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# Cultivating the Holy Callings of Ordinary Saints: The Church at Work for the Life of the World

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CULTIVATING THE HOLY CALLINGS OF ORDINARY SAINTS:  
THE CHURCH AT WORK FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

by

JEFFREY A. EISELE

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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2016

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## ABSTRACT

### *Cultivating the Holy Callings of Ordinary Saints: The Church at Work for the Life of the World*

by

Jeffrey A. Eisele

The Christian Church has long struggled to make better connections between Sunday and Monday by effectively equipping the priesthood of all believers for living out its faith in the world. This thesis reports the results of a participatory action research project aimed at cultivating connections between faith, baptismal callings, daily work, and the *missio Dei* through several congregational interventions. The results showed the effectiveness of cultivating a congregational culture through worship, faith formation activities, service, and especially small groups, for the purpose of strengthening congregation members' witness in the workplace.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work presented here was the result of many partnerships with followers of Jesus who have affirmed with gracious words and actions over many years that I have been called to serve as a pastor in God's Church. I am so very grateful to all of you.

My parents and first teachers, Pete and Phyllis Eisele, faithfully followed through on the commitment they made at my baptism to frequently and lovingly remind me that I am a child of God. They also showed me in their daily work as a greenhouse operator and court reporter that you don't need to work as a professional Christian leader to glorify God and bless the neighborhood.

My Sunday School teachers, pastors, confirmation instructors, and Bible camp counselors had more of an impact on my life than they imagined. I have told many persons who serve in the same way in other congregations what a difference you made.

My teachers and fellow students at St. Olaf College, Luther-Northwestern Seminary, and Luther Seminary cultivated and challenged my faith while simultaneously preparing me for leadership in God's Church. One important reason I have continued to live out my calling to serve as a Lutheran pastor is because you did and continue to do your work so well.

The members of the congregations I have served in South Dakota and Wisconsin, especially those identified in this thesis as members of "Prairie Wind Lutheran Church," have given me significant, ongoing models for what it means to follow Jesus together as

the priesthood of all believers. Thank you for your encouragement, your patience, and for your enthusiastic willingness to consider new ways to make connections between faith and work.

My family has accompanied me through the joys and struggles of parish ministry every step of the way. Thank you, Ben and Samuel, for your love and support, and for the ways you continue to use your many gifts and talents to serve as apprentices of Jesus with your mom and me. Most of all, I am grateful to my wife Katherine, who has kept on affirming my call, cheering me on, and serving as a great partner in ministry in every place we've lived. The work presented here would not have been completed without your steadfast love, patience, and encouragement to keep going.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AR	Action Research
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
IRB	Institutional Review Board
PAR	Participatory Action Research
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001 killed thousands of people, and propelled hundreds of thousands of others into panicked flight from the rubble of the fallen towers. New Yorkers sprinted and stumbled through smoke and dust in search of safety. The trouble was that few people on the ground knew where safety could be found. The best guess was to get as far away from ground zero as possible. Most did not get very far before they were reminded that Manhattan is an island, and that their exodus was blocked by water.

Every mode of transportation out of lower Manhattan was shut down that morning—except one. Boats were still able to navigate the waterways around the island. The United States Coast Guard put out a call for help, asking for assistance with the evacuation of the growing crowds of people beginning to line the island's edge. Fifteen to twenty minutes later, boats of all kinds headed for lower Manhattan.<sup>1</sup> Tugboats, ferries, private boats, party boats, yachts, and fishing boats skipped across the water and directly into the grey clouds billowing off the island. The captains angled their various vessels towards the shore any way they could to get in a position to load the evacuees.

Hundreds of boat captains answered the call to transport people to safety. The boats traveled back and forth all day long, carrying as many passengers as each of the

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<sup>1</sup> The story of the great boatlift of 9/11/2001 is told in the documentary film by Edward Rosenstein and Rick Velleu, "Boatlift: An Untold Tale of 9/11 Resilience," (2011).

different kinds of boats would hold. Participants in the evacuation remembered that it was just a bunch of average people using their particular skills to do what needed to be done that day. The captain of one boat said, “It was the greatest thing I ever did with my life.”<sup>2</sup> The great boatlift of 9/11 became the largest sea evacuation in history, larger even than the evacuation of Dunkirk during the Second World War. Nearly 500,000 persons were rescued in less than nine hours.<sup>3</sup>

It is rare to be called upon to use the expertise and opportunity of our daily work to respond to the kind of tragedy that citizens of New York City experienced on 9/11. It is a very *usual* thing for those baptized into the Christian Church to have the opportunity to impact the communities in which we live through *our* particular daily work. Most church members’ work does not require performing dramatic acts of rescue. All of us do live and work in a world in which we and our neighbors *need rescue* from God-defying forces that threaten all that God has made. God has created the Church, empowered it by the Holy Spirit, and called it to participate in a God-directed rescue operation. What if the members of God’s Church understood our daily work, not as something separate from the call to live as disciples of Jesus, but as a primary way to live out such a call? What if we grasped more firmly the many opportunities for joining God’s saving, healing, and rescuing work in our daily work, whether paid or unpaid? This is the focus of the study presented in this thesis.

This *calling* or *vocation* (from the Latin word *vocare*)—the two words are more or less interchangeable—are terms the Christian tradition has long used to talk about

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



purpose, direction, or meaning in one's life that comes from God.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, these words have lost much of the richness of this original meaning. *Vocation* has become synonymous with *occupation*. A vocational education has become education which prepares a person for a particular job or career. This may or may not have something to do with what God is doing or wants to do in the location of the occupation.

The understanding of *calling* has become even narrower inside the Christian Church. It is now most often used to refer to the specific work of a clergyperson or someone else who works in a religious institution. The absence of robust biblical and theological teaching on vocation in congregations of people hungry for purpose and meaning has meant leaving the teaching to others with cultural authority, such as Oprah Winfrey.<sup>5</sup> She helpfully expands the meaning of *calling* beyond a job, but falls short of describing the full richness of a God-given call lived out in community for the sake of the world.

Several factors have maintained or widened the divide between what is usually considered participation in God's mission and daily work: growing secularization, a movement from an agricultural to industrial to a consumer-driven economy, church practices that reinforce separations between clergy and laity, and few intentional connections between Sundays and Mondays. Faith has become little more than a kind of balm for smoothing the way through the challenges and difficulties of life for many in the

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<sup>4</sup> William C. Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Oprah Winfrey, "What Oprah Knows for Sure About Finding Your Calling," O, The Oprah Magazine, <http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Oprah-on-Finding-Your-Calling-What-I-Know-For-Sure> (accessed March 28, 2015).

Body of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Leaders in the missional church movement have sounded an urgent cry at the beginning of the twenty-first century for the church to develop a more holistic, inclusive understanding of the callings of all the baptized as ways God is present and accomplishing God's purpose in the world. One such leader wrote,

As we see more and more evidence of the “end of Christendom,” especially in our public and cultural life, the issues of ministry in daily life become more urgent. The constant witness of the earnest Christian in the workplace is, “How shall we witness?” The answers are by no means easy.<sup>7</sup>

Missional theology pushes for the dissolution of the false dichotomy between *sacred* and *secular*. The church must “take far more seriously the realities of the world in which Christians struggle to live faithfully each day,” if mission is to be understood as something more than what happens when the church plans and implements an outreach event or mission trip.<sup>8</sup> The church is “missionary by nature.”<sup>9</sup> It is what the church *is* as well as what it *does* as it scatters into the many spheres of daily life, including its daily work. The church meets God in its workplaces as well as in its worship spaces. God is *on the job* there, too, tending, mending, and saving what God has made.

### **Research Question**

A congregation that desires to help its members live out their Christian faith in daily life takes intentional steps to help its members understand what it means to

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<sup>6</sup> Christian Batalden Scharen, *Faith as a Way of Life: A Vision for Pastoral Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Guder, "Worthy Living: Work and Witness from the Perspective of Missional Church Theology," *Word & World* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 431.

<sup>8</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, The Missional Network (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 154.

<sup>9</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 122.

cooperate with God to accomplish God's purposes in the world. This *missio Dei* is not limited to activities the church plans, organizes, and implements. God desires humanity's cooperation with and participation in God's mission in every sphere of our lives, and therefore calls all the people of God to share in God's mission through our daily work. This daily work includes labor done in exchange for money in a wide variety of jobs and careers. It also includes the work of a father who changes his infant son's diapers, the work of a volunteer who stocks the shelves of the local food pantry, the assistance provided by a student who helps a classmate with her homework, and the daily care given by a wife to her dying husband. A congregation that wants to help its members make connections between God's work and their daily work will teach its members to recognize and embrace their work as holy callings, and then equip and deploy these members for living out such callings in their various workplaces. Such a congregation also makes clear connections between vocational stewardship and God's transformative work in the community.

The aim of this research project was to determine the effectiveness of certain practices in helping a single congregation cultivate the kind of community life that leads to these goals. The research described here follows a participatory action research (PAR) process in a single congregation, Prairie Wind Lutheran Church in Riverside, South Dakota.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of the transformative process was to research the question:

How does implementation of a participatory action research process within Prairie Wind Lutheran Church cultivate community practices which lead to members more readily recognizing and responding to God's call to participate more fully in the *missio Dei* in their daily work?

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<sup>10</sup> Prairie Wind Lutheran Church, Riverside, South Dakota, and all other names and places are pseudonyms that are used in order to protect the identity of the people and congregation who participated in this research project.

## Variables

The *independent variable* in this project was the PAR process via the introduction of a variety of opportunities for congregation members to learn, reflect on, and practice an understanding of *calling* rooted in baptism, sustained in the Lord's Supper, and lived out in daily work. The practices introduced were determined through the facilitation of a *search conference*, a co-generative learning event open to all congregational members.<sup>11</sup> These practices consisted of: storytelling via social media; testimonies in worship services about perceived connections between faith and daily work; monthly commissioning in worship of members who are living out their vocations in different kinds of daily work; praying for persons in different occupations; and meetings of small groups gathered to learn and discuss issues related to faith and work such as personal identity, prayer on the job, and Sabbath-keeping. The intent was to transform assumptions of little or no connection between faith and work into an embrace of daily work as one of the key locations of God's working out God's purposes in the world.

The *dependent variable* in the research was the congregational community life and participation in the *missio Dei* cultivated and intentionally transformed by the process. The purpose of several interventions was to equip members in ways that would help them readily identify their particular calling from God to ministry through their particular daily work. Another goal for the project was to empower members to respond to this call by more intentionally living out Prairie Wind's five core values—passionate worship, radical hospitality, lifelong faith formation, extravagant generosity, and bold

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<sup>11</sup> Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 136-150.

service—wherever they do their daily work. One further goal was a neighborhood and city enlivened by the Spirit of God working through the daily ministry of Prairie Wind’s missionaries serving in various workplaces throughout the community.

*Intervening variables* in the project included age, gender, faith history, the length of time a person has participated in Prairie Wind Lutheran Church, and the ways church members participated in congregational life. It was also important to identify the kind of work people do, and their level of job satisfaction. The research inquired about member concerns about jobs that are not satisfying, or not in alignment with their Christian faith. This work also explored the ways God calls to ministry persons who are not paid for their daily work, such as retirees, students, full-time caregivers, full-time homemakers, and those who are differently-abled and unable to work.

### Why This Research Matters

I only ever thought of *one* of the many jobs I worked before my thirtieth birthday as a *calling*. Because my family owns a greenhouse business, I was working in the dirt before I entered junior high school. I continued to work in the family business every summer until I graduated from college. In the years that followed, I painted buildings, drove a delivery truck, served as a bellman and busboy at a resort, packaged books at a bookstore, cleaned food processing machines, and washed and folded laundry. No one asked me when I applied for those jobs if I was *called* to that kind of work. It was only when I completed my seminary education and interviewed for work as a parish pastor in western South Dakota that I heard people using *work* and *calling* interchangeably.

One of my biggest challenges as a Lutheran pastor in thirty years of parish ministry in rural, urban, and suburban congregations has been to effectively help

congregation members receive the gift of faith in Jesus Christ, and then guide their *daily* participation in the ongoing work of the Triune God. Many sermons have been preached, devotions offered, and lessons taught to encourage members and friends of various congregations to *live as disciples of Jesus* all seven days of the week. This means listening for and responding to Jesus on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights, *and* when they go shopping, pay their taxes, play in softball tournaments, vote, spend time in the hospital, gather with family, volunteer, and go to work. To be sure, some of the saints in those congregations have understood and embraced their callings seven days a week more faithfully than their pastor did. Yet many more struggled to make daily connections, and treated church membership and the faith exercised *in church* as one of several ingredients in a customizable recipe for a happy and fulfilling life.

I have contributed to the problem at various times by helping people identify their gifts and talents *primarily* to get them to participate in some kind of congregationally organized ministry. I have also preached too many sermons on the need to be good stewards of time, talents, and treasure principally to support the mission of God's church, which has been equated with organized congregational activities. This has strengthened rather than chipped away at longstanding, false distinctions between sacred and secular work, and the callings of clergy and laity. My own lack of clarity about the ways God can and does show up in all kinds of daily work was also an issue. Another purpose of this research was for me to discover new ways of exercising leadership that cultivated the callings of *all* members of the congregation in a way that pointed concretely to what God was doing through many kinds of daily work.

This project was also devised to assist Prairie Wind in resisting cultural forces that shrink the life lived by faith into a very small thing. Large and seemingly intransient obstacles have emerged in the wider culture over the last several decades to discourage the church's cultivation of the callings of its members to walk by faith in daily life for the life of the world. Christian Scharen identifies and summarizes two of the most problematic as the compartmentalization of life and the self-maximization of life.<sup>12</sup> Each of the different spheres of life becomes disconnected from one another when life becomes compartmentalized, and each sphere becomes its own little god.

Faith has its own tidy sphere on Sundays and in one's soul, but the spheres of work, family, politics, and the arts are each oriented by their own values that usurp the proper place of faith in shaping our thought and action. In such a vision of modern life, love of neighbor may rule the soul, but love of a bargain rules shopping, love of taste and beauty rules the arts, and so on.<sup>13</sup>

The other barrier that blocks the way to receiving and practicing faith in all spheres of daily life is the deep belief that faith is a private matter. This individualistic understanding of faith values faith primarily as a means to personal happiness and success. The assumption is that each individual just needs to discover what *brand* of faith works best for him or her. The temptation for the pastor in a culture that values self-maximization so highly is to learn and adopt the right strategies for becoming effective managers and/or therapists which will lead to organizational (and thus personal) success. The temptation for the parishioner is to search endlessly for the kind of faith that will lead to feeling lasting peace or happiness, or regular assurance that following the right faith

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<sup>12</sup> Scharen, *Faith as a Way of Life: A Vision for Pastoral Leadership*, 14-42.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 15.

formula will lead to special blessings.<sup>14</sup> What gets lost in these pursuits is the significance of faith lived in community at God's call to become a partner in God's transforming work in all spheres of life for the common good.

The research outlined here did assist Prairie Wind Lutheran in the discovery of some ways that congregation members and I, their pastor, and could navigate these cultural obstacles and discover more fully the abundant life promised by Jesus Christ (John 10:10).<sup>15</sup> A community of faith that learned to *actively practice its way* into this understanding became more adept at resisting the deceptive and false promises of life, compartmentalized, and life, self-maximized. It made a shared commitment to pursue a more vibrant faith exercised in daily life by deciding on and testing various practices together through this action research. The particular focus on our daily work expanded recognition of what God is doing through our congregation in our neighborhood and city when we are *gathered* together for planned church activities, and *scattered* into both God's and our workplaces.

This work might also serve as a resource to other Lutheran Christian leaders and congregations, and those of other traditions, who share a similar, rich understanding of the divine calling of all believers into a shared priesthood, but who have struggled with the same cultural obstacles and congregational missteps as Prairie Wind Lutheran Church. Other pastors also lament being unsure about how knowledge of the priesthood of all believers translates into equipping the baptized to make it so. Dwight L. DuBois, who led a research project aimed at empowering and encouraging pastors for equipping

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>15</sup> All biblical references and quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.



church members for ministry, discovered that some pastors have been “paid Christians” for so long that they “no longer remember what it is like to be a Christian in the world.”<sup>16</sup> Many leaders and congregation members have lost the capacity to imagine ministry or the *missio Dei* as anything other than what the gathered church does.

The potential of individual congregations as well as the whole Christian Church to participate in the *missio Dei* will only be fulfilled as more and more leaders and congregation members, both clergy and laity, begin recognizing and intentionally living into the possibilities of joining what God is doing in and through our daily work. This is true wherever the church has been planted.<sup>17</sup>

### **Theoretical Lenses**

This research project was informed by several theoretical lenses, but three specific lenses were chosen for the helpful ways they informed what was required to cultivate new and effective community practices in Prairie Wind Lutheran Church. The theoretical lenses used were *transformational leadership*, *social ecology*, and *generative learning*.

#### **Transformational Leadership**

*Transformational leadership* is leadership worked out in a cooperative manner with members of a group for the purpose of creating change in the group. It goes beyond the more typical exchange of leadership practices for pay or other rewards, what is known as *transactional leadership*. Transformational leadership values followers as important partners in the mission that the leader(s) and followers share.

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<sup>16</sup> Dwight L. DuBois, “Your Minister at Walgreens,” *Congregations* Issue 1 2012, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Gibbs, “Vocation, Work, and Work for Pay,” *Word & World* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 127.

My research drew upon the pioneering work of James MacGregor Burns and Bernard Bass to gain an understanding of transformational leadership. Burns introduced the idea of “transforming leadership” in *Leadership*.<sup>18</sup> Bass built upon Burns’ work in his *Transformational Leadership: Industry, Military, and Educational Impact* to explain at greater length why leadership that cultivates input from followers is more effective in the long run than leadership by an individual who is expected to have all the answers.<sup>19</sup>

*The Leadership Challenge* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner provided a further refining of the transformational leadership lens.<sup>20</sup> Kouzes and Posner argue forcefully that leaders are made, not born. Transformational leadership can be learned by persons willing to master key leadership practices.

The transformational leadership lens offered an alternative vision to my own long-held assumptions that good leaders must assume primary, if not sole, responsibility for figuring out the answers to questions and challenges facing a group or congregation. Such a burden grows heavy over time, and greatly restricts the options for responding to questions and challenges. I learned to exercise transformational leadership in relying on an action research team in designing, implementing, and evaluating the interventions we used. The search conference provided an opportunity for Prairie Wind members to collaborate on deciding the practices we implemented to address the research question. The use of surveys and convening of focus groups were also ways congregation members were invited into the process of discerning how the congregation—and not just the

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<sup>18</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

<sup>19</sup> Bernard M. Bass, *Transformational Leadership: Industry, Military, and Educational Impact*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1998).

<sup>20</sup> James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

pastor/leader—could cultivate practices to help members make stronger connections between faith and daily work.

### Social Ecology

*Social ecology* is a term Robert Bellah and his associates use in *Habits of the Heart* to describe the connections and commitments that tie a group of people together.<sup>21</sup> Modernity has done great damage to our natural ecologies *and* social ecologies. The compartmentalization of life and self-maximization mentioned earlier have led to a limited, if any, sense of the relationships between personal well-being and the common good in the social ecology. Human flourishing will require the restoration of our social ecology beginning with small communities and neighborhoods.

A similar theme is picked up in John L. McKnight's and Peter Block's *The Abundant Community*.<sup>22</sup> They also identify individualism, especially as it is married to consumerism, as a source of serious impairment to the development of strong communities. McKnight and Block assert that a revitalized social ecology, what they call "abundant community," will take shape as the many members of communities identify and utilize particular skills, expertise, and connections for the common good.<sup>23</sup>

This lens aided this research by identifying just how deeply our Western culture is fragmented—and the magnitude of what is required to repair what has been damaged. The lens also provided a check on using the people who participated in this research and

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<sup>21</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> John McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

their particular assets to gain institutional success. It kept the development of Christian community health through the cultivation of callings in the forefront of research, and did not allow it to become just another way to try and enhance congregation statistics.

### Generative Learning

Transformational leadership requires a collaborative relationship between leaders and followers. Similarly, *generative learning* requires a cooperative, two-way relationship between teachers and learners. Teachers *and* learners share responsibility for teaching and learning. Teachers and learners creatively interact with one another, generating new ideas and new relationships. Shared learning experiences lead to discoveries that would otherwise remain hidden.

The key text for *putting on* this lens in this research project was *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge.<sup>24</sup> Senge argues that organizations wanting to move from survival to thriving must practice generative learning. Generative learning expands what members of an organization know about the organization beyond each person's role or specific area of expertise. It also addresses an organization's tendency to lurch from one event or initiative to the next without stopping to evaluate what worked, what didn't work, and if the organization is on a course to reaching its goals.

The Christian Church has suffered from similar *learning disabilities* for centuries. It's usually assumed that the manner and direction of ministry will be decided by paid, professional ministers who will tell the rest of the congregation what to do. The generative learning lens reveals the impoverishment caused by these old assumptions and

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<sup>24</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Rev. and updated. ed. (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 2006).

searches for new ways to see the blessings and benefits of lifelong learning generated by clergy and lay members of the congregation.

The introduction of the participatory action research process to Prairie Wind's leadership team, the action research team, and eventually the whole congregation, was a first step in generative learning. The conversations in meetings, and written and spoken announcements, informed the congregation that this research was a shared activity and not an effort by an expert to gather information that would eventually be delivered to members. *Introduction to Action Research* by Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, and *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* by David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, served as valuable guides for showing how generative learning happens through Action Research (AR).<sup>25</sup>

### **Biblical and Theological Lenses**

The Christian Church has struggled to fully embrace what it means for followers of Jesus to live their lives by God's call in daily work. This has happened despite a rich collection of passages from the Bible and corresponding theological developments that address the issue. Four biblical lenses and four theological lenses proved to be helpful in guiding this research.

#### **Biblical Lenses**

The creation stories in the first two chapters of Genesis teach us that work is both something God does and assigns to the creatures God creates in God's own image. Work

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<sup>25</sup> Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*; David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE, 2009).

is a God-given opportunity for humankind to serve as *co-workers with God* in God's continuing creation of life on our planet. This happens when men and women actually "till" and "keep" the *earth* (Gen 2:15). It also happens whenever and wherever people cooperate with God in growing abundant communities, and join God in blessing and healing others through other kinds of daily work.

Eugene Peterson's *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* helped sharpen this biblical lens with the reminder that God's call to God's people to serve as co-workers with God is always to a particular time and place.<sup>26</sup> It is to the time and place we find ourselves in the present, in whatever *garden* we currently live in, and not to some more ideal destination arrived at after reaching a higher level of spiritual maturity. A corresponding emphasis in this research was on how God was showing up in whatever kinds of daily work Prairie Wind members were doing in the present, and not on what God might be calling us to someday.

A second biblical lens that informed this research was the biblical exhortation to *keep the Sabbath*. "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy," God commands the slaves God has led to freedom (Ex 20:8). God rested after six days of work, and therefore all who work should rest. If the Creator's existence is marked by a rhythm of work and rest, so must all creatures' existence. God's call to rest also reminds us that neither our lives nor our identities depend on our work, though we are tempted to believe otherwise.

The questionnaire used in this research asked a direct question about setting aside a day for rest. This information resulted in Sabbath keeping becoming one of the topics introduced in the small groups gathered for vocational discernment. *The Sense of Call* by

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<sup>26</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005).

Marva Dawn was used as a resource to provide participants in the groups with a more complete understanding of the relationship between God's calling, Sabbath keeping, the *missio Dei*, and daily work.<sup>27</sup>

The biblical understanding of *the priesthood of all believers* served as a third biblical lens in this research project. The traditional understanding of a priest is that he—most always male—served as a necessary intermediary between ordinary people and God. There are passages in both the Hebrew Scriptures (Exod 19:5-6) and the New Testament (1 Pet 2:9-10) that contradict this teaching by identifying all called by God to faith as priests. Martin Luther served as the primary extra-biblical resource in shaping this lens used here.<sup>28</sup>

Each time the action research team met to plan and evaluate the interventions used in this research, it read 1 Peter 2:4-10 together, using a method of Bible reading known as *Dwelling in the Word*.<sup>29</sup> The same text was studied in the search conference. Reminders of Luther's understanding of a shared call to the priesthood were repeated in sermons and leadership team meetings over the course of the research.

The fourth biblical lens used in this research was the lens of *radical love*, described in 1 Corinthians 13. The cultivation of holy callings can become so focused on the right kinds of practices that the people called begin to matter less than the introduction of practices. A researcher is tempted to use people in the same way. All kinds of work can easily become a method of using others to reach a goal. This research

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<sup>27</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther and Harold J. Grimm, *Christian Liberty* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957).

<sup>29</sup> Pat Taylor Ellison and Patrick R. Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word: A Pocket Handbook* (St. Paul, MN: Church Innovations, 2011).

project might have degenerated into little more than convincing the people of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church to participate in certain events and then using them to gain information for a thesis. St. Paul's words and Peter Marty's article "Do You Love People?" stayed near the top of my collections of papers and notes throughout my research to remind me of what mattered most in this research.<sup>30</sup>

### Theological Lenses

The paired theological lenses of *justification* and *vocation* served to temper any slide in this research towards treating daily work as the thing that makes us righteous in the eyes of God. The doctrine of justification teaches us that God alone does that through the saving work of Christ Jesus. We are justified by grace through faith, and therefore have been set free to respond to God's call in various kinds of daily work.

These paired lenses were discussed by the action research team, with guidance from Martin Luther, especially his teaching on the freedom of a Christian.<sup>31</sup> Gustaf Wingren's integration of Luther's teaching on vocation with other key components of this theology in *Luther on Vocation* provided valuable historical material.<sup>32</sup> The Centered Life Initiative's video resource, *Down + Out: Where Grace Takes You*, was used to introduce the basic complementary tenets of justification and vocation to participants in the search conference.<sup>33</sup> The necessary tension between these two lenses was also discussed in the first meetings of the small groups gathered for vocational discernment.

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<sup>30</sup> Peter W. Marty, "Do You Love People?," *The Christian Century*, September 23, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Luther and Grimm, *Christian Liberty*.

<sup>32</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957).

<sup>33</sup> *Down + Out: Where Grace Takes You*, (St. Paul, MN: Centered Life: An Initiative of Luther Seminary, 2007), DVD, 2 discs.



One of the major obstacles to helping ordinary saints discover and live into the fullness of their callings is an assumption that God's work in the world is limited to what the gathered Church does. It was not unusual for a person who participated in one or more of the interventions in this study to tell me they had never really considered how God might be accomplishing God's purposes through the Church scattered into a variety of workplaces. The introduction of the *missio Dei* as another lens for this research provided a response to those statements and lifted the vision of the participants to recognize God at work in new ways.

Help for looking through this lens was provided by *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*.<sup>34</sup> David Bosch's *Transforming Mission*, and Craig Van Gelder's and Dwight Zscheile's *The Missional Church in Perspective* also helped guide my conversations with Prairie Wind's leadership team and action research team.<sup>35</sup> The repeated emphases in these texts on changing talk about the Church's mission from something it does to something God is doing accompanied by the Church needed to be read and shared again and again to break through old, steadfast paradigms.

A third theological lens that informed this research was *the work of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit that was poured out on the Church on the Day of Pentecost continues to breathe life into the Church. The Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and

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<sup>34</sup> Darrell L. Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998).

<sup>35</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, American Society of Missiology Series no 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011); Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*.

sanctifies” the Church.<sup>36</sup> The Christian life is only possible by the help and power of the Spirit. Therefore, the cultivation of holy callings requires an introduction or reminder that God continues to do the kinds of things recorded in the Bible by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives.

One of the key sources for developing this lens in Prairie Wind’s context was *God the Spirit* by Michael Welker.<sup>37</sup> Welker identifies the differences between the spirit of Western culture and the Holy Spirit. Miroslav Volf addresses the relationship between the Holy Spirit and daily work in his book *Work in the Spirit*.<sup>38</sup> Volf argues that a pneumatological understanding of daily work is more helpful than Luther’s doctrine of vocation. The research here kept these viewpoints in tension, especially in the blessing and commissioning interventions offered monthly in Prairie Wind worship services.

The Holy Spirit does not gather Jesus-followers into communities and then scatter them to live against the world or apart from it. This is the key argument in James Davison Hunter’s book, *To Change the World*, the primary resource in shaping the final theological lens of *faithful presence*.<sup>39</sup> A theology of faithful presence emerges out of a clear understanding of God’s move to become present with God’s people in the incarnation of Christ. This is the way God chooses to heal and bless the world, and is also the way God calls the Church to participate in the *missio Dei*. It can happen in whatever

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<sup>36</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959).

<sup>37</sup> Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, 1st English-language ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

spheres of influence we find ourselves. This includes, but it is not limited to, our workplaces.

Craig Nesson also contributed to the shaping of this lens in *Shalom Church*.<sup>40</sup> Nesson builds on Luther's two-kingdom paradigm by identifying how the *missio Dei* employs an *ambidextrous* Body of Christ in becoming faithfully present in the world. God desires that the Church be present in the world to both share the means of grace and work for justice and peace.

A primary assumption in the research question is that when God calls ordinary saints to faithful living, God calls us to be faithfully present in daily work. This lens shaped this research from the beginning. A question that was repeated in the questionnaire, focus groups, interviews in worship, and in small group conversations was some variation of "How is God showing up in your daily work?" The repeated answer was through our faithful presence, by the power of the Spirit. A key focus of this participatory action research was to direct Prairie Wind members towards recognition of the ways God is accomplishing God's purposes *in the world through us*, in our daily work.

