for the

interim senior pastor then had the authority to develop position descriptions, performance

evaluations, reporting procedures, and decision processes.

On the congregation level, the Holy Spirit was made a part of conversations and

decision-making. All actions were accountable to God and measured against whether

they seemed to be in line with God's ways. Midway through the interim period, out of the

Vision Summit process, Ascension discerned that one of its callings was to "equip people

for living their faith." A cause and effect relationship cannot be established, but that

calling is related to the practice of discerning whether actions were according to God's

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[42] Mark Frederick Bents, "Intentional Interim Ministry: The Development of a Tool to Assess Needs During Pastoral Transition" (D.Min. Thesis, Luther Seminary, 2004), 53.

mission. A need to better identify what God is asking of people came out of the congregation's accountability to the Lord.

Ascension's third calling (the other two being shared leadership and equipping people for living their faith) is *being Christ-like by changing lives*. By the end of the interim period the people of Ascension had yet to fully realize what that calling was to be, but they would come to understand it as they fulfilled their calling to equip people for living their faith. Ascension's future would be in its calling to change lives. The congregation's restructuring would continue until they became an effective force for redeeming, reconciling, and restoring people.

<div align="center">Trust</div>

Trust is a condition of a relationship that can never be earned, demanded or seized. It can only be given. One can demonstrate *trustworthiness*, but one cannot *earn* another's trust. No one is obligated to trust someone just because they did something trustworthy. Trust is what Nathaniel Fick called "moral authority."[43] It is that quality of the relationship in which soldiers will follow their officer into battle. Necessary components of trust are *care* for those who put their trust in you (their well-being above all else), *confidence*, *consistency*, and *competency* (which is simply delivering on expectations).

Demonstrating care for others is done by listening and understanding their perspectives and values. It is acting on their behalf before one's own interests. But even acting for their best interest does not guarantee they will trust. Such care can be seen as weakness or deception. The staff at Ascension had come through a history of broken trust

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[43] Nathaniel Fick, *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 276.

and were skeptical of anything imposed by a senior pastor. When the previous senior pastor was inconsistent in his communication and behavior, their skepticism seemed justified. Care must be demonstrated repeatedly.

Confidence is not obstinacy. Confidence is that internal strength that allows for other voices to be heard without being threatened. Confidence allows for others to shine without feeling diminished. Confidence is knowing oneself apart from others, whereas obstinacy is reaction to others. Much of what fed the growing conflict at Ascension was stubbornness and entrenchment that was reaction to others.

Consistency is demonstrating the same values and behavior repeatedly. It is a component of integrity.[44] With consistency, others come to know what to expect.

Care, confidence, and consistency only go so far, though. At the end, trust also depends on being able to deliver the goods. A caring person who consistently and confidently is present for people will be appreciated when all is well. But trust comes when expectations are carried out with consistency, care, and confidence during *difficult* times. There are numerous tried and true programs for church growth or ministry effectiveness or improved development that pastors shovel onto congregations. But what is expected—and what must be delivered—is *the gospel of Jesus Christ*. When God is lost in delivering the latest and greatest program, trust in pastoral leadership suffers. Intricate planning went into how Ascension would be a great church, but Jesus was not part of the plan. Council had strong ideas about how to salvage the financial disaster of Ascension, but salvation in Jesus was lost in the numbers. *At the heart of the problem of churches in trouble is not seeing how the Holy Spirit makes any real difference in the mundane, earthly decisions people must make each day.*

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[44] Stephen L. Carter, *Integrity* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 39.

Trust is not earned. It can only be given by others. Others give their trust only when they perceive or assume another is trustworthy. People are generally willing to trust their pastors. However, every interim situation requires to some degree the interim pastor demonstrating trustworthiness, because people are willing to suspend their granting of trust when they know the interim pastor's term is short. Interviews have a crucial role in establishing trustworthiness.

This interim senior pastor at Ascension listened to the concerns of those interviewed, valued their positions and ideas, showed willingness to work with them, allowed the expression of even angry emotions, and allowed for inconsistency and uncertainty. The interim pastor and interviewee then discussed how each can assist the other and worked together toward a plan of action. This reassured the interviewee that all was not complete chaos, that there was a force creating order, and that there was direction, which contributed to the trustworthiness of the pastor.

Conventional Interim Tasks

Interim ministry for the last twenty years has been understood as accomplishing five key tasks:

- commitment to new directions in ministry,

- renewing denominational linkages,

- allowing needed leadership change,

- discovering a new identity, and

- coming to terms with [the congregation's] history.[45]

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[45] Loren B. Mead, *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1986), 36-50.

These tasks are instrumental to carrying out the organizational transition of the congregation from one pastor to the succeeding pastor. The intended result is for the congregation and next pastor to engage in mutually supportive ministry that draws on past experiences and traditions, but is not enslaved to past patterns.

A missional approach to this interim period did accomplish the key tasks, but not as the primary purpose to the interim process. A missional approach assumes that the primary task of the interim period is preparing the congregation for its part in the next phase of God's purposes. The next pastor is not the focus of interim preparations, *God's mission* is the focus. Commitment to new directions in ministry has often been that of *the congregation* deciding what it shall do in its near future with a new pastor. A missional approach looks to what God is already doing in the congregation's location and time, and then determines how God is calling the congregation to be involved in God's activities. This discernment process occurred throughout most of the interim period, in the work of the Interim Transition Team, the work of the Demographic Task Force, neighborhood town meetings, the Vision Summit, the Vision Summit Task Forces, the council, and with members daring to ask what God might be expecting of them personally.

Commitment to new directions in ministry was achieved by the congregation engaging in mutual conversation on what God might be up to and where the Spirit might be leading. New directions were communicatively discerned in several forums. Commitment came about through members participating in the discernment process, and through people understanding Ascension's and their own personal callings within God's mission.

Renewing denominational linkages occurred not on the basis of mutual benefits shared by synod and congregation, but rather by an awareness that Church is greater than this congregation, and that this congregation is part of the larger Church through the synod and denomination. The basis for the link is missional not instrumental. Church is evidence of God's kingdom on earth. Any one congregation, and any synodical group of congregations, are but appearance and expression of the one, universal Church of Jesus Christ.

Allowing needed leadership change was a matter of reframing the context of leadership. Leadership moved from domination and imposing one's will to that of creating the environment for communicative dialogue and action. Leadership was not *enabling* in the sense of coaching or encouraging someone to take initiative, but became that of clearing social space so that people could together discern, plan and act. This conventional interim task moved from an instrumental functioning to that of establishing opportunity for leadership to occur.

Discovering new identity went the direction of clarifying Ascension's place in God's mission in the communities surrounding the congregation. It was not an identity chosen by the people for themselves. It was an identity shaped by the three main callings of the congregation: Christ-like by changing lives, equipping people for living their faith, shared leadership.

Coming to terms with the congregation's history was not accomplished if this meant that members were eventually satisfied with the outcomes of their experiences. Nor did it occur when the congregation fully perceived or understood the shifts in power and leadership. Rather, different people would at times make comments like "this was a

wake-up call" and "we had become complacent." The interpretation of their history became one of God leading them in a different direction, and the congregation had not yet awakened to the fact. Coming to terms with that interpretation of their troubles then led to discerning what God was doing and what response the congregation ought to make to what God was doing.

Summary of Explanation Building

Causal links were made to explain the phenomenon of approaching the interim period missionally. Explanations were given across five units of analysis: environment and context, power and leadership, conflict, organizational restructuring, trust, and conventional interim tasks.

