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THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION CRISIS
REIMAGINING THE CHURCH'S MISSION IN A SECULAR₃ WORLD

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
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Rise of the “nones”

It only took one research poll to send the entire church into a tailspin. The panic that overtook the church around the disappearing young people within their congregations had suddenly become a statistic. When the Pew Forum released their study on religious affiliation in October 2012¹ stating that nearly 20% of all Americans now would affiliate as one of the “nones”² congregations began to panic. With subsequent reports following the release of the Pew data³ it became clear that this affiliational decline was not simply the result of one study’s misinformation, but instead a reality present within the American public. Perhaps one of the most concerning aspects of this poll was that it was clear this was not simply a one-year trend. Instead, the downward slide of those who claimed to be religiously affiliated had been on a constant decline on a yearly basis from 2007-2012. Those who claimed to be religiously “nones” was growing from 15% in 2007 to nearly 20% in 2012. It was clear that the “rise of the nones” had begun and was not going to be turning around any time soon.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of the Pew study, however, was the fact that the number of “nones” was even more dramatic within youth and young adult

¹ Lugo Luis, “*Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation*,” The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. (October 2012): 7, www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/ (accessed February 6, 2015).

² The “nones” group is a combination of three possible responses: “nothing in particular”, “agnostic” or “atheist” the similarities that they have are that they have differing degrees of declaring no religious affiliation to any faith group.

³ Similar Studies were also released at around the same period of time by Call-Berkley professors in collaboration with Mark Chaves from Duke as well as a Gallup poll that also supported this finding. UC-Berkley; Michael Hout, Claude S. Fischer and Mark Chaves, *More Americans have No Religious Preference*. UC-Berkley Institute for the Study of Societal Issues. 7 Mar 2013 http://issi.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/shared/docs/Hout%20et%20al_No%20Relig%20Pref%202012_Release%20Mar%202013.pdf & Gallup <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>

populations. The Pew study found that one in three (32%) of those in the millennial generation⁴ were a part of those who affiliated themselves with this group of “nones.” Where was the future of the church going to be if none of the children believed that they were still Christians? This number was a stark jump from those ages 30-49 in which only one in five (21%) affiliated with the “nones.” It was even more drastic when compared with those 65+ among whom only 9% affiliated as “nones.” Churches had a crisis on their hands that needed fixing. So in response they returned to the same methods that they had been using for years to solve the problem, Sunday School, Confirmation, and worship attendance. As a result congregations worked to create massive overhauls in the ways they provided these services. These changes were ranged from offering models of family education, to involve the whole family, contemporary worship, to fit in with the young “hip” crowd, in each of these changes churches were searching for ways to make their programs more relevant and “in” for these young people, so they would “want” to come into their churches.

There was a major problem with this solution. When the information from this Pew Forum study was combined with other larger church trends which included declining church attendance and a growing number of churches closing their doors it became clear that the structures that had become the core of the Christian being, most notably, worship attendance, may in fact be falling apart as

⁴ Age 18-29

well. Since the 1950s the number of mainline congregations⁵ has declined from 80,000 congregations to 72,000. Over that same time period membership in these denominations has dropped by over a quarter to settle at 20 million members today. The unsettling numbers do not end there. In a study released by the General Social Survey⁶ 34% of Americans stated that they never go to church or other services of worship (excluding weddings, baptisms, etc.), a number that has increased from below 20% in 1970. When we pull together all of these statistics and studies we realize the failure of the idea to “revamp” worship. Those people who were affiliating as “nones” were no longer stepping within the church doors, they weren’t even concerned about the changes that the church was making, they simply didn’t walk in the doors. The panic that overtook the churches was real, going forward churches had to discover new ways to reach out to these “nones” or else they were going to have to worry about their long-term viability, keeping people in their pews, and paying for pastors and staff for their congregations.