### **Research Methodology**

This PAR project employed a transformative mixed methods design.<sup>41</sup> The mixed methods approach involved the *generation* of both quantitative and qualitative data from

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<sup>40</sup> Craig L. Nesson, *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014), 228.

members of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church.<sup>42</sup> It was transformative in design because of the desire to include participants in the research in a way that built trust, made goals and strategies transparent, and led to changes in the way congregation members understood and lived out their individual and communal callings from God.<sup>43</sup> A second goal was to change the congregational culture through the different kinds of data gathering and planned interventions. The assumption at the outset of the research was that the generation of diverse kinds of data would lead Prairie Wind members into a more comprehensive understanding of call, and provide a more thorough analysis of any changes in the congregation that resulted from the PAR.

The population in this study was the adult membership of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church in Riverside, South Dakota. The five hundred adult members of Prairie Wind have participated in a three-hour new member class at some point in the fifteen year history of Prairie Wind. They also worship with the congregation, and offer time and financial gifts to support the ministry of the congregation.

The quantitative research component consisted of a census of 312 members who had a valid email address on file in the church office. I developed a questionnaire that served as a baseline and end line measurement. It was field tested by the eight members of the congregation who served on the action research team, and by two persons serving with me on a regional outdoor ministries board who responded to an email invitation to participate. Following the field test, the questionnaire was distributed through

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<sup>42</sup> Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 74. Coghlan and Brannick assert that “even the very intention and presence of research” is an intervention and has implications for the system involved. Therefore it is more appropriate to speak of data generation than data gathering.

<sup>43</sup> Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 71.

SurveyMonkey to the census in November 2014 for a baseline measurement.<sup>44</sup> An implied consent form accompanied each questionnaire.

Qualitative research was conducted via the creation of a focus group protocol and the convening of two focus groups. The focus group protocol was field tested on two groups of persons from other Lutheran congregations in Riverside. I recruited fifteen persons to participate in two Prairie Wind focus groups. The groups met at the beginning of the study; one met on December 2, 2014, and the second met on December 4, 2014. Participants were given the choice to participate in whatever meeting best fit their schedules. Five women and three men met in the first group. They ranged in age from late 30s to early 60s, and identified daily work in health care, sales, insurance, graphic design, and education. Three women and four men met in the second group. They ranged in age from late 30s to late 50s. Persons in the second group identified daily work in real estate sales, small business and entrepreneurial endeavors, law, law enforcement, banking, education, and business. Several persons in the groups also noted that parenting was a significant kind of daily work.

The focus groups represented a nonprobability, purposive sampling of the congregation. The same persons were invited to meet again at the end of the study, in September 2015. Nine of the participants met in two different groups. The qualitative data gathered served as baseline and end line measurements. The group conversations

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<sup>44</sup> SurveyMonkey is a web-based survey development tool that individuals and organizations can use for the creation, distribution, reception and analysis of customizable questionnaires. I used the tool to create and distribute by email the questionnaires used in this research. It was also my tool of choice for receiving and compiling the quantitative data generated by the questionnaires. SurveyMonkey is product of SurveyMonkey, Inc., located in Palo Alto, CA. More information is available at [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com).

were audio recorded and video recorded. Each member of the focus groups read and signed an informed consent form.

Once initial baseline measurements were obtained, I worked with the research team to introduce and implement five interventions to the congregation between January 1 and August 31, 2015. The first intervention was a search conference.<sup>45</sup> The conference consisted of a meeting of twenty-two Prairie Wind members who met on a Saturday in January 2015 to learn more about and discuss the subject of this research project. The goal was to decide upon and devise plans to implement four more interventions or practices which would help Prairie Wind members cultivate their holy callings. Participants agreed by the conclusion of the conference to develop and introduce the practices of *storytelling* via social media, first person *testimony* in worship, *blessing and commissioning* in worship, and *small group integration* of vocation and daily work.

These four additional interventions were spread out between February and August of 2015. Storytelling happened via Facebook pictures and posts on the congregation website in Lent. The testimonies were also offered during Lent, in Wednesday night worship services. The one-Sunday-a-month blessing and commissioning of members according to different kinds of daily work began the second Sunday in March and continued beyond the end of this research. Three small groups met in June 2015 to talk about the relationship between personal identity and daily work. Two groups met again in August 2015 to discuss the relationship between work, rest, and Sabbath keeping.

The action research team, in its monthly meetings starting in February 2015, discussed and evaluated each of the four interventions following its introduction to the

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<sup>45</sup> Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 144-149.

congregation. This action research cycle continued until the conclusion of data gathering in September 2015.<sup>46</sup> Adjustments to the ongoing intervention were made as necessary, and plans to introduce whatever intervention was next on the calendar were reviewed.

End line measurements were obtained in September 2015 by the redistribution of the initial questionnaire to the same census, plus new members who joined the congregation since the baseline measurement. Participants in the initial two focus groups also met to provide an end line qualitative measurement. Seven questions were added to the questionnaire to inquire specifically about the PAR interventions. Quantitative data were assessed by doing an independent t-test on all who filled out the questionnaire. Qualitative data were coded again using the same method used to code the initial focus group conversations.<sup>47</sup> Analyses of the data determined that the participatory action research process used in this research did assist Prairie Wind members in the recognition of ways their callings and opportunities in daily work enabled us to participate more fully in the *missio Dei* individually and together.

## Other Matters

### Definitions of Key Terms

*Abundant community*: An understanding of community developed by John McKnight and Peter Block in a book by the same name that asserts that every neighborhood and local community has the gifts and assets it needs to solve many, if not all, of its own problems.

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<sup>46</sup> Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*.

<sup>47</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014).

*Asset-based community development:* An approach to community development builds on the skills, expertise, and connections of local neighbors, associations, and institutions to build strong, local, and sustainable communities.

*Body of Christ:* A biblical metaphor for describing the Church. The Church is both like a human body with many different members working together as one, and the physical embodiment of the Risen Christ in the world.

*Calling:* An invitation by God to live a God-centered life in any number of ways. The term is more broadly used in contemporary Western culture to refer to a certain kind of work a person is doing or should be doing.

*Daily work:* The activity God assigns humanity for the provision of individual and communal sustenance. Daily work includes, but is not limited to, a job done for pay. Daily work also includes carrying out household tasks, caring for a child or elder, service as a volunteer, and the tending and mending of the creation.

*Generative learning:* A cooperative learning process in which teacher and learner creatively interact with one another to generate new relationships between what is already known with what is yet undiscovered.

*Missio Dei:* The Mission of God understood as ever active, always moving toward the whole creation in love for the purpose of reconciling and healing the whole creation. This Mission includes, but is not limited to, God's calling of God's people to cooperate with and participate in this work.

*Participatory Action Research (PAR):* A social science research method that is participatory and democratic, and seeks to enable some kind of change through the research process.



*Priesthood of all believers:* A theological concept which asserts that all persons who confess faith in Jesus Christ and are baptized into the Christian Church are equally qualified to serve as witnesses to the Gospel, but will do so in different ways, according to the gifts given them by the Holy Spirit.

*Pneumatology:* The study of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit

*Shalom:* The intended state of God's creation made whole, marked by peace, justice, love of neighbor, and care for the creation, grounded in God's love and grace.

*Transformational leadership:* Leadership that challenges followers to move beyond the *status quo* in favor of adoption of a new identity that accompanies new mission and vision.

*Vocation:* The call from God to all human beings to live as new creations in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and to participate with the Holy Spirit in the blessing and healing of creation.

### Ethical Concerns

This participatory action research project was conducted according to the standards of Luther Seminary and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the research, and about how the data would be compiled and reported. Implied consent forms accompanied every questionnaire (see appendix C), and informed consent forms were distributed and signed before any focus group interviews (see appendix D). Focus group participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed. All quantitative and qualitative data collected were kept confidential. Data generated and collected during the project were kept on a computer that was password protected, and on a flash drive that was kept in a

locked container in the investigator's home. Pseudonyms have been used for the congregation, the location of the congregation, and for those who participated in the research. All data collected were being kept in a locked safety deposit box following the conclusion of the research. The data will be kept there for three years and then destroyed.

Every effort was made during the research to assure those invited to participate that they were under no obligation to participate in the questionnaire, focus groups, or research interventions, and that their participation or refusal to participate would not jeopardize their standing in the congregation in any way. That being said, there is no escaping the fact that a researcher of a congregation who is also the pastor of that congregation holds a kind of power that would not be present if the researcher were an outsider. The one who speaks for God from the pulpit, and *carries* the Lord to the people at the font and table, will likely wield influence that a *normal* researcher would not. The action research team and congregational leadership team were asked to serve as watchdogs throughout the project to make sure no harm or negative consequences were suffered by participants or non-participants. What is more difficult to discern is how this unique relationship between researcher and people might have skewed the data in some way due to people responding to their pastor and not just a researcher.

### **Chapter Summary**

Prairie Wind Lutheran Church has insisted since its beginning fifteen years ago that all members of the congregation are ministers. The congregation asserts in its core values that every member is called to and gifted for ministry. Yet church leaders, starting with myself, have fallen into old habits of interpreting this to mean that Prairie Wind members have been called to lead or participate in some kind of congregationally

sponsored activity. While not all bad, this shrunken understanding of ministry misses most of the opportunities Prairie Wind members have to participate with God in God's work of tending, mending, and saving the whole creation through daily work. It also serves to reinforce a cultural compartmentalization of religion.

The purpose this PAR and its multiple interventions introduced here was lead to Prairie Wind members into a discovery of the various and sometimes surprising ways that God is transforming Riverside, South Dakota through the many and varied expressions of our daily work. Chapter two of this work provides a brief overview of the ways the whole Christian Church has struggled to embrace the full meaning of vocation, with special attention given to hopeful developments in the last century. Chapter three examines in-depth the key theoretical lenses of transformational leadership, social ecology, and generative learning. We turn in chapter four to a more complete look at the four biblical lenses and four theological lenses that have informed this work. Chapter five reports the rationale for using a Participatory Action Research model for this research project, and describes details of the methodology and how it was implemented. Chapter six reveals the results of the research. Chapter seven is dedicated to an analysis of what was discovered in the research, and what the results mean for the further cultivation of the callings of the members of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church. It also suggests how this research could benefit other communities of faith desiring to cultivate the callings of its members in daily work.

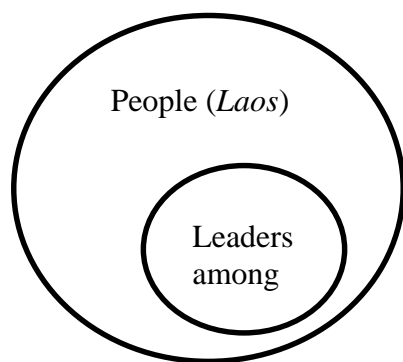
## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

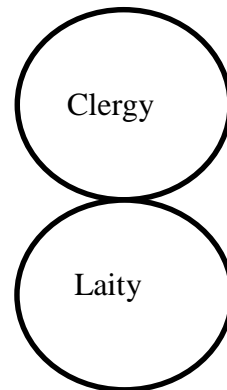
Throughout most of its history, the Christian Church has divided followers of Jesus into two categories of people: clergy and laity. The clergy have been the trained experts who “do” ministry. The laity has been identified as those persons to whom ministry is “done,” or who assist the clergy with mostly institutional chores.<sup>1</sup>

Descriptions of the early church in the New Testament do not make this distinction. When the Apostle Paul describes the Church, he talks about it being one body with many members. Each member of the body receives some gift or “manifestation” of the Holy Spirit “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7, 12). Certain persons in the community are chosen to serve as leaders, but there are not two classes of disciples.

New Testament Church View



Contemporary Church View



**Figure 1. Views of Leadership<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI/Vancouver, BC: W.B. Eerdmans; Regent College Publishing, 2000), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 27.

Another New Testament letter describes both the great honor and grand mission of the whole people of God: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). There are guidelines for persons chosen to serve as leaders in the church (1 Tim 3:1-2, Titus 1:7). But the expectation and practice in the first century church is that every member of the church would *do* ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit, according to his or her gift. Every member of the community would also receive ministry from others in the body.

### The Clergy-Laity Divide

A distinction between clergy and laity began to emerge in the church in the second and third centuries. The division arose largely due to three influences: (1) imitation of the secular structures of the Greek-Roman world in which citizens were distinguished from their leaders; (2) the transference of the priesthood model in the Hebrew Scriptures to the leadership of the church; and (3) popular piety which elevated the Lord’s Supper to a mystery which required priestly administration.<sup>3</sup> Growing debates over theological issues also contributed to the choosing of certain members of the community to do the theological wrestling for the rest of the community. These debates further accelerated the shift from a notion of leadership in which Spirit-given gifts and abilities were dynamically employed in the community of faith to a separate clergy office entrusted with special knowledge and authority for directing the life of the church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>4</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, “Missional Leadership: Equipping God’s People for Mission” in Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 190.

The church became settled and established in ways it could not have dreamed when Constantine made Christianity the preferred religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century C.E. It had survived centuries of struggle and persecution to conquer the empire that had sought to destroy it. A pitiful band of frightened disciples had become the victorious people of God. The *missio Dei* seemed completed. Christendom was born. The church's understanding of leadership was revised and reshaped again to fit its new, prominent status. The focus was no longer on making inroads in a fallen world, but on maintaining captured territory. Now leaders were needed to care for and dispense grace to a settled people. The governing principle became "No clergy, no church."<sup>5</sup>

A related consequence of Christianity's new status and the establishment of the clergy to lead worship and care for church members was the church's complacency in its cultivation of lifelong faith in the lives of disciples.<sup>6</sup> Why bother if the victory was won, the kingdom come, and every citizen of the empire was a member of the church because they were considered the same thing? This complacency eventually led to the development of monasteries and convents where followers of Jesus who wanted to dedicate their entire lives to prayer, worship, and humble work came to live. Like the clergy in the institutional church, those who chose this path were understood to have received a higher calling from God than those who lived out their faith in ordinary daily life.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>6</sup> Dave Daubert and Tana Kjos, *Reclaiming the "V" Word: Renewing Life at Its Vocational Core*, Lutheran Voices (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 17.

## The Masks of God

The only work that qualified as *God's work* at the dawn of the Reformation in the sixteenth century was that done in and for the church.<sup>7</sup> Those choosing service as priests, monks, or nuns were called the *spiritual* estate. Those who labored at any other kind of *worldly* daily work were assigned membership in the lesser *temporal* estate. Martin Luther attacked this distinction in his treatise *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* by arguing “all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate” and “consecrated priests” through our baptisms.<sup>8</sup>

Luther argues forcefully that God makes no distinction between lesser and greater kinds of daily work. God accomplishes God's purposes in God's creation through all kinds of laborers complementing one another in a variety of ways. God does this much like a loving parent who assigns chores to his children. The parent could do the work directly, but this would hinder the child's development and keep the child from experiencing the joy of work well done. So God “hides”—and chooses to accomplish God's work through all manner of our work:

What else is all our work to God—whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government—but just such a child's performance, by which He wants to give His gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are the masks of God, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy J. Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, Redeemer (New York: Dutton, 2012), 68.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther and Theodore G. Tappert, *Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, Fortress Press 2007 ed., 4 vols., vol. 1, 1517-1520, edited by Theodore B. Tappert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 263.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms III* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1958), 96.

Luther championed an understanding of daily work that was radical in his day. He urged a return to *the priesthood of all believers* as it is described in the New Testament. But the understanding of Christian ministry that emerged following the Reformation was not so different from what existed before the Reformation. In the Augsburg Confession, the church is identified as “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”<sup>10</sup> The work of gospel preaching and administration of the sacraments continued to be reserved for trained professional clergy who were *called* to such work. The laity, consisting of all other members of the church, was invited to assist the clergy in a variety of supportive roles whenever believers assembled. Arguments made at this same time in church history for recognition of *the priesthood of all believers* did not halt assumptions about the superior role of clergy and the lesser role of laity in carrying out the ministry of the church.

Nearly five hundred years after the Reformation, the church still struggles to move past the division of followers of Jesus into *clergy* and *laity*. It still struggles to recognize all kinds of daily work as *the masks of God*. Representatives from a variety of denominations can agree that “*ministry* in its broadest sense denotes the service to which the whole people of God are called.”<sup>11</sup> But the actual practice of ministry mostly remains stuck in old paradigms with professional clergy serving as distributors of spiritual expertise and resources, while the rest of the priesthood of all believers serves in a

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<sup>10</sup> Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 42.

<sup>11</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 21.



lesser, supporting role. “The priesthood of all believers is continually undermined by the practices of ordination.”<sup>12</sup>

### Faith at Work Movement

The Faith at Work movement emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century as a response by lay persons to church leaders’ failures to help them bridge the gap between Sunday and Monday.<sup>13</sup> The people in the pews had grown tired of the church’s great *omission* in preaching, teaching, and congregational prayers about faith and daily work. They suspected there must be more to most work than collecting a pay check, and more to the abundant life promised by Jesus than worship services and ministry planning meetings. Yet most church leaders stayed silent on the subject.

Not surprisingly, the Faith at Work movement arose “largely outside the institutional church and theological academy.”<sup>14</sup> David Miller suggests that the movement is actually the third of three waves that began at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> The first wave was the social gospel era (1890s-1945) which receded during the Great Depression and ended with World War II. The second wave was the era of lay ministry, marked by a combined emphasis by the global church on ecumenism and the ministry of the laity in all of daily life. A signature statement representing this emphasis was issued at the second assembly of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, Illinois in 1954 which declared:

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<sup>12</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, “Missional Leadership: Equipping God’s People for Mission” in Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 195.

<sup>13</sup> David W. Miller, “The Faith at Work Movement,” *Theology Today* 60 (2003).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

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

The time has come to make the ministry of the laity explicit, visible and active in the world. The real battles of the faith today are being fought in factories, shops, offices, and farms, in political parties and government agencies, in countless homes, in the press, radio and television, in the relationship of nations. Very often it is said that the church should ‘go into these spheres’; but the fact is, that the Church is already in these spheres in the persons of its laity.<sup>16</sup>

This emphasis on the ministry of the laity in the world gradually morphed into an emphasis on helping the laity discover and utilize its gifts and talents to strengthen the ministry of the congregation whenever it gathered.

Miller calls the third wave of the movement the faith at work era. This era began in the 1980s and continues today. The third wave of this movement “encompasses a wide range of theologies” and multiple expressions of faith around the world.<sup>17</sup> The diversity among participants in the movement has made it difficult for them to talk with one another about what is driving the movement. This is also true for clergy and laity in the Christian tradition who have struggled to connect on this issue for centuries. Miller suggests that the movement is characterized by four different ways people *do* integrate faith and work whether their faith tradition has given them language for it or not: through ethics, experience, enrichment, and evangelization.<sup>18</sup> The motivation for integration may be different for each way, but all the ways bridge the chasm between Sunday and Monday, and provide a means to start to recognize what daily work has to do with the *missio Dei*.

The clamoring of a consumer culture for professional ministers to satisfy the religious *customer* has become a more recent reason for maintaining the clergy—laity

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<sup>16</sup> *Evanston Speaks* (New York: World Council of Churches, 1955) 64-65 quoted in Nelvin Vos, "Laity in the World: The Church at Work," *Word & World* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 154.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, "The Faith at Work Movement," 303.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

divide, even though the church's understanding of ministry has better matched the witness of Scripture in recent decades. The old system fits nicely—and unhealthily—into the current culture of purchasing services from professionals. Many paid servants feel trapped by these expectations even as the Scriptures direct church leaders to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” as a primary job description (Eph 4:12). The way for the church to become what God intends is not through the offer and purchase of goods and services from religious professionals. Rather, the way of the *missio Dei* is a path shared by all in the community through the recognition of God's call and the exercise of gifts given to all the members of a community for cooperating with God in bringing about shalom in the whole, wide world.

#### A Brief History of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church

Prairie Wind Lutheran Church began as a mission start of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Riverside, South Dakota in 2000. A dream of this pastor/developer and the first members of the congregation was that Prairie Wind would become a church that would recognize and live out individual callings in community. The dream took shape as a group of fifteen to twenty people met regularly for three months to read the Bible, and begin discerning what it says is the *essence* of God's Church. We read from the Gospels, especially Jesus' parables in Luke, and Jesus' Last Discourse in John 13-17. We spent time reading the Book of Acts to find out what happened after the Holy Spirit ignited Jesus' first followers into a church. We listened together to Peter's proclamation in Acts 2 of what the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus means for the world, and we asked with the crowd (2:37), “What should we do?” We read from Paul's letters, especially 1 Corinthians 12-14, and talked with one another about what it might

look like for us to become the Body of Christ in Riverside. We shared our individual stories to get a sense of who the Holy Spirit had gathered together, and what that might mean for a congregation about to be born. Finally, we talked about the neighborhood into which we would eventually be transplanted. Five years earlier, the South Dakota Synod, working with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, had purchased land for a future congregation in an area expected to grow in population after 2000. The property was surrounded by fields of corn and oats at that time, but many housing development projects were underway. The city planners informed us that our eleven acres would eventually be surrounded by several hundred upscale homes inhabited by highly educated people in an upper middle class income bracket.

A first mission statement and set of core values for the community of faith emerged out of those first Bible studies, conversations about our context, and study of other congregation mission and vision statements. We wanted something that could be stated in a single sentence that would keep Jesus Christ at the center while also informing how we were called to respond to His Lordship. The congregation agreed upon the following statement and inserted it into the congregation constitution at the time of our formal organization in November 2002:

The mission of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church is to *invite* people to a transforming faith in Jesus Christ, to *grow* with one another to become more like Him, and to *serve* as His compassionate community in the world.

The small group which morphed into a steering committee also proposed the five core values with brief commentary to highlight what we believed should be the essence of the congregation the Spirit was gathering into existence. We hoped to be as clear about our being as we were about what God was calling us to do together. These values were also inserted into the congregation's constitution:

1. *Jesus Christ is the Way to life.* We believe Jesus is Lord (John 20:28), and that He has most clearly revealed who He is by His suffering love on a cross. Following Jesus is our first priority, and the way to experience life that is abundant (John 10:10), joy-filled (John 15:11) and everlasting (John 3:16).

2. *All people matter to God and so they matter to us.* Jesus came into the world to offer grace and mercy to all persons no matter what path they have chosen in life (Luke 15:1-32; 19:10). We are committed to obeying Jesus' New Commandment (John 13:34-35) and to reaching out with the unconditional and everlasting love of Jesus to all people, just as they are, without regard to race, beliefs, gender, age, lifestyle or anything else.

3. *Following Jesus is a life-long, growing experience.* When we meet God through the love of Christ, we are changed and impelled towards spiritual maturity (Phil 3:13-14). For this reason we strive to bring people into an ever-growing relationship with Jesus Christ (Matt 28:19). This growth happens most often by the power of the Holy Spirit through participation in personal devotion, community worship and small groups (Acts 2:42-47).

4. *Every Jesus-follower is called to and gifted for ministry.* We believe God calls every believer to ministry, and gives every believer special gifts and abilities for faithful living and serving (1 Cor 12). We are committed to helping people discern their call, realize and develop their spiritual gifts and abilities, and recognize opportunities to serve as the Body of Christ in the world.

5. *God is continually at work in us to transform the world.* We believe God is at work here and now, through the Holy Spirit, to empower and equip us for carrying out our mission (John 14:26, Acts 2:1-42). We are committed to prayerfully receiving direction from the Spirit who inspires Christ-like living, bold and innovative serving, and a changed world.

The first congregational leaders also decided on a church structure consisting of four ministry teams: Growth, Ministry Resources, Outreach, and Worship. A significant influence on our decisions to structure our ministry teams as we did was the fractal design for teams proposed and outlined by Pastor Wayne Cordeiro in his book *Doing Church as a Team*.<sup>19</sup> Cordeiro defines fractal design as the repeating pattern that appears in many living organisms such as fern leaves and the human body. In the case of a fern, if you look at the plant in its entirety, you see one major stem with small branches

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<sup>19</sup> Wayne Cordeiro, *Doing Church as a Team* (Honolulu, HI: New Hope Pub., 1998).

extending from it on either side. A closer look at a single branch will reveal the same pattern. Careful examination of a single leaf and the fronds on each leaf will reveal the pattern repeated again. Cordeiro argues that because a church is a living organism, doing church as a team can mean copying this same fractal design. It begins with congregation leaders assigning responsibility for ministry to four core teams. Each team consists of five people who have been identified as having gifts, passion, and abilities for the particular area of ministry. Cordeiro goes on to suggest building teams in groupings of five people for the sake of simplicity and because it's a good size for people providing care to one another.

Each team then decides how to divide its ministry into four areas. In our case, the Growth Team's responsibilities were divided into adult education, youth, children, and faith milestones. The Worship Team's responsibilities were divided into music, visual arts, Sunday servants, and prayer. The other two teams also identified four areas of ministry. Using fractal design, one person on the ministry team guided the whole work of the team, and the other four choose which area he or she led. The problem with this design, and the ministry that ensued, was that it was almost completely focused on ministry as a planned congregational activity. There was little conversation about what it means to be the church beyond our planned events. There was no training or coaching of members for recognizing opportunities and responding to them in daily work or daily life.

A significant way that leaders of the congregation have attempted to further clarify our shared ministry began at a retreat for the congregation's staff and leadership team in 2008. The retreat began with our turning to the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17) to learn how to do battle with *giants*. The group also used a resource prepared by

Dr. Richard Bliese for a stewardship conference.<sup>20</sup> The group prayed through and pondered the text to discern what “five smooth stones” (1 Sam 17:40) God had given Prairie Wind for doing mission faithfully and effectively in our present and future.

Each of the identified stones is both a congregational asset and a practice for responding to the congregation’s five core values. Each of the practices clearly becomes something the congregation can only do with God’s help as it is qualified by the accompanying adjective.<sup>21</sup> The *stones* that Prairie Wind recognizes as gifts from God, has lifted up in banners in the worship area, and carries in its *pockets* for fulfilling its mission are: Passionate Worship (the response to *Jesus Christ is the Way to life*); Radical Hospitality (the response to *All people matter to God*); Lifelong Faith Formation (the response to *Following Jesus is a lifelong, growing experience*); Extravagant Generosity (the response to *Every Jesus-follower is called to and gifted for ministry*); and Bold Service (the response to *God is continually at work in us to transform the world*). These stones have not been identified in the congregation just to sling in a place called “church” or for doing what has often been referred to as “church work.” These are gifts for daily discipleship, for joining God’s mission in the world in daily life.

Fifteen years after it began worshipping, the congregation has grown to approximately 850 baptized members. The core value that every member is gifted for ministry remains part of our “soul script,” but leaders’ teaching over the years has

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<sup>20</sup> Richard H. Bliese, “Mission Starts with Stewardship and Five Small Stones (Session 1 of 3),” Luther Seminary, [http://www.luthersem.edu/stewardship/resource\\_detail.aspx?resource\\_id=875](http://www.luthersem.edu/stewardship/resource_detail.aspx?resource_id=875) (accessed December 23, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> After our leaders discerned the five “stones” we discovered another resource that identified five key “fruits” for congregational life that were almost identical to our stones, and convinced the group of the power of adding appropriate adjectives to describe each stone. See Robert C. Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

continued to focus more on members' calling and gifts for ministry *in congregational gatherings and activities*, especially as the number of weekly worship services and congregational programs have increased.<sup>22</sup> Prairie Wind maintains a strong focus on ministry in the wider community, but thus far has fallen short of early dreams of helping every member discover how God wants to use us to accomplish God's purposes, not just through congregational events, but in every facet of daily life.

### Chapter Summary

The Christian Church has struggled for two thousand years to embrace an ecclesiology in which persons chosen for leadership and all other members of the community share a common calling to participate in God's mission in the world. The New Testament teaches that all members of the community are given gifts and empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve as priests with different roles in the priesthood of all believers. This model for ministry was shoved aside with the coming of Christendom and the accompanying division between the roles and prestige of clergy and laity. Martin Luther and other reformers sought to resurrect a more biblical understanding of shared ministry in the 1500s by pointing out the ways God's people share a common vocation in different occupations as they wear *the masks of God*. The Faith at Work movement in the twentieth century has tried to build on Luther's teachings and draw clear connections between the work of the laity and the *missio Dei*. Some progress has been made at closing the clergy-laity divide as we enter the twenty-first century, but now new factors, such as consumerism, serve to limit ministry to paid *specialists*.

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<sup>22</sup> Prairie Wind Lutheran Church participated for two years in a coaching relationship with Vibrant Faith Ministries. One of the congregation's assignments during that time was to put together a "soul script" consisting of a brief summary of the congregation's mission, vision, values, and priorities.



Prairie Wind Lutheran Church was developed with an eye towards helping every member understand and embrace the core teaching that “every Jesus-follower is called to and gifted for ministry.” The young congregation has realized some success in achieving its goal, but it’s been understood mostly in terms of every member having something to contribute to organized congregational activities. Up until now, few connections have been made between the call to ministry and church members’ daily work. We will take a look in the next chapter at some theoretical lenses that will help Prairie Wind begin to make the shift towards a broader understanding of what it means to participate in the *missio Dei* beyond the events listed in the church bulletin.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND KEY THEORETICAL LENSES

We all look at our lives through different lenses. These lenses are concepts through which people observe the world around them. The Enlightenment presumed that it was possible to learn certain value-free (or lens-free) facts that every person could know in the same way. Yet developments in science in the twentieth century, especially in quantum physics, have shown that a picture of the cosmos that attempts to exclude the observing subject “is not a true picture.”<sup>1</sup> When making observations, especially in research, it is important to identify the lenses through which things are seen.

Several different theoretical lenses and frames informed this research project. Three that were especially helpful were *transformational leadership*, *social ecology*, and *generative learning*. Each of these three lenses complemented the other two in the planned work of cultivating change in Prairie Wind Lutheran Church for the sake of the wider community. Introducing and guiding effective change in any organization requires artful leadership. A brief review of some of the growing amount of literature on transformational leadership showed a fit with the work outlined here. The use of social ecology as a second lens linked an understanding of daily work to the health of communities. This lens also focuses on the tendency of modern systems to outsource community work to professional leaders, and how that might change. Generative learning

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<sup>1</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 37.

offered a way for leaders and organizations to discover together new, preferred pathways into the future as they work out of a creative tension between current realities and a shared vision of new possibilities.