Rival Explanations

The propositions examined in this case study, listed in chapter 4, are about the Holy Spirit actively participating in this interim process in identifiable, specific ways. Further, the Holy Spirit carries out God's mission in the congregation's context, and the congregation's ministries are engagement in what the Holy Spirit is already doing. Discerning the acts of the Spirit and the role of the congregation is a communicative process that is itself guided by the Holy Spirit.

However, there might be other interpretations of what happened at Ascension during this last interim period. Major types of rival interpretations are described in Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*.[46] Craft rival explanations have to do with methodology. Real-life rival explanations are about interpretations of data. Each type of rival explanations are addressed as follows.

[46] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed., Applied Social Research Methods Series, vol. 5 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 112-14.

Craft Rivals

Chance

Rather than the Holy Spirit influencing and shaping the development and outcomes of the interim process, an argument can be put forth that these developments and outcomes would have occurred regardless of God's involvement. It just so happened that the congregation was ready for the types of changes that occurred, that the ministry environment was ready for such changes and that the right people had come into place to act on the opportunities that presented themselves. In other words, chance alone accounts for the processes that occurred during the interim period.

Discerning what the Spirit was up to did not occur by chance; it was an intentional act by the interim senior pastor and the congregation together. People do not make decisions and intentionally act by happenstance. It was an intentional act to seek the Lord's will and purposes.

Secondly, the premise chosen was that of the Lord willfully acting in creation and history, rather than the premise of fate or chance. The Lord works through human means, human reason, and human effort. It has been demonstrated in the time-sequence analysis that actions and decisions came about from discerning the Holy Spirit's participation in the congregation's experiences, their intentional actions, and their decisions, not from arbitrary situations.

Flawed Methods

Improper or careless data collection and interpretation results in unreliable or erroneous explanations. Possible questions of inadequate or incorrect data were addressed by extensive collection of data from multiple sources, both from within the congregation

and by independent, outside experts. Interpretation of data was done by two analytical methods for the purpose of compensating for the shortcomings of each.

Time-series analysis as used in this study identified the sequence in which events occurred and described how each built on others. Some events could have occurred in a different sequence, but the overall movement from conflict and chaos through discernment to communicative action required events and developments occurring in the order they did. Shared leadership would not have occurred if domination was not addressed earlier. Equipping people for living their faith would not have been a current priority had not it been discerned as one of the key callings of the congregation. And so on.

Explanation building was conducted thematically, linking theoretical postulates to actual events, behaviors, and outcomes. Questions might arise on whether the data were correctly collected or on their relevance to theory. However, data were collected from numerous sources and compared across types, following generally accepted protocol. Multiple links to theory were made so as to demonstrate the data's relevance.

Investigator bias might be raised. This researcher was also the interim senior pastor who led the interim process. However, the researcher bias objection is not about the influence of the researcher on the interim process, but on the *interpretation* of that influence. To reduce bias in interpretation, several readers of this study at various stages of its writing had commented on and critiqued the researcher's interpretation.

Real-Life Rivals

Different Intervention

Outcomes might be explained by the simple fact that there were different players in this interim period. New lay leaders arose who previously did not have much influence. The changes experienced by the congregation could be explained by there being different personalities and different people talents involved. However, almost all the new leaders had already been members of the congregation and had been active in the life of the congregation prior to the interim period. The influence of these new leaders would have been felt before if the explanation was simply that of different intervention.

Another explanation could be that panic and anger rose to such a pitch that it finally motivated people into different behaviors. It was not so much the Holy Spirit leading the changes but holy terror. However, both panic and anger are survival reactions to threat, not imaginative responses that create new opportunities. Panic and anger cannot account for the cooperation, trust, engagement in the Holy Spirit's mission, willingness to try new ventures, and so on, that also occurred during the interim period. There was some other influence that reduced the emotionality of the congregation, an influence that existed apart from the members themselves. That influence seemed to be the Holy Spirit.

Implementation

The process and practices themselves could have caused the changes that occurred, not the Holy Spirit. This is an underlying assumption of conventional interim training and practices. Learn the methods and apply them rigorously and accurately, then each interim process will result in success.

Another version of an implementation explanation is that the communicative action process itself created what was perceived as the congregation's calling and the current cooperative functioning of the members. There is merit to these two rival explanations. Human intervention whatever its form, as systems theory would suggest, could have caused the observed changes.

In response, the Holy Spirit does not work *from above* and dump holiness on procedures or events. The Holy Spirit works within human means and rational processes, even when the Spirit's involvement is not perceived or acknowledged. Thus, implementation is not a true rival explanation. The Holy Spirit acted within those very processes and practices. An objection might be that the changes could be explained *only* by the processes and practices. However, the congregation did not pursue only processes and practices in its interim period. The congregation intentionally engaged the Holy Spirit *as part* of the processes and practices, never as an add-on.

Super Rival

A super rival explanation recognizes a force larger than that accounted for in the case study. That the Holy Spirit was already moving prior to the interim period and intervention is an explanation other than the postulate that this interim was conducted missionally. Such an explanation asserts that the Holy Spirit would have accomplished the same outcomes whether or not a missional approach to the interim was undertaken. Yet, it was assumed that the Holy Spirit was already and had always been at work within and through the congregation. A missional approach to this interim period consciously addressed the Holy Spirit's influence and sought to align the interim processes with the Spirit's activities. It was this intentionality that gave the members a new vocabulary and

thereby a new awareness of the Spirit's lead. The missional approach does not discount the super rival explanation, and is not superseded by it. The missional approach to the interim process is simply a specific, narrow interpretation of the Holy Spirit's work.

Societal Explanation

Another alternative to this study's explanations is that lay leaders had finally reached a critical mass to overcome former barriers, and were able to function differently and organize differently. Social trends sufficiently explain the interim phenomena without a missional approach. Such an explanation does not require reference to the Holy Spirit. As a social group, members were able to redirect themselves through ordinary, democratic means. Yet, such means often has its end in the greatest benefit to the group.

Much of what took place during this interim was oriented to what was better for those outside the congregation, even to the detriment of the congregation. Only a cause greater than the well-being of the congregation can move a group to sacrifice itself, and it is asserted that cause is the mission of God. However, it is recognized that many groups and organizations provide benefits beyond what's best for themselves. The entire Independent Sector is founded on this principle. Many of them do not reference the divine.

A second social explanation is the changes that occurred during the interim, particularly changes in leadership, can be explained by the postmodern suspicion of authority. Church members are less inclined in this age to easily trust anyone in authority, including church leaders. The changes in the role of the senior pastor and council can simply be attributed to the trend in society in general to less trust of authority and thus greater action on the part of those who are led. However, the postmodern distrust of

authority devolves into nihilism. What actually occurred was a community-wide assertion of the congregation's identity and purpose within God's larger mission. Authority was not reduced during the interim, but rather was reorganized and enhanced.

Summary

This chapter described the events and development of an interim period of a congregation that was conducted along a missional model of congregation functioning. Key themes were explored at length to bring depth of interpretation to the events. Rival explanations were addressed. Demonstrated throughout was the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit through the congregation and its history as a whole, and through the particular process of interim transition.