Mark Chaves, in his book *American Religion*, asserts that for decades, when asked about religious affiliation and church attendance by pollsters, Americans have had a tendency to exaggerate their attendance patterns. Chaves states that the recent changes in church affiliation, in polls like that released by the Pew Forum may have more to do with honesty with pollsters than any changes in church

⁵ United Methodist Church (UMC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PCUSA), the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Churches, and the United Church of Christ (Congregationalist)

⁶ Tobin Grant, *7.5 Million Americans Have 'Lost Their Religion' Since 2012*. Huffington Post. 16 Mar 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/13/americans-no-religion_n_6864536.html

attendance.⁷ Chaves also asserts that although there were major declines within church attendance during the 1950s-1990s these declines have flattened and we are seeing relatively stable numbers in attendance today.⁸ In combining the congregational statistics about declining attendance in services with the growing number of “nones” that are present with American society, we begin to see more correlation between the continual decline congregations had already been dealing with for decades (but polls never accurately represented) and the recent “jump” in the number of young people that were willing to affiliate as “nones.”⁹

One of the major concerns that I have as the story of the “nones” is told throughout churches and society is that we lose the deeper picture. Behind each of these concerning numbers is a face of an individual who is a part of this movement from being distantly Christian to being a part of the “nones.” The story of the millennial generation can partially be heard from the story of Jake:

Jake is a 23 year old who grew up in a Suburban Lutheran congregation.

Jake had attended Sunday School, Confirmation, and his High School

Youth group and had always considered himself a Christian. When Jake

went to college at his local public University Jake was introduced to

ideas that challenged his Christian faith that he had never been

encouraged to deal with before. Jake learned about evolution,

⁷ Shifting the attention of churches away from the panic that young people are running out the doors never to return, but instead to a deeper cultural change that is leading to a level of honesty that hadn't been present within previous generations of Americans.

⁸ Mark Chaves, “The Decline of American Religion?” ARDA Guiding Paper Series. (2011): www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers/Chaves.asp (accessed April 2, 2015).

⁹ Suddenly we (leaders of churches whose salaries will be reliant upon this future generation) can relax as we see the way in which this problem is no longer a 5 year sharp increase in church disaffiliation, but instead a multi-decade trend that the church has been dealing with for years.

experienced sexuality that opposed his Christian upbringing, and learned about the painful ways that the Christian faith had been hurtful to many in their past. Jake began to question whether this Christian faith was “for him.” When Jake returned home over Spring Break to his local congregation’s worship he found the service to be boring and he found himself disconnected and when he asked questions about the challenges to his faith he was met with resistance. So he simply left. Jake found himself amongst for the first time as a part of the “nones”.

Jake, in many ways, is the poster child for the “nones” of this millennial generation, falling away from church, never to return again. As researchers and church leaders worked to make sense of these stories and statistics they began by grouping young people into categories that would explain their religious stories, to explain why they were leaving the church. In his book *You Lost Me*,¹⁰ David Kinnaman divided young people into three different groups; “nomads,” “exiles,” and “prodigals”.¹¹ In working to explain the stories of young people like Jake, Kinnaman uses these categories to bring to life the individual stories within the larger groups of the “none.” For Kinnaman the “nomads” are those who would still be included in the “Christian” category for the Pew study, but simply don’t attend services. These individuals may be C&E people (Christmas and Easter worshipers) or they may just never attend worship but still see themselves as Christians. When asked to identify themselves they would identify with a Christian title but their faith is not always

¹⁰ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith*. 2011: Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 28

connected with the ways they live their lives. The second group, the “exiles” would be a group who remain in the Christian church, but for some reason are at odds with the faith. They find it difficult to connect their Sunday worship experience with their daily life. Often times this can result in adapting their faith to fit with the challenges that come from other life experiences. The final category, “prodigals,” would be the group that Jake would belong to. They are those individuals who once found themselves belonging to the “Christian” group but have become disconnected for some reason, and now affiliate with the “nones.” It is because of this group of “prodigals” that we have begun to discover the shift in polls released by groups like Pew Forum revealing the shift that is occurring in the American religious landscape.