### Transformational Leadership

A common assumption about leadership is that it is mostly a solo activity practiced by a supremely gifted individual who shows others the way to do something or get somewhere. There is biblical support for such solitary leadership. For example, Moses acts in this way in the Hebrew Scriptures as he argues with the Egyptian king for the release of God's people, stretches his hand out over the Red Sea to divide it, and trudges to the top of Mount Sinai all by himself to receive God's commandments (Exod 6:28-10:29; Exod 14:21; Exod 19:20). He dies alone after a lifetime of faithful leadership at God's command (Deut 34:1-5). American history is filled with stories of the solo leader who gallops on a midnight ride, treks across the wilderness, leads a charge in battle, or makes a fortune through what is assumed to be sheer individual brilliance, courage, and perseverance.

A better understanding of leadership is that it "is not simply a matter of what a leader does but of what occurs in a relationship."<sup>2</sup> Effective leadership requires much more than an individual exerting his or her will on another person or group. It is not synonymous with *authority*. Leadership is a "subtle process of mutual influence fusing thought, feeling and action to produce cooperative effort in the service of purposes and

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<sup>2</sup> Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 338.

values embraced by *both* the leader and the led.”<sup>3</sup> This understanding of leadership better informs pastors and congregations desiring to cultivate and practice shared ministry than stories of mountain-climbing prophets or charismatic American heroes.

Leadership that challenges followers to move beyond the status quo in favor of adoption of a new identity that accompanies new mission and vision is called *transformational leadership*. First introduced by James MacGregor Burns as “transforming leadership,” it was expanded by Bernard Bass to explain how such leadership motivates and impacts followers.<sup>4</sup> Much of the leadership exercised in our society is *transactional leadership*. Transactional leaders lead by exchanging one thing for another: financial rewards for a job well done, a starting position on the team for working hard in practice, or political favors for campaign contributions. Most leadership exercised in the church is also transactional. Paid professionals are usually the persons responsible for envisioning, deciding on, and implementing the majority of church operations in exchange for congregation members’ gifts of time, talents and treasure.

Transformational leadership is an expansion of transactional leadership.<sup>5</sup> Transformational leaders move beyond setting up simple exchanges or agreements with colleagues and followers. Bass identifies four components of transformational leadership:

Leadership is charismatic such that the follower seeks to identify with the leaders and emulate them. The leadership inspires the follower with challenge and persuasion providing meaning and understanding. The leadership is intellectually stimulating, expanding the follower’s use of their abilities. Finally, the leadership

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>4</sup> Burns, *Leadership*; Bass, *Transformational Leadership: Industry, Military, and Educational Impact*.

<sup>5</sup> Bass, *Transformational Leadership: Industry, Military, and Educational Impact*, 5.

is individually considerate, providing the follower with support, mentoring, and coaching.<sup>6</sup>

Critics of transformational leadership note that leaders with these qualities could use them to do more harm than good. The temptation to dictatorial elitism, self-interest, and exploitation of followers would increase if charismatic leadership were the only component of transformational leadership. There is no shortage of examples in political or church history. Leaders who exercise all four components interdependently usually transcend their own self-interests to benefit their group or organization, meet the challenges of a mission, and/or do the right thing.<sup>7</sup>

Bass also argues that transformational leadership moves followers beyond motivation resulting from transactional leadership. The transformational leader assists followers with “the exciting experience of unexpected discoveries, and the sense of empowerment as a mature adult rather than continued treatment as an immature child.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the follower’s commitment is strengthened by the leader’s insistence that he or she is a valued partner in the shared mission. This kind of leadership began to emerge in my research simply by inviting participants to consider ways they were living out the *missio Dei* in their daily work. Some had never considered it a possibility. They’d assumed that participating in Prairie Wind’s mission only meant giving financial gifts and using their time and abilities for church-organized activity.

Another significant contribution of Bass’ work is his contrast of *laissez-faire* leadership with empowerment. In my experience as a leader, I’ve confused handing off

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 26.

ministry and *getting out of the way* with empowerment. *Laissez-faire* leadership that turns over responsibilities to others with little or no direction or support, and then abdicates responsibility for follower performance is “the epitome of ineptness and ineffectiveness.”<sup>9</sup> By contrast, empowering leadership allows and encourages followers “to enable, direct, and control themselves in carrying out their responsibilities in alignment of their goals with the goals of their leader and the larger organization.”<sup>10</sup> This kind of leadership requires an ongoing conversation with followers, instead of a one-time *launch* into the unfamiliar. For empowerment to work, the leader delegates responsibilities which are meaningful, if possible, while also providing necessary information, authority, resources, encouragement, clear objectives, and room for failure. The empowering leader also monitors progress, gives support, and provides praise and rewards for accomplishment of objectives.<sup>11</sup> The empowering transformational leader inspires, teaches, and coaches followers while honoring full partnership in a shared mission.

*The Leadership Challenge* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner is another key text in describing best ways for leaders to inspire and challenge followers, and to develop followers into leaders.<sup>12</sup> While Bass’ identification of *charismatic leadership* as one of the four components of transformational leadership seems to indicate people with certain personalities make better leaders, Kouzes and Posner argue that leadership “is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that are available to all of us. The ‘great person’—

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>12</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*.

woman or man—theory of leadership is just plain wrong.”<sup>13</sup> The authors have learned through case analyses and survey questionnaires of thousands of leadership experiences that five key practices for learning and developing transformational or “exemplary” leadership: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.<sup>14</sup> Exemplary leadership can be practiced at any time by anyone who is willing to learn these five practices. Transformation is likely when these skills are practiced together by the persons in an organization.

Kouzes’ and Posner’s description of old assumptions about leaders discovering a vision to share with their constituents reads a little like the biblical stories of Moses—or of clergy who understand their role as bringing a vision to the laity in their charge. One of the mistakes leaders make is assuming “it’s their vision that matters, and if it’s their vision then they have to create it.”<sup>15</sup> Church leaders may give God credit for the vision, but many still assume they are people chosen to receive it and deliver it. Effective leaders invite followers and constituents to participate in finding a common purpose for the present and the future. An effective leader is like a good wagon master who led wagon trains across the western United States in the nineteenth century. Before the wagons rolled, the wagon master sent out scouts to see what was over the horizon. Information provided by the scouts enabled the wagon master to better discern when and where to go next.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 23.

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

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

The metaphor has been useful in helping Prairie Wind members recognize how their daily work puts them out on the horizon, and how important they are in crafting a shared vision for how to be church in the community and join God over the horizon. It has been a way for this leader to recognize how members can and must contribute to discerning a future direction for our congregation's ministry. The gathering of quantitative and qualitative data in this research has been one of the ways Prairie Wind's *scouts* have been empowered to report what they see.

Like Bass, Kouzes and Posner identify the empowerment of followers and constituents as a key skill in transformational leadership. Effective leaders enable others to act by fostering collaboration, developing competence, and building confidence.<sup>17</sup> One of the goals of the participatory action steps in this research was to do this. Prairie Wind members were invited to view how fellow members were living out their calling in daily work via social media; pray for one another in worship by categories of daily work; and learn to talk about their own joys and struggles related to faith and work by gathering for conversations. This was a significant step beyond declarations from the pulpit that every member is a minister in his or her daily work.

Prairie Wind Lutheran Church has implemented some practices in the past to work towards a shared vision and goals. Yet problem solving and innovations in ministry were still mostly assumed to be the responsibility of the paid *experts* who make up the church staff. Congregational leaders have done some work in *equipping* members to carry out certain kinds of organized and directed ministry, but for the most part this has fallen short of developing followers into leaders. The purpose here was to introduce

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 260.



transformational leadership practices in ways that led to congregation members' developing new approaches to ministry as they served in their role of *scouts* roaming the horizon in their daily work.

### Social Ecology

Residents of the state I live in are participating in a great debate these days over whether or not the Keystone XL Pipeline should run through the western third of the state. Proponents argue it will generate thousands of jobs and a huge boost to the economy. Critics declare that the potential environmental disaster from a leak is not worth the risk. The very construction of the pipeline, they add, will harm the planet by continuing our dependency on fossil fuels which will lead to more climate change. It is yet to be determined whether decision makers will be swayed more by questions of ecology or by questions of economy.

Robert Bellah and his associates suggest in *Habits of the Heart* that there is such a thing as *social ecology*—also referred to in the book as *moral ecology*—that raises similar and parallel questions about the impact of modernity on society. Social or moral ecology is defined as “the web of moral understandings and commitments that tie people together in community.”<sup>18</sup> The technological advances of modernity in the past century have led to devastatingly destructive consequences for the natural ecology. Modernity has led to comparable consequences for the social ecology. The urgency to repair our social ecology is at least as great as the need to reverse damage done to our natural

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<sup>18</sup> Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 335. Social ecology is also a term used for a social theory developed by author and activist Murray Bookchin that addresses the relationship between environmental, economic, and social issues. See Murray Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007). This work will adhere to Bellah's narrower understanding of the term.

environment. “Social ecology is damaged not only by war, genocide, and political repression. It is also damaged by the destruction of the subtle ties that bind human beings to one another, leaving them frightened and alone.”<sup>19</sup>

*Habits of the Heart* identifies several factors attacking and damaging social ecology, but underneath them all lies a growing, excessive, cancerous individualism. The individualism exhibited by Brian, one of the persons whose story is told in the book, is described this way:

What is good is what one finds rewarding. If one’s preferences change, so does the nature of the good. Even the deepest ethical virtues are justified as matters of personal preference. Indeed, the ultimate ethical rule is simply that individuals should be able to pursue whatever they find rewarding, constrained only by the requirement that they not interfere with the “values systems” of others.<sup>20</sup>

A later chapter in the book describes the impact of modernity and individualism on work, especially as it relates to understanding work as a *calling* that contributes to the common good. The growth of large-scale industry in the twentieth century meant many jobs consisted of very specialized, segmented activities that made it difficult for the worker to see work as a “contribution to the whole.”<sup>21</sup> This segmentation also contributed to a split in public and private life seldom part of an existence in an agricultural society. Workers like Brian, who enjoys a successful career as a business manager, neither see nor seek a connection between daily work and the common good. He defines his work—and his personal identity—by a lucrative career on the upswing, “empty of a calling’s sense of social responsibility.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 284.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

The authors assert that reclaiming work as a *calling* is critical to combatting excessive individualism, healing the split between public and private life, and revitalizing our social ecology. “It is true that a change in the meaning of work and the relation of work and reward is at the heart of any recovery of our social ecology.”<sup>23</sup> This change would also challenge assumptions that an individual’s work is primarily his or her own business. “It would become part of the ethos of work to be aware of our intricate connectedness and interdependence.”<sup>24</sup> It is difficult to make too large a claim about the recovery of a social ecology in the limited scope of this research project. Some first steps forward were evident.

One of the concerns of the authors of *The Abundant Community* is the failure to share the kinds of community “secrets” that make us more aware of our connectedness and interdependence.<sup>25</sup> Authors John L. McKnight and Peter Block do not use the term *social ecology* in their book, but their goal of providing a strategy for forming abundant communities is very similar to what Bellah and associates are calling for in *Habits of the Heart*. McKnight’s and Block’s book is an especially inspiring introduction to asset-based community development.<sup>26</sup> Asset-based community development builds on the skills, expertise, and connections of local neighbors, associations, and institutions to build strong, local, and sustainable communities. The goal is a revitalized social ecology. It is related to transformational leadership in that it assumes leadership can be learned and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>25</sup> McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

practiced by a wide variety of people with a wide variety of talents and expertise. Asset-based community development does not dwell on the community's needs or deficiencies. It assumes, instead, that every community has gifts, strengths and resources within the community itself, no matter how broken. Such resources can be identified, mapped and mobilized for reviving and transforming the community.

The cultural malady McKnight and Block meet head on is consumerism.

Consumerism is not simply an economic system; it has become the way people relate to one another and their environment in the western world:

That is why it can be considered an ecology. It has become a cultural as well as an economic system. It impacts how we relate to one another; it shapes our relationship with food, work, music, ritual, religion—all the elements of culture. And for this ecological system to work, we have to willingly participate in the effort to purchase what matter, and we must persist at it, despite the lack of results.<sup>27</sup>

This sickened social ecology requires obedience to three rules for those living in it to find “satisfaction.”<sup>28</sup> The first rule is that the good life can be achieved through our purchasing power. The second rule is that to acquire the power to purchase, we must follow a certain way of life. This has direct implications for our relationship with daily work, and how much we work. The third rule is that if you live the system way, it becomes who you are. Work and more work becomes the norm, not for personal satisfaction in the work itself or to benefit the neighbor, but in order to purchase more and more leisure from others. “We rotate between functioning as an employee, a consumer, and a spectator.”<sup>29</sup> The result is a loss of our vocational identity.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 47-49.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 49.

The segmentation addressed in Bellah's discussion of the relationship between individualism and work is also a product of consumerism. Individual rights and concerns become more important in an ecology of consumerism than the welfare of the community. Individuals who work long hours in order to consume more and more have neither time nor energy to participate in activities that have been shared in public space. Matters of public interest such as education, health care, even national defense get auctioned off to the highest bidder.<sup>30</sup>

The way to turn a damaged ecology of consumerism into a healthy social ecology is to change the rules. Residents of a healthy social ecology—what McKnight and Block call an “abundant community”—recognize, celebrate, and live out certain capacities that “reside in individuals and can be nurtured to exist in the collective.”<sup>31</sup> These capacities are kindness, generosity, cooperation, forgiveness, and the acceptance of fallibility and mystery.<sup>32</sup> Abundant communities find ways to practice these capacities in public spaces, including the workplace. They help residents discover that we are worth something not because of what we've earned or purchased, but because we have opportunities to share our capacities.

The particular emphases on establishing connections with local institutions and mobilizing their assets for the health of the local community informs possible ways for a congregation to identify the callings of its members for ministry in daily life. The authors' warning about the tendencies of systems to make relationships instrumental “for

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 83-84.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 84.

the utility of being together,” and to use community members’ assets to achieve institutional success, is an important warning to congregations that easily stray into such depersonalizing practices.<sup>33</sup>

Congregations wanting to help their members identify and live into their capacities and callings need to combat the powerful assumption that most Christian ministry is only properly done by trained professionals accompanied as needed by a few gifted “everyday Christians” in church activities.<sup>34</sup> Congregations also often limit imaginations for using individual gifts and abilities to church organized work. The lens of social ecology gives a congregation another frame for looking at and identifying the abundance of gifts in every community to bless the wider community. This consideration of a wider understanding of community abundance and of ways to make it visible has helped broaden Prairie Wind’s repertoire of practices for blessing the wider community in its members’ daily work.<sup>35</sup>

### Generative Learning

Generative learning results from incorporating prior learning and current knowledge with new information. The learner will be an active participant with the teacher/leader in the learning process instead of a passive receptacle of information. Merlin Wittrock, former professor at UCLA who developed generative learning theory, insisted that effective learning is a cooperative process, with teacher and learner

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

<sup>34</sup> David Lose argues for the use of *everyday Christians* instead of the usual *lay people* in his blog. David Lose, “Do You Feel Called?” ...*in the meantime*, <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/08/do-you-feel-called/> (accessed August 29, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> McKnight and Block offer many possibilities. McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, 119-131.

creatively interacting with one another to generate new relationships that enhance our ability to link what we already know with what is yet undiscovered.<sup>36</sup>

Peter Senge lays out the implications for practicing generative learning in an organization in *The Fifth Discipline*.<sup>37</sup> According to Senge, “learning organizations” are

organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.<sup>38</sup>

It is not enough for an organization to learn what it needs to learn just to survive—what is often called “adaptive learning.” In an organization that wants to thrive, “adaptive learning” must be joined by “generative learning” in order to enhance the capacity to discover and enter into a preferred future.<sup>39</sup>

One of the reasons organizations have “learning disabilities” is that people in them equate their identities with their role or job in the organization.<sup>40</sup> Senge uses the example of what a large American steel company discovered when it began closing plants and attempted to retrain workers for new jobs. The training never took because the steelworkers linked their identity to their old job. It’s not just a steelworker problem. “When asked what they do for a living, most people describe the tasks they perform every day, not the purpose of the greater enterprise in which they take part. ...

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<sup>36</sup> M. C. Wittrock, “Generative Learning Processes of the Brain,” *Educational Psychologist* 27, no. 4 (1992).

<sup>37</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Consequently, they tend to see their responsibilities as limited to the boundaries of their position.”<sup>41</sup>

These words accurately describe assumptions by clergy and laity in most congregations. They also describe assumptions I’ve made in more than thirty years of ordained ministry. I recognize my own *learning disability* as a pastor. I was trained at a seminary for preaching, teaching, and providing pastoral care. I learned to tell people what the Bible says and how to live out their lives together as the church. I’ve understood my role primarily in terms of a certain expertise that I bring to my *flock*. I was not taught, nor did I consider it my responsibility, to teach people how to *discover together* what it means to be the church in a rapidly changing world. Likewise, most everyday Christians assume their church identity to be what they do when the organized church gathers. It is a struggle to overcome such a deep-seated learning disability!

A related challenge for organizations that want to become learning organizations is to move beyond event thinking. “Generative learning cannot be sustained in an organization where event thinking predominates.”<sup>42</sup> The problem in congregations like Prairie Wind is programmatic thinking. That is why this project has focused on the introduction of certain congregational practices. The practices introduced did lead to some patterns of change in congregation members’ thinking about what it means to be the church all the days of the week.

The third part of *The Fifth Discipline* offers a wealth of help for introducing ways to build a learning organization. Senge asserts that a prerequisite for creating such an

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 53.



organization is for *many* of the individuals in it to become learners. It is not enough for only the leaders to learn on behalf of the whole group:

“Learning” in this context does not mean acquiring more information, but expanding the ability to produce the results we truly want in life. It is lifelong generative learning. And learning organizations are not possible unless they have people at every level practice it.<sup>43</sup>

Prairie Wind describes itself as a congregation that prioritizes *lifelong faith formation*, but truthfully only a small percentage of adult members participate in adult learning opportunities. One goal and result of this research was the gathering of people who do not normally participate in adult faith formation activities in order to broaden the number of members practicing generative learning, at least for a short time.

The other core disciplines Senge highlights in his work are mental models, shared learning, and team learning, all of which have relevancy for congregations. Senge asserts that mental models are so powerful because “they affect what we see.”<sup>44</sup> A goal in this research that began with qualitative and quantitative questions was to help Prairie Wind members begin to see daily work as a location for God’s presence and an avenue for kinds of ministry they’d not considered before. Senge’s comments on shared vision echo what Kouzes and Posner say in their book about the relationship between personal visions and shared visions. Team learning, Senge writes, “is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create results its members truly desire.”<sup>45</sup> This is a matter of uniquely talented individuals coming together via a shared vision to use their talents for a common purpose as part of a talented team.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 218.

Towards the end of his book Senge turns to the topic of leadership. If an organization that practices generative learning is so preferable to those that don't learn in this way, why aren't there more of them? The answer is leadership. In Senge's discussion of leadership, he compares an organization to an ocean liner and wonders what the leader's true role is. The obvious answer is *captain, navigator, or engineer*. Senge suggests that the best answer is the designer of the ship.<sup>46</sup> Leaders as designers worry less about getting the words right and more about using the words to engage people. (I wish I would have received this advice years ago, before spending hours and hours working with leaders in different congregations to craft the perfect mission statement.) Leaders as designers are prepared to take longer to develop statements of guiding ideas. Finally, leaders as designers remember that the work isn't over when the guiding statements get hung on a wall or inserted into official documents. They focus on how the guiding ideas get used.

A good leader, according to Senge, is also a steward. Stewardship is about "serving a larger purpose."<sup>47</sup> Stewardship is also paradoxical. Leadership is always about change. But leadership is also about staying connected to what matters.

I believe one of the reasons a deep sense of purpose is so important for leaders is that it also provides an anchor. While pursuing what is new and emergent, they are also stewards for something they intend to conserve.<sup>48</sup>

A church leader could search a long time for a better job description than this one at the beginning of the twenty-first century!

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 335.

Action Research (AR) is one way for an organization and/or its leaders to design a way to participate in a process of generative learning. Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin argue in their *Introduction to Action Research* that AR is first and foremost a way of “keeping the conversation going” instead of embarking on a search for objective truth.<sup>49</sup> Creating space for a group to share prior knowledge and participate in collective reflection on new analyses and learning will lead to what the authors call *cogenerative learning*, a close cousin to what Wittrock and Senge mean by generative learning.<sup>50</sup>

### Chapter Summary

Prairie Wind Lutheran Church’s cooperation with God in the *missio Dei* as it unfolds in Riverside and beyond the community requires more than a one-way impartation of theory, theology, and practices from professional leaders. This means that this pastor/leader is released from the burden of having to come up with all the answers for cultivating congregation members’ callings. It also means practicing a new paradigm for ministry that requires a willingness to set aside the cherished role of *expert* for one that involves as much learning as leading. One way this happened in this research project was through the formation of an action research team. This team helped with planning learning activities, and joined me in reflecting on the results of the research. Another significant event was the convening of a search conference for the purpose of designing action steps intended to cultivate Prairie Wind members’ understanding of call. The members of a congregation are the experts when it comes to knowing the various

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<sup>49</sup> Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 72.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

challenges of living out their faith in their particular kinds of daily work. Relying on their expertise as *scouts* required learning that was generated together.

This expertise is gained by experience, but it is also informed by the biblical witness and theological study. We turn now to an examination of the passages of Scripture and theological teaching that informed both the researcher and participants in this project.

## CHAPTER 4

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The words of Scripture and theological understandings that accompany them serve as the primary shapers of what the life and work of a congregation of followers of Jesus should look like. The following biblical and theological lenses are especially significant in considering how Prairie Wind Lutheran Church might faithfully cultivate its members' callings to practice their Christian faith in their daily work.

#### **Biblical Framework**

The Bible contains many stories of God calling God's people to cooperate with God in the *missio Dei*. Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament recount dramatic details of God's enlistment of particular individuals to assume leadership roles in God's plans. A shepherd tending his flock in the wilderness sees a bush that is on fire but does not burn. When Moses comes closer to investigate, God calls to him from the bush, and commissions him to deliver God's people from slavery in Egypt (Exod 3). A young boy working as a servant to an old, blind priest lies down to sleep near his master in the temple of the Lord. When he is awakened by someone calling his name, he runs to his master, but the master insists he did not call. Old Eli perceives that God is calling the boy when Samuel hears the call a third time (1 Sam 3). A devout enforcer of God's law rounds up and imprisons people he deems a threat to his religion until he is suddenly

struck blind and interrogated by a man he thought dead. Jesus then tells Saul to get on his feet and enter the nearby city where he will receive further instructions (Acts 9:1-9).

These stories clearly reveal instances of God’s coming near to God’s people and calling them to a certain kind of work. They are each significant in the grand sweep of the biblical narrative. However, they are so extraordinary that they offer limited help for most followers of Jesus and congregations trying to discern God’s call. Gospel accounts of Jesus calling his first disciples as he walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee give us a glimpse of a more *ordinary* calling (Mark 1:16-20; Matt 4:18-22). But here too God’s call appears to require a move away from ordinary circumstances into full-time discipleship training and ministry. This reinforces modern assumptions that God *only* calls special persons God has singled out for full-time leadership in God’s church.

#### Co-workers with God—Genesis 1 and 2

We need turn no further than the first chapters of the Bible to discover that work is something God does. “In the beginning, then, God worked.”<sup>1</sup> Daily work is not punishment assigned the first humans after the Fall, or a burden meant to be endured by mere mortals. God works to create the heavens and the earth, and delights in it! God considers all the work God had done in the six days of creation and pronounces it “very good” (Gen 1:31). God acts much like a contractor who looks over a house he or she has completed with a sense of accomplishment, or a composer who finds just the right notes to write into the last measure of a symphony. God rests after six days of creating, but then God continues to work in God’s creation. The divine gardener “causes the grass to grow

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<sup>1</sup> Keller and Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work*, 34.

for cattle, and plants for people to use ...” (Ps 104:14). God’s “wondrous works” include upholding those who are falling, and raising up “all who are bowed down” (Ps 145:14).

God also works by creating, recruiting and equipping other workers to share in God’s labor of love. Genesis 1 teaches that humans were created in the image of God, and that God has *called* humanity to the responsibility of caring for the earth and for “every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1:26, 28). God makes humankind partners in the management of what God has made from the dawn of creation. In Genesis 2, God gives man-formed-from-dirt the assignment of cultivating the ground he has come from (2:15). God takes the man and puts him in the Garden of Eden where he plows and plants, and later enjoys the privilege of naming every living creature God created. The picture is of close co-workers laboring together in a particular location to accomplish what the Creator desires.

All this work was part of the design of Paradise from the beginning. Endless days of nothing but leisure were never in the original blueprints! Work is not punishment or a demeaning necessity, but rather “work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for our soul.”<sup>2</sup> Many kinds of work meet this basic need and can provide meaning and dignity to the worker, even if the culture assigns varying levels of status to different jobs. God’s work as a gardener and eventual incarnation as a construction worker informs us that physical toil can be as holy as preaching God’s word or healing human bodies.

Though daily work does give expression to humankind’s being creation in God’s image, work can also be tedious, boring, stressful, and soul-killing. Work is part of the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 37.

original divine plan, but after Adam and Eve's disobedience work is identified as a source of trouble for the first humans: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (Gen 3:17). The depiction of work that is God's good gift in the first two chapters of Genesis needs to be held in tension with punishment assigned in Genesis 3. "Those who emphasize the dignity of work over the instrumentality of work or the instrumentality of work over the dignity of work are missing the irresolvable tension that exists in Scripture."<sup>3</sup>

The creation stories in Genesis also remind us that God's call to "till" and "keep" the garden is local and specific (Gen 2:15). It happens in a particular time and place. People do daily work in the same way, which is exactly how God intends to accomplish God's purposes through us. Eugene Peterson points out, "God works with us as we are and not as we should be or think we should be. God deals with us where we are and not where we would like to be."<sup>4</sup> Prairie Wind members have taken to heart God's command to till and keep gardens in the particular time and place God has *planted* us. The congregation cultivates and marks off an acre of church property each spring for use as community gardens. The gardens are available to any resident of Riverside on a first come, first served basis. Another group of church members continues to plant, weed, and prune an ever-expanding prayer garden on the opposite side of the church building. This garden has also been enjoyed by the congregation and its neighbors. Cultivation is part of the congregation's culture. In this research project, regular cultivation of church property has been accompanied by shared, regular cultivation of a few important practices to

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<sup>3</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, 246.

<sup>4</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, 74.



enhance church members' understanding of what it means to serve as co-workers with God in various kinds of daily work.

### Sabbath Rest—Exodus 20:8-11

The story of God's creating work in Genesis 1 and 2 is incomplete without an accounting of God's resting at the end of the work:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. (Gen 2:1-3)

God's artistry does not cease after six days. God doesn't stop planting, watering, providing, protecting and sustaining after God announces that what God has made is "very good." But God does set aside a day for resting before God continues God's work. The day of rest, of accomplishing nothing but rest, is as significant for God as each of the days God spoke some part of the universe into existence. God didn't run out of things to do; God intentionally built a rhythm of work and rest into the design of the creation.

God clearly connects a commandment to rest with God's own rest when God gives Moses the Ten Commandments to instruct freed slaves how to live as God's People in community.

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. (Exod 20:8-11)

Since God deemed it necessary to rest after working to create the heavens and the earth, we must also live by a similar rhythm of work and rest. "To violate the rhythm of work

and rest (in either direction) leads to chaos in our life and in the world around us.”<sup>5</sup> To ignore God’s command to rest is to violate our own design and the design of the creation. God calls us to rest as clearly as God calls us to participate in the *missio Dei* in our daily work. They are inseparable.

Yet we try anyway. One of the more surprising results from the initial survey filled out by Prairie Wind members was the number of people who indicated they seldom or never set aside a day for rest. The question was not about gathering for worship; it was specifically about resting from work. Two small groups convened as part of the last intervention in this PAR invited participants to wrestle together with the disconnect between a cultural expectation to keep busy, and the biblical mandate to set aside a day for rest.

Marva Dawn highlights in her book *The Sense of Call* several reasons for Sabbath keeping that emerge from the Exodus text, along with several suggestions for faithfully doing it.<sup>6</sup> One reason for Sabbath keeping is that it reminds us that our life does not depend on our work. God calls us to participate in the *missio Dei* in all kinds of daily work, but the success of the mission doesn’t depend on us! Neither does our receiving our daily bread. Another reason for keeping Sabbath is to remember that our identity does not depend on what we do, or our successes and failures. We are more than what we do. By grace, God declares us beloved sons and daughters through the saving work of Jesus Christ. We’ll never earn preferred status in God’s eyes—the good news is that we can stop trying! The first persons to hear the command to keep the Sabbath day were made

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<sup>5</sup> Keller and Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work*, 235.

<sup>6</sup> Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World*, 67-71.

slaves against their will until God liberated them. The commandment was given as a gift to keep them free.

Luther argues in his explanation of the Third Commandment in the Large Catechism that we do not keep the Sabbath day simply by refraining from external work, but when we “occupy ourselves with God’s Word and exercise ourselves in it.”<sup>7</sup> This is a critical part of Sabbath keeping, but God’s resting after the six days of creation indicates that refraining from work is also critical to keeping the Sabbath *wholly*, especially in Prairie Wind’s context. There are plenty of Christians living in western culture who have become slaves to cultural expectations. Those who keep the Sabbath *wholly* declare their freedom from such expectations. By keeping Sabbath, we also enter what Dawn calls “a holy cathedral in time.”<sup>8</sup> God hallows the day, not us, and invites us into this holy time of revitalization and renewal through cessation of work, rest, celebration, and hearing God’s word.