Ascension Church moved from a situation of chaos and conflict where expectations of pastors, council, staff, and members was not agreed upon or communicated well. Leadership functioning changed from domination toward consensus-building and communicative reasoning. This change was not complete and would take several more years of conscientious effort. The congregation had been blessed and nurtured by the Holy Spirit for 40 years. In the last years the Holy Spirit was raising its expectations of the congregation. It can even be argued that the conflict experienced by the congregation was of the *Spirit's* making, the Lord leading the congregation in a new direction with different purposes for the church. A non-religious euphemism is *growing pains*, but that term does not account for the tangible influence of the Holy Spirit. The resulting conflict was the congregation coming to realize this new calling and adjusting to its demands.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Introduction

This case study describes how a missional approach to an interim period was experienced by a congregation. It describes what happened, why events and changes occurred as they did, and how the events and changes were understood. The study explains how in this particular interim experience the Holy Spirit acted and how the participants engaged in the Holy Spirit's actions.

Several presuppositions guided the start of the interim period and this research. First was a radical incarnation theology, that the Holy Spirit was actively and dynamically involved in what was happening in the congregation's environment, and in what was happening within the congregation itself. The Holy Spirit was restoring the congregation to a calling in what the Spirit was accomplishing in Ascension's context (God's mission), although the congregation was experiencing the Spirit's work as turmoil and conflict. The congregation had a specific part in the Holy Spirit's particular mission in the surrounding communities. The key tasks of the interim process were to discern that calling and then organize ministry around the calling. Grassroots missional organizing was a necessary early step in preparing the congregation to discern its calling and organize its ministries. Grassroots organizing moved authority and power away from its charismatic form in the person of a pastor, to a shared, communal—and at times

communicative—expression within the whole congregation. The congregation's ministry environment was too unpredictable for strategic planning and goal setting to be effective. Instead, experimentation, innovation, and cooperation were key to developing direction and ministries. These were key presuppositions that marked the interim process.

Biblical Identity

Isaiah 43:1-44:8 describes the recent experience of Ascension. The first verse summarizes Israel's history; the Lord created them, the Lord formed them into what they were, and the Lord redeemed them. Culminating this history is their identity in relationship to the Lord, "I have called you by name, you are mine." The people have a role in the Lord's plans, and are the Lord's possession, i.e. are *not* free to pursue their own destiny. Following this description of their relationship to the Lord come promises of the Lord's presence and protection as the people are threatened.

Ascension had been through troubled times, some of their own making. The Lord had called, established, and preserved the congregation for over four decades. The Lord redeemed them from their recent problems, reforming and reestablishing them as a people belonging to God. They will continue to face threats, but the Lord also will continue to protect and hold them close.

In verses 8 and 9 comes the Lord's challenge to the nations. "Let them bring their witnesses to justify them." The Lord calls forth the lesser gods of the nations to stand against the reign of the Lord Almighty. No one shows up. The Lord turns to Israel in verse 10, "You are my witnesses." The purpose and calling of Israel is to declare and demonstrate the reign of the one Lord of all creation.

Ascension was placed in the particular corner of a metropolitan area to be witnesses by their very presence to the reign of God that has come to that place. With them the Lord has marked God's territory. All other gods trespass upon the property of the one Lord and God. Ascension is set in the midst of the growing communities around them to be witnesses to the work and reign of the one, true God that will not allow intrusion by other gods.

The Lord does a new thing (43:19). In the midst of wildness and danger, the Lord nourishes and sustains. Even the wild beasts who would threaten shall honor God. More so, the Lord waters the people when the Lord chose and formed them, *so that* they shall declare God's praise among those who have yet to hear and believe. This is Ascension's ultimate calling. The congregation discerned three callings from God. The first is shared leadership, which was more than organizational restructuring. Shared leadership was learning a new way of being church and being in community with one another. The second calling was equipping people for living their faith. This was primarily preparing congregation members for ministries the Lord had in store for them. Equipping people for living their faith would be an on-going calling that was just beginning at the time the interim period came to an end. The ultimate calling of Ascension is being Christ-like, changing lives. This is the ultimate purpose for which the Lord formed and reformed them. Ascension was to be a force for changing the lives of those who had yet to know the grace and redemption of Jesus Christ, to be God for those who had not yet encountered God.

Somehow things had gone astray. Rather than witnessing to God, members were clawing each other. Conversations and decisions lacked even reference to the Lord. "Yet

you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel!" (43:22). In all honesty, people of the congregation intended to act in the name of God. They thought they were doing the right things. It was hoped and assumed that their decisions were somehow godly and right.

This last interim process moved from assuming that decisions were of God, to actually calling upon God to inform and guide. "Put me in remembrance, let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right," commanded the Lord (43:26). Plans, decisions and actions were set before the Lord for evaluation. Assumptions were tested against facts and spiritual insights. Motivations were stated publicly.

The people of Ascension responded to the Lord. They took notice of what the Holy Spirit was up to within and around them. The Spirit was "water on thirsty land" (44:3). "Grass amid waters, like willows by flowing streams" (44:4) was the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the new ministries and initiatives that occurred during the interim time. More "grass" ministries are sure to come. Ascension shall flourish even more because of the Holy Spirit moving through them.

Isaiah 44:6-8 puts in perspective the reign of God among the cacophony of the gods of fate, entitlement, consumerism, nihilism, narcissism, deism and a hundred other petty isms. "Who is like me? Let him proclaim it, let him declare and set it forth before me," says the Lord. Let the minor deities put their best before the Lord and let all see which is great. Ascension, along with every other congregation of the Lord's making, is the best the Lord puts forth before the world. Ascension is God's best, not because the members are superb and excellent (although they are delightful and precious), but

because the Holy Spirit is revealed in their very humanity and faith. Ascension is witness to the mighty and merciful and steadfast Lord. "Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any." Ascension is testimony to this Lord.

Identity

This interim was a process of turning to the Lord and declaring the reign of the Rock that had come to this place and time. Rather than preparing for the next senior pastor, the missional interim ministry process was preparing the congregation for its part in the next phase of God's mission in the congregation's environment. The tasks before the congregation were and still are:

- discerning what the Holy Spirit was doing within and around the congregation (God's mission),
- determining what was Ascension's role in the Holy Spirit's work (the congregation's calling), and
- describing what the congregation's response was to be to that calling (ministry).

The role of the interim senior pastor was not to be an expert who had answers to problems. The interim senior pastor was a fellow explorer who asked questions that led to deeper insight into the ways of God. The interim pastor's and the congregation's primary work was to wonder and wander in the ways of God.

Determining the congregation's identity is critical for missional engagement. Identity is an understanding of the congregation's calling, and thus is embedded in God's mission. It is ascertained, first, by discovering just what the Holy Spirit is up to in a particular context at a specific historical moment. Then the congregation explores and understands its calling in what the Spirit is doing, i.e. what the Lord is asking of the

congregation. At this point the Lord might not reveal a specific game plan. The calling

might be a general direction, with the congregation turning to reason and experiment for

shaping the calling. As the calling is gradually understood, the congregation's role in

God's missional activity is revealed. The congregation's role is the specific part the

congregation is to play in God's mission, within the social, political, economic, and

spiritual realms of the context in which the congregation exists. This role is the

congregation's identity. From the congregation's role in God's mission is developed the

organizational structures and ministries needed to carry out its role. Conventional interim

ministry has tended to develop organizational structures and functioning, without

discerning God's mission and determining the congregation's role (identity).

Power

The exercise of power was understood to be an act of God. "But you shall receive

power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be my witnesses . . ."

(Acts 1:8) was interpreted literally. Power is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Of

course, because of sin, power is often abused. Power's abuse is taking the name of God in

vain, using the power of God to defame and desecrate the reign of God. Because of this

abuse, Jesus relinquished all power on the cross so as to sap and stop those who defame,

leaving only the reign of God revealed.