Buried deep within the Pew Forum study that was released in 2012 lays perhaps the most important statistic of all:

“In 2007, 60% of those who said they seldom or never attend religious services nevertheless described themselves as belonging to a particular religious tradition. In 2012, just 50% of those who say they seldom or never attend religious services still retain a religious affiliation – a 10-point drop in five years. These trends suggest that the ranks of the unaffiliated are swelling in surveys partly because Americans who rarely go to services are more willing than in the past to drop their religious attachments altogether.”¹²

Although this statistic was largely ignored by news media, and congregational leaders in the early panic within the church, this statistic reveals where much of the “prodigal none” population is coming from. Instead of the mass exodus from the pews of our congregations into a growing “secular world” that has become the focus

¹² Lugo Luis, The Pew Forum October 2012.

of congregations in recent years, there may be a deeper shift that is occurring. Whereas in the past Jake would have responded to the question of Religious affiliation as a “nomad” or an “exile”, today Jake is willing to respond with “prodigal” non-affiliation. It is within this narrative from “exile” to “prodigal” that we are seeing the shift in religious affiliation from “Christian” to “nones.” For an extended period of time the reality of American Christendom kept “prodigals” within in the church as “exiles.” Today we are stepping into a new reality that Charles Taylor describes as Secular₃, where “prodigals” are accepted as an option, and “prodigals” have become normalized into the larger society.

Secular₃ not Secular₂

In his work, *A Secular Age*,¹³ Charles Taylor divides the definition of the word “secular” into three different categories. The first, Secular₁ is comprised of the “temporal” things of this world. This historical division is the division between the “sacred” callings¹⁴ of priest or pastor as opposed to the Secular₁ calling of the garbage man, teacher, or financial advisor¹⁵. For years the realm of Secular₁ was the predominant understanding of what it meant to be secular. Following the Enlightenment a new understanding of secular began to creep into the ways that we understand the word. In this new understanding we find what Taylor calls Secular₂, an understanding that the things that are un-religious or separate from religious

¹³ This paper focuses on James K.A. Smith’s summary of Taylor’s larger work, although I will focus on Taylor’s work the citations for this piece will reference Smith’s smaller piece, *How (Not) to be Secular*. For a deeper reading on Taylor’s understanding of Secular Theory his book *A Secular Age* would dive much deeper than I will be willing to dive into for this paper.

¹⁴ Taylor doesn’t limit this to simply that of career, also included are spaces (such as churches) as well.

¹⁵ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. 2014: Willam B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K. (19-20)

influence, are what comprises the category of Secular₂.¹⁶ This is the division that often separates places that are associated with religious ideals, for example churches, church schools, mosques, synagogues, etc. from places that are seen as Secular₂ because of their intentional separation from those things that are “religious”. Examples of this Secular₂ division include the emphasis place on “secular” schools, “secular” businesses, etc. It is within this category that Taylor groups secularization theory¹⁷ and normative secularism.¹⁸

The final category that Taylor emphasizes is the growing understanding within today’s society of secular to mean our living in a world where religious belief or belief in God are options among many options available to chose. This category is what Taylor describes as Secular₃.¹⁹ In a Secular₃ world we have shifted away from categorizing individuals as “believers” and “unbelievers” in the traditional sense. In a Secular₃ world a grey area is established as individuals, like Jake, are pulled in multiple directions, and influenced by multiple narratives as they work to create their own understanding of what faith, and religious belief mean to themselves in a world of endless possibilities for belief.²⁰ With a Secular₃ understanding of the world voices are no longer pulling in just two directions²¹ but instead we are influenced by

¹⁶ Ibid. 20-21

¹⁷ According to the likes of Marx, and Freud. In which societies advance and grow beyond the need for religious belief.

¹⁸ Idea of a shared universal moral system (The Golden Rule) that would be separate of religious influence.