#### The Priesthood of All Believers—1 Peter 2:4-10

Keeping Sabbath helps prepare the priesthood of all believers for their daily work. The traditional role of the priest is to serve as an intermediary between God and humans. The priest brings the cares and petitions of the people before God, and also represents God to other human beings.<sup>9</sup> The identification of all God’s people as priests first appears in the Hebrew Scriptures. After the Israelites reach Mount Sinai, the Lord calls to Moses

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<sup>7</sup> Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 377.

<sup>8</sup> Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World*, 68.

<sup>9</sup> William E. Diehl, *The Monday Connection: A Spirituality of Competence, Affirmation, and Support in the Workplace*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 61.

from the mountain to instruct him, “you (all) shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Ex 19:5-6). The first Christians were also identified as a *kingdom of priests*, like Israel under the Sinaitic Covenant,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

Luther argued that all who believe in Christ are priests. It is not a position we attain on our own through good works or a seminary education.

Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in him, to be not only his brethren, co-heirs, and fellow-kings, but also his fellow-priests. Therefore we may boldly come into the presence of God in the spirit of faith [Heb. 10:19, 22] and cry “Abba, Father!” pray for one another, and do all things which we see done and foreshadowed in the outer and visible works of priests.<sup>10</sup>

Even though all Christians are equally priests, this doesn’t mean every Christian is called to publicly minister in the same way or to teach.<sup>11</sup> It does mean we are all called to be representatives of the reality and mercy of God both to those inside the church and those in the community at large. “The emphasis is not only on what happens in church or among believers, but upon living out the whole of one’s life in the light of a developing Christian world view and set of values (Rom 12:1-2).”<sup>12</sup>

The testimony of 1 Peter 2 was often read in congregational meetings as Prairie Wind grew from a single small group into a formally organized congregation.

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<sup>10</sup> Luther and Grimm, *Christian Liberty*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>12</sup> Robert J. Banks, *Redeeming the Routines: Bringing Theology to Life* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 27.

The emphasis in those early years was on verse 10 as God was making it a reality before our eyes. A group of people mostly unacquainted with each other and sometimes only nominally familiar with God's promises was becoming "God's people" in the form of a new congregation (1 Pet 2:10). Attention was also given to the purpose of God's gathering expressed in the preceding verse: to give witness to "the mighty acts" of God (1 Pet 2:9).

Prairie Wind returned to 1 Peter 2:4-10 in the months that this research project was carried out. The action research team read this text in its monthly gatherings. It helped shape the January search conference as well. One emphasis was on the implications of God calling every member of the congregation into a *holy priesthood* and *royal priesthood* (1 Pet 2:5, 9). Martin Luther's argument that *priest* should be used interchangeably with *Christian* was introduced, along with Luther's understanding of what this passage says about the role of every priest. We explored ways for Prairie Wind members to carry out the priestly work of offering sacrifices, praying, and proclaiming God's *mighty acts* in our daily work, remembering that this is the work to which God calls every Christian/priest.

### Radical Love—1 Corinthians 13

One of the dangerous temptations of daily work even for priests is to treat other people as a means to a certain end. When this happens, co-workers, clients, customers, and parishioners become stepping stones to a goal. Or we might see co-workers only as competitors for a promotion instead of as a brother or sister with the same kind of needs, hurts, and fears as we have. It can be a danger in research too, and may be especially crippling in a congregation, if congregation members perceive that a pastor/researcher

drifts into using members as instruments rather than seeing them as children of God.

Paul's famous chapter on love in 1 Corinthians is seldom applied to thinking about vocation and daily work. Reading it with daily work in mind—and not just a bride and groom—gives it fresh meaning:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

To paraphrase an earlier verse in the same chapter, if I do my work extraordinarily well, if I build grand houses, sell the most cars, heal a patient, educate a child, double the size of a client's financial holdings, or *grow* a church, but do not have love, I am nothing. Love, the apostle points out, must undergird every way we live out our callings as *cultivators* and *priests*. There is a difference between doing something *on behalf of* our neighbor and entering fully into his or her reality. The latter embrace of the neighbor is the way of cross-shaped love.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus demonstrated ways that love assumes the primary place in the Christian imagination. Jesus also preached that becoming fully human and living abundant lives comes down to loving God and loving one another—in all situations of our lives. This understanding of the nature of reality will have to have a powerful impact on how we do our daily work.<sup>14</sup> It will affect how we treat the people we encounter in our daily work,

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<sup>13</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 116.

<sup>14</sup> Keller and Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, 206.

whatever the nature of the relationship. It will affect our ethical behavior, determining in some cases whether we sleep at night or not.<sup>15</sup>

This research helped Prairie Wind members tell stories of the ways love and work fit together in their workplaces. Some of the stories were of people doing what they were paid to do by spending extra time with a troubled student, or patiently attending to an ill patient. Other stories of *agape* expressed in daily work included that of a boss who paid for an \$800 plane ticket so an employee could fly home to visit a sick parent, and of a team of employees who regularly devote time after work to one of Riverside's feeding ministries.

### **Theological Framework**

The aforementioned biblical lenses inform four related theological concepts that guided this research project. The Lutheran understanding of the interrelationship of *justification and vocation* states that works and work do not earn anyone divine approval, and rebuts assumptions that daily work is a primary source of our identity. A discussion of *missio Dei* helped turn consideration of God's individual and communal callings towards what God is doing in the world by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is *the work of the Holy Spirit* to initiate, enliven, direct, and undergird the work of God's Church when it both gathers and scatters. The theology of *faithful presence* reminded participants that God is in the middle of every kind of daily work, and that as the Body of Christ in the world the church serves as that faithful presence wherever its members live and work.

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<sup>15</sup> At least three persons who participated in focus group conversations used nearly the exact same language to describe why it was important for them to treat their clients right, even if meant less profit for them and/or their company.

## Justification and Vocation

The doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone was at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. The doctrine freed Christians from believing that works or work is the way to gain God's approval. The righteousness of God is given as a gift (Rom 1:16-17). The doctrine also means that religious work was not superior or more pleasing to God than other kinds of labor. Martin Luther paired vocation with justification, and argued that God's people are free to live out their vocations in various kinds of daily work since *secular* work is also pleasing to God as the neighbor is served by it. Yet God's saving work always comes first. Luther was tireless in his insistence that no kind of daily work is of ultimate significance for human beings. Only faith in the saving work of Christ finally matters:

Wherefore it ought to be the first concern of every Christian to lay aside all confidence in works and increasingly to strengthen faith alone and through faith to grow in knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, who suffered and rose for him. ... No other work makes a Christian.<sup>16</sup>

The danger, for Luther, of any theology that moved too quickly to talk about what a Christian could or should do as a disciple of Christ is that this work will usurp the saving work of Christ in the life of the believer. This "perverse idea" that righteousness can be sought and found in any good work deceives Jesus-followers and leads them "to deceive one another like ravening wolves in sheep's clothing [Matthew 7:15]."<sup>17</sup> Luther's theology of justification by faith alone "places all human ventures under judgment."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Luther and Grimm, *Christian Liberty*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective," *Word & World* 7, no. 1 (1987): 25.



There is nothing done or can be done in one's vocation, even out of selfless love, that bridges the divide that sin has opened between God and us.

This does not mean Luther rejected good works or the value of vocation. The negation of the possibility that any person can do a single thing to earn God's favor is only the first movement of the story.<sup>19</sup> Resurrection follows crucifixion. Out of death comes life. The person saved by grace through faith is freed *for* good works. Faith cannot help but do good works in the same way that a good tree cannot help but bear good fruit (Matt 7:18). For Luther, faith was a "living, restless thing which could not remain inoperative."<sup>20</sup> Good works can never save a person, but doing good works is "simply the natural and spontaneous outcome of justification by faith alone."<sup>21</sup>

Luther pointed to the example of a soldier when he was asked whether or not Christians could serve in the military. The godliness of the person, in response to Christ's saving work, is of greater concern than the occupation itself. So a good person will make a good soldier. A scoundrel will still be a scoundrel no matter what job he holds!

An occupation or a work can be good and right in itself and yet be bad and wrong if the man who does the work is evil or wrong or does not do his work properly. The occupation of a judge is a valuable divine office. This is true both of the office of the trial judge who declares the verdict and the executioner who carries out the sentence. But when the office is assumed by one to whom it has not been committed or when one who holds it rightly uses it to gain riches or popularity, then it is no longer right or good. . . . It is the same way with the profession or work of the soldier; in itself it is right and godly, but we must see to it that the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, 250.

<sup>21</sup> Forde, "The Viability of Luther Today: A North American Perspective," 23.

persons who are in this profession and who do the work are the right kind of persons, that is, godly and upright.<sup>22</sup>

Though teaching ethics is not a primary responsibility for the church, and ethical living not the main concern for Christians, they *are* significant for how we do our daily work.

We are freed from needing to do anything to gain righteousness and salvation. We should, therefore, be guided by “one thing alone” in considering how we respond to God’s love and grace: that we might serve and benefit others, “considering nothing except the need and the advantage of [our] neighbor.”<sup>23</sup> As mentioned earlier, this happens in a variety of ways, through people wearing many different *masks of God*.

Five hundred years after the beginning of the Reformation, the Church still struggles to get this right. Christian vocation is still too often understood as the work of religious professionals or church committees. A more damaging problem in contemporary Western culture is equating work with worth. Personal identity is frequently more closely intertwined with work than anything else. I reminded participants in this research project that “the gospel frees us from the relentless pressure of having to prove ourselves and secure our identity through work, for we are already proven and secure.”<sup>24</sup> Prairie Wind explored what that looks like in the gatherings of small groups of people who work in various occupations.

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<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther and Theodore B. Tappert, *Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, Fortress Press 2007 ed., 4 vols., vol. 3, 1523-1526, edited by Theodore B. Tappert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 434.

<sup>23</sup> Luther and Grimm, *Christian Liberty*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Keller and Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, 73.

### *Missio Dei*

Leaders of the Reformation defined the Church as “the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.”<sup>25</sup> One crippling consequence of this definition is that the church came to be understood as a *place* where certain religious activities take place instead of a *body of people* who are gathered *and* scattered. The church’s ministers came to be defined as the persons who led religious rituals in designated places because the church came to locate its identity in buildings and in organizational forms that met in those buildings. Many church members and leaders in the United States church in the twenty-first century still talk about *going to church* or *meeting at church* for church activities usually led by the paid leader(s) of the church. This church has come to be understood as a vendor of religious goods and services for those who are attracted to those places where the church gathers.

A related consequence of the reformers’ definition of church was an *ecclesiocentric* view of mission.<sup>26</sup> Mission came to be reduced to activities the church planned and implemented. It was assumed that church members participated in mission when (and only when) they assisted with these organized church activities. It was the church’s burden and responsibility to *bring God* to those places where organized bodies of believers were not yet located.

In the middle of the twentieth century, a handful of church leaders and churches in the West began to perceive and rediscover mission as *theocentric* work instead of

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<sup>25</sup> Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 81.

church-sponsored activity. They began to recognize that the church's mission flowed from God's mission, more specifically Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.<sup>27</sup>

The church became redefined as the community spawned by the mission of God and gathered up into that mission. The church was coming to understand that in any place it is a community sent by God. "Mission" is not something the church does, a part of its total program. No, the church's essence is missional, for the calling and sending action of God forms its identity. Mission is founded on the mission of God in the world, rather than the church's effort to extend itself.<sup>28</sup>

The *missio Dei*, then, is not merely church activity initiated, run, and carried out mostly by professional ministers. The church does not bring God anywhere. In its missionary activity, the church "encounters a humanity and a world in which God's salvation has already been operative secretly, through the Spirit."<sup>29</sup> God sends out all who are justified by grace through faith to participate in this mission to restore and heal creation.

Van Gelder and Zscheile argue that what is required for churches desiring to faithfully participate in the *missio Dei* is not the adoption of better strategies but "a more robust missional theology" that will stir and render more faithful and fruitful "our imagination of who God is, what God is doing in the church and the world, and how we can better participate in these works of God."<sup>30</sup> Such a theology must include a fuller Trinitarian vision. The tendency in the Western church has been to focus on the single divine substance of God and ignore the Eastern church's understanding of *perichoresis* or

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<sup>27</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, 399.

<sup>28</sup> Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, 82.

<sup>29</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, 401.

<sup>30</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 102.

mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit. This has turned the Trinity into some kind of strange puzzle to solve instead of a description of how God is on the loose and involved in the world. A missional theology embraces an understanding of the Trinity as a Three-in-One Holy Community “whose orientation is outward, and whose shared love spills over beyond itself.”<sup>31</sup>

Van Gelder and Zscheile also assert that a more fully developed doctrine of creation will enrich both a missional theology and ecclesiology. Another tendency in the Western mainline Protestant church has been to focus much more on the Second Article of the Creed, and, to a lesser extent, the Third Article. Christians in the West have mostly treated the creation as a *secular* realm, outside of God’s care and concern. Yet the world—and not just the church—is “a field of God’s ongoing activity and presence through the Spirit.”<sup>32</sup> The Incarnation reminds us that matter matters to God! If God working through Jesus Christ is determined to bridge the gap between the sacred and secular, then we ought not create one. God in Christ plunges deeply and completely into the joys and struggles of a particular community in a particular time and place, and invites us to follow God there.

A more robust missional theology also celebrates the Triune God’s ongoing reconciling mission through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the secularized West, if God is considered at all, it is often as the author of moral laws humanity should obey. God is not expected to speak or act. Human agency becomes the central focus as church members suffer from functional atheism and strategize how to survive by implementing

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 112.

the latest sure-fire strategies or principles. The antidote for these assumptions, according to Van Gelder and Zscheile, is “a retrieval of a biblical imagination for the Spirit’s presence and power in our midst. This recovery must be in relation to the world around us and not simply within the interiorized hearts and minds of individuals.”<sup>33</sup>

Prairie Wind has struggled to redefine *God* and *church* in these ways. As a relatively young congregation, it is still flexible in how it plans and carries out ministry. Yet it has primarily measured the numbers of people attracted to and gathered for congregational activities rather than the ways members and friends are engaging our context beyond the usual events hosted on congregation property. The congregation’s leadership team was mostly frustrated by our reading *Missional* by Alan Roxburgh in the year leading up to this research project.<sup>34</sup> Team members found it difficult to grasp some of the paradigm shifts introduced in the book. Other shifts that were understood were rejected as too foreign to long-held understandings of church. This research project helped the congregation take some strides in embracing a theological shift that leads to a change in ecclesiology. Some Prairie Wind members shared a sprouting understanding that *church work* happens wherever church members meet God at work, usually outside the church building. *Missio Dei* as a theological frame helped Prairie Wind members recognize *why* it is so important to move beyond settling for gathering greater numbers of consumers of religious services into the congregation. Further stirring of Prairie Wind’s imagination by God’s Spirit will assist the congregation in recognizing how it is empowered for living faithfully in the workplace.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>34</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, Allelon Missional Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

### The Work of the Spirit

The breathing, creating Spirit of God works to meet humanity in this world God has made and accomplish God's will in the world, not one breath-filled person at a time apart from others, but by gathering us into community. The Spirit's action

is not something diffuse and numinous that remains otherworldly or can only be incorporated into indeterminate, mystical 'experience.' Instead it is mediated in and the through the community of testimony of people who have been 'washed ... sanctified ... justified' by the name of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from the Holy Spirit, human beings cannot live according to God's will or enjoy the abundant life God intends for us (John 10:10). The Holy Spirit even intercedes for us with "sighs too deep for words" when we mortals who are made-from-dust do not know how to call upon the everlasting God who promises to be near to us (Rom 8:26). The Holy Spirit "makes it possible to live lovingly, responsibly, and honorably precisely under the conditions of fleshly-perishable existence."<sup>36</sup> The Christian life is not possible without the Spirit of God.<sup>37</sup>

Michael Welker in *God the Spirit* identifies an important distinction between the predominant *spirit* of the Western world and the work of the Holy Spirit that especially informs the callings of followers of Jesus to live out their faith in public, daily work. The spirit of the West, informed by the philosophies of Aristotle and Hegel, establishes "forms of domination" that must suppress and erode alternatives to itself.<sup>38</sup> The goal of this spirit is self-actualization. The process of producing itself, becoming knowable to

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<sup>35</sup> Welker, *God the Spirit*, 238.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>37</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, 79.

<sup>38</sup> Welker, *God the Spirit*, 281-282.

itself, of becoming intimate with self, of enjoying itself is the divinity towards which this spirit reaches. It is a force that infinitely returns into self.<sup>39</sup> This is the spirit of the age.

By contrast, the Spirit of God places people in conscious solidarity for acts of love on behalf of the other.

These persons are aware of their public significance and worth in view of the significance and worth of their fellow creatures, and in view of God's glorification. They experience themselves as members of a community effected by the Spirit, a community of persons who change themselves, each other, and the world by *free self-withdrawal for the benefit of their fellow creatures*.<sup>40</sup>

This Spirit does not turn persons or communities inward, but effects freedom wherever it is (2 Cor 3:17). The persons upon whom the Spirit comes, and in whom the Spirit dwells, discover power and pleasure in living for other creatures, and not in constant self-identification and need for control. The Holy Spirit gives courage to churches that have been ensnared by an obsession with self-preservation, and “trapped in many forms of faintheartedness.”<sup>41</sup>

Welker's contrasting of the spirit of the age with the work of the Holy Spirit directly addresses a struggle experienced by many in the workplace. Conventional wisdom avows that the way of success in many workplaces lies in adoption of the spirit of the age. A small minority of the congregation members who filled out the quantitative survey indicated that they were often tempted to set aside the values of their Christian faith in exchange for success in the workplace, but conversations in the focus groups suggested that the percentage of persons wrestling with the Western spirit may be higher.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 308.



The stories that have emerged in this project have also demonstrated just how real and active the Spirit of God is in all kinds of situations and surroundings.

This discussion of *spirit* and *Spirit* might imply that this is all just a matter of *internal affairs* that inform human activity in a *spiritual* sort of way, but finally has little to do with what a person *does* in daily life and work. A related misconception is that the Spirit of God cares primarily about overtly noble or religious work and is apathetic about daily mundane happenings in places such as barnyards, factories, and mechanics' garages. The truth is that God poured out the Spirit "upon all flesh," even on slaves (Acts 2:17-18). The Holy Spirit of God "is not only the Spirit of religious experience but also the Spirit of worldly engagement."<sup>42</sup> An adequate understanding of daily work is only possible as it is viewed in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup>

Miroslav Volf asserts that a pneumatological understanding of daily work provides a more stable and relevant way to understand Christian callings in our time than that offered by Luther's doctrine of vocation.<sup>44</sup> One of his problems with Luther is that the Reformer minimizes the reality that some work is dehumanizing and degrading. Such work cannot be considered a way to human flourishing.<sup>45</sup> Volf also argues that Luther's doctrine of vocation "is not applicable to the increasingly mobile industrial and information society" that we live in today.<sup>46</sup> The singleness of a Christian's calling to live

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<sup>42</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 108.

a life of faith and love in response to God's saving grace is not matched by a single external calling to a particular kind of daily work.

The connection between a Christian's calling and daily work is better understood, Volf says, via a theology of work based on a theology of charisms. God doesn't just send us out into the world and then meet us there to participate in the blessing and healing of God's creation. God also inspires us, gifts us, and enables us for accomplishing whatever specific work God has given us (1 Cor 12:4-11). The enabling depends on the presence and activity of the Spirit working in and through those God has called.<sup>47</sup>

One of Prairie Wind's key themes stated in the congregation's soul script is "God is continually at work in us to transform the world." Congregational leaders repeat it on new member Sundays, but otherwise talk little about how that happens outside the church building's walls, especially in public spaces. Like many Lutheran congregations, Prairie Wind has a habit of treating the Spirit like an ancestor who is in all the old family photographs, but doesn't attend the family gatherings any more. That has begun to change now that the congregation has started to intentionally ask and listen for how the Spirit is living and active in and through daily work.

### Faithful Presence

The Spirit-empowered church that participates in the *missio Dei* is always accompanied by the Word who became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14). We learn in the incarnation that this world matters to God. God created all of it and cares about all of it. God entered the creation at a particular time and a particular location in Jesus Christ

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 114.

to reveal God's nature and purpose in the workplace as well as worship space, on dusty roads, at community banquets, and near sickbeds.

God, then, does not speak through empty abstractions or endless circumlocutions. Rather, in every instance, God's word was enacted and enacted in a particular place and time in history. In all, presence and place mattered decisively. Nowhere is this more evident than in the incarnation.<sup>48</sup>

This means that Jesus-followers who desire to faithfully live as Jesus' disciples do so *in* the world, not *against it* or *apart from* it. The call to faithfulness requires a life lived “in the context of complex social, political, economic, and cultural forces that prevail at a particular time and place.”<sup>49</sup> These prevailing forces in twenty-first century Western culture include pluralism that has led to more ambivalence and in matters of faith. “God is simply less obvious than he once was, and for most no longer obvious at all—quite the opposite.”<sup>50</sup> The loss of trust in the connection between words and the world is another formidable challenge brought on by the prevailing forces of our time.<sup>51</sup> A faith that has leaned heavily on the authority of written and spoken words—even if, as the church claims, these words are the word of God—finds itself in strange, difficult territory.

The way for followers of Jesus to faithfully respond to these prevailing forces, says James Davison Hunter, is through a theology of *faithful presence* emerging out of a clear understanding of the incarnation.<sup>52</sup> Hunter calls *faithful presence* “an alternative way forward” for the church over against the “Defensive Against,” “Relevance To,” and

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<sup>48</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, 240.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

“Purity From” prevalent paradigms for church today in Western culture.<sup>53</sup> He argues that just as God is faithfully present in the world for us, so faithful presence is the only adequate reply to the challenges of being church in our time.

The church’s first call is to be faithfully present to God as God is present in and with the church. It is only by being present to God “as a worshipping community and as adoring followers” that we can be faithfully present in the world.<sup>54</sup> Faithful presence in the world begins with extending grace to those inside the body of believers *and* to those outside the community of faith. It also requires that Jesus-followers be fully present in and committed to their daily work, whether paid or unpaid, while navigating the “irresolvable tension” between the dignity of work and necessity of work.<sup>55</sup> Lastly, faithful presence in the world conforms to the way of Jesus within our spheres of influence by committing us “to do what we can to create the conditions in the structures of the social life we inhabit that are conducive to the flourishing of all.”<sup>56</sup>

The God who is faithfully present in the world and invites the Church to follow God’s lead employs a “right-hand” and “left-hand” strategy in the *missio Dei* according to Craig Nesson in *Shalom Church*.<sup>57</sup> Nesson builds on Luther’s two-kingdoms paradigm to explain how the church today is to be faithfully present in the world. Luther notes that though Christians belong to the kingdom of God and need no temporal authority, the world is full of people who are not Christians and need to be restrained so that they do

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>57</sup> Nesson, *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community*.

not “bite and mangle everyone.”<sup>58</sup> In “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,” Luther makes his argument that Christians do not need temporal government, but they live in a world that does—and for the sake of the neighbor they submit to governing authorities, as St. Paul commands in Romans 13:1. So both “temporal government” and “spiritual government” come from God, and “neither one is sufficient in the world without the other.”<sup>59</sup>

Nessan uses Luther’s distinction between two governments to describe how God goes about accomplishing God’s purposes in the world through the *right hand* and *left hand* of the Body of Christ, a New Testament term for the church (1 Cor 12:27). The right-hand strategy “entails God’s mission of bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world through the church.”<sup>60</sup> This work is carried out under what Luther calls Christ’s *spiritual* government. In this strategy, God is faithfully present through the proclamation of the gospel and the sharing of the means of grace to make a person righteous by faith. The left-hand strategy addresses issues that fall under the jurisdiction of temporal government. This left-hand strategy “involves the establishment of a just, equitable, peaceful social order that entails distinct attention to four arenas: family, work, church, and state.”<sup>61</sup> Neither of these strategies is sufficient without the other as the church lives out its calling to be faithfully present as the Body of Christ in the world.

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<sup>58</sup> “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed” in Martin Luther and Theodore B. Tappert, *Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, Fortress Press 2007 ed., 4 vols., vol. 2, 1520-1523, edited by Theodore B. Tappert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 281.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>60</sup> Nessan, *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community*, 14.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

### Chapter Summary

There is much here to inform the work of cultivating the holy callings of the ordinary saints of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church. Much of the biblical and theological frames outlined here were taught at least briefly in newsletter articles, sermons, the search conference, and in small groups gathered around different kinds of daily work. The quantitative tool used in this project gave some evidence of the congregation's growing understanding of Scripture and theology described above. More growth was evident in the telling of stories in which congregation members saw themselves called by God in ways they'd never realized before. Participants described the ways they live as *priests* empowered by the always-present Holy Spirit to embody God's faithful presence in all manners of daily work.

## CHAPTER 5

### METHODOLOGY

This research project sought to discover ways to change longstanding assumptions and behaviors prevalent in the Christian church that have separated Christian faith, most daily work, and the *missio Dei*. Many members of churches have tended to think of *vocation* or *calling* as something reserved for certain, specially-gifted members, or as an assignment completed by helping out with church-organized activities, when they were *not* working, at home, or enjoying leisure activities. The focus of this research was on the attitudes and behaviors in a single Lutheran congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The specific research question was:

How does implementation of a participatory action research process within Prairie Wind Lutheran Church cultivate community practices which lead to members more readily recognizing and responding to God's call to participate more fully in the *missio Dei* in their daily work?

#### **Participatory Action Research**

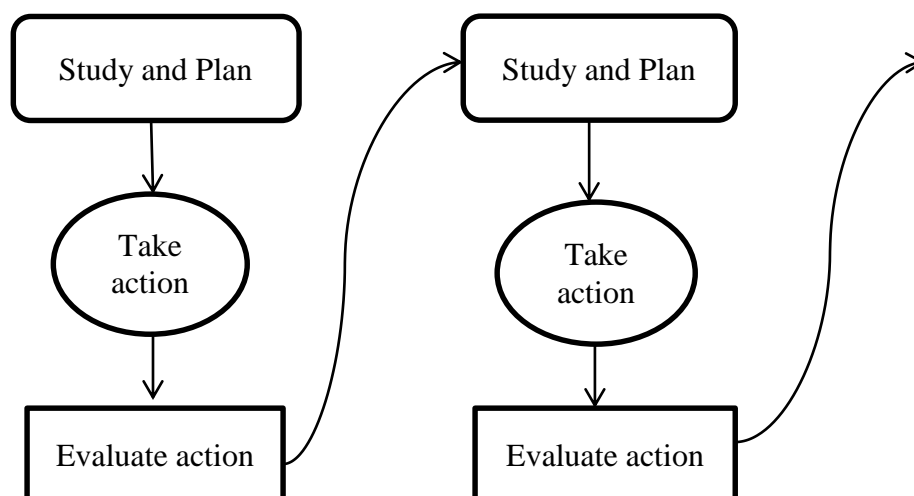
Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research strategy that aims to generate knowledge and effect change within a group of people or organization through a series of designed interventions. It democratizes the research process “through the inclusion of the local stakeholders as coresearchers.”<sup>1</sup> The focus of PAR is “on doing ‘with’ rather than doing ‘for’ stakeholders and credits local stakeholders with the richness of experience

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<sup>1</sup> Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 3.

and reflective possibilities that long experience living in complex situations brings with it.”<sup>2</sup> The PAR process fit especially well with this project because the emphasis on collaborative research *with* congregation members aligned with the desire for cultivating changes in Prairie Wind Lutheran Church that would lead to more collaborative ministry.

PAR is also research *in* action rather than research that is only *about* action.<sup>3</sup> This project gathered information from congregation members through the use of both quantitative and qualitative instruments. It also included members in a cyclical process of planning, taking action, evaluating the action, and then taking another action step in an effort to answer the research question.<sup>4</sup> Figure 2 shows the flow of the process. The action research cycle was repeated four times in this project. Each cycle built on previous iterative cycles of joint action, evaluation, and planning in simultaneous data gathering and action.



**Figure 2. Action Research Cycle**

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>3</sup> Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.



The particular approach in this project was a *transformative mixed methods* approach to the research. *Mixed methods* research involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires distributed via email in a survey of adult members of Prairie Wind. The qualitative data were gathered in meetings of focus groups and in monthly meetings of the action research team. The primary reason for this form of inquiry is that “the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone.”<sup>5</sup> Quantitative data provide breadth, but not much depth. Qualitative data provide depth, but not much breadth. A mixed methods approach makes it possible for the two kinds of data to complement and inform the other, and to provide a more robust picture of what is happening in the research.

This research was *transformative* because it included an “agenda for reform” that led to changing the lives of the researcher, the participants, and the ways they interact as members of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church.<sup>6</sup> Different participants in the focus groups, search conference, and worship interventions told me that until this project began they’d never really considered the connections that existed between their faith, daily work, and what the Spirit of God is accomplishing in the world. Others shared assumptions that connecting faith and daily work meant starting a workplace Bible study or inviting coworkers to church. The desired reform was a cultivation of new imagination and practices for understanding and living out shared callings to participate in the *missio Dei* through a wide variety of daily work.

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<sup>5</sup> Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 9.

The change that occurred was identified and measured through concurrent quantitative and qualitative instruments used at the beginning and end of the research. A first questionnaire distributed in November 2014 served as a baseline instrument, and a second questionnaire distributed to the same population in September 2015 served as an end line instrument. The two focus groups that met in December 2014 met again in September 2015. Both kinds of data gathered at the end of the research project indicated some changes in congregation members' understanding and practices. Congregation members' participation in the research as subjects and not just objects proved critical in the transformation. It also was an important way for the congregation to live into its belief that God keeps on calling every member into full partnership in the *missio Dei* through the Holy Spirit.