Power is the Holy Spirit's activity in the world. Power is not a product given by

the Spirit, a commodity to possess and use, nor is it a quality of being. Power is a social

phenomena that occurs between persons. It is an expression of the Trinity, and an

expression of the Triune God as power is enacted on earth. How that power of God was

manifested in Ascension's history and how it was engaged during the interim process is

central to understanding how Ascension determined and lived out its calling as a congregation.

The phenomena of power has a vast body of theory and literature behind it, yet it is rarely recognized or understood in congregations and other groups that are created by the presence of God (Matt 18:20). The power of God acts within community. It is an incarnate power. Whatever is created, whatever care is done, whatever is made good and right, whatever reconciliation happens, is an act of God and expression of the power of God in the world.

Thus, Ascension as a congregation that is evidence of God's kingdom come on earth, cannot be defined as an organization that provides spiritual services for members. Ascension is a manifestation of the power of God acting in the world. How power was engaged and directed was an extension of its identity.

Importance of This Research

One implication of this case study is that the needs of congregations experiencing an interim period are not so much organizational development (conventional interim tasks) or behavioral changes (systems theory), as they are spiritual issues, specifically missional discernment and alignment. Identifying the purpose of the congregation as it relates to God's activities within a specific context precedes member desires, ministry structure, and property issues. The congregation's calling within God's mission determines the who, what, and how of ministry.

Further, this research demonstrated how a missional process to the interim intervened in conflict and reestablished community. The source of conflict might not be a difference of values or some deficiency in organization. The source of conflict might be

of the Lord's doing! In other words, the Lord might be calling the congregation to a different ministry and focus, but the congregation resists, causing discomfort and confusion. This type of conflict is redemptive, for it drives the congregation back to God. Addressing missional conflict is not about solving (or avoiding) a problem. It is about exploring why the conflict exists and what implications the conflict might have for the congregation.

It is demonstrated here how power is a social phenomena and not a personal quality or a commodity. Therefore, the expression of power is accountable to the social organization that bestows it. The source of all power is ultimately God who is a power relationship in Trinity. Power appearing in creation is an epiphany of God. As it appears in persons or groups it is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Power's purpose is to accomplish the will of God.

Limitations of this Research

This is a study of one congregation at one period in its development. It is not the definitive history of, and certainly not the prophecy for the congregation. Described here were only those elements pertaining to the interim process from 2006 into 2008. Much more occurred that affected the congregation, but the regular, on-going ministries were not included in the scope of this thesis.

Because it was a study of one congregation at one period of time, the results cannot be generalized to other interim situations or congregations. However, the findings can be generalized to theories in the same way that experimental results are generalized to theory.[1] This case described a particular interim situation, from which connections

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[1] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed. Applied Social Research Methods Series; V. 5 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 38.

were made to a theory of missional interim ministry processes. The case study and theories can serve as basis for further quantitative and qualitative research.

Generalization for making policy also cannot be done from this research. The results cannot be applied to other cases for each interim situation and every congregation have their own unique circumstances. This case study serves as starting point for understanding a missional approach to interim ministry. It is not the *only* missional approach. Further exploration of this topic is needed before policy can be established based on its results.

There are also methodological limits to this particular study. Rigorous methodological practices and analyses were followed. However, case studies are not as precise as other scientific methods. These limitations were compensated for by the use of multiple data sources and data types, triangulation of data, and analysis at several levels of the study. While being less precise, case studies can provide a depth of understanding and breadth of scope that other methods cannot.

Future Research

This was a study of one congregation. Future duplication of the missional interim ministry process will validate and refine the theories presented. With additional interims taking a missional approach, rival explanations will be more thoroughly addressed.

Further investigation is needed on whether a missional interim ministry process better prepares a congregation for its future and for ministry with its next pastor than do either the organizational development or health models. Inadequacies of the two conventional models were noted in this study. However, a direct comparison of all three models will be needed in the near future.

How a missional approach, the organizational development model, and the health model supplement and augment each other is not at all clear. At what point the models connect and whether they are even compatible remains unanswered.

Conflict is a powerful motivator. Many church people have a knee-jerk reaction against every instance of conflict. It was asserted in this thesis that conflict at times is not only helpful, but that it may even be an act of God. A theological understanding of conflict as it pertains to interim ministry needs further study, as does discerning types and sources of conflict. A missional view of conflict would look for where and how the Lord is involved in the conflict.

Power is manifestation of the Holy Spirit. God acts within history and within creation. The scriptures testify to this fact. However, the scriptures also testify to the role of powerlessness and kenosis[2] in God's mission. A theological understanding of power for interim ministry needs further exploration. There is also a need for research into the *theoretical* foundations that inform the use of power within interim processes, in particular, how communicative power can be achieved within a traditionally hierarchical ecclesiology.

Leadership in the interim situation described in this thesis took many forms and circulated among many people. How leadership switched between people and who decided the switches are not clear. How leadership is to be understood missionally needs further study. What leadership qualities are needed in order to conduct an interim missionally, and who should bear those missional interim leadership qualities is not defined or decided. The implications for interim ministry training are enormous.

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[2] Kenosis is from the Greek word for *emptying* in Phil 2:7, referencing Is 53:1-11.

In a missional approach it is not clear how different and specialized interim ministry is from settled ministry. Since the 1970s, it has been argued that interim ministry is significantly different from settled ministry, as reviewed in chapter 2. A missional approach seems to blur the differences. The difference between interim ministry and settled ministry might not be that of technique and objectives. The difference might instead be that of opportunity and pace. Further research and discussion is needed on both interim ministry verses settled ministry, and missional interim ministry verses conventional interim ministry.

Introduced in this research was a theological basis for missional interim ministry. Several others over the years have proposed different theological foundations, some of which are described in chapter 3. More discussion remains on the theological and biblical rational for interim ministry in general and missional interim ministry in particular.

Another theological issue not addressed in this thesis and which have been given little attention elsewhere include the role of the prophet for interim ministry. What form and place in interim ministry does prophecy have? Who speaks for God? There has been a tendency in many denominations toward the idea that ordination bestows the mantel of prophecy, speaking for God. However, adequacy of this idea is questionable and needs challenging, particularly from a missional standpoint.

Similarly, what is the form and role of revelation in discerning the will of God? If an individual receives direct revelation, how is that then to be communicated to others and incorporated in the collective deliberation of the congregation? In the interim period studied for this thesis, it was assumed that the Holy Spirit spoke through the collective conversations of faithful people who were seeking insight into God's ways. It was

assumed that God spoke where two or three were gathered in Christ's name. The possibility of the Lord speaking to an individual on behalf of the whole was not incorporated into the interim processes, although it was acknowledged that such revelation might have occurred. The theological basis and practical mechanism to allow for revelation within communicative-missional discernment needs further study.

Power was explored at length. In this thesis it was asserted that power was a social phenomenon, with agency theory providing theoretical framing. The group bestows power on an individual, who exercises power at the will of the group. What was not explored is one's personal responsibility to the group, whether or not power was given to the individual. "Am I my brothers keeper?" is Cain's response that judges the ages (Gen 4:9). A simple affirmation is insufficient. What, precisely, is the responsibility of an individual to others? What can the group demand of individuals who constitute it? Who decides? These are political questions needing theological and biblical answers.

This thesis presented an example of an interim process that was conducted with a missional orientation. Themes and theories were explored at length. It provides a starting point for discussion on missional interim ministry processes. There is much yet to explore.