¹⁹ James K.A. Smith, 21-23

²⁰ Personal faith, in its own right is a product of the Enlightenment, and modernity.

²¹ Secular vs. Religious is no longer the battle that is being fought in a Secular₃ world. Instead we are being pulled in multiple directions (as many as one could fathom) by voices that are telling us what we are to believe.

multiple voices, including faith communities, science, society and friends as we work to discover a faith that is right for us.²²

Drawing Taylor's understanding of Secular₃ into the larger picture of the Pew Forum poll and corresponding studies we are able to see the ways in which Kinnaman's "prodigal" group have actually always lived with their own Secular₃ mentality for an extended period of times. These "prodigals" have been pulled in multiple directions seldom hearing the voice of the church due to their lack of attendance and lack of interest in the church to speak to them.²³ When they have stepped foot into church settings these "prodigals" not been allowed to struggle with their religious faith within the church setting either.²⁴ As a result of this toxic system for developing religious faith we are seeing the results of these poor conditions for faith growth in young people in the results of the 2012 Pew Forum polls. While studies like this continue to categorize individuals, like Jake, by the old definitions of the Secular₂ world a new reality is being formed through increases in interconnectivity and the individualization of Enlightenment thought.

Another important aspect that has played a roll in this shift away from organized religion into the "nones" has been the role that the internet, cell phone, cars, and other forms of increased connectivity have played in increasing the

²² In many ways this phenomenon can also help to explain the ways in which the "Spiritual but not Religious" and "Spirituality" movements have become popular, as individuals are pulled in multiple directions and find their own faith beliefs, outside of the organized religious communities of the past.

²³ Because for years they have been a part of the "nomad" group, which has not been present within our congregations, but they have worked to develop "their own" Christian faith outside of the organized congregations.

²⁴ As a result they have associated themselves with the "exile" group. If they have actually been present within our congregations they have often times found themselves on the outside because of their willingness to question the cores of the faith, casting them to the edges as "exiles".

number of competing narratives that are present in the lives of our young people. In a very short period of time technology has made it possible for individuals to hear voices from many of the world religions and has allowed for travel of religious leaders to become much easier. As these voices increase in the Secular₃ world individuals are encouraged to weigh all of the different possibilities and even create their own belief as a blend of multiple faiths. Each of these new levels of connectivity lead to ways in which faith in the Secular₃ world becomes more challenging to maintain in Secular₂ terms and more personally adaptable for those who might not fall neatly into Christian congregations.²⁵

As we look at the stories of those of the Millennial Generation we have heard Jake's story and understood the way in which his story explains the rise in those who make up the "nones." But in many ways Jake's story might actually be a lot like that of Kara.

Kara is a 33-year-old single mother of two who works multiple part-time jobs in retail. Kara grew up in the church and has continued to attend regularly the Sunday morning services at her local congregation. Kara has discovered however that the church isn't everything that she hoped it would be. There are times when Kara is financially unable to pay for the needs of her children and is met with resistance from the Senior Pastor at the congregation because she is "always coming to [him] looking for handouts." Kara also talks about frustrations about

²⁵ Buddhist Christians like Kevin Thew Forrester, and Christians who "don't like church" like Jefferson Bethke, are just a few examples of Secular₃ Christians pushing the edges of the faith

the ways in which the church doesn't respond to her religious needs either. Kara wonders about an abortion she had when she was 16, and the ways her divorce from her ex-husband is viewed by God.

Kara is an “exile” and in a Secular₃ world her story is not much different from Jake. In a Secular₃ world both Jake and Kara are allowed have doubts and questions, and they are pulled by the daily demands that are surrounding them into and out of the church. But when you categorize Jake and Kara according to the Pew study, and into religious or un-religious categories according to Secular₂ standards they're in totally separate worlds.