### Biblical and Theological Grounding

The book of Joel, in the Hebrew Scriptures, tells of a time when God's Spirit will be poured out on "all flesh," without regard to gender, age, or cultural status:

Then afterward  
 I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;  
 your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
 your old men shall dream dreams,  
 and your young men shall see visions.  
 Even on the male and female slaves,  
 in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:28-29)

The remarkable promise insists that a future outpouring of God's Spirit will not be bound by the various categories even the people of God use to divide up its members. No privileged few will gain special knowledge or power for communicating to the rest of the community. All frail and perishable human beings will receive knowledge of God for the

purpose of understanding together what God is doing in the world with and through God's people. Michael Welker summarizes the promise this way:

When the Spirit of God is poured out, the different persons and groups of people will open God's presence with each other and for each other. With each other and for each other, they will make it possible to know the reality intended by God.<sup>7</sup>

Christians believe that the fulfillment of this promise in Joel came on the Day of Pentecost that followed Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The Holy Spirit filled all of Jesus' disciples as they met in one place, and gave them the ability to speak about God's deeds of power in many languages (Acts 2:1-36). This was not the *glossolalia* that Paul addresses in his letter to the Corinthians, but the gift of speaking in languages other than one's own native tongue. It was not long before some of the first followers of Jesus began arguing over which members of the community had received more of the Spirit, or at least more important gifts of the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Other early disciples recognized that God had empowered them in their diversity for working together to understand and participate in the *missio Dei*.<sup>9</sup>

The participatory action research process requires trust in the value of all participants' contributions towards the desired outcome of the project. There is a convergence between the theological claims about the work of the Spirit in a community and the assertion of PAR that people in a community are capable of analyzing their situation, and conducting research in order to change what needs to be changed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Welker, *God the Spirit*, 151.

<sup>8</sup> One example is the first Christian community in Corinth, whose bickering over spiritual gifts (among many other things) leads to the Apostle Paul's response to their quarrels in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

<sup>9</sup> Debate and discernment by the Council of Jerusalem reported in Acts 15 is an example.

<sup>10</sup> Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 156.

Another way to state this is by noting with the Apostle Paul that God gathers and arranges members of a congregation or *body* in a way that makes it necessary for the whole body to work together in order to become what God intends:

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor 12:18-27)

It is not just *possible* for different persons and groups of people who make up different *parts* of the Prairie Wind *body* to learn together which community practices to cultivate. It is *critical* that persons with different roles and responsibilities in the community learn and put into action those practices which *lead to members readily recognizing and responding to God's call to participate more fully in the missio Dei in their daily work.*

The pastor/researcher's role in the PAR was *convener* and *equipper* of the saints for discerning and deciding together a way to participate in God's preferred present and future. This was a change in roles from teacher and preacher whose primary work is to deliver the Word of the Lord and ministry assignments to the *laity*. Prairie Wind's pastor and people have worked some at collaborating in ministry, but mostly as an exercise in mapping out congregational activity. The change in leadership roles and time required to carry out this PAR generated some confusion and concern in the congregation, especially among those who have been quite comfortable with the traditional split in ways clergy and laity live out their callings to ministry.

## Research Design

In my role as researcher, I devised the overall framework of the research design, recruited and convened the action research team, and authored the initial draft of the quantitative and qualitative instruments used in the research. Prairie Wind members did most of the work of designing and implementing the planned interventions. The researcher and participants in the research shared evaluation and adjustments of interventions over the nine months of their implementation.

### Action Research Team

The first step in the research process was to invite eight members of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church to serve on the *action research team*. Several of the persons who were invited expressed interest in the research question either directly, in conversation with me, or when they participated in past congregational conversations. Others were recruited to provide diversity in age, gender, work experience, and number of years of membership in the congregation. Four members of the team were men and four were women. One of the men is a Prairie Wind staff member. One of the women on the team was a teacher who became a staff member during the course of the research. Another of the men on the team was elected to serve on Prairie Wind's leadership team soon after the team began meeting.

The action research team began meeting once a month in October 2014. I distributed a summary of the research proposal at this first meeting, and shared the reasons for my interest in the research question. The members of the action research team were then introduced to the PAR process, the rationale for using PAR in a congregational setting, and a tentative outline of the research design at the first team meeting. The action

research team informed consent form was also reviewed and signed by all members of the team (see appendix F). This same information was shared with the congregational leadership team in order to keep them informed on the project.

Each successive team meeting began with the reading of 1 Peter 2:4-10, using guidelines for the practice of Dwelling in the Word.<sup>11</sup> The reading was followed by a brief time of silence, and an invitation to group members to share what they heard or how they were caught by the text on that particular day. The team prayed together, and then moved into a time of evaluating current actions in the research and planning next steps in an upcoming intervention. The team continued to meet until the conclusion of the research in September 2015.

### Research Instruments

A quantitative questionnaire was developed to serve as a baseline and end line measure of connections congregation members made between their Christian faith and their sense of vocation, specifically as it is related to their daily work (see appendix A). The questionnaire measured nominal variables of gender, marital status, education, and type of daily work. The instrument also contained ordinal levels of measurement that gathered data about the frequency of members' participation in congregation activities and personal faith practices. A Likert scale was used to measure the ordinal variable of strength of agreement with various statements about the relationship between faith and daily work. The end line questionnaire asked additional questions about participation in the interventions that were part of this project (see appendix A supplement). The purpose was to determine which practices introduced in this intervention (the independent

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<sup>11</sup> Ellison and Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word: A Pocket Handbook*.

variable) impacted congregation members' sense of calling as part of the community (the dependent variable) and their understanding of the connection between their faith and daily work.

The questionnaire was field tested via the distribution of paper copies to the eight members of the action research team. A second field test was conducted through the emailing of an attached file of the questionnaire as a Word document to fifteen other persons who were serving with me as members of a regional outdoor ministry board. The field tests resulted in a few slight changes to the wording of questions on the questionnaire, but no substantial changes were made to the content.

The edited questionnaire was distributed through SurveyMonkey by email on November 26, 2014 to the 312 adult members of the congregation whose emails were on file in the congregation office. Paper copies were also made available in the church office for any persons who preferred to fill out a hard copy, but no one chose that option. An implied consent form that outlined the purpose of the research, promised confidentiality, and explained how the results would be reported accompanied every questionnaire (see appendix D). The first email resulted in eighty-five responses. A second email was sent on December 5, 2014 to the 227 persons who had not responded. Another forty persons filled out the questionnaire after this second invitation. A third and final reminder was emailed to those who had not responded to either of the first two requests. This third reminder resulted in sixteen more responses. A total of 141 persons completed the baseline questionnaire by the end of December 2014 when no additional questionnaires were accepted. The data gathered were a census of all adult members of Prairie Wind.

The members of the action research team were among the 312 persons receiving the questionnaire, but they did not return it because they had participated in the field test.

The qualitative focus group protocol developed for this research consisted of eight primary questions and ten potential follow-up questions. The instrument was also field tested in November 2014. The test groups consisted of two separate small groups of seven members of neighboring Lutheran congregations in Riverside. One thing learned in these field tests was of the need for the researcher to be very clear when asking questions about faith and daily work outside the normal activities of the congregation. More often than not, answers to questions about daily work turned into affirmations of congregation ministries and those who were doing good work in the congregation. It was another reminder of how tightly church members bind talk of ministry or God's mission to church organized activities. I also learned in the field tests how quickly I inserted myself into the conversation, even when I came as an outsider to listen. The discovery helped me avoid jumping in to the focus group conversations with Prairie Wind members.

I convened two separate focus groups in the first week of December 2014. The first group consisted of seven members of Prairie Wind; eight members met in the second focus group interview. The purpose of the focus groups was to delve deeper into questions asked on the quantitative questionnaire, but because the mixed methods research was concurrent, the preliminary quantitative data did not inform the focus group conversation. The persons chosen to participate in the focus groups represented a nonprobability purposive sampling of the congregation. Participants were recruited to provide a balance of male and female participants, a variety of ages, ranging from 37-62,



and an intentional mix of persons who worked in banking, medicine, education, sales, technology, and legal services.

An edited version of the focus group protocol was prepared before the groups met (see appendix B), and each person who participated read and signed an informed consent form before the conversations began (see appendix E). The participants were also informed that the group conversation was recorded on both an audio and video recorder.

I invited the same persons back together in September 2015 for two end line focus group conversations. Nine of the fifteen persons—five at one, and four at the second—participated in these end line groups. The protocol was basically the same. Two questions were added to ask about the impact of the interventions implemented in this research (see appendix C). The focus group participants expressed general appreciation for the research process, though few group members participated in more than one of the interventions.

### PAR Interventions

The action research team and I introduced five interventions into the life of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church from January to August of 2015. The first intervention, a *search conference*, was organized and led by the pastor/researcher to introduce more congregation members to the subject matter of this research, and to enlist their help in choosing four subsequent interventions. The twenty-two persons who gathered on a Saturday in January 2015 chose and designed interventions that utilized the communal practices of *storytelling* via social media, *testimony* in worship, *prayer and commissioning* in worship, and *small group conversation* about issues related to the intersection of vocation and daily work.

## Search Conference

Greenwood and Levin argue that the core element in the action research process is “the creation of arenas where discussion and collaborative research facilitate cogenerative learning.”<sup>12</sup> Solutions to the research problem must emerge from the local context with the help of local stakeholders. Interventions that are predetermined and implemented by the researcher may help a researcher/leader feel more in control of the process, but they will often bypass the particular skills and knowledge of the group involved. Searching is a cogenerative learning process that creates a situation “where ordinary people can engage in structured knowledge generation (from developing plans to execution) based on systematic experimentation.”<sup>13</sup> This was the reason for planning and offering a *search conference* as the first intervention in this research process.

The search conference was held on Saturday, January 24<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The conference was held in the comfortable meeting space of a downtown business instead of in the church building at the action research team’s request. The team surmised that if the purpose of the conference was to help members make better connections between their calling and daily work, the members should gather in a place where people gather for daily work that is not *church-as-usual* work. Twenty-two Prairie Wind members participated in the conference.

The aim of the conference was to share the biblical, theological, and theoretical grounding for the research project, and introduce the context and purpose for the

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<sup>12</sup> Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 135.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 136.

project.<sup>14</sup> First, I explained my own wrestling with overcoming the clergy-laity divide, and my desire to help church members discover that God's call to serve as co-creators in God's creation meant more than serving on church committees. This was followed by theological and biblical teaching that reminded the Lutheran audience of the connection between justification and vocation. The tool used for this teaching was the video resource *Down + Out: Where Grace Takes You*.<sup>15</sup> The group broke into small groups to discuss two chapters of the resource. One chapter addressed faith lived in congregational life, and the second addressed faith lived in the workplace. Between viewings of the video chapters, the small groups were challenged to consider three different case studies of persons wrestling with difficult economic or ethical decisions in their work.

The conference also served as the location of a collaborative effort to *construct* the particular contextual issues being addressed, brainstorm possible actions to address the issues over the following four months, plan the first cultivation of community practices, and decide how to implement them in an initial action research cycle.<sup>16</sup> Following lunch, participants were given examples of fifteen different practices implemented by other congregations to cultivate the callings of its members in their daily work.<sup>17</sup> They were instructed that this wasn't an exhaustive list, but rather examples to help *prime the pump* of their own creativity in order to come up with practices that would

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<sup>14</sup> Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Down + Out: Where Grace Takes You*.

<sup>16</sup> Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 8-11.

<sup>17</sup> Some of the suggested practices came from suggestions shared in a phone conversation with Pastor Tania Haber on January 22, 2015. Others were gleaned from Amy L. Sherman, "Ten Ways to Encourage Vocational Stewardship in Your Church," [http://www.vocationalstewardship.org/wp-content/pdf/Ten\\_Ways\\_to\\_Encourage\\_Voc\\_Stew\\_in\\_Your\\_Church.pdf](http://www.vocationalstewardship.org/wp-content/pdf/Ten_Ways_to_Encourage_Voc_Stew_in_Your_Church.pdf) (accessed January 22, 2015).

be doable and effective in Prairie Wind's context. Details were not required yet—only first ideas. A half hour of small group conversation led to the emergence of seven possible practices for Prairie Wind to try:

- Develop leadership labs to equip adults and youth for living out their vocation in their daily work. This could involve using a tool that identifies skills and strengths such as StrengthsFinder.<sup>18</sup>
- Commission people in worship according to their different occupations, pray for them in their different kinds of daily work, and craft the dismissal to highlight what people are sent out to do in that kind of work.
- Develop multiple small groups, possibly organized around different occupations, to talk about the link between vocation and occupation.
- Create mentor relationships between adults and adults, or adults and youth, through work interests or hobbies.
- Create a social media photo journal of where congregation members see God at work in daily work.
- Publicize forty ways in forty days to live as God's compassionate servants in the world throughout the season of Lent.
- Collect stories and testimonies of how members have experienced the connection between their faith and daily work, and then post these stories on the church website, Facebook page, or in live interviews in worship.

The participants prayed for the Spirit's direction in deciding which of the practices to try, and then each of them voted by putting three post-it notes next to the

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<sup>18</sup> Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007).

three he or she thought were the best choices. The group chose practices under the three broad headings of leadership integration, worship, and storytelling in order to do some combining of the seven choices above. They then self-selected which group they wanted to join in order to more clearly define the intervention and decide how to implement it between Ash Wednesday 2015 and September 1, 2015. The collaboration between the pastor/researcher and participants in the conference modeled the shared ministry that was a goal of this participatory action research.

### **Storytelling**

The storytelling group organized at the search conference developed two interventions. First, they put together a list of *Forty Ways to Live Out Our Call to Live as Jesus' Compassionate Servants in Forty Days* (see appendix I). A different way was posted each of the forty days in Lent on the congregation's Facebook page and Twitter feed. The whole list was available on the church's website and in Sunday bulletin inserts.

The forty ways were accompanied by photos of Prairie Wind members doing their daily work. Some of the photos were of members in their places of employment. Other photos showed members in daily work at home, or as volunteers in the community. Photos were compiled into a photo journal and posted on the church website at the end of the season of Lent. Some of the photos were also used for worship bulletin covers, and were printed in the monthly newsletter.

The group also suggested inviting Prairie Wind members to share testimonies of when and where they recognized God at work in their daily work. This happened at five Wednesday night worship services in Lent between Ash Wednesday and Holy Week. These testimonies were offered in an interview format with me or another member of the

action research team asking questions similar to those in the focus group protocols. An engaged couple shared their stories on one Wednesday night. A member of the leadership team invited her boss to come in on another Wednesday night, when they talked about how they saw the connection between faith and daily work in their shared workplace.

## **Worship**

The worship group organized at the search conference decided to begin their intervention in March 2015. They created a calendar with different kinds of daily work highlighted each month for twelve months. The chosen category of daily work for the month was written up in the worship bulletin. Examples of occupations in the particular category were listed. Persons participating in the daily work of the month were invited to stand and be recognized in a commissioning that connected Christian calling and daily work. One or more of the petitions in the prayers of the people asked for God's blessing upon all who live out their vocations in whatever work was highlighted for the month.

**Table 1. Emphasis for Monthly Prayer and Commissioning in Worship**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Daily Work</b>
<b>March</b>	Public service/police/firefighters/military/waste management/politicians
<b>April</b>	Financial services/accounting/tax preparation
<b>May</b>	Farming/gardening/landscaping/earth care/animal care
<b>June</b>	Construction/plumbing/heating/electrician
<b>July</b>	Civic service/government agencies/city management/citizen
<b>August</b>	Education/teacher/student/school administration/other school staff
<b>September</b>	Relational vocations/friends/family members/child care/elder care
<b>October</b>	Health care/doctors/nurses/dentists/therapists/medical technicians
<b>November</b>	Food services/restaurant workers/grocery store workers
<b>December</b>	Social services/social workers/counselors/
<b>January</b>	Technology services/computer scientists/researchers/engineers
<b>February</b>	Persons involved in ministry, paid and unpaid

The calendar was put together in such a way that all members of the congregation would be recognized for their daily work at least once during the year, and preferably

more often than that. One monthly emphasis was for the daily work required by any and all relationships. Another monthly emphasis was for all persons involved in ministry of any kind in any place. These understandings of daily work meant that everyone in attendance on those Sundays were recognized and commissioned.

### **Integration of Faith and Daily Work**

The group formed at the search conference that struggled the most with their assignment to devise and implement an intervention was the group gathered around the task of finding a way for congregation members to intentionally integrate their faith and what they do in the workplace. Some persons in the group lobbied for presenting learning events in which people would be taught more about vocation. Others wanted to bring persons together who participated in similar kinds of daily work for sharing and mentoring. The intervention that finally emerged from the discussion was the offering of three opportunities in June, and another two opportunities in August, for persons to gather for small group conversation around a specific topic related to the cultivation of callings in daily work.

The June question for consideration was about the relationship between daily work and personal identity. The topic was chosen in response to the result of the baseline questionnaire statement (Q20), “My sense of self is closely linked to whether I succeed or fail in my work.” One hundred persons of the one hundred thirty-seven who answered the question (73%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the assertion. The relationship between daily work and identity was discussed at a Thursday evening *Table Talk* gathering held at a nearby restaurant, at a Friday morning coffee and conversation gathering, and in a gathering of high school youth and parents. The small groups were

open to any congregation member or guest. Two additional opportunities for conversation were offered in August on a Thursday night at the same restaurant and on a Friday morning in the church building. The August topic was about the relationship between work and rest. It was also chosen as a way of addressing one of the baseline questionnaire questions. The statement talked about at the August gatherings was (Q33): “I keep a Sabbath day once a week to rest and detach from my work.” Thirty-two of the one hundred thirty-five persons who responded to the question (24%) answered that they “never” or “seldom” do this. Several of the persons who attended the Friday morning coffee and conversation specifically engaged the matter of rest as it relates to retirement from full-time paid work.

### Action Reflection Cycle

The action research team met again in early February to evaluate the search conference and the action plans devised for cultivation of each of the four practices in the areas of storytelling, worship, and vocational integration. The team agreed that the conference offered a healthy balance of teaching the basics of Christian vocation and opportunity to create interventions that might strengthen the connection between faith and daily work. The biggest concern was that the conference ended before any of the groups could finalize what they had begun planning.

The team continued to meet once a month following the first intervention to evaluate the action and repeat the action reflection cycle following the interventions that took place in March-June 2015. Conversations in the action research team meetings led to some adjustments of the social media and small group interventions as they were implemented.



### Analysis of Data

SurveyMonkey tools provided a first analysis of data gathered by completed questionnaires. They revealed the frequency of responses (n) to the various questions, and summarized the categorical data. They also revealed the weighted average or mean to questions asked using a Likert scale. IBM *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) software provided a means for more in-depth analysis of quantitative data.<sup>19</sup>

Evaluation of the qualitative data began with the researcher transcribing the recorded conversations of the two focus groups. First I typed out what I heard on the audio recording. I also viewed the video recording to determine what visual data ought to be added to the typed word. Once this transcription process was complete, I began coding the focus group meetings using a process of initial and focused qualitative coding.<sup>20</sup>

Coding is the pivotal link between generating qualitative data and making sense of the data. It is the process of “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.”<sup>21</sup> I used the Charmaz method of coding the transcripts of the focus group gatherings. This process began with initial coding of *in vivo* codes developed through a careful word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident reading of the transcripts. By video recording the focus groups, I was able to code nonverbal data as well as words spoken. The goal of creating *in vivo* codes was to stay as close as possible to the language of the participants in the group. Careful coding helps the researcher refrain from inserting his or her own motives or

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<sup>19</sup> IBM Corp. released 2013. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.

<sup>20</sup> Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 109-161.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

preconceptions into what is actually being shared by persons participating in the focus groups.

Initial coding was followed by focused coding. This consisted of focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. Focused coding first sifts and sorts the data by combining smaller categories of data into larger categories, subdividing a category of data that seems too large and eliminating data that are not useful. Clustering and categorizing the data led to first decisions about the concepts that emerged in the data. Axial coding moved the interpretation process into a second level of abstraction. I clustered the focused codes into larger categories of data. Axial coding was accompanied by a review of other literature about similar research to see if the findings were aligned in some way with what other researchers have discovered.

Theoretical coding was the last step in the coding process. I assessed and specified the relationship of the axial codes to one another. I also discerned the directions of influence of the axial codes, which led to theoretical codes that helped tell a story with coherence. I recognized that at this stage of coding there was a danger of predetermining how the data should be categorized and assessed. Every effort was made to let the theoretical codes “breathe through the analysis,” and not apply them to it.<sup>22</sup> This happened by reviewing the entire coding process and by asking the research team if conclusions drawn from the qualitative analysis made sense.

End line measurements were obtained in mid-September 2015 by the redistribution of the initial questionnaire to the same population, and by reconvening the initial two focus groups. An independent t-test was done to compare the responses to the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 155.

questionnaire at the beginning of the research with those received at its conclusion. Qualitative data were coded again using initial and focused coding methods, and then compared to data collected at the beginning of the project.

### **Chapter Summary**

The aim of the Participatory Action Research reported here was to determine if a series of community generated and designed interventions could change ways members of a single Christian congregation understood and lived out God's call to participate in the *missio Dei* through their daily work. I worked with an action research team to put together and host the first intervention, a search conference. Participants in the search conference then created three more interventions that were introduced to the congregation: storytelling through social media and worship testimony; monthly prayers and commissioning of persons according to kinds of daily work; and small group conversations.

Quantitative data were gathered before and after the interventions through the distribution of a questionnaire. Qualitative data were gathered in focus group interviews convened before and after the interventions. Careful analysis of the data that were collected revealed that many members of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church had a good understanding of how their faith informed their daily work at *the beginning* of the PAR. Other members shared their struggle to identify or even imagine ways that God might accomplish God's purposes through their work. The analysis also revealed that there were some measurable changes in attitudes and behaviors over the course of the research project, but it was difficult to attribute the change to any particular factor. We turn now to take a closer look at these results of the research.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

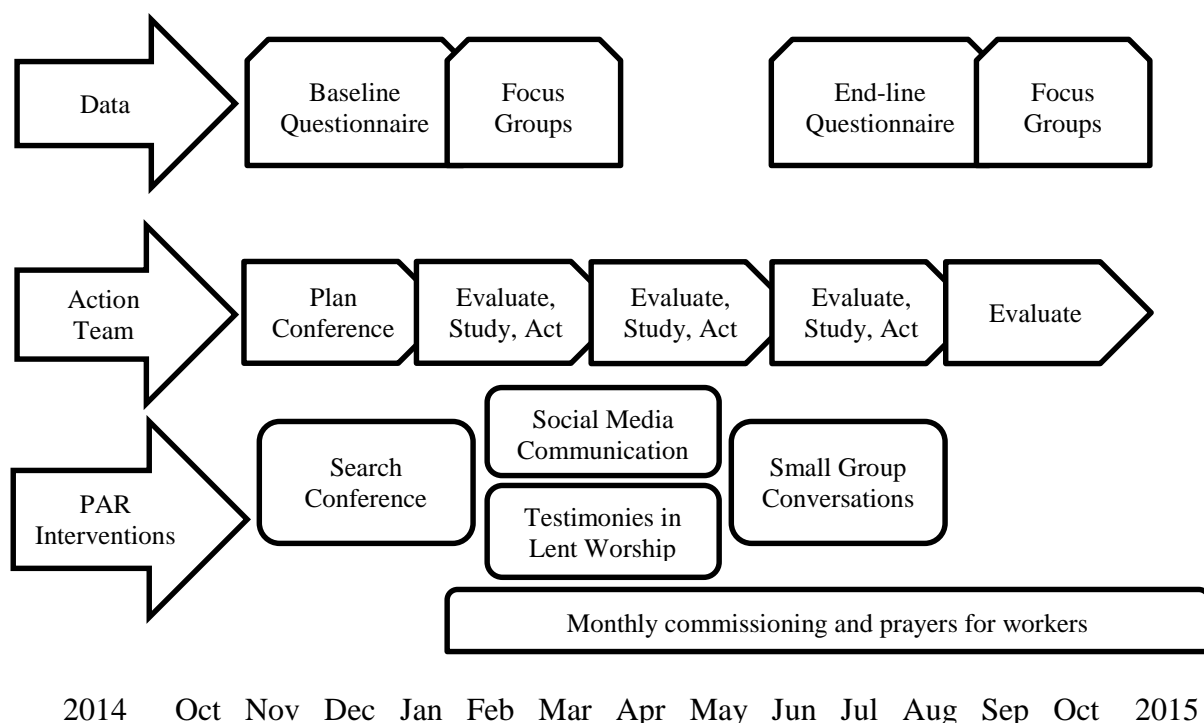
#### **Introduction**

One key way to measure the impact of this participatory action research process on Prairie Wind Lutheran Church was to closely explore the diversity of data gathered throughout the process. The data tell stories, through statistics and coded conversations. The primary sources of data were baseline and end line quantitative questionnaires emailed to Prairie Wind members, and baseline and end line focus groups convened at the same time the quantitative data were being gathered. Also contributing to the data were notes from meetings of the action research team, my journal entries written throughout the process, and memos written during the coding of qualitative data. No amount of data could provide a complete picture of Prairie Wind members' thoughts and convictions about the relationship between Christian faith and daily work before, during, and at the conclusion of this PAR. The data that have been collected and are presented here do offer insights into one congregation's efforts to explore the question:

How does implementation of a participatory action research process within Prairie Wind Lutheran Church cultivate community practices which lead to members more readily recognizing and responding to God's call to participate more fully in the *missio Dei* in their daily work?

The action research team worked with me to create and revise both the quantitative questionnaire and the focus group protocol in October 2014. Team members

assumed a leadership role in data collection throughout this study. The team also helped me plan and host a January search conference for the purpose of introducing the purpose of this study and the PAR process, and to enlist the help of the participants in determining and designing interventions. An open invitation was issued to all Prairie Wind partners to participate in the conference; twenty-two persons accepted the invitation. The search conference served as a first intervention. Four more PAR interventions were planned for February 2015 to August 2015. The processes of gathering data, the timing of the PAR interventions, and the overlapping meetings and evaluations of the interventions by the action research team are illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Overview of the PAR Process**

Three different groups formed at the search conference assumed responsibility for four interventions. At least one member of the action research team joined each of the

groups. The storytelling group started and completed its work in Lent. The worship group designed a calendar and process for commissioning and praying for persons with different callings once a month in worship. That intervention began in March 2015 and is continuing beyond the endpoint of this study. A third group offered suggestions for topics and locales for small group conversations in the summer months. Two groups met in June, and two in August. The action research team met monthly during this period to evaluate interventions completed, and use any pertinent information to fine tune interventions that followed.

### **Description of Participants**

Data collection began with the emailing of the baseline questionnaire using SurveyMonkey to every Prairie Wind adult with an email address in our database. I also made paper copies of the baseline questionnaire available to anyone who might choose to fill it out that way, but no one chose that option. Three hundred twelve questionnaires were sent out and one hundred forty-one persons responded. (Two emails bounced back, and two persons opted out of receiving the survey.) Four of the persons who responded opened and closed the survey before answering any or more than a few of the questions. I chose to delete their responses due to the lack of information, putting the number of usable baseline questionnaires at one hundred thirty-seven, forty-four percent of those sent out.

The end line questionnaire was emailed via SurveyMonkey to the same population as the baseline questionnaire. Eight additional emails were sent out to new members who were not in our database at the time of the baseline questionnaire. I chose to not offer a paper option due to the lack of responses to the first questionnaire. Three

hundred twenty questionnaires were sent out and one hundred five persons responded.

This time one of the respondents answered none of the questions and two answered only the first ten descriptive questions. I deleted these three responses for lack of information, putting the total usable end line questionnaires at one hundred two, thirty-two percent of those sent out. The genders of all respondents are shown in Table 2. The much higher percentage of female participation was nearly equal in the baseline and end line.

**Table 2. Frequencies and Percentages by Gender of Participants**

What is your gender?	Baseline Frequency N=137	Baseline Percentage	End line Frequency N=102	End line Percentage
Female	94	69.6	68	67.3
Male	41	30.4	33	32.7
Total (n)	135	100.0	101	100.0

The ages of persons responding to each of the questionnaires are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Frequencies and Percentages by Age of Participants**

Age	Baseline Frequency N=137	Baseline Percentage	End line Frequency N=102	End line Percentage
25-34	25	18.5	12	12.2
35-44	40	29.6	28	28.6
45-54	15	11.1	13	13.3
55-64	27	20.0	20	20.4
65-74	25	18.5	22	22.4
75-84	3	2.2	3	3.1
Total (n)	135	100.0	98	100.0

One important factor in determining what a person does for daily work is education. More education generally leads to more options for working, and better paying jobs. Certain kinds of professions in areas such as health care and education, in which the

overt purpose is to help the neighbor, often require extensive education. The levels of education of all respondents are shown in Table 4. The data show that those responding to both the baseline and end line questionnaires were highly educated groups as a whole. More than three of every four persons (77.4%) filling out the baseline questionnaire had earned at least a bachelor's degree. That percentage rose to 80.4 in the end line data.

**Table 4. Frequencies and Percentages of Level of Education**

Highest level of formal education completed?	Baseline Frequency N=137	Baseline Percentage	End line Frequency N=102	End line Percentage
Graduated from high school or earned GED	4	2.9	1	1.0
Some college or technical school	14	10.2	13	12.7
Associate Degree	12	8.8	6	5.9
Bachelor's Degree	49	35.8	33	32.4
Some Graduate work	12	8.8	14	13.7
Graduate or Professional Degree	45	32.8	35	34.3
Not sure	1	.7	0	0
Total (n)	137	100.0	102	100.0

Persons receiving the survey were also asked (Q4), "What best describes the kind of daily work you do in a normal week?" Fifteen options of both paid and unpaid daily work were provided, along with space to type in any kind of daily work not listed. Table 5 shows what Prairie Wind members who filled out the baseline and end line questionnaire consider their daily work. The wide variety of daily work by respondents indicates that attitudes and perceptions about daily work and any connection between faith and daily work that is measured here reaches across many occupations. The data also include attitudes and perceptions of persons who do not get paid for daily work.