APPENDIX 1

DEMOGRAPHIC TASK FORCE REPORT

August, 2006

This year Ascension Lutheran Church, Maple Grove, Minnesota celebrates its 40th year of ministry as a congregation. Established among potato fields, it is now strategically located in the midst of high-traffic roadways and a region that is rapidly developing. The area once supplied Minneapolis with produce. Now it is becoming a business and light industrial district. Once it was scattered farms. Now planned are thousands of new homes.

There are 17 other churches within 2.3 miles of Ascension, while 38.1% of Hennepin County's population is "unclaimed," numbering 354,952 people.[1] The Holy Spirit seems to be establishing so many churches in so small an area out of desire that *some* at least witness to the thousands who yet have no place in Christian community. The Lord is holding before Ascension the call to invite into our community of faith the thousands who are not yet part of any church and the thousands more who will be moving to this area.

Projections

The suburbs surrounding Ascension Lutheran Church are expected to grow in population, in number of homes, in office space, in light industrial businesses and in retail stores. Table 8 gives population projections as calculated by the Metropolitan Council. Every zip code area is expected to grow both in population and in households.

Metropolitan Council Population Projections[1]

	Population				Households			
	2000	*2010*	*2020*	*2030*	*2000*	*2010*	*2020*	*2030*
Maple Grove	50,365	64,500	75,700	84,000	17,532	24,900	30,300	34,000
Champlin	22,193	23,700	24,500	25,800	7,425	8,500	9,200	10,000
Osseo	2,434	2,600	2,850	3,300	1,035	1,100	1,200	1,400
Brooklyn Pk	67,388	74,500	80,500	85,000	24,432	28,400	32,000	35,000

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[1]The ARDA, *County Membership Report: Hennepin County, Minnesota*, Pennsylvania State University, http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/reports/counties/27053_2000.asp (accessed May 22, 2006).

[1]Metropolitan Council, *2003 Regional Development Framework – Revised Forecasts, March 8, 2006*, St. Paul, MN, http://www.metrocouncil.org/metroarea/RDFforecasts.pdf (accessed May 22, 2006).

Maxfield Research Inc. designates the area from I-94 east to Zane Avenue (east of US 169) and from I-694 north to Champlin as a "primary market area." Ascension Lutheran Church is at the epicenter of this market area. The area is projected to add 16,000 people between the years 2000-2010 (a 27% growth), and another 11,000 in population between the years 2010-2020. It is projected to add 12,750 jobs (a growth of 62%) between the years 2000-2010, and another 17,500 jobs between the years 2010-2020.[2]

> The greatest increase in population . . . this decade will be among older adults ages 45 to 64. This age group is projected to add 8,500 people . . . (+67%). The portion of this group who are empty-nesters will strongly consider maintenance-free multifamily housing in a downtown environment that is within walking distance of shopping, entertainment, and other services . . ."[3]

One of the "downtown environments" is Osseo, just a block from Ascension. How Osseo develops as a downtown community favorable to the 45 to 64 year old age group will impact Ascension's availability to target its ministry to this age group. In other words, should Osseo develop in a way that attracts this age group, Ascension is "within walking distance" to provide "other services."

The Target Corporation plans to build a new corporate campus in Brooklyn Park at northeast corner of MN610 and US169. The campus will include 8 million square feet of offices for over 26,000 employees, 2 million square feet of retail/commercial space and 3,000 housing units. On the site will be a new park and at least two hotels. Land will also be set aside for a new Hennepin County Library.[4]

The corridor along US 169 is zoned to be mostly industrial and office space. The immediate northeast corner of Highway 610 and US 169 (just west of the Target Campus) was planned for entertainment use. It seems that will now be unlikely and that the land will become industrial. If that occurs, then some of the areas now planned for industrial use, might be rezoned residential, possibly the area between Winnetka Avenue and US 169 and between 101st and 109th Avenues.

The gravel mines in Maple Grove, north of I-694 and to the west of US 169, will continue operations for the next 30 years. As each section of the mine is finished it will be redeveloped into commercial, industrial and residential uses. In the next few years planned are over 5,000 housing units, five million square feet of industrial space, and ten million square feet of retail and office space.[5]

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[2] Maxfield Research Inc., "A Market Potential Analysis for Redevelopment in Osseo, Minnesota," report prepared for Hennepin County Housing, Community Works and Transit, Minneapolis, Minnesota, December 2004, p.8.
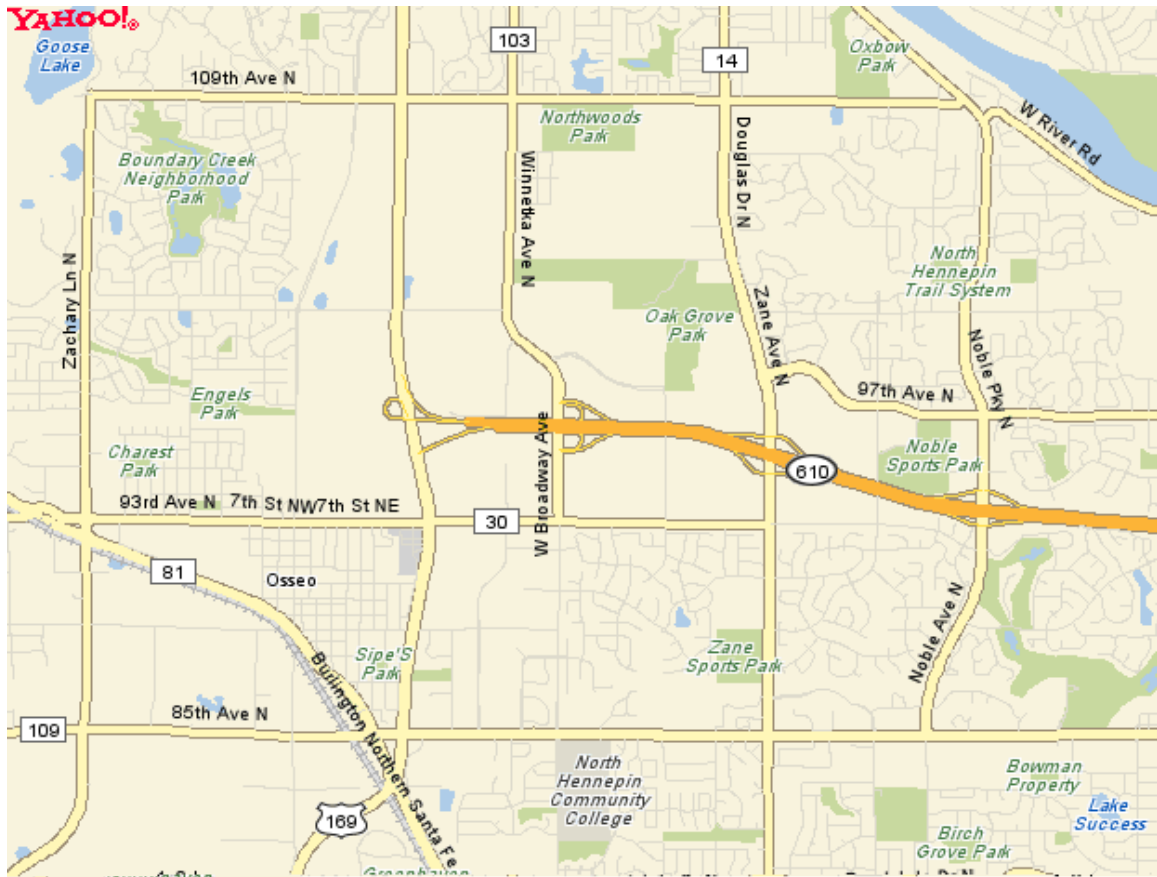
[3] Maxfield, p.9.