The greatest issue that has plagued the Christian Church as they look to respond to the growing numbers of “nones” has been in their own inability to change worldviews. As Christian Leaders we have been so caught up in the numbers that tell us of the decline of the church according to Taylor's Secular₂ narrative that we have failed to realize our need to be voices of influence in the Secular₃ world that we are living in. Churches have lost their ability to speak into the lives of many of the individuals that make up this “none” group. By restricting messages to pulpits inside of church buildings, or TV channels that are just one of the multitude of options to chose from, the church has failed to grasp onto the opportunity to be one of the voices of influence that shape the lives of these young people.

In the massive shift that has occurred we, as a society, have transitioned away from a world where individuals²⁶ divide the world into religious and un-

²⁶ This is most notable in our young people, but it's present within the entire society that surrounds us.

religious (a Secular₂ world) into a world where everything is fair game (Secular₃) where influences can come from both inside and out of the religious world. This old era of Secular₁ and Secular₂, was an era where individuals can block themselves in, to religious communities and remain totally separate from the influence of the secular world around them. At the same time society was one that had the opportunity to block out the religious world. Individuals had the opportunity keep themselves totally separated from the voices of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or any other of the major conversion religions of the world, separate from religious influence. In the Secular₃ world that we are a part of these walls have been broken down. No longer is there “religious” and “secular” in the old ways, because there will always be forces of both the “secular” and the “religious” that will be pulling individuals in multiple directions. For Christians this should be good news in that there will always be “a place at the table” for the Christian worldview to be shared with the “nones.” Even if the statistics are telling churches that individuals are not sitting down at the “Christian table” the Secular₃ world that we are a part of means that individuals are willing to listen to the Christian voice, amongst many.

However, this comes with a word of caution. If churches continue to sit and wait on the “nones” to come running into our congregations and listen to our voice of influence inside the doors of our church buildings our voice of influence (and power of our spreading of the Gospel) will forever be muted. Instead, churches must enter into the world of the Secular₃ age and speak of the impact and the changing influence that the Christ event has had on our own lives and step out into mission

for the world by bringing the Good News of the Gospel to the world outside our doors.

Sharing Christ in an Age of Influence

As the church transitions from a model that was effective²⁷ for “winning souls” to Christianity in the Secular² world into a model that effectively ministers to the masses of Secular³ they will find themselves struggling to find a new model by which to live. As churches step into being one of many influences in Secular³ the church will need to reexamine the ways in which their voice will be heard by the world around them. No longer will claiming membership within an organization be an attractive manner for bringing in young people into our churches.²⁸ Instead ministry will have to be about leaving our church doors and bringing real events of Christ into the Secular³ world. When we step outside of our doors we will help to reveal the ways that Christ is already present in the lives of all of the “nones” and be incarnations of Christ in the lives of those who are in the Secular³ world.

In his book, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross*, Andrew Root proposes, “A Christopraxis approach begins and in many ways ends with the *event* of revelation.”²⁹ The place that the church meets these young people is going to be in the *events* that reveal God to them. As church leaders we must identify the places in which our young people are experiencing God in their lives. These places of

²⁷ The effectiveness of this method of evangelizing might be up for debate, but it brought massive numbers of Christians to the faith and has left Christianity as the largest religion in America today.

²⁸ It also may not be the best way for measuring the success or failure of a church anymore either.

²⁹ Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross*. 2014: Fortress Press, Minneapolis. (88)

revelation will include places of worship, Confirmation classes, and mission trips.³⁰ But the essence of the Secular₃ world is that these events will also occur in hospital rooms, locker rooms, dance clubs and even bars. These are the places, that for too long, have been ruled out as un-religious by our Secular₂ understanding of ministry. But these are also the places where we now have the opportunity to show up and share the voice of Jesus with the world around us. When examining the role that the church plays when stepping into these new arenas of ministry Root goes on to say that, "To participate in Christopraxis is to take on the form of and join Jesus' own action, which is to join the praxis of ministry itself."³¹ We are the church today and as such we are the body of Christ. In doing ministry in the world and not just within the arenas that have been religious in the past we are the ways in which others will experience the living reality of Jesus.