**Table 5. Frequencies and Percentages of Daily Work of Respondents**

What best describes the daily work you do in a week?	Baseline Frequency N=137	Baseline Percentage	End line Frequency N=102	End line Percentage
Education	20	15.3	16	16.0
Business	19	14.5	19	19.0
Government	3	2.3	1	1.0
Skilled Labor	0	0	1	1.0
Homemaker	16	12.2	12	12.0
Health Care	21	16.0	13	13.0
Social Services	4	3.1	3	3.0
Volunteer	10	7.6	11	11.0
Student	0	0	2	2.0
Child care	3	2.3	1	1.0
Sales	11	8.4	4	4.0
Construction	2	1.5	2	2.0
Clerical	3	2.3	3	3.0
Arts	1	.8	0	0
Religious organization	3	2.3	1	1.0
Hospitality	2	9.9	0	0
Retired	13	11.5	11	11.0
Total (n)	131	100.0	100	100.0

There is no single kind of daily work that dominates the data, though persons working in three areas—education, business, and health care—make up nearly half (45.8%) of those responding to the baseline questionnaire and the end line questionnaire (48.0%). It’s also notable that a high percentage of respondents identify their daily work as the kind of work that usually is unpaid: homemaker, volunteer, and retired. Persons in these three groups make up almost one-third of the respondents (31.3%) in the baseline questionnaire, and more than a third (34.0%) in the end line questionnaire.

The questionnaires also inquired about the frequency of the respondents' participation in various congregational and community practices. These practices include worship and faith formation activities, as well as opportunities to volunteer in the neighborhood and city. Table 6 displays the responses; the lower the mean, the more frequent the participation in the activity. Not surprisingly, those answering the questionnaire indicated they participated in worship more than the other options. Further breakdown of the statistics on worship participation reveals that approximately half of those responding to the baseline (49.6%) and end line (50.9%) questionnaires participated in worship at least once a week. Fewer of those responding to each of the questionnaires participated in faith formation activities such as Sunday forums or small groups. The means measuring frequency of participation in community service activities that were planned and organized by Prairie Wind, and those activities available to the wider community, indicated slightly more participation by Prairie Wind members in community service opportunities.

**Table 6. Frequencies and Means of Participation in Community Practices**

Community Practices	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)
Worship	136	2.79	102	2.68
Faith formation activities	137	4.11	102	3.75
Community service activities organized by Prairie Wind	137	4.78	102	4.54
Community service activities outside of congregational life	136	4.52	100	4.50

For Means: 1=more than once a week, 2=once a week, 3=two or three times a month, 4=once a month, 5=a few times a year, 6=do not participate

The gathering of qualitative data in this research happened through the convening of two baseline focus groups in December 2014, and two end line focus groups which met in September 2015. Persons were chosen with the intention of balancing gender representation, and for their representation of a variety of ages and daily work. The fifteen persons who participated represented a nonprobability purposive sampling of the congregation. The persons who participated in groups are shown in table 7.

**Table 7. Participants in Focus Groups<sup>1</sup>**

Name	Work	Age	Baseline Focus Group (BFG)	End Line Focus Group (EFG)
Alan	Insurance	41	1	1
Clare	Health care	57	1	1
Karissa	Physical therapist	42	1	1
Barb	Teacher	54	1	1
Amy	Financial services	39	1	
Grant	Doctor	38	1	
Teresa	Graphic design	44	1	
Bob	Marketing	62	2	1
David	Banking	58	2	2
Stacy	Real estate	37	2	2
Donna	Early childhood education	42	2	2
Nancy	Lawyer	42	2	2
Ron	Law enforcement	42	2	
Tim	Technology services	60	2	
Ted	Engineer	51	2	

As the table indicates, all of the persons listed participated in either the first (BFG1) or the second (BFG2) baseline focus group. The same persons who participated in the baseline groups were invited to participate again in the end line focus groups. Five of them participated in the first end line focus group (EFG1), as indicated in the

<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

corresponding column in the table, and four persons participated in the second end line group (EFG2). Each of the persons who were unable to participate in the end line groups indicated an interest in being interviewed, but time constraints prohibited that from happening before the conclusion of this research.

### **Quantitative Data**

The quantitative data in this research project were gathered from baseline and end line questionnaires. Eight additional end line questionnaires were emailed to persons who joined Prairie Wind after the baseline questionnaire was sent out. The responses of the two questionnaires were not paired. The baseline questionnaire was sent out via SurveyMonkey in a way that made responses anonymous. I was able to track who returned questionnaires by email address, but not match the emails to individual responses. It also became apparent when the end line questionnaire was sent out that sending a survey to a particular email address was no guarantee that the same person who filled out the baseline questionnaire also filled out the end line questionnaire. Several email addresses were shared by couples; two of them told me they either collaborated on one or the other questionnaire, or each filled out one of them. Therefore an independent t-test was used to compare the overall means of the two data samples.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of the questions in the questionnaires sought to uncover perceptions and attitudes about the relationship between daily work, Christian faith lived out in response to God's calling, and the role Prairie Wind Lutheran Church has played in nurturing a connection between these two vital things among its members. The

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<sup>2</sup> Peter M. Nardi, *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Methods*, 3rd Edition. ed., 188-190.

instruments measured responses to queries about the nature of work, the daily work of respondents, and the intersection of faith and daily work. Questions were also asked about the effectiveness of Prairie Wind in cultivating connections between faith and daily work, and the effectiveness of Prairie Wind in cultivating connections between daily work and God's mission in the world. The end line questionnaire invited those responding to indicate which of the PAR interventions they experienced, and how helpful those they experienced were in cultivating connections between faith and daily work.

#### Data on Perception of Daily Work

Three of the questions invited respondents to consider basic ways to define work, and indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. Q13 stated: "Daily work is a basic human need." The other two questions sought to determine if responders understood daily work as blessing or curse by asking for a response to Q14: "Daily work is a gift from God," and Q15: "Daily work is punishment for humanity's sin." Table 8 shows the results.

**Table 8. Perceptions of Daily Work**

Question:	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)	t	df	p
Q13: Daily work is a basic human need.	137	4.285	102	4.412	-1.477	237	.141
Q14: Daily work is a gift from God.	137	4.314	101	4.396	-.845	236	.399
Q15: Daily work is punishment for sin.	135	1.667	102	1.628	.426	235	.671

For Means: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

A comparison of baseline and end line mean scores for Q13 showed an increase in value, representing an increase in strength of agreement. The difference between the two

mean scores was .127. A p-value of .141 indicated that the change was not statistically significant. Q14 asserted that work is intended as blessing, a gift from God. There was a .082 increase in the end line mean score, compared to the baseline score. A p-value of .399 showed that the change was not statistically significant. High baseline and end line scores indicated respondents did agree with both assertions. Q15 makes a claim that is the opposite of Q14. The end line mean *decreased* by .039, representing a slight increase in disagreement with the statement. A p-value of .671 reveals that the difference in scores, once again, was not statistically significant.

Another group of questions addressed respondents' perceptions about the *particular* kind of daily work they do, as it related to their abilities, sense of meaning, and sense of self. Responses to a question about how daily work fit with the person's abilities, interests, and talents (Q17), resulted in mean scores in both the baseline and end asserting a fit. There was an increase of .128 from the baseline mean to the end line mean, but a p-value of .348 indicated the increase was not statistically significant. Prairie Wind members who responded to the survey also generally indicated (Q19) that they found the work they do gives meaning to their lives. Once again there was a slight increase (.117) from the baseline mean to the end line mean, but it was not statistically significant. A third question in this group inquired about the connection between sense of self and success or failure in work. Q20 stated, "My sense of self is closely linked to whether I succeed or fail in my work." The baseline mean was 3.363, but what caught my attention in this question is that one hundred out of one hundred thirty-seven respondents answered that they agreed (54.7%) or strongly agreed (18.2%). with the assertion. This result from this baseline question was the impetus for shaping the June small group conversations

around the question of work and identity. An end line mean of 3.530 revealed a decrease in agreement of .163. The p-value for this change was .254, indicating that the change was not statistically insignificant. Table 9 presents the results of these questions.

**Table 9. Perception of Personal Daily Work**

Question:	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)	t	df	p
Q17: My daily work is a good fit with my abilities	136	4.110	101	4.238	-.941	235	.348
Q19: My daily work gives meaning to my life	137	4.197	102	4.314	-1.019	237	.309
Q20: My sense of self is closely linked to my work	137	3.693	100	3.530	1.142	235	.254

For Means: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

#### Data on Perception of the Intersection of Faith and Daily Work

The more general questions inquiring about the fit between self and work were accompanied by questions aimed specifically at determining perceptions of how God is present or not present in choosing work (Q11), and whether or not daily work matters to God (Q12). The results are shown in table 10.

**Table 10. Perception of the Intersection of Faith and Work**

Question:	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)	t	df	p
Q11: I believe God has called me to my daily work	135	4.082	101	4.208	-1.160	235	.247
Q12: How I do my daily work matters to God	137	4.453	102	4.520	-.646	237	.519

For Means: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

There was very high level of agreement in both the baseline and end line questionnaires to the assertion in Q12, "How I do my daily work matters to God." This

affirmation indicates that the research question at the heart of this process is an appropriate question to explore with this congregation. As we recognize that daily work does indeed matter to God, then how we go about learning to respond more fully and faithfully to God's call to participate in the *missio Dei* in daily work also matters to God. The high mean score in the baseline provided little room for an increase, yet the end line mean rose by .067. It was not statistically significant. There was also a slight increase in the end line mean score of Q11, but once again this was not statistically significant.

Table 11 shows results to inquiries about how frequently participants were tempted to set aside their values in their work (Q35). The change in responses from a baseline mean of 1.405 to an end line mean of 1.434 indicated a slight increase moving from *never to seldom*. The p-value of .728 indicates this change was not statistically significant. The table also shows the difference in the baseline and end line means of responses to Q38, which indicates a slight increase in *how often* those responding saw glimpses of God in the workplace. This difference was also not statistically significant.

**Table 11. Frequency of Temptation and Divine Appearance**

Question:	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)	t	df	p
Q35: I am tempted to set aside Christian values to succeed in my work.	131	1.405	99	1.434	-.348	228	.728
Q38: I see glimpses of God in my workplace	130	3.700	100	3.720	-.163	228	.870

For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always



### Data on Effectiveness of Cultivation of Connections between Faith, Work, and Mission

The questionnaires addressed the research question most directly in one set of questions about how well the congregation is cultivating connections between faith and daily work, and in another set of questions about cultivating connections between daily work and the *missio Dei*. Responses to the first of the questions are shown in table 12.

**Table 12. Perception of Congregation Help Connecting Faith and Work**

Question	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)	t	df	p
Q25: I wish my congregation would help me with clearer connections between my faith and my daily work.	137	3.037	100	3.240	-1.673	235	.096

For Means: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Those participating in the questionnaire were asked to respond to Q25: “I wish my congregation would help me make clearer connections between my faith and daily work.” There was an increase from the baseline mean to the end line mean of .203. The p-value of .096 shows that the change was not statistically significant, but the result still raised some questions. Did the PAR interventions confuse the connections between faith and daily work? Or did the repeated raising of the issue raise interest in making better connections? The p-value discourages putting too much weight on this change, but it is worth checking against other questions.

A similar question (Q36) invited participants to evaluate how often participation in Prairie Wind activities aided the discovery of meaning in daily work. The increase between baseline mean and end line mean was slight, with a p-value of .263, indicating the change was not statistically significant. This is shown in table 13. Participants were

also asked how frequently they felt, “Our congregation has helped me make connections between my faith and daily work” (Q39). There was another slight increase from the baseline mean to the end line mean of .029, suggesting something of a response that is contrary to the answers to Q25. The p-value of .815 indicates this change was not statistically significant.

**Table 13. Frequency of Connection of Congregation Activity, Faith, and Work**

Question	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)	t	df	p
Q36: Participation in congregational activities helps me find meaning in work.	124	3.315	97	3.454	-1.123	219	.263
Q39: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my faith and my daily work.	121	3.322	94	3.351	-.234	213	.815

For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always

Another set of questions asked those responding to both questionnaires about the kinds of connections they saw between congregational ministries, daily work, and God’s work of transforming the larger community. Table 14 displays the results. The level of agreement that “God is transforming our city through our congregation’s ministries” (Q23), and that “God is transforming our city through members’ daily work” (Q24), is already quite high in the baseline questionnaire. This is indicated by a baseline mean of 4.257 for Q23, and a baseline mean of 4.191 for Q24. Prairie Wind members who answered the questionnaire clearly recognized before this project began that God was at work transforming the city through both congregational ministries and members’ daily

work. The end line mean scores for both these questions indicated that general agreement to both assertions increased, but a p-value of .237 for Q23, and .523 for Q24, shows the

**Table 14. Perceptions of Connection of Work and the *missio Dei***

Question	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)	t	df	p
Q23: God is transforming our city through our congregation's ministries.	136	4.257	101	4.356	-1.185	235	.237
Q24: God is transforming our city through members' daily work.	136	4.191	101	4.248	-.639	235	.523
Q26: I wish my congregation would help make clearer connections between my work and God's work.	137	3.168	100	3.300	-1.033	235	.303

For Means: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

increases were not statistically significant. An increase in the end line mean for Q26 raises the same questions mentioned above regarding responses to Q25. The means of responses to Q26, "I wish my congregation would help me make clearer connections between my faith and daily life," increased from a baseline score of 3.168, to an end line score of 3.300. This increase of .132 is smaller than the increase in Q25, and is also not statistically significant.

Participants in this research were also asked how frequently Prairie Wind helped them make connections between their own daily work, and "God's work in the world" (Q40). "God's work" was not specified, leaving the content of the *missio Dei* open to interpretation. There was a lukewarm response to the question in both the baseline results, indicated by a mean of 3.320, and the end line results, indicated by a mean of

3.458. The p-value of .233 indicated that the increase in means was not statistically significant. These results are displayed in table 15.

**Table 15. Frequency of Connections between Work and the *missio Dei***

Question	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)	t	df	p
Q40: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my work and God's work in the world.	125	3.320	96	3.458	-1.196	219	.233

For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always

#### Data on Relationship of Personal Faith Practices and Work

The question this PAR raises is how Prairie Wind Lutheran Church can “effectively cultivate community practices” that strengthen connections between God’s call and the *missio Dei* in daily work? One way to measure community practices is to ask the individuals in the community what kinds of faith practices they are exercising in relationship to their daily work. Both the baseline and end line questionnaires raised five such questions: about prayer, worship, sharing faith, keeping the Sabbath, and working for justice.

One way to bridge the longstanding Sunday-Monday divide is to continue the praying done on Sunday in the worship space on Monday in the workplace. I was curious to know if Prairie Wind members considered praying about their daily work, whatever kind of work they did (Q28). How would various encouragements of faith practices in the PAR interventions impact the way Prairie Wind members practice their faith individually in the workplace? The results to the question on prayer, and the other four questions about faith practices, are presented in table 16.

**Table 16. Perception of Relationship of Faith Practices and Daily Work**

Question	N (Base)	Mean (Base)	N (End)	Mean (End)	t	df	p
Q28: I pray about my daily work.	134	3.470	99	3.455	.114	231	.910
Q30: My participation in worship helps prepare me for work.	131	3.626	100	3.780	-1.179	229	.240
Q31: I talk about my faith with coworkers	130	3.115	100	3.140	-.199	228	.842
Q33: I keep a Sabbath day once a week to detach and rest from my work.	133	3.428	101	3.386	.287	232	.774
Q37: My faith causes me to be more just and compassionate in my work.	130	4.139	99	4.222	-.804	227	.422

For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always

The responses to Q28, “I pray about my daily work,” indicated a very slight decrease in the mean between the baseline questionnaire and the end line questionnaire of .015. This revealed a slight decrease in how often the practice was true for the respondents, but the p-value of .910 showed that this was not statistically significant. A similar decrease from the mean of the baseline questionnaire to the mean of the end line questionnaire was shown in the responses to Q33: “I keep a Sabbath day once a week to detach and rest from my work.” A p-value of .774 for the difference between the means similarly indicated that the decrease was not statistically significant. An analysis of the frequency of responses to this question in the baseline questionnaire revealed that nearly 24% of respondents “Never” or “Seldom” keep a Sabbath day once a week, a somewhat surprising violation of the Third Commandment, and an indication of just how unhealthily busy some Prairie Wind members are. This statistic, along with the biblical

lens of Sabbath rest, served as catalysts for the small group discussions, offered as the final PAR intervention, in August 2015.

Comparing baseline and end line scores for Q30 about worship participation, Q31 about sharing faith with coworkers, and Q37 about being just and compassionate in the workplace, showed a slight increase for each of the questions. The largest increase was in response to the statement (Q30) about participation in congregational worship. The p-value for this question and the other two indicated that the changes in the means were not statistically significant.

#### Data on Relationship of Community Practices and Work

My next step in analyzing the data was to take a closer look at the responses to questions about community practices by collapsing responses for selected questions into two groups for both the baseline questionnaire and the end line questionnaire. The purpose was to determine if there was a significant relationship between the variables in the different groups by running an independent t-test on the two groups within the two questionnaires. For example, I grouped the six responses to Q7, “How often do you usually participate in worship?” into two groups: those worshipping once a week or more, and those worshipping less than once a week. I did the same thing to questions about participation in faith formation events (Q8), and congregational service beyond the congregation’s building walls (Q9). The collapsing of responses was done with an eye towards making the two groups as equal in size as possible. The division of those responding to Q7 was done in such a way that quantity of persons in each group in both the baseline and the end line was nearly equal. The purpose was to determine the impact of more frequent participation in these faith practices. This work is shown in table 17.

**Table 17. Frequency and Percentage of Worship Participation**

Q7: How often do you usually participate in worship?	Baseline Frequency N=136	Baseline Percentage	End line Frequency N=101	End line Percentage
Once a week or more	67	49.3	52	51.5
Less than once a week	69	50.7	49	48.5
Total (n)	136	100.0	101	100.0

I compared the means of the two groups' responses to several of the same questions in both the baseline and end line questionnaires, including, "How I do my daily work matters to God" (Q12), "My daily work gives meaning to my life" (Q19), and "My work brings me joy" (Q29). The independent t-tests showed there were no statistically significant relationships between the variables in either the baseline or end line data.

A comparison of the two groups' responses to two questions asking how frequently the congregation helps make connections between faith and daily work, and daily work and the *missio Dei*, did yield different results. The independent t-test on how the two groups responded in the *baseline* questionnaire to "Our congregation has helped me make connections between my faith and daily work" (Q39), and "Our congregation has helped me make connections between my daily work and what God is doing in our community and in the world" (Q40) resulted in p-values greater than .05. This meant there was no significant relationship between the variables. Data from the baseline indicated that frequency of participation in community faith practices did not have a measurable impact of the perception of connections between faith, daily work, and the *missio Dei*. The results are shown in table 18.

**Table 18. Baseline Perceptions of Connections between Faith, Daily Work, and the *missio Dei* in Relationship to Frequency of Worship Participation**

Question	Worship Frequency	N	Mean	t	df	p
Q39: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my faith and daily work.	Once a week or more	63	3.651	1.210	128	.229
	Less than once a week	67	3.403			
Q40: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my daily work and what God is doing in our community and in the world.	Once a week or more	63	3.508	.513	129	.609
	Less than once a week	68	3.412			

For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always

A different result emerged from analysis of the end line questions, shown in table 19. Those who responded in the end line questionnaire that they worshiped once a week or more indicated that Prairie Wind helped them make connections between faith and daily work, and connections between daily work and what God is doing in the world, significantly more frequently than those who worshiped less than once a week. A p-value of .001 for Q39, and .002 for Q40, means we reject the null hypothesis for both questions and conclude there is a significant difference in the means of the groups.

More frequent participation in worship matters in the cultivation of callings to live out faith in daily work. The change measured in this quantitative data does not reveal what about worship matters most. The data do not indicate if the more *usual* practices of proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments had an impact, or if one of the additions to typical worship practices that was part of this study, such as commissioning



of members by kind of daily work or member testimony, led to the change. It is clear that worshiping with the congregation at least once a week shaped understandings of callings.

**Table 19. End Line Perceptions of Connections between Faith, Daily Work, and the *missio Dei* in Relationship to Frequency of Worship Participation**

Question	Worship Frequency	N	Mean	t	df	p
Q39: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my faith and daily work.	Once a week or more	49	3.755	3.508	95	<b>.001</b>
	Less than once a week	48	3.125			
Q40: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my daily work and what God is doing in our community and in the world.	Once a week or more	50	3.820	3.182	97	<b>.002</b>
	Less than once a week	49	3.265			

For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always

A similar approach to the more in-depth analysis of the significance of worship participation was used to look more closely at the significance of participation in faith formation events in the congregation. Faith formation events mentioned specifically included small groups, Christian education leadership, and Sunday forums. Responses to Q8, “How often do you usually participate in one or more faith formation events?,” were collapsed into two groups in both the baseline and end line questionnaire. The groups were nearly evenly divided in the baseline between those who participated once a month or more, and those who participated less than once a month, or not at all. A slightly higher percentage of those responding to the end line questionnaire indicated that they

usually participate in faith formation activities once a month or more. The results are displayed in table 20.

**Table 20. Frequency and Percentage of Participation in Faith Formation Activities**

Q8: How often do you usually participate in faith formation activities?	Baseline Frequency N=137	Baseline Percentage	End line Frequency N=101	End line Percentage
Once a month or more	66	48.2	62	61.4
Less than once a month	71	51.8	39	38.6
Total (n)	137	100.0	101	100.0

Independent t-tests were also conducted to measure the relationship of frequency of participation in faith formation events with responses to Q39 and Q40. The results of the t-tests run on the baseline questionnaire are displayed in table 21.

**Table 21. Baseline Perception of Connections between Faith, Daily Work, and the *missio Dei* in Relationship to Participation in Faith Formation Activities**

Question	Faith Formation	N	Mean	t	df	p
Q39: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my faith and daily work.	Once a month or more	62	3.613	.801	129	.425
	Less than once a month	69	3.449			
Q40: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my daily work and what God is doing in our community and in the world.	Once a month or more	63	3.524	634	130	.527
	Less than once a month	69	3.406			

For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always

Once again, p-values greater than .05 resulting from the comparisons of the means of the two groups for both questions in the *baseline* demonstrate there was no significant difference between the means of the two groups for the questions. This level of significance changed in the analyses of responses to the same questions by groups in the same two *end line* categories. The results are displayed in table 22.

**Table 22. End Line Perception of Connections between Faith, Daily Work, and the *missio Dei* in Relationship to Participation in Faith Formation Activities**

Question	Faith Formation	N	Mean	t	df	p
Q39: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my faith and daily work.	Once a month or more	61	3.623	2.532	95	<b>.013</b>
	Less than once a month	36	3.139			
Q40: Our congregation has helped me make connections between my daily work and what God is doing in our community and in the world.	Once a month or more	61	3.721	2.511	97	<b>.014</b>
	Less than once a month	38	3.263			

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For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always

The mean of those responding to Q39 who participated in faith formation activities once a month or more was 3.623, while the mean of those responding in the end line who gather for faith formation activities less than once a month was 3.139. The resulting p-value is .013, indicating that there is a statistically significant difference in how the two groups view congregational efforts to connect faith and daily work.

The table also shows a statistical difference in the way persons in the two groups responded to Q40. The mean of those responding to Q40 in the end line who participated

in faith formation activities once a month or more was 3.721, while the mean of those responding who gather less than once a month was 3.263. The p-value of .014 means we reject the null hypothesis and conclude there is a significant difference in how the two groups view efforts to make connections between daily work and the *missio Dei*.

A typical component of most congregational faith formation activities is time for prayer, whether or not the purpose of the activity is to teach participants how to pray. Small groups, Sunday forums, faith milestone gatherings, and classes for children and youth typically begin and end with prayer. A curious revelation of baseline responses to Q26: “I pray about my work,” was that the persons who met for faith formation activities once a month or more indicated that they prayed slightly less frequently about their daily work than those who participated less than once a month or not at all in the same activities. The results of this measurement of the baseline response are shown in table 23. The p-value resulting from the independent t-test of the means of the two groups’ responses was .453, so the difference is not statistically significant.

**Table 23. Baseline Perception of Prayer Practice in Relationship to Participation in Faith Formation Activities**

Question	Faith Formation	N	Mean	t	df	p
Q26: I pray about my daily work.	Once a month or more	65	3.400	-.753	132	.453
	Less than once a month	69	3.536			

For Means: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

A different result was, again, revealed in the independent t-test of the end line responses of the two groups. The p-value of .029 means there was a statistically

significant difference in means between the two groups. By the end of this PAR, persons participating monthly or more in faith formation activities indicated that they were statistically significantly more likely to pray about their daily work than those persons who seldom or never participated in similar activities. This result is shown in table 24.

**Table 24. End Line Perception of Prayer Practice in Relationship to Participation in Faith Formation Activities**

Question	Faith Formation	N	Mean	t	df	p
Q26: I pray about my daily work.	Once a month or more	60	3.618	2.222	96	<b>.029</b>
	Less than once a month	38	3.158			

For Means: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

The other category of congregational activity I examined more closely was community service that was organized and carried out by the congregation. Table 25 shows the frequencies and percentages of persons who serve in these ways through the congregation, and responded to the questionnaires.

**Table 25. Frequencies and Percentage of Participation in Prairie Wind Service Events**

Q7: How often do you usually participate in Prairie Wind service opportunities?	Baseline Frequency N=137	Baseline Percentage	End line Frequency N=101	End line Percentage
Once a month or more	35	25.5	37	36.6
Less than once a month	102	74.5	64	63.4
Total (n)	137	100.0	101	100.0

One intriguing result of the analysis of the independent t-tests comparing groups participating in congregational service showed up in a look at how persons responded to Q24: “My work brings me joy.” There was no statistically significant difference between the groups in the baseline questionnaire. The results are displayed in table 26.

**Table 26. Baseline Perception of Joy in Work in Relationship to Participation in Prairie Wind Service Activities**

Question	Prairie Wind Service	N	Mean	t	df	p
Q29: My work brings me joy	Once a month or more	33	4.030	-.196	131	.845
	Less than once a month	100	4.060			

For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always

There was a statistically significant difference discovered in the responses of the two groups in the end line questionnaire to Q29. These results are shown in table 27. The mean of responses of persons who participated in congregational service once a month or more was 4.168. The mean of responses of those who served less than once a month or not at all was 3.828. The resulting p-value was .031 means we reject the null hypothesis and conclude there is a statistically significant difference in means between the two groups for frequency of congregational service leading to the frequency of finding joy in daily work. This result raises questions that the data do not answer here. Is there something about serving with a person’s community of faith that makes one joyful in other work? Or might the large percentage (38.0) of persons answering the end line questionnaire who identify their daily work as typically unpaid work (retired,

homemaker, volunteer, student) impact the data in some way? The qualitative data that follow will prove helpful in this discussion.

**Table 27. End Line Perception of Joy in Work in Relationship to Participation in Prairie Wind Service Activities**

Question	Prairie Wind Service	N	Mean	t	df	p
Q29: My work brings me joy.	Once a month or more	36	4.168	2.187	98	<b>.031</b>
	Less than once a month	64	3.828			

For Means: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=almost always

The other category of activity the questionnaire inquired about was community service apart from congregational activities. Those responding were collapsed into those serving in this way once a month or more, and those serving less than once a month. Independent t-tests run on several questions did not reveal any statistically significant differences between the two groups in either the baseline or end line.

#### Data on PAR Interventions

The end line questionnaire included seven additional questions (see appendix A supplement). The first asked if the respondent had filled out the questionnaire as a way of checking responses against identical emails. There were five questions about each of the five PAR interventions: the search conference, social media, testimonies in worship in Lent, monthly commissioning and prayers in worship, and small group conversations. Each of these questions included a response for indicating that the respondent “did not experience” the PAR intervention. A final question gave respondents the opportunity to indicate anything else they had experienced in Prairie Wind over the course of this

research to help them make connections between faith and daily work. Table 28 shows that the least meaningful intervention was the search conference, and the most meaningful were the small groups.

**Table 28. Quantitative Data on PAR Interventions**

PAR Interventions	N (End)	Mean (End)
How helpful was the search conference?	29	3.310
How helpful was the use of social media?	57	3.491
How helpful were the testimonies by Spirit of Joy partners and guests in Lent worship services?	73	3.466
How helpful were the monthly commissioning prayers for people of different occupations in worship?	85	3.482
How helpful were small group conversations?	46	3.848

For Means: 1=not at all helpful, 2=somewhat unhelpful, 3=somewhat helpful, 4=helpful, 5=very helpful

None of the means of the responses indicate a strong preference—or dislike—for any of the interventions. A frequency analysis of the responses does reveal that 67.4% of those who participated in the small group conversation described them as helpful (45.7%) or very helpful (21.7%). In comparison, the use of social media for storytelling, which had the second highest means in the responses, was rated either helpful (35.1%) or very helpful (10.5%) by 46.5% of the persons who experienced that intervention.