[4] Brooklyn Park, *Target Expansion Proposal*, Brooklyn Park, MN, http://www.brooklynpark.org/sitepages/pid1080.php (accessed April 4, 2006).

[5] Maxfield, p.11.

Immediate Area Around Ascension

On the map below, Ascension is located south of Engels Park in the open space just north of County Rd. 30. The large open areas west and east of US 169 are planned to be developed in the next 5 years.

Directly to the north of Ascension Lutheran Church is Ahrens Greenhouse. The company has not made public any plans to move or close. However, once the city of Maple Grove installs water and sewer lines through the area, the value of the property will greatly increase, making it attractive to developers. If the property does get sold, the space most likely will become a combination of single-family homes and town-homes.

Directly east of Ascension, across Jefferson Highway and north of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church is a large field used for agriculture. That part of Brooklyn Park is planned to be the last to receive city services (water and sewer), but will likely receive the services within the next 4 years. The field across from Ascension will become single-family homes in the next 5 years.

St. Stephens Catholic Church in Anoka owns the 40 acres of open space west of Jefferson Highway and south of 109th Avenue. The church plans to retain the property until Brooklyn Park installs water and sewer, expected in the next few years. At that time

the church plans to sell the land for development into single-family homes and town-homes.[6]

Summary

In summary, most of the development of currently open spaces in the areas closest to Ascension will be single-family and town-homes. The Lord has placed Ascension on its current site and is now surrounding the church with new families. However, the change the Lord is bringing will be nearly complete in the next 5 years. Ascension's window of opportunity is short.

The Lord is calling Ascension to be a place of spiritual nurture. Many of the anticipated new residents will not be active in any church and *will not be aware* that they are welcome at Ascension. Therefore Ascension must initiate contact with those moving into the area. Many of them will not be Biblically literate or knowledgeable of the Christian faith. Therefore Ascension will need to provide an extensive array of learning experiences so that people may enter at different levels of biblical and spiritual knowledge.

Because many of the new residents will be new to Christian faith, the current members of Ascension are called be examples and models for them. The members of Ascension need to be people of mature faith and spiritual living so as to teach and lead new Christians by our behaviors and service.

Ascension is at an unprecedented time in its history for tremendous expansion in ministry as the Lord dramatically changes the area's economic and demographic environment. The moment of preparation is upon the congregation for the changes are occurring now and will be complete in the next 5 to 10 years. Ascension is being positioned by God to participate in the changes God is accomplishing. Ascension's role is to provide witness and interpretation of what God is doing in this corner of the world.

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[6] Private conversation with Dick West, Business Administrator of St. Stephens Catholic Church, Anoka, MN, on August 18, 2006.

APPENDIX 2

BUILDING LAYOUT OF ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

Classrooms

Sanctuary
1967

Offices

Atrium

Sanctuary
1978
Grace Hall

Sanctuary
2001

APPENDIX 3

VISION SUMMIT AGENDA AND WORKSHEETS[1]

8:00	Vision Team arrives for final preparations. Meeting area already set up.
8:30-9:00	Participants arrive. Refreshments available.
9:00	MC calls group to order.

           Thanks all for coming.

           Invites pastor for prayer of thanks, promise and hope.

                a. 1 Peter 2:9-10 "God's own people

                b. Periodically throughout the day, Bible passages that describe what the church is.

9:05   MC introduces retreat:

           1. outcome of the Vision Summit is to find key themes to the Ascension's future

           2. the next steps after this summit:

                a. task forces for ways to carry out the vision themes

                b. task forces report back to the congregation in February

                c. committees, staff and other leaders begin carrying out

           3. today's discussions will be fast and fun, but that's OK.

                Remember your teacher's advice – go with the first answer.

           4. introduce and thank: Vision Summit team

9:15   Form dyads.

           MC instructs to form two lines, one from each line to form dyads

9:25   Partners get acquainted.

           Three quick ice-breaker questions

9:30   First joke and door prize.

            1. Emphasize that this will be a day of serious discussion, but done in light-hearted way with a joke contest.

            2. During the day participants will be invited to come up front to tell a joke. A special door prize will be given to the best joke-teller at the end.

            3. MC begins by telling a joke.

            4. Door prize to the person who has been a member the longest.

9:40-10:00   Bible Study on *The Church's Identity*.

            1. Review the instructions at the bottom of the handout.

            2. Explain that this is the format for the day:

                a. make a decision by oneself,

                b. discuss with partner until you arrive at a common decision,

                c. join another dyad to reach agreement as a group of four.

            3. The theological basis for this process is the Holy Spirit present

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[1] Adapted from Steven M. Nelson, *The Miracle of Vision: Discovering God's Vision for Your Church* (Combined Locks, WI: Christ the King Lutheran Church, 1995).

and working "wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in my name."
(Jesus in Matthew 18:19-20).
4. MC asks for questions of clarification.

10:00-10:15   Break: collect index cards of key words to the Bible Study.
10:15   Joke and door prize.
     1. Invite someone to tell a joke.
     2. Record the jokester's name and punch line on a joke board.
     3. Door prize to the newest member of the church present.
     4. Matthew 5:14,16 The church is the "light of the world."
10:20   MC explains the morning's process.
     1. Each person is given a set of blue sheets. Working alone, each
       person assigns points to the statements on the sheets. Each
       sheet's points can total only to 20. Thus, some statements
       will receive no points, while others will have more points
       depending on how strongly you agree with the statement.

     2. Then each dyad discusses each sheet and comes to agreement on
       the number of points for each statement. The points are
       then recorded on two sets of yellow sheets. One set of
       yellow sheets is kept for the next step. All the blue sheets
       and one set of yellow sheets are collected by the Event
       Assistants.
     3. You have about 10 minutes to complete the blue sheets and 20
       minutes to come to agreement as dyads and record your
       points on the yellow sheets. Remember to go with your first
       impressions and do not dwell long on any of the sheets.
     4. Hand out sets of blue sheets and yellow sheets.
11:00   Joke and door prize.
     1. Invite someone to tell a joke. Record on joke board.
     2. Door prize to the one who lives farthest from Ascension.
     3. Isaiah 58:12, The church is the "restorer of streets."
       Church is called to redeem society and restore communities
11:05   Form groups of four.
     1. Each dyad partners with another.
     2. Green sheets are distributed.
       a. each group of four is assigned a number,
       b. each green sheet is labeled with the group's number.
     3. Groups of four again discuss, agree on points distributed on each
       sheet.
     4. Green sheets are collected by Assistants and recorded by Data
       Team.
11:50   Feedback
     1. MC thanks participants for their hard work this morning.
     2. Feedback on how strongly they agree with their group's
       decisions.

a. "Fist to Five":

>> 5 fingers = complete agreement,
>> 3 fingers = OK with results,
>> fist = this is a waste of my time.

> 3. Brief discussion on the comfort level of this retreat so far.

Noon   Lunch, Joke and door prize.

1. Invite someone to tell a joke. Record on joke board.
2. Door prize to the one who can name all of Ascension's pastors.
3. Table prayer.
4. Instructions for lunch. Lunch is only 30 minutes.
5. Data team records results of green sheets on grids, makes copies.

12:30   Joke and door prize.