As I think about examples of the way the Church can be positive influences on the lives of young people of this Secular₃ Age I am brought back to a story of my own. While visiting the Holy Land³² I experienced my own division of Sacred₂ and Sacred₃.

While on the trip Sacred₂ sites surrounded me, from the baptismal place of Jesus to churches where the Miracles of Jesus are said to have occurred. However when I look back on the trip these sites were not the places where I would say that I saw Jesus revealed the most. One day,

³⁰ At least I hope that these continue to be places where we have not hindered the message of Christ so much that God cannot still shine through.

³¹ Andrew Root, 93

³² Israel/Palestine

while touring sites in Jerusalem I received a call from my mother informing me that my father had died from a massive heart attack. In a moment of informal Christopraxis the group of students that I had been traveling with for the past week gathered together in the hotel lobby for prayer to send me on my way home. In that moment, in a completely secular space, I experienced Christ's presence through the community of individuals that were holding me up.

If we long to be a relevant church in this age of secularism we will need to discover moments of Christopraxis like this in the lives of our young people. This will not be easy! This will require building long-term relationships and will require spending time investing in lives of people that may not fill our pews.³³ It's only once this established relationship is built that we will be able to be present in times of need to minister as Christ to those around us.

As Lutherans this understanding of being Christ, active in the world, should be all the more exciting for us to grasp onto. In much the same way as Root describes our own need to be the body of Christ in the world, the reformers searched for ways in which God was active in the world. For the reformers it was in the 18th article of the Augsburg Confession that they expressed the ways in which the Holy Spirit brings about faith in believers "Without the grace, help and operation of the Holy Spirit a human being cannot become pleasing to God... this happens

³³ This is a concept that will be counterintuitive for anyone who is still working within the Secular₂ mindset. When these relationships are done well they will not be done with the intention of "converting" these individuals to be a part of our congregations, but instead out of deep concern for the other.

through the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God.”³⁴ As the Holy Spirit stirs in the lives of others we are given the opportunity to reach out and welcome our brothers and sisters into the faith.

An Active Church Sharing Christ for the World

As a church we can no longer be passive, waiting for this group of “nones” to come back into our churches like they may have done in decades past. This ministry was less than ideal in decades past, and will not be sustainable if we rely on this style of ministry in the future. The good news is that we have an example for our vision for ministry in the incarnation of Christ. God’s saving act of mercy was not one of waiting, but instead of coming, through the incarnation, to meet humans in the place where they were. This vision for ministry must become our mission today as the church. Andrew Root provides us with another great picture as we begin to imagine what the church is to look like in saying, “God’s being is *becoming* in acts of ministry that are mission.”³⁵ God has come to earth, in Jesus Christ, and in acts of Christopraxis to reveal God’s self to the world in order that they might come to believe in Him. In the same way we are called today to be the church for the world. It is our responsibility as the people of the church to bring the person of Christ to everyone, believer and un-believer alike.³⁶ In living our lives, and revealing Christ, through our daily vocations, we will provide a voice where those who have found

³⁴ Kolb, et al. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Edited by Theodore Tappert. Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis. (50)

³⁵ Andrew Root, 98

³⁶ Because in many ways we are all believers & unbelievers in the Secular³ world that we are living in.

themselves as a part of the “nones” hearing the Gospel of Christ spoken into their lives.

As the church³⁷ we must do a better job of being there for these young people when they are experiencing the events of Christ’s revelation in their lives. For much too long young people have found themselves associating more closely with “exiles,” “nomads,” or “prodigals” and have been unable to find voices that are willing to be present when they need it most. As the church we must equip leaders, both lay and ordained, who are willing to live in relationship with these young people. By being in relationship with these young people already we will have the opportunity to be present in their lives when the opportunity presents itself. By already being a part of these young peoples lives³⁸ we will have the opportunity to be Christ in the lives of these young people when they experience the events of Christ.