### Summary of Quantitative Data

The analysis of the baseline and end line questionnaires via independent t-tests indicated there were no statistically significant changes in the means of the responses between these two large groups. The lack of statistically significant differences between the overall means of responses to most questions seemed to indicate that no singular PAR intervention was effective in achieving the desired change. One possible reason was the



brief time period (nine months) between the baseline and end line questionnaires. Another reason may be that many of the responses to questions in the baseline questionnaire indicated that many Prairie Wind members recognized significant connections between their faith and daily work before this PAR began. The independent t-test comparing all the responses in the baseline with all the responses in the end line was not the only way to measure the impact of this research. The high baseline scores for several questions meant there was little room for change. It is worth noting that in the vast majority of means measurements, there *was* some positive change, if only slight, between the baseline and end line. A pattern of changes in the same direction of the means for nearly all the questions, though not statistically significant, did seem to indicate a positive effect from this project.

It is also noteworthy that further analysis of the responses to questions about community practices in the end line questionnaire yielded several statistically significant results. Persons who participated more frequently in worship, faith formation activities, and congregational service indicated they found the congregation more helpful in making connections between faith, daily work, and God's work in the world than those participating less frequently in the same activities. We now turn to qualitative analysis to get a different kind of picture of what resulted from this process.

### **Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data for this study were gathered from transcriptions of four focus groups, notes of action research team meetings, and my journal entries. Two baseline focus groups met in December 2014, and two end line focus groups met in September 2015. The occupations and ages of group members as well as an indication of which

group members participated in each of the groups are shown in table 7. The baseline focus group protocol was identical for both baseline groups (see appendix B), and the end line protocol identical for the two end line groups (see appendix C). Some changes were made in the end line protocol in order to ask specifically about the PAR interventions. All focus groups were both audio recorded and video recorded to provide redundancy in case one or the other recording failed to work properly. The video recording also provided me with the opportunity to code nonverbal communication.

Following the meeting of each focus group, I typed up a transcription of the conversation. The process of starting and stopping the recording of each meeting, and typing up what was spoken word for word, gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the data in a slow and careful way. I also typed up my own handwritten notes of the action research team meetings.

Coding these data began by reading through each of the transcripts several times. The purpose of this initial coding was to organize the data in a way that stayed true to the language used by participants, while also looking for concepts and themes emerging from the data that relate to the research question. This *in vivo* coding began with a search for codes that were identified via a word-by-word, then line-by-line, and finally an incident-by-incident analysis of the transcripts, following the Charmaz method of coding.<sup>3</sup> Such codes “anchor your analysis in your research participants’ worlds,” instead of forcing the participants’ words and actions into preconceived categories.<sup>4</sup> I used the same process to code my notes from the action research team meetings.

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<sup>3</sup> Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 124-137.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 135.

The next step in the coding process was the development of focused codes that resulted from sorting through the large number of initial codes, comparing them with one another, and assessing their frequency and value, while staying true to the data. It was a move from immersion in the data towards interpretation of the significance of data. The focused codes were developed using gerunds, to keep closer to the actions described by the research participants, and to avoid moving too soon to topics and themes.<sup>5</sup>

The last two steps in the coding process were axial coding and theoretical coding. Axial codes were developed by moving together those focused codes which seemed to be related. Axial coding provided a framework into which the data fit, and enabled me to begin to make some comprehensive judgments about the data. This move to a second level of abstraction was accompanied by a review of related literature to help determine if what I was seeing had some connection with what others have already discovered in related research. The data were then scrutinized to describe the interrelationship of the axial codes. I evaluated the ways the axial codes were linked to one another, and then discerned their directions of influence on one another. This led to the construction of theoretical codes that communicated a coherent narrative of the qualitative data. These resulting theoretical codes were fashioned to “breathe through the analysis, not be applied to it.”<sup>6</sup> Memos I recorded of my thoughts, reactions, and early interpretations throughout the coding process became useful as this analysis moved into axial, then theoretical coding.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 155.

### Baseline Qualitative Results

The *in vivo* codes from the two baseline focus groups were combined into one pool of data before the development of focused codes, since my intent was to look at the responses of all fifteen participants together. The reason for hosting two groups was to encourage more conversation among those participating. The protocol was the same for each group, and the participants chose which group they attended according to their availability at the given times.

### Focused Codes

Analysis of the initial 180 *in vivo* codes (see appendix G) led to the development of seventeen focused codes, shown in table 29. Some of the codes, such as “seeing God show up on the job” (12), and “recognizing a calling” (14), emerged from respondents using language similar to that used in the protocol. For example, the initial codes “feeling blessed to receive a calling,” “believing current work could be preparation for future calling,” and “distinguishing between skill set and calling to help others,” were among those that informed creation of “recognizing a calling” as a focused code. Other focused codes arose from unanticipated responses of the participants. When I pushed participants to consider connecting points between worship and work, a few of them expressed a desire and need for worship gatherings to be a place to get away from work and stop thinking about work. Others mentioned that the content of worship services helped give them a sense of balance between demands in the workplace and a more faithful understanding of individual identity. These responses led to the creation of the focused code “appreciating church as a refuge” (10). Both focus groups also turned somewhat unexpectedly into extended conversations about the influence of family in choosing

work. Several participants also talked openly about the painful difficulties of moving both towards and away from parenting as primary daily work. This became the focused code “considering the relationship between work and family” (8).

**Table 29. Baseline Focused Codes**

<b>Focused Codes</b>
1. Navigating changes in career paths
2. Perceiving the value of longevity in work
3. Recognizing opportunities to bless the community
4. Building relationships through work
5. Experiencing economic concerns
6. Wondering about sharing faith while working
7. Praying about work
8. Considering the relationship between work and family
9. Perceiving God’s guidance in work
10. Appreciating church as a refuge
11. Counting the cost of making strong connections between work and faith
12. Seeing God show up on the job
13. Missing a sense of calling
14. Recognizing a calling
15. Experiencing community with coworkers
16. Discerning options for strengthening faith and work connections
17. Seeking balance in working and living

### **Axial Codes**

Careful examination of the focused codes with an eye to discerning relationships between those codes resulted in the formation of six axial codes. I gathered together five focused codes to create the axial code, “discerning the intersection of divine action and work.” This discernment includes coded responses about when and where God shows up in daily work, and when and where God is perceived as absent. The code, “blessing the larger community,” was constructed from focused codes that addressed relationships with clients and co-workers, as well as family members. Faith practices that were understood to be private and those experienced communally were brought together in the code,

“considering faith practices.” Another axial code, “searching for a healthy approach to work,” was uniquely constructed here from a single focused code. The significance of the code merited this. The six codes are shown in table 30 with the corresponding focused codes listed below each one.

**Table 30. Baseline Axial Codes**

<b>Axial Codes</b>	
A. Blessing the larger community	
3. Recognizing opportunities to bless the community	
8. Considering the relationship between work and family	
B. Searching for a healthy approach to work	
17. Seeking balance in working and living	
C. Building relationships	
4. Building relationships through work	
15. Experiencing community with coworkers	
D. Discerning the intersection of divine action and work	
9. Perceiving God’s guidance in work	
12. Seeing God show up on the job	
11. Counting the cost of making strong connections between work and faith	
13. Missing a sense of calling	
14. Recognizing a calling	
E. Considering faith practices	
6. Wondering about sharing faith while working	
7. Praying about work	
10. Appreciating church as a refuge	
16. Discerning options for strengthening faith and work connections	
F. Evaluating career paths	
1. Navigating changes in career paths	
2. Perceiving the value of longevity in the same work	
5. Experiencing economic concerns	

Several of the axial codes that emerged in this study aligned nicely with the work of Nancy Ammerman that is presented in her book *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Ammerman's qualitative research across a wider population gave special attention to participants' references to the connections between their work, and spiritual or religious elements in their lives. Ammerman notes that several sociologists have examined working-class life, but "rarely have they asked those working people about what role their faith plays in the everyday world of making a living."<sup>8</sup>

One of Ammerman's discoveries in her research was that vocation is "very much about day-to-day moments in which divine purpose and personal work intersect."<sup>9</sup> This same intersection is reflected in this research in various ways in the axial code "discerning the intersection of divine action and work." Karissa, a physical therapist who works with children, and served as one of the participants in this research, said, "I would think for my job, I am completely convinced it's a calling. I absolutely love, love, love it. And I really feel like I'm helping people at their most vulnerable times" (BFG1). Clare discerned this intersection at a time when a coworker shared an urgent need.

She has had some rough circumstances, and there has been a culmination of some not good things, and now two young boys, sixteen and thirteen, are coming to live with her and her husband. They are her husband's biological children. They were sent to them with nothing. One set of clothing garments. She shared it individually with us, and then amongst ourselves we decide that, I know that I have some twin bed sheets at home that are packed up, and ready to move to the Goodwill box. I can contribute that to her household needs. Somebody else has other stuff. ... So, as a small unit we're just, that's God on the loose with eight women running around collecting boy things. Immediately. To me that's just God at work. There's somebody who has a need, and bam, it's taken care of (BFG1).

Ammerman also notes in her work, that "some jobs are simply more plausible as spiritual narratives than others."<sup>10</sup> This was a struggle for some who participated in this

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 180.

research. Amy lamented what seems like a disconnection between her faith and her job in the financial services industry when she declared that she “feels like the tax collector half the time” (BFG1). Teresa went to school to become a nurse because she “enjoyed the idea of helping people” (BFG1). She eventually learned that nursing was not a good fit for her. She’s now a graphic designer, a job that fits well with her creative abilities, but doesn’t seem very beneficial to others. She misses the sense of calling that she felt in nursing. “I don’t get that sense of fulfilling, or calling [in my current job]. It’s just really not too impactful” (BFG1). Ron, who has worked in law enforcement his whole life, said that he used to believe his job was arresting people, but that wasn’t very fulfilling (BFG2). Then he thought of it as helping people, but there was so much need that it became discouraging. When he finally recognized that his work was helping people solve day-to-day problems, he began to make better connections between his work and God’s call. It was a matter of reevaluating the purpose of the job.

Others who participated in the study were able to see their work as a spiritual narrative, even if it wasn’t in a caring profession, because they recognized ways their work was “blessing the larger community.” Stacy helps people sell and buy residential real estate, which may not seem like a very *spiritual* occupation. She realizes, however, that she works with people at a very important and stressful time in their lives, and that her skills can be a blessing to them: “I’ve always felt like my job is a calling for me. Where I shine in my job is negotiating and marketing, and I think God has blessed me as far as using that skill set for what I do” (BFG2). Alan, who sells insurance, believes the same thing about his work:

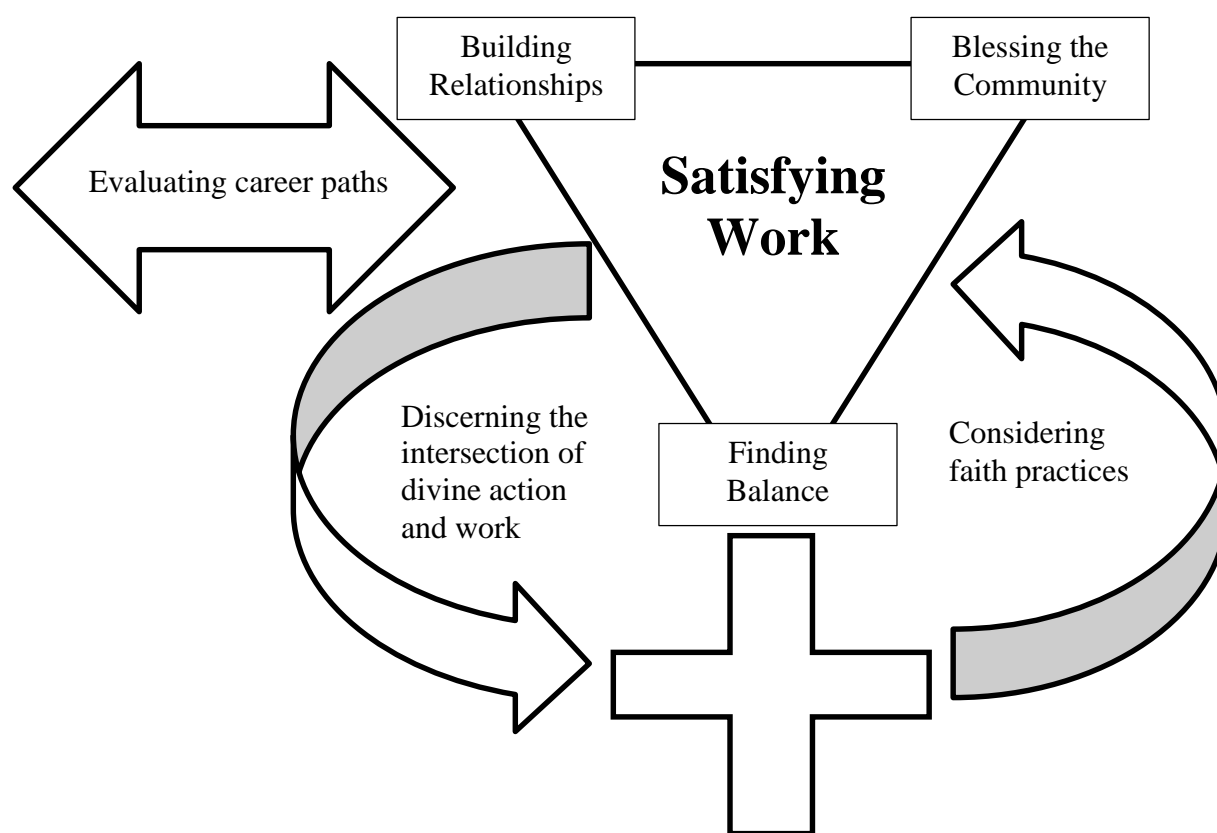
In my seventeen years, I think we’ve had five houses burn to the ground. I’ve had people take out life insurance and then their spouse dies. I mean, nobody likes



dealing with insurance, it seems like, but when you look at how important it is, I think—I really do feel—that one of my callings is to help people understand that. It's not something you can just slough off. It's pretty important stuff (BFG1).

### Theoretical Codes

Theoretical coding consists of determining the relationships between the axial codes, and the direction of influence between these same codes. The theoretical codes for the baseline qualitative data that were studied for this PAR are displayed in figure 4.



**Figure 4. Baseline Theoretical Codes**

#### Evaluating Career Paths

All of the participants in the baseline focus groups were invited to introduce themselves, share what they consider their daily work, and how they arrived at the work

they were presently doing. Initial responses often developed into in-depth self-evaluations, especially after questions about *calling* were introduced. Many participants had changed career paths several times, for a variety of reasons. One example of this is Tim, who currently runs a technology services company he started himself, but has done many things.

I got there—it wasn't really a roundabout way, it was zig-zagging all over the place. I've done a lot of different things over the years. Worked in church camping for several years. Worked in the service industry, I worked for Eastman Kodak for years. When the internet came out I fell into that groove and never got out of it. Been on my own ever since (BFG2).

Several participants assessed their past and present work in terms of whether they were moving closer, or further away from what they considered faithful, satisfying work. The arrows pointing both towards and away from faithful, satisfying work in figure 4 represent these varied valuations. Bob used to work at a job that he believed was “definitely my calling,” but “they didn't want to pay me for it” (BFG2). So he found another job with different challenges that financially rewarded him so he could pay for his kids' college education. This latest job is a decent fit, but is not as satisfying in many ways as his previous work.

Teresa followed her “first instinct,” when she was in college, to go into nursing (BFG1). She believed it was a really strong calling. “I really enjoyed the idea of helping people,” she said. She soon learned that nursing was not a good fit for her, and eventually became a graphic designer. Although satisfying in some ways, her current job does not lead directly to helping people in the ways she hoped she would as a nurse. Teresa shared that the focus group conversation had helped her reconsider ways her current work was both satisfying and faithful.

The axial codes *building relationships*, *blessing the community*, and *finding balance* represented the key components in evaluating whether or not daily work was satisfying. This is represented by the three points of the “satisfying work” triangle in figure 4. The presence of two or three of these components usually meant the work was satisfying; the absence of two or all three usually meant the person had struggled or was currently struggling in his or her daily work.

### Building Relationships

All of the persons who participated in the baseline focus groups talked about the way or ways their work brought them into some kind of relationship with coworkers, customers, clients, patients, or students. The quality of these relationships had a powerful effect on what they thought about their work, in a particular day, and over the long term. Donna, who works in early childhood education, said, “In my line of work it’s a lot about relationships. Relationships are so extremely important” (BFG2). One of the great blessings of Clare’s work is that she is “surrounded by faithful people” (BFG1).

I work with a core of seven or eight women, and they’re all faithful women. They all bring something else to the table. You usually find when you work with that many women that you have a lot of problems. At the end of the day we all have our quirks, our unique personalities, but if somebody has a need, somebody else is ready, someone sends out an email saying we’re praying for this, or we’re doing that. So, the environment I work with, not just the core women I work with, but my whole 250 people that I work with, are all very much like that.

Amy had a difficult time seeing how her work in financial services could be a way for to live as a disciple of Christ, since she was not in a helping profession like several others in her focus group. She did see the significance of building relationships with her customers, especially over time. Even though she is “in a role that seems so far

from God's work," she says, "there's still that building those relationships when you can tell that someone needs someone to talk to" (BFG1).

### Blessing the Community

The participants in the two baseline groups also asserted that it is a Christian's responsibility to work for the greater social good by blessing the community in some way. There were, however, varied responses to the inquiry about how that happens through daily work. Several persons who worked in health care or education told stories of how they'd directly helped someone in the community. Some others struggled with how it was even possible in the kind of work they did, especially as they heard about the work of those in caring professions, work that directly benefits other persons. Amy, identified earlier as a person working in financial services who feels like a "tax collector," told those in her group, "it's not that I can't do things for somebody, but what I actually do for a job for a living doesn't necessarily feel all that grand. It's not reaching that many people. It's not changing someone's life" (BFG1). She did go on to say, after being encouraged to step back and consider a bigger picture of her work, "I sell consumer data ..., so when I look at it and ask who am I helping, I am helping all of us in this room and in the world pay less for your goods and services."

David, who works in a similar industry, more readily identified how he is able to bless the community by overseeing the culture of a company with many employees:

The previous CEO of the bank was tough on employees. So when I took over one of the things we did was set clear values that are Christian based. Treating people right, being respectful, doing the right thing. So we really spent a lot of time changing the culture. ... People are definitely feeling like it's a better place to work than it was years ago (BFG2).

Several of the participants in the two groups also recognized that blessing the community often began in their own homes, or with extended family. Nancy starts the day by making sure there is “peace at home” before tackling challenges at work (BFG2). Another of the participants delights in spending time with grandchildren as a way of recalibrating what is important in his life. Tim and his wife moved to Riverside to be close to their kids and grandkids. They are too young to retire, so they are “spinning up two or three businesses and see if we can get at least one or two of them to stick” while they share more intentionally what is going on in their family (BFG2).

### Finding Balance

The axial code “finding balance” was developed out of challenges respondents voiced in integrating work that fits their unique personalities and abilities as people of faith in a world that needs healing. How does a person integrate all these things? Must all work have a spiritual and socially conscious agenda in mind, or can it be enough to simply do work you enjoy well? What is the relationship between working and living the rest of your life? The fact that participants talked about this component of satisfying work more specifically in relationship to their faith meant coding this component by making it the point in the triangle that touches the cross as balancing point in figure 4.

Grant, the doctor who didn’t see his work as his calling, did assert that his faith helped him find satisfaction in his work, because of its “moderating influence” (BFG1). His work results in real highs and lows because of the kind of patients he sees. “Most people don’t do well, simply by the numbers.” He says his faith helps him be thankful when things go well for a patient, and helps moderate his reactions when things don’t go well. It also teaches him to recognize that many successes and failures are beyond his

control. “We’re there to help and comfort these folks. So [faith] is a moderating influence. We don’t ride too high, we don’t go too low.”

Barb, who is a teacher, finds that balance in her work is the result of work that is fully integrated with who she is as a person. “What I do, my life is breathed all the time in the same language, and I don’t think that’s true of everyone. Because to me, I don’t have that separation, and I know that many people do” (BFG1).

### Discerning the Intersection

The theoretical coding process also involved determining how the axial codes “discerning the intersection of divine action and work,” and “considering faith practices” fit with participants’ evaluation of career paths, and their assessment of the components of satisfying work. Figure 4 shows an arrow pointing *from the cross to the triangle* representing “satisfying work” to represent how participants discerned God’s influence in choosing their work and in their workplace. The other arrow moving *from the work triangle to the cross* represents participants’ consideration of what actions faithfully align with their daily work.

Several of the participants in the baseline focus group recognized a clear intersection between divine action and work. Barb, the teacher, shared her belief that she knew as early as third grade what she was meant to do, here, and in the hereafter. She declared, “I am a teacher, and that is what I will be doing in heaven. I am convinced of that, that we will get to do whatever pleases us to do here” (BFG1). Donna, who works in early childhood education and recently has begun speaking at conferences about her work, also remarked that her unique way of doing things is a gift from God to carry out the work she does. “People ask me when I speak, they come up to me afterwards, ‘How

do you come up with these things?’ It’s very easy for me, my brain just doesn’t work normally. ... That’s definitely a God-given talent or gift, whatever you want to call it” (BFG2). Teresa, the graphic designer, didn’t see the intersection so much in her paid work as in the work of a parent. “I think God is on the loose with my kids all the time. They drive” (BFG1).

There were also several participants who, though people of faith, did not so readily see an intersection of their work and God’s action in their lives. Grant, who is a doctor, asserted that he really enjoys the work he does, but “I don’t think I feel called to do it” (BFG1). He’s developed a skill set for a very specific type of health care, and says “that’s the role I’m here to fulfill for these people that have these particular problems.” He is uncertain, though, that his work is a calling. Nancy also asserted that she really likes her job as a lawyer, and does it well, but it is not a calling. It may, however, lead to the eventual discovery of her calling. “I kind of feel like it might be preparing me for a job later on that will be a calling, because I’ve learned a lot of skills” (BFG2).

### Considering Faith Practices

Participants also talked about their perceptions of how to do their chosen work in alignment with their Christian faith. When Ted was wrestling with whether or not to make a significant change in careers, he told us he prayed a great deal about it:

But when I decided to start this business, one of the things, I sat down and really prayed a lot about it. ... I really just asked for some indication of what I should do. Should I go down the path of starting this new company with this crazy technology? I don’t know if that will be successful or not. Or should I just maybe go find a different job (BFG2)?

He eventually received a rather dramatic answer that he believed was an answer to his prayers. David, who is a banker, believes his ability to make sense of numbers is a God-

given gift for working in his industry. He also solicits God's assistance in carrying out responsibilities that are a part of his job, such as public speaking. "I just pray every time I get up for the calmness to be able to do it. I really put myself in God's hands versus my own. That's helped tremendously" (BFG2).

Another issue that arose in the consideration of how one practices faith at work was how public a disciple of Jesus should make the connection. What is expected of a Christian in the workplace when it comes to sharing faith? Karissa voiced her concern:

Something I struggle with is I think our calling as Christians is to tell other people about Jesus. That's the calling. And I know in my job, when I'm in a home when I know the people are Christians, I'm very good about talking about that. But then when I get to these other homes, I'm like (draws in deep breath), I might step on their toes, I don't know if I'm going to bring that up. Then I wonder should I actually bring Jesus up to these guys, or maybe if they just watch me, what I do as a Christian, then that's good enough (BFG1).

Karissa's comments led to several other participants wondering out loud about the difference between sharing faith in word and living out faith in deed.

Some of the participants also recognized that there can be a significant cost to Christian discipleship in the workplace. Bob shared his story of acting as a whistleblower in a previous job. He didn't identify his action as God-directed, or as something he did intentionally for the sake of the larger community. It just seemed the right thing to do.

It's not the Golden Rule, but there are certain things you're brought up with. If you don't say something, you're part of the problem. You're an accessory to it, if you know. So I did. The problem was that I told the wrong person. I told the person who was embezzling. I didn't know who he was, and the next day I lost my job (BFG1).

Bob related how God seemed absent at the time, in part because of the severity of the consequences for his action. He said "God showed up" a couple of years later when he was steered to another career. Bob recognized his action as something that emerged out of his faith more in hindsight than in real time.



## End Line Qualitative Results

The end line qualitative data for this project were gleaned from the two focus groups that met in September 2015. I was able to meet with just nine of the persons who participated in the baseline focus groups, due to scheduling conflicts. One group of five persons and a second group of four met in Prairie Wind's library for conversations that lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. A revised protocol (see appendix C) was used in both groups.

Analysis of the end line qualitative data began with creation of 215 *in vivo* codes (see appendix H) from transcripts of the conversation of the two end line focus groups. I also added initial coding of my notes of the action research team meetings to this end line data. Close readings of the word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident initial codes led to the development of fifteen end line focused codes, displayed in table 31.

**Table 31. End Line Focused Codes**

<b>Focused Codes</b>
1. Developing teamwork
2. Cultivating relationships
3. Keeping priorities in order
4. Considering work as calling
5. Needing affirmation
6. Practicing humility
7. Helping those who struggle with work
8. Contemplating connections between faith and work
9. Cultivating faith practices
10. Identifying difficulties of making congregation connections
11. Asserting the value of small groups
12. Effecting change in the congregation
13. Serving neighbor through work
14. Differentiating self from work
15. Experiencing satisfying work

A change in the initial question in the end line protocol resulted in richer descriptions of participants' daily work. The greater time spent in the end line groups discussing relational aspects of work resulted in the formation of several related codes. They include "developing teamwork" (1), and "cultivating relationships" (2). Another new theme that emerged in the end line groups was "practicing humility" (6). This code was developed from many initial codes, including "asserting that no work is more important than any other," "perceiving that Christian beliefs inform how you treat people," "admitting need to make changes," and "seeing self as a constant work in progress." One other new, noteworthy code was "helping those who struggle with work" (7), which arose out of conversation about how the congregation might help those trapped in meaningless, low-paying work. Several codes matched up closely with baseline focused codes. "Considering work as a calling" (4), "serving neighbor through work" (13), and "contemplating connections between faith and work" (8) were among those codes and themes repeated.

Several of the codes unique to the end line focus group conversations arose from my persistent asking of those in these groups to discuss and evaluate congregation practices long established and newly introduced in helping them cultivate connections between their Christian faith and daily work. I reminded them of the specific PAR interventions that were introduced as part of this research. The *in vivo* codes resulting from the discussion of particular interventions were gathered into the codes "cultivating faith practices" (9), and "asserting the value of small groups" (11). "Effecting change in the congregation" (12) and "identifying difficulties of making congregation connections" (10) were unexpected codes that formed out of a great deal of conversation about the

challenges of helping change to occur. Contributions that led to development of this code included “doubting much change in such a brief time period,” “recognizing that church is a certain thing in people’s minds and some prefer it stay that way,” and “expressing the need for leaders to prioritize faith in daily work as a key part of our identity.”

### **Axial Codes**

Assessment of the relationships between the focused codes resulted in the creation of six axial codes. These codes are shown in table 32 with the corresponding focused codes listed below each one.

**Table 32. End Line Axial Codes**

<b>Axial Codes</b>	
A. Developing relationships	
1. Developing teamwork	
2. Cultivating relationships	
B. Helping the neighbor	
7. Helping those who struggle with work	
13. Serving neighbor through work	
C. Establishing priorities	
6. Practicing humility	
9. Keeping priorities in order	
D. Discerning identity	
4. Considering work as calling	
5. Needing affirmation	
14. Differentiating self from work	
15. Experiencing satisfying work	
E. Effecting change	
10. Identifying difficulties of making congregation connections	
12. Effecting change in the congregation	
F. Cultivating faith connections	
8. Contemplating connections between faith and work	
9. Cultivating faith practices	
11. Asserting the value of small groups	

The first axial code in table 32, “developing relationships,” is consistent with some of the leadership skill and abilities identified in Kouzes’ and Posner’s *The Leadership Challenge*.<sup>11</sup> It was mentioned earlier in this work that the authors have determined through years of research that “exemplary leadership” can be learned by anyone willing to learn five key practices: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.<sup>12</sup> “Developing relationships” aligns nicely with both “modeling the way,” and “encouraging the heart.” This study did not set out to measure the *leadership* capabilities or practices of Prairie Wind members, but rather, to determine how the congregation might effectively cultivate *faith practices* which lead to members participating more fully in the *missio Dei* in their daily work. Prairie Wind members demonstrated ways the two are connected.

One example of “cultivating relationships” that demonstrates what Kouzes and Posner call “modeling the way,” was shared by Nancy, the lawyer:

Christianity impacts my work in every case I do, and in how I treat the other side: with respect, even if we don’t agree. Obviously there’s a problem, that’s why we’re in litigation. But that doesn’t mean that you’re mean or unpleasant to the other side. There’s no tricky lawyer tricks when you work for my office (EFG2).

Nancy works in a government office, so she is clear about not being able to talk a lot about her faith, lest she be perceived as biased towards certain kinds of clients. Her actions, she hopes, speak at least as loud as any words she might use.

Clare takes advantage of opportunities in her work to “cultivate relationships” by finding ways to “encourage the heart.” She laments that so many people receive and believe a constant message “that they’re not good enough. Everything is not good

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<sup>11</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14.

enough” (EFG1). The antidote that Clare embodies in her daily work is affirmation. “Just affirm each other. You don’t have to be bigger or better. You don’t have to do more, more, more. ... What you’re giving, what you are, is good enough. You are good enough.”

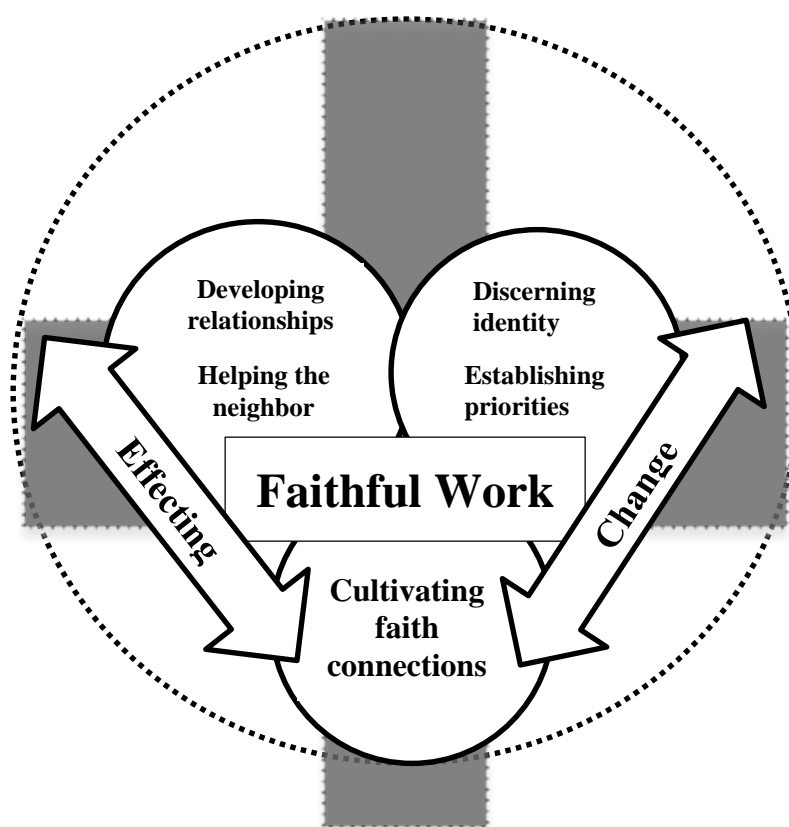
The code “discerning identity” was constructed from four focused codes, all having to do with some aspect of the relationship between work and identity. Data reflecting a clear understanding of call, and data about uncertainty and rejection of the notion of a connection between call and work, were included in this code. The variety of ways several persons expressed satisfaction in their work were included in this code as well. One example was the comment of Donna, who said, “I love everything that I do, as far as my occupation goes” (EFG2).

The last two axial codes shown on table 32 emerged out of the discussions of the intentions and effectiveness of this PAR process. Memos I recorded during the coding process also informed construction of these two codes. Positive and negative assessments of specific cultivation efforts were gathered into the code “cultivating faith connections.” Identified challenges that accompany the process of change were brought together in the code “effecting change.” These included comments like the one made by Stacy, who said she would like to participate in faith formation practices beyond worship, but it’s very hard to commit to doing so. Her job—which she loves—requires a great deal of time and energy, and there’s often not much of either left at the end of the day (EFG2). David suggested that because so few people—including himself—will “raise their hand” to participate in small groups or in service activities, they need to be firmly prodded to do

so. The times someone has “strong-armed” him into participating in such practices “you really feel good about it. It leads to deeper faith” (EFG2).

### Theoretical Codes

Now we turn to the end line theoretical codes, constructed to demonstrate a congruent accounting of the relationships between the end line axial codes. These codes are shown in the diagram in figure 5.



**Figure 5. End Line Theoretical Codes**

The end line data revealed equally significant, overlapping influences on what persons in the end line focus groups deemed important for living out God’s calling in faithful, daily work. God’s call is lived out through daily work in relationships: to others, self, and God. Faithful work meant attending to *others* by *developing relationships* and

*helping the neighbor*. It meant attending to *self* by *establishing priorities* and *discerning identity*. It meant attending to *God* through the *cultivation of faith connections*. These influences are represented in the three overlapping circles in figure 5.

The relationship that is foundational to all these relationships is the one that God has initiated with us through Jesus Christ, revealed most profoundly on the cross of his crucifixion. The shaded cross in figure 5 represents this relationship. The cross in figure 5 also serves to underscore that living out faith in daily work to participate fully in the *missio Dei* is a significant way for followers of Jesus to answer his call and live out the vocation to “take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). This lies *underneath* the cultivation of callings that is the focus of this work. The cross in figure 5 reminds us too of our struggle with God to trade our self-interest in the workplace for the *missio Dei*.

The two-way arrows displayed in the lower half of the figure represent the theoretical code “effecting change.” The purpose of this PAR was to effect change by enlarging the influence of cultivated faith connections on relationships with self, others, and God in daily work. The potential of this enlarged influence is represented by the circle made with dashes that encompasses all manners of relationships in work. The arrows are pointing in two directions, because the data made it clear that desire and effort to create change did not happen without resistance. Persons in the end line focus groups and the action research team noted that change comes with difficulty, usually for a variety of reasons. Most push for change is met in some way by a push back.

### Developing Relationships

Participants identified how critical it was for them to develop relationships with all kinds of persons they meet in their work. This included the persons they were paid to

assist, such as students, customers, and patients, and the persons they worked with directly. Many also talked about the importance of getting to know or helping persons they weren't required to get to know, because it was the right thing to do. Barb, for example, understands that her day begins as a teacher, not when the first class bell rings, but when she parks her car on school property.

I'm the reading specialist there, but my day starts when I walk through the parking lot, because out of courtesy we always park in the *back forty* so the night shift can park in the *front forty* for protection. I feel like every time I go into my parking spot I'm giving a gift. Then I always meet the main custodian for the school on the back sidewalk. We chat, and that always seems like, it's not a job (EFG1).

Barb goes on to explain that, though she's hired to teach students, she also feels like an important part of her job is relating to other teachers and volunteers. "I always feel like I need to take care of the teachers. I feel like it's a part of my job even though it's not in my description."

David's work as the CEO of a medium-sized regional bank takes him all across the country to meet with wealthy investors and board members. He also sets aside whatever time is necessary to be present for open forums with employees of the bank's branch offices in several states. He spoke of the connections between valuing everyone in the company for the work they do, helping others do the same, and his Christian faith.

The important thing is that no one role is more important than any other thing we do, whether it's collecting garbage, whatever it is. I don't like getting up in front and talking to people, but it's important to know that I'm not any more important than anyone else in the room. Nobody else is more important than me either. So the tie in is how do we make sure we live those values and treat people that way, whatever our work, whatever role we have in our work. It's important to do that (EFG2).

There was noticeable tension in both baseline focus groups that emerged from perceptions about what kind of work is more closely related to the participants'



Christianity. The primary attention in the end line groups to the high value of developing relationships with coworkers and clients of all kinds, no matter what the daily work, strengthened the sense of sharing a common call, something that went mostly missing in the baseline groups.

### Helping the Neighbor

The end line data also revealed that many persons felt that helping the neighbor not necessarily connected to daily work was also a part of living out God's call in daily work. Alan described his desire for people to know him *through his work* for more than selling insurance. He shared, "I want them to think, that's the guy who always likes to help out the schools. Or, help other people, or do this. I really see, what I do, vocation, as a means to an end, how I can impact other people" (EFG1).

The data also revealed participants' beliefs that assisting the neighbor means figuring out ways to come alongside those who work in jobs that are difficult, low-paying, or not very meaningful. Barb shared her concern this way:

I see a lot of them, particularly the young people who come to work ... who are the teacher's assistants, or the night crew, that are paid very poorly. They are there, just hanging on to get the next paycheck, and putting up with changing soiled sheets, and restraining kids who are hitting and biting them. They're just desperate to go home again. Only to come back and do it again the next day. ... When and how can we help people come to where I hear a lot of us are at (EFG1)?

### Discerning Identity

The primary way the end line data overlapped with the baseline data was in similar discussions of how participants understood their identities in relationship to God's call. Those who articulated a clear sense of what is and what is not their calling in the baseline focus groups shared similar thoughts in the end line groups. Barb, the teacher who talked

in the baseline groups about continuing her work as a teacher in heaven, referred to her sense of self and her work as “a whole tapestry” (EFG1). It’s hard for her to refer to her work as a calling, if that means something other than who she is. “The longer I’m in it, the more my calling gets confused with, or maybe meshed, I should say, with my whole being. ... My calling has become my essence.” She is quick to point out that she believes this is a healthy, positive thing.

Karissa, who works as a physical therapist, talked about the close relationship between her work and her calling, but also made it clear that she doesn’t feel her actual job is her calling. “I think that I have physical therapy as a profession, but I use that to work at my calling. Physical therapy is just the mechanism to get there. So I use that mechanism to get into the home, and that’s what I’m doing” (EFG1).

Nancy made it clear in her baseline focus group that she did not want her occupation to be her primary identity. It was not her calling. She reiterated again her belief that her calling has more to do with “raising my kids, being nurturing to my nephews and nieces” (EFG2). She also noted that one hour of volunteering in community service means more than solving any problem in her paid profession. “When I think of a calling and how I would describe it, a calling makes you feel fulfilled. I don’t really get, I love my job, it just doesn’t make me deliriously fulfilled. I want more. I don’t think there is any way, it is what it is, I don’t know any way I can make it better.”

Bob spoke openly and honestly about understanding a calling “as the gift that God gives you,” and about losing not only a sense of call, but a healthy understanding of who he was as a person when work becomes the first and only priority:

It took me some pretty big life changes to bring me back down to sitting here tonight and saying, “God is first, everything else is second, everything else in life

has a reason for it, and it's part of God's plan." I'm ok with that now. For a while, I was like, whoa, what's happening? It was the reprioritization process. I lost a sense of self, there's no question. It was because of work (EFG1).

Bob shared that he not only lost his healthy sense of self, he also lost his marriage because of his unhealthy devotion to his work. He has recovered what it means to have a calling through caring relationships, and participation in faith practices encouraged and nurtured by Christian communities.

### Establishing Priorities

Bob's story was one of a few that straddled more than one axial code. Another of the axial codes that emerged in the end line was *establishing priorities* in evaluating what work to do, and how to go about that work. The overlapping of the circles representing five axial codes in figure 5 is indicative of the ways each of these codes overlap with one another. One could argue that each of the axial codes represents a *priority* in the discussion. *Establishing priorities* is used here to refer to more personal wrestling with priorities in work. When Nancy said, "I have a terrible time stopping at night," she was referring to weighing the advantages and disadvantages of finishing a project she started when the office is quiet, or going home earlier in the evening to spend more time with family before bed time (EFG2). Alan talked about how easy it is for the ego to become inflated in times of success, and lose sight of what is most important in life:

When you work for a sales organization ... they're driving you to do whatever, and you hit it, and you feel like King Kong, and that drives the ego, and it's a whirlwind. Where my wife works ... you've got to see so many people, it's a really, there are a lot of things in life that can really take the eye off of the ball (EFG1).

Donna specifically pointed to practicing humility as a key priority for doing her work well, and living faithfully as a disciple of Christ. She attributes new and exciting

opportunities to speak at conferences around the country as a direct result of honestly talking “about my failures and my struggles, and what I learned when I finally woke up and had my aha moments, when I finally realized that the way I was running my program was not the way that children learned the best” (EFG2). David added that leadership as a CEO means taking yourself off the pedestal. “You have to let your employees see you fail. You have to let them see you struggle. You have to ask for help solving difficult problems” (EFG2). These humble behaviors, David asserts, must become regular practices for success and working faithfully as a disciple of Jesus.

### Cultivating Faith Connections

The protocol for the end line focus group was very intentional about asking for the participants’ assessment of congregational practices, and, specifically the PAR interventions, for helping cultivate a sense of call in daily work. It was Karissa, the physical therapist, who articulated the thoughts of many when she argued that what is most significant in strengthening the connection between faith and daily work is not re-envisioning one’s work so much as it is the strengthening of a person’s faith. Do that, she argued, and people will begin to see, no matter what their work, that God can and will use them for God’s purposes.

I think the stronger your faith is, the more you become at ease in your profession and find how God is leading you that way. You know someone who is working as a cook in the kitchen at school may not realize she’s doing God’s work until her faith gets stronger and then she realizes she’s providing food for all these people. It broadens your vision to what you’re really doing for God. I think when your faith is stronger then you see it that way. In other words, if you don’t have strong faith, then you don’t even see what you’re doing is a calling (EFG1).

Several other persons in the two focus groups made the point that they really didn’t feel the need for special efforts in the congregation to cultivate their callings in

their daily work. What they needed most was to experience vibrant worship, radical hospitality, and continued encouragement by their congregation to reach out to neighbors in need. Participation in these congregational ministries would naturally spill over into how they went about their daily work. Nancy, the lawyer asserted, “I think that Sunday worship is necessary for me. Anything else above that is a bonus. I think that recharges my life for the next week in a good way” (EFG2). Stacy, the real estate agent, said that it was the congregation’s intentional emphasis on radical hospitality that helped her make Sunday-Monday connections. “When we were going to churches, and we came here, and ‘radical hospitality’ was up [on a banner], for some reason that stuck with me. I think that is reflective in what I do for work, to offer radical hospitality to people, and keep that Christian mentality in that” (EFG2). Many of the participants in the end line groups made some mention that Prairie Wind’s emphasis on service locally and globally primed them to be aware of needs they encounter in their work, and to see how God is at work in the world seven days a week.

The one practice that focus group participants favored over the others introduced during the PAR was small group conversation. Some in the groups expressed appreciation for the communication of information and stories through social media, but all of them made positive comments about their involvement in small group conversations. Donna said that just having the conversation makes her more aware of what it means to live out her faith in her work. “Tomorrow when I’m working I’m going to be so much more aware of that connection, that bridge, as you call it, between Sunday and Monday. What Christian values am I bringing into this job? I’m going to be so much more aware” (EFG2). Bob commented, speaking again from personal experience, how

difficult it is to keep a faith-based approach to work in front of you when you are constantly bombarded by so many corporate messages, and blasts of consumerism, that contradict what it means to live as a Jesus-follower. Bob said,

Part of it goes back to just an awareness of it. If you don't talk about it it's very easy to lose the message in the face of material goods, or the day to day struggle of someone making \$10.50/hour. You don't think about 'I'm an instrument of God.' You're thinking about how am I going to make it to Wednesday? But I think talking about it, and inviting people from all different economic spectrums to talk about it is powerful. In talking about it, you're aware of it; it helps you correct your compass. You realize, 'God is at my center' (EFG1).

The difficult thing, many participants said, was to find time to do this. They recognize it as a valuable practice, but it is very difficult to make a commitment. Several said that it often feels like their greatest need is more rest, and less conversation. Participants readily admitted they didn't have a satisfactory answer for how Prairie Wind should cultivate this vital faith practice among busy people, other than to keep offering opportunities, and to keep asking.

A practice needing more attention, some said, was prayer. Karissa remarked, "One [practice] we are totally missing is just praying. Maybe we should have a prayer thing in which I'm praying for you in your profession. I just think praying is huge" (EFG1). Prairie Wind did add specific prayers to the weekly worship prayers for people working different occupations. Karissa's suggestion was for a more intentional effort to equip and encourage congregation members to pray *on the job*, and for others in their daily work.

### Effecting Change

The data clearly showed the challenge of introducing and effecting lasting change in a community of faith. It was significant enough to construct the axial code that is

shown differently in the theoretical coding displayed in figure 5. The diagram shows the arrows representing the phrase “effecting change” moving both away from and back towards the circle representing faith practices, the intended sources of change in this PAR. The arrows pointing *out* from the cultivating faith connections circle indicate the direction of influence of these practices. The dotted circle indicates the faith community’s desire, not fully realized, that cultivating connections between faith and daily work will fully envelop and primarily influence the individual and interpersonal practices in the other two circles. The arrows pointing back to the circle indicate that the attempt to enlarge the influence of faith and daily work met resistance. Participants in the end line focus groups and the action research team talked at some length about the difficulty of changing individual and community perceptions and habits, when it comes to many things. Changing how people relate faith and work was one of them.

One member of the action research team remarked when assessing the specific impact of this PAR project and the possibility of change in the congregation in general,

It feels like swimming upstream, trying to create change. Church is a certain thing in people’s minds, and some prefer it stay that way. ... Some people just want to come and do church as usual and not think about or serve as a minister beyond church activities.

Another action team member, commenting on the whole PAR process, stated that real, lasting change in how people approach the connection between faith and work takes longer than the brief period of this project. Longer lasting change *will* require finding ways to continue this work at a slow, every day, incremental way if this is going to become a priority for Prairie Wind, and a key part of the congregation’s identity.

### Summary of Qualitative Data

The data that became available from the transcripts of four focus group conversations, and the notes from monthly action research team meetings, proved to be a rich treasure of personal stories and varied opinions about what it means to be called to live out Christian faith in and through daily work. There was little, if any, disagreement with the assertions that God calls God's people to live faithfully in the ordinary circumstances of life, and that daily work matters to God. Just how that happens was a matter of lively discussion. It was clear to some participants that they are either living out their baptismal callings in the duties of their work, or that their work gives them regular opportunities to live out those callings. Several other participants were not so sure. Their work seemed more like something you do to pay bills, or even help people, but the links to God's Will for their lives seemed fuzzy at best.

The qualitative data also suggested that the most effective way to cultivate the holy callings of ordinary saints is to do well the kinds of things the church has done for centuries: proclaim Good News, refresh people with Word and Sacrament, nurture them in community, lift their sights to what it means to love the neighbor, and invite them to participate in ways to do that. This needs to be done, however, alongside an intentional effort to develop these practices in connection with the variety of relationships lived out in the workplace: with self, others, and God. Of the several practices introduced and cultivated in this study, small group opportunities were endorsed as the best way to cultivate ongoing connections between what it means for a disciple of Jesus Christ to live out his or her faith in daily work.



## Summary and Interpretation of Results

One of the strengths of mixed-methods research is that it offers a built-in “validity strategy” to enhance the researcher’s ability “to assess the accuracy of findings as well as convince readers of that accuracy.”<sup>13</sup> We move to assess the overall findings of this PAR now, by triangulating the different sources of data that were gathered via baseline and end line quantitative and qualitative instruments. Several findings that emerged from comparing the qualitative and quantitative data will be highlighted here. They include: Prairie Wind’s healthy pre-PAR understanding of the connections between faith and daily work; the difficulty of defining *call* and *calling*; patterns of change in understanding that were detected by comparing baseline and end line measurements; the primacy of developing a missional culture over singular events or interventions in effecting change; and the promising power of small group conversations to cultivate connections between faith, daily work, and the *missio Dei*.

### Pre-PAR Understandings of Connections between Faith and Daily Work

The Christian Church has long struggled to make connections between faith and daily work, and to make connections between what happens in worship on Sunday with what happens in the workplace on Monday. (This gap was discussed in detail in chapter two.) One of my assumptions at the outset of this study was that even though Prairie Wind teaches every new member, “Every Jesus-follower is called to and gifted for ministry,” there would be a limited understanding that this means ministry through daily work, and not just church activities. This connection is not spelled out in new member classes, or in other Prairie Wind faith formation activities.

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<sup>13</sup> Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 201.

The research revealed that most Prairie Wind members understand that daily work is not something separate from the life of faith, but rather an important location for living out that faith. Daily work is not punishment from sin—ninety percent of those responding to the baseline questionnaire disagreed or strongly disagreed with the assertion that it was (Q15). Just less than ninety percent (89.8) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (Q14), “Daily work is a gift from God.” When asked to respond to the statement (Q12), “How I do my daily work matters to God,” 91.2% of those answering the baseline questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed.

The baseline focus groups also demonstrated comprehension of connections between faith and daily work. It is safe to say that since their pastor asked them to participate in a conversation about these connections, they were tipped off at the outset that there was something important here. It was still up to them to verbalize how they understood the connection. The coding process turned up many *in vivo* codes that led to the creation of the axial code (baseline axial D), “discerning the intersection of divine action and work,” and the axial code (baseline axial E), “considering faith practices.” Participants in the focus groups discussed how God was *present* and *absent* in their work, but there were no claims that their faith was irrelevant to their daily work.

### Different Understandings of Call and Calling

Prairie Wind members who participated in the PAR were less united in their understanding of what is meant by a *call* or *calling*, and if there is a connection between God’s calling of the baptized to ministry, and what happens in the workplace. Data from the qualitative questionnaire revealed a mean of 4.082 in response to the statement (Q11), “I believe God has called me to the daily work I’m doing now,” where four equals

”agree,” and five equals ”strongly agree.” The mean increased to 4.208 in the end line questionnaire, a result that was not statistically significant (see table 10).

The same Likert scale was offered as possible responses to the statement (Q17), “My daily work is a good fit with my abilities, interests, and talents.” One way that persons have understood their work as a calling is by the presence or absence of an alignment between their daily work, and abilities, interests, and talents. The mean of responses in the baseline was 4.110; the mean of responses in the end line was 4.238. The mean responses to both Q11 and Q17 indicated overall agreement with the statements.

The qualitative data revealed why quantitative data alone can miss the rich nuances of different interpretations and experiences. Participants in both baseline and end line focus groups articulated a wide variety of interpretations of calling, and a similar variety in understandings of what their daily work has to do with their callings. Nancy, who said that her job as a lawyer is a good fit with her abilities, interests, and talents, also emphatically insisted in both the baseline and end line focus groups that her job is not her calling. She recognized that there is some kind of relationship there, but insisted they are mostly two different things. Grant also stated that he is very good at his work as a physician, and that he helps many people via his specialty, but he doesn’t see it as his calling. Some of the participants said they once did work that seemed like a calling, but various circumstances necessitated their moving into other work.

Others who participated declared that they believed their work was their calling *because* it was such a good fit with their interests, talents, and abilities, and they were able to help people directly or indirectly while doing their jobs. Donna, an early childhood care provider, told Nancy, the lawyer, that she believes “the opposite” about

what constitutes a call: “I see a calling as what you are gifted, what you are put here to do” (EFG2). Barb is a teacher who is so certain that her work is her calling that she uniquely declared, “I’m more sure of my calling than my Christianity” (EFG1).

The research question addressed in this PAR focused on the development of community practices “which lead to members more readily recognizing and responding to God’s call to participate more fully in the *missio Dei* in their daily work.” The variety of ways members understand this call added surprising complexity to this work.

### Patterns of Change

Quantitative data presented earlier in this chapter failed to turn up any statistically significant difference in the means of the responses to the baseline and end line questionnaires. Careful study of the data *did* reveal a consistent *pattern* of change in the means of the two groups, with nearly all of the change in the end line indicating an increase in an understanding of the connections between faith, daily work, and what God is up to in the community and wider world. This pattern of consistent change indicates that something transpired over the course of this PAR to create the kind of change that was the intention of this PAR.

The independent t-tests that were conducted on the end line data provided a clearer picture of some possibilities for the recognizable change. Persons who participated in worship once a week or more, and persons who participated in faith formation activities and community service at least once a month, were demonstrably more likely to declare that Prairie Wind helped them make connections between faith and daily work, and daily work and what God is doing in the world. The frequency of

participation in these community practices also had an effect on other convictions related to daily work.

The qualitative data were able to provide more specific evidence of this pattern of change. Alan, an insurance salesman, noted how his participation in a baseline focus group caused him to do his daily devotions differently.

A typical day, for me, starts about 5:30. I get up, first thing I do typically is read a daily devotional. Since we met last December what I really try to think about, or put a focus on is how does this directly interact with my day and my team that I work with, because it's kind of interesting. Most of the time you can find something that has a pretty direct impact (EFG1).

Barb, the teacher, shared her personal wrestling with her kids' working hard to play hard without any greater sense of purpose in what they do:

Since you brought up the topic, I've really been struggling with looking at my children and the various jobs they do. They are in that twenty-something area. They go to work, and come home, and they play hard on the weekend. Then they go to work, come home, and play hard on the weekend. I'm trying to look back on my life to see when, is this a maturity thing? Is it ingrained in us? The question you are asking is very good, because right now, I feel the same right now as when I go to work, or when I go home. Like I said, God is my essence. It's enmeshed. It's not just a priority ... (EFG1).

The pattern of change suggested in the quantitative results were affirmed in these and other stories of changed practices and outlooks.

### Development of a Missional Culture

One of the reasons for introducing several interventions over the course of this PAR was to find out which, if any, might lead to creating desired change. That meant, in this PAR, determining what interventions resulted in Prairie Wind members embracing God's call to participate more fully in God's work in the world through their daily work. The independent t-tests, mentioned earlier, that were conducted on groups collapsed into two in the end line, revealed significant relationships between frequency of participation

in congregational activities, and a stronger understanding of God's intended connection between faith and daily work. The data were unable to show a significant relationship between frequency of participation in congregational activities, and the helpfulness of the PAR interventions. So, for example, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean of the responses of those attending worship once or more a week, and less than once a week to questions about the helpfulness of testimonies in worship, or monthly commissioning in worship. Curiously, persons who attended a faith formation activity once a month or more *did* find the commissioning in worship statistically more significant than those attending a similar activity less than once a month. There was not a statistically significant difference in how these groups looked at the helpfulness of small group conversations.

A similarly puzzling finding in the quantitative data about the relationship between frequency of participation in Prairie Wind service and finding joy in daily work was mentioned earlier in table 27. The data do not say *why* these relationships are significant; only that they exist. My assertion here is that the pattern of change discussed above, and the lack of data consistently connecting any single PAR interventions with change, *even though change occurred*, suggests that change happened more as a result of the congregational culture than any specific activity or practice.

This is also suggested in the variety of responses to questions put to the focus groups about the relationship between the PAR interventions and any change in perceptions of the understanding of the relationship between faith and daily work. One participant remarked, "I think that Sunday worship is necessary for me. Anything else above that is a bonus. I think that recharges my life for the next week in a good way"

(Nancy, EFG2). Another participant said, “Lifelong faith formation and radical hospitality, those were both pillars for me when, they were like a calling to me when we came in here for the first time. It sounds like us, it sounds like my family, it sounds like how we do things” (Stacy, EFG2). Another participant said, “in this congregation, we do a fantastic job of reaching out to the community and giving to the community” (Clare, EFG1). Organized community service with the congregation reminds her of possibilities for serving the rest of the week. Another focus group member said she couldn’t name any one thing in particular that helped her understand and live out her calling from God: “I would say the sermons, the newsletter, everything, really” (Donna, EFG2).

No particular practice led to cultivating faith connections in a way that expanded the influence of congregational life on relationships between God, self, neighbor, and daily work, as indicated in the end line theoretical codes displayed in figure 5. It was the cultivation of the combination of usual and new practices that seemed to affect the congregational culture in a way that enhanced understandings of relationships between faith, daily work, and the *missio Dei*.

### The Promise of Small Groups

Participation in small group conversations did emerge in the data as a new practice that was significant for those who experienced it. It was noted earlier that 67.4% of those who participated in the small group interventions described them as helpful (45.7%) or very helpful (21.7%). Participants in the focus groups also shared their feeling that sitting down and talking about things like faith, callings, and work made a difference in how they connected such things. Bob, who works in marketing, said,

How many times do you get to stop, sit down, and discuss this issue? When you actually get to peel this issue to see that I am an instrument of God in my work?

There are certain gifts that have been bestowed on me, and it's my job to use them. (EFG1).

David, who works in banking, shared how significant the small group conversation was for him, and how hard it is for him to make the commitment to participate. He wonders out loud how a congregation can offer these kinds of opportunities when people are either reluctant or busy or both:

I would say too, these group things are good. I'm not one to sign up for Bible studies or classes. I'm one who needs to be encouraged, or have Pastor Jeff change the date so I can make it. I need to be pulled. Some of the other things, I would say didn't mean as much to me to bridge [faith and work] as this does. Last time it carried me for a while, but like everything, creature of habit, you get busy, you start going back into your old ways. How do you do this for a whole congregation (EFG2)?

David summarizes succinctly both the gift and challenge of small group participation. Other participants in the focus groups shared similar opinions. The small group conversations were meaningful and made them think, but most wondered how it could happen regularly when so many other things seem so pressing?

### **Chapter Summary**

We have looked at great length at the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in this PAR. The results point to the complexity of cultivating people's callings, especially when "calling" is understood in various ways. The analyzed data did suggest some possibilities for continuing to create a culture that connects faith, daily work, and the *missio Dei*. We return now to our theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses, in order to draw some overall conclusions about this research, and to discern some possibilities for continuing cultivation in the future.



## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project was to measure Prairie Wind Lutheran Church's understanding of the connections between Christian faith, baptismal callings, daily work, and God's working in the world; and to determine the effectiveness of certain practices in cultivating such connections. The key findings of the research are summarized in this chapter. The findings are then brought into conversation with the theoretical lenses described in chapter three, and the biblical and theological lenses described in chapter four. This resulted in some conclusions about the effectiveness of this PAR, and what they might mean for Prairie Wind and the larger church.

#### **Summary of Results**

The research revealed that many Prairie Wind members had a healthy understanding of the relationships between faith, callings, and daily work at the outset of the research. Baseline data indicated that a majority of participants asserted that daily work matters to God, and that God has called them to their daily work. Some participants made a distinction between different kinds of daily work, such as parenting and work they get paid to do. Participants were generally less certain about how God is active in their daily work to accomplish God's working out God's desire to tend, mend, and save

the whole creation. They were also less certain that their congregation was helping them make connections between faith, daily work, and the *missio Dei*.

Participants in the research held a wide variety of understandings of what *calling* and *vocation* mean. This qualitative finding revealed that, though most persons agreed in the quantitative data they have been called to their daily work, this meant different things to different people. Teaching and preaching about *vocation*, then, could not assume a common starting point. It also meant that the stated goal of this project to assist members of Prairie Wind to more readily *recognize* and *respond* to God's call in daily work required helping members with both *recognition* of God's call and with faithfully *responding* to God's call.

The research also revealed a consistent pattern of increased understanding of the relationships between faith, God's calling, daily work, and the *missio Dei* over the course of the PAR. No statistically significant change was measured in independent t-tests of the overall means of responses to questions in the baseline and end line questionnaires. Analysis of the data did reveal a pattern of consistent change *towards* greater understanding of faith and work connections between baseline and end line measurements. Statistically significant change was discovered in comparisons of congregation members filling out the end line questionnaire who participated more and less frequently in worship, faith formation activities, and congregational service events. Those who participated more frequently in congregational