1. Invite someone to tell a joke. Record on joke board.
2. Door prize to the one who can name the most staff members.
3. Give thanks to Refreshments Coordinator and team.
4. Isaiah 49:6b, God gives the church as a "light to the nations."
   > Ascension is God's gift to the world.
   > Ascension is a light that reveals God to those in darkness of ignorance or doubt.

12:35   Ivory Sheets

1. Each person is given a set of *Green Sheet Results* grid and an Ivory Sheet.
2. MC explains that the grid shows what is important in each vision category: *focus, feel, orientation, style*.
2. Using the grids, individually complete the Ivory Sheet.

1:00   Regroup as four, Pink Sheets

1. In the groups of four from the morning exercises, discuss and agree on the top 8 characteristics.
2. Assign points to each characteristic, totaling only 20 points.
3. Discuss and record the remaining questions.
4. As each group finishes, Assistants collect the pink sheets.
5. Data team processes the pink sheets.
6. Pink sheet results projected for group to see.
7. Top 3 or 4 statements describe this church in the next 5 years!

1:30   Break

1. Turn in pink sheets.
2. Tally pink sheets and display for participants to see.

1:45   Joke and door prize.

1. Invite someone to tell a joke. Record on joke board.
2. Door prize to the youngest participant.
3. Ephesians 1:23, The church is "Christ's body."
   > Today, as Christ's body we have discerned God's calling for Ascension. God's Holy Spirit has spoken through our conversations.

1:50   **Large Group Discussion**

         1. Ask the participants, "what do you see in these results?"

            Allow a lot of time for reflection and comment.

         2. Keep the vision results to 3 or at most 4 statements.

            If some are close, consider combining them.

         3. Ask if anyone sees connections between the vision statements

            and the key words from the opening Bible study.

2:30   Next: Vision Task Forces

         1. Following this day, task forces will be recruited for each vision

            statement.

         2. The task forces will identify possible ways to carry-out the

            vision statements in the next 5 years at Ascension.

         3. Pass around sign-up sheets for each task force.

         4. The task forces will report back in February at an evening event.

2:45   Conclusion

         1. Review the jokes and have people indicate their favorite joke by

            applause. Award the jokester with the last door prize.

         2. Offer a prayer of thanks for the day.

         3. Ask participants to complete the evaluation form before they

            leave.

A: Focus (blue, yellow, and green sheets)

Our Church in 5 Years

Who should our church be serving primarily five years from now?

You have 20 points to divide among the following items. You are to give as many points as you want, or no points, to any item. The sum of your points must total 20 exactly.

_____ 1. Our church should provide for my needs as a member.

_____ 2. Our church should provide for the needs of others in the community.

_____ 3. Our church will be its best if members share similar values and lifestyles.

_____ 4. Our church will be its best if members have a diversity of values and lifestyles.

_____ 5. Our church should invest resources and staff in ministry with children and youth.

_____ 6. Our church should invest resources and staff in ministry with young adults.

_____ 7. Our church should invest resources and staff in ministry with middle-age adults.

_____ 8. Our church should invest resources and staff in ministry with older adults.

_____ 9. Our church should invest resources and staff in equipping people for living their faith.

_____ 10. Our church should invest resources and staff in ministry with the poor, the disenfranchised, and/or those with special needs.

_____ 11. Our church should do everything we can to bring into Ascension those who are not part of any church.

_____ 12. Our church should do everything we can to bring into Ascension those moving into our area.

_____ 13. Our church should minister with people in other cultures or countries.

__20__ TOTAL POINTS

B: Fᴇᴇʟ (blue, yellow, and green sheets)

Our Church in 5 Years

How should our church "feel" five years from now?

You have 20 points to divide among the following items. You are to give as many points as you want, or no points, to any item. The sum of your points must total 20 exactly.

_____ 1. Our church should be sure members feel known and valued.

_____ 2. Our church should be comfortable for those who are searching spiritually.

_____ 3. Our church should make people feel like they belong.

_____ 4. Our church should be easy for visitors to feel welcomed.

_____ 5. Our church should be comfortable for people who want to worship
         but who don't want to be involved in other ways.

_____ 6. Our church should have a "big church" feeling.

_____ 7. Our church should have a "small church" feeling.

_____ 8. Our church should have an informal, relaxed feeling.

_____ 9. Our church should have a formal, dignified feeling.

_____ 10. Our church should be familiar, keeping things the same.

_____ 11. Our church should be innovative, trying new things and continually improving.

_____ 12. Our church should encourage diversity of opinions.

_____ 13. Our church should encourage similar ideas.

_20_ TOTAL POINTS

C: ORIENTATION (blue, yellow, and green sheets)

Our Church in 5 Years

What should be our church's orientation five years from now?

You have 20 points to divide among the following items. You are to give as many points as you want, or no points, to any item. The sum of your points must total 20 exactly.

_____ 1. Christ-centered: changing lives.

_____ 2. Scripture-centered: learning and applying God's Word.

_____ 3. Spirit-centered: living out our faith every day.

_____ 4. Creator-centered: caring and nurturing all of creation.

_____ 5. Evangelical: bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ.

_____ 6. Missional: bearing witness to God's grace and love for all the world.

_____ 7. Relational: reconciling and restoring relationships between people.

_____ 8. Community: sharing good times and bad as a caring group of Christian friends.

_____ 9. Inspirational: motivating people in faith and life.

_____ 10. Church-planting: starting up congregations in other places.

_____ 11. Healing: helping people cope, recover and grow.

_____ 12. Accepting: graciously open to people wherever they are on their spiritual journey.

__20__   TOTAL POINTS

D: STYLE (blue, yellow, and green sheets)

Our Church in 5 Years

What should be our church's size and style in five years from now?

You have 20 points to divide among the following items. You are to give as many points as you want, or no points, to any item. The sum of your points must total 20 exactly.

_____ 1. Size: growing a little larger than we are.

_____ 2. Size: not much larger than we are today.

_____ 3. Size: a large church made up of many small fellowship communities.

_____ 4. Size: a large church that starts churches in other places.

_____ 5. Service area: our church should focus locally, on our immediate communities.

_____ 6. Service area: our church should focus regionally, this half of the metro area.

_____ 7. Service area: our church should focus on being a nation-wide influence.

_____ 8. Service area: our church should focus on international joint ministries.

_____ 9. Governance: strong pastoral leadership with people mostly following.

_____ 10. Governance: pastors and people share leadership.

_____ 11. Governance: pastors support and serve the leadership of others.

_____ 12. Worship: only the pastors and trained lay people lead worship.

_____ 13. Worship: members take part in leading worship.

 20 TOTAL POINTS

Ivory Sheet   Group #__

Our Church in 5 Years

Carefully review the Green Sheet results and answer the following questions.

What are the three most important characteristics of our church five years from now?
    1.

    2.

    3.

What are the next five most important characteristics?
    1.

    2.

    3.

    4.

    5.

What excites you the most about the next 5 years at Ascension?

What concerns you the most about the next 5 years?

What should we do next?

Group #__

Our Church in 5 Years

As a group of four, share your thoughts from your individual Ivory Sheets. Discuss and come to agreement on the 3 most important characteristics for this church, and agreement on the next 5 most important characteristics. Score them with points. Then answer the remaining questions as a group.

What are the three most important characteristics of our church in 5 years?

_____ 1.

_____ 2.

_____ 3.

What are the next five most important characteristics?

_____ 1.

_____ 2.

_____ 3.

_____ 4.

_____ 5.

_20_ TOTAL POINTS

What excites you the most about the next 5 years at Ascension?

What concerns you the most about the next 5 years?

What should we do next?