As tempting as it might become, the church cannot rely on creating events that force our young people to come to faith by means that we have instituted as humans either!³⁹ Faith in a Secular³ world will always be a personal journey, as such we must walk with each individual in conversation with him or her as they struggle through the difficult realities of life. This is not to say that our formal Sacraments are to be discarded, or cheapened in any way. Christ has promised that He shows up in

³⁷ By church I mean the institutional church.

³⁸ This means we must be there before they come running into our doors, so we must be actively reaching out a hand to welcome them into relationship even before they are willing to step inside of the institution’s doors.

³⁹ Our reliance on baptizing individuals as babies, confirming them as youth, marrying them as young adults and performing their funerals in old age will not always be a linear structure anymore. Individuals will rarely fit nicely into the categories that we have specified in the past, and we will need to adapt, and perhaps step forward or back in the process in order to match the events of Christ with the experiences of the church.

the elements of the Lord's Supper, and the experience of the Holy Spirit will not come without the preaching of the Word of God. But we cannot continue to rely on these events to continue to occur solely within the doors of our churches, or in the neatly defined order that has consumed our Secular₂ model of church in the past.

As churches learn to do ministry differently within our doors we also must step out and claim a more public voice in the public square. Taking a vision for ministry that looks much more like that of prophets of the Old Testament than pastors of Christendom we must bring the voice of God to the people. For centuries the prophets were the voices for God in an age where there was a multitude of voices surrounding the people. The prophets brought the message of God, which spoke the truth amidst the many voices that pulled the people in other directions. Just as the prophets were voices for God in the past Christian leaders today must become prophets to the world once again. As church leaders we must enter into conversation with members of other faiths, as well as voices of the "secular" world that have become major voices in the lives of individuals today. We must speak the message of truth that we possess about the power that our own encounter with Christ has brought into shaping our lives, and the lives of the community around us. No longer can we sit passive watching the world turn around us, staying silent to the problems we complain about on Sunday mornings, but not doing anything to change the issue when we leave our church doors. If we expect to see a change in the world around us we must step out and be that change ourselves.

In reaching out we will meet these people on their terms and on their territory.⁴⁰ We will learn their life stories and we will be shaped by those things that are important in their lives. In this encounter we will open ourselves to experiencing Christ in new ways for ourselves. We will have opportunities to share Christ through our own actions of caring and by sharing the stories of the way Christ has already acted in our lives. As we build communities that care and love, as extensions of Christ's mission, we will begin to realize our need to reach beyond our doors into the community. As we encounter the other, bringing Christ with us into the world we will begin to understand that it is in these places of mission that we will discover the ways in which the "nones" will be welcomed into the community of Christ once again.

In order to accomplish this, our churches must be places that equip leaders, to speak the Gospel. For the success of our congregations our churches must realize that these leaders cannot just be the Ordained leaders speaking from pulpits. Instead, these leaders will need to be friends, who proclaim hope in the lives of those around them during the hopelessness of the death of a loved one. Maybe they will act as neighbors, when they bring about the kingdom by caring for those in need. The days of church as organization have long since passed us by, and the church in a Secular₃ Age is going to have to be one that reaches out, instead of closing in.

⁴⁰ Sometimes this might mean crossing our own pietistic boundaries in order to be able to experience life with them. And that's ok!

As the church works towards bringing about this vision throughout our congregations we have the opportunity to return to a message that has filled our congregations for many years. Although this message will be one of change for many who have lived in the church their whole lives it will not be something that is completely new. This movement outside of our doors will be a return to the early church message of evangelization and outward focus for the world. In reimagining the way the church functions in the world it is my hope that we can once again honestly cry out this message of hope that has provided hope for generations past. Maybe today will be the first of many when we can pour out of the doors of our churches into the streets proclaiming with honest hearts:

The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,

A fountain ever springing;

All things are mine since I am his—

How can I keep from singing?⁴¹

⁴¹ Robert Lowry, *My Life Flows on in Endless Song*. Evangelical Lutheran Worship. 763.

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