APPENDIX 4

NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP MEETINGS AGENDA

Neighborhood Group Meetings
September, October 2006

Purposes:
1. Listen to the perceptions and thoughts of members so as to
    a. provide formal and public opportunity for them to be heard
    b. have others in attendance hear and engage in conversation
    c. garner additional information helpful for the visioning process.
2. Create a sense of urgency among members so as to motivate their support for upcoming changes at Ascension.
3. Inform members of what is expected of them in the coming months.

Listening
A. Introduction
- Thanks for coming this evening. May this be a time to become better acquainted with your neighbors and a time to share thoughts about Ascension.
- I am Pastor Chris, interim senior pastor until the time you call another.
- Prayer

B. Your thoughts.
- What kind of church do you want Ascension to be?
  - What do you need from a church?
- What are your perceptions about Ascension currently?
  - How would you describe Ascension at this time?
- What needs to happen at Ascension in the next 5 years?
- What can I do at this time?

C. My perceptions
- Ascension is a church rich
  - in good, honest people,
  - in talents and skills,
  - in people willing to make this a better place.
- In the next 5 years the area around Maple Grove will change dramatically
  - cf. *Demographic Task Force Report*
  - Ascension is poised well to take advantage of the tremendous growth.
- Members of Ascension have been distracted from opportunities by the problems of the past couple years.

Expectations
A. Participation in Deciding Ascension's Future
- cf. September newsletter and *Update on Interim Progress*
- Vision Summit, Sat. Nov. 11ᵗʰ, 8:00-2:00,
  - *as a congregation* to discern Ascension's key ministry areas for next 5 years
  - followed by task forces to find ways to make the areas happen.
- Call Process
  - Mission Profile Task Force, most likely some kind of survey
  - contribute your thoughts on what is needed in a senior pastor
- Contribute your skills, labor and knowledge to make Ascension a better church.
- Speak well of Ascension and the staff and the council in public.
  - If you have criticism or corrections, tell them privately to those who can make changes.

B. Financial Support
- cf. *Ascension Financial Summary*
- Expenses have been held down in 2006.
  - expenses close to revenue
  - but this means some planned ministry *did not happen*
- Some members cut back on giving or withholding for some reason.
  - This is not hurting particular people but the entire congregation and our work for God.
  - Holding back on giving only slows Ascension's recovery.
  - It is now time to recommit your money to making this church stable and strong.
  - As members of this congregation, your responsibility to support with your money.
- In October you will receive pledge cards once again.
  - Fill out and return so that council can accurately plan next year's budget.

Comments
How will you contribute to Ascension's future?
Prayer.

APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

June 2007

Introduction
    1. Chris states purpose of this evaluation:
        to review what occurred at Advent during this interim period that changed
        the circumstances of Advent between January of 2006 and now.

        The goals of this interview are:
        a. identify key events and decisions that shaped the interim period,
        b. identify how Advent is in a better situation for future ministry,
        c. identify issues that have yet to be resolved, and
        d. reinforce the progress that the congregation has made.

    2. Chris introduces The Rev. Dr. Mark Bents.
        a. Why Mark?
            - experienced interim pastor who knows what to look for,
            - objective outsider without bias,
            - has no interest in Advent other than to understand the interim
        b. Mark's role is to lead conversation as an objective inquirer.
        c. He will *not* be reporting any of this to the synod or outside groups.
            All information and comments will be given only to Pastor Chris.
            This will *not* be part of the call process.
        d. Chris leaves the interview.

    3. Mark thanks the people for coming.
        a. Their presence demonstrates their commitment to Advent.
        b. The conversation will be recorded.
            - Attendance is not being taken so that no one's name will be
                connected to anything that is said.
            - The recording will be turned over to Pastor Chris *only*,
                and will *not* be available to anyone else.
        c. Prayer

Interview
A. Identify major changes during the interim period (Jan.1, 2006 to currently).
      1. What major events or changes took place in 2006 and 2007?
          - List some of the things that happened in this last year.
      2. What led to the changes or caused them?
          - What people or groups were part of the changes or events?
      3. In what ways has [select one event] changed Advent?
          - [Repeat this question for a couple of events that seem significant.]
      4. In what ways is Advent better as you prepare for ministry with the next pastor?
B. How the Holy Spirit was acting in the changes.
      1. When in the last year or so does it seem that God was at work in Advent?
          - What were the signs of the Holy Spirit acting?
          - In what ways was God's Holy Spirit acting in Advent in the last year?
      2. What do you suppose God was doing in the changes of the past year?
          - *Why* do you suppose the Holy Spirit brought about those changes?
          - What is God calling Advent to be?
      3. What events or methods did Advent engage this past year to discern what God
           is asking of Advent?
      4. Where do you see the Holy Spirit acting now, either in Advent or in your
           personal lives?
          - How is the Lord caring for you, creating anew, changing circumstances,
           reconciling people?
C. The Spirit's involvement in conflict.
      1. What were some of the conflicts Advent experienced the last couple of years?
          - What might God have been doing with the conflict?
      2. How might conflict and troubles be something *God* does in a congregation?
          - Why might God bring troubles to those God loves?
          - In the Old Testament stories of Israel and Judah, it is said over and over
           that the Lord brought about their afflictions and troubles. Why
           would God do that?
D. Readiness for next phase in Advent's history.
      1. In what ways is Advent ready to move on in ministry with the next pastor?
          - What are some of the signs that members are more engaged in what
           happens in Advent?
          - What are some of the ways that members are taking more leadership
           responsibility?
      2. How is Advent better attuned to where God is leading than it has been before?
      3. What are some lingering issues that still need attention?
          - What might God be asking of Advent that has not yet been addressed?
      4. What changes have been made to lesson the possibility that past problems
           will not be repeated?
E. Conclusion
      1. Thank you for your willingness to share some of what happened this past year.
      2. You are an encouraging sign of God's future blessings for Advent.

APPENDIX 6

COUNCIL AGENDA

Ascension Council Agenda
October 8, 2007   7:00 p.m.

7:00 **A. Call to Order**
    1. Prayer Listener: _____
    2. Council as worshipful work more than business management.
    3. Devotions: _____
    4. Study: Fryer, Kelly A. *Reclaiming the C Word: Daring to Be Church Again*
        (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), chapters 1-3

7:45 **B. Changes to the Agenda**

7:46 **C. Pastors' Reports**

7:50 **D. Secretary's Report**

7:55 **E. Treasurer's Report**

8:00 **F. Business Affairs Committee**
    1. 2008 Budget introduction
    2. Ascension's financial status

8:05 **G. Staff Report**

8:10 **H. Committee Reports**
    1. Call Committee
    2. Worship/Music Committee: holiday worship schedules
    3. Grace Hall Committee
    4. Wellness Board: AED (emergency defibrillator) training for staff

8:30 **I. Other Business**
    1. Appointments to the Nominating Committee
    2. Katrina Trip fundraising
    3. Ascension to host spring Conference assembly
    4. Northwest Hennepin County Grief Support Coalition

8:40 **J. Reflection on the meeting**
    1. How was our conduct a reflection of Christ?
    2. Which decisions/discussions tonight were clearly God's will?
    3. How did we share leadership at this meeting?
    4. In what ways did/will we equip people for carrying out their ministries?

8:59 **K. Information**
    1. Devotions next month: _____
    2. Refreshments next month: _____
    3. Next month's agenda items:
        • Budget for 2008
        • Fryer, chapters 4-6

9:00 **L. Motion to adjourn, and closing prayer**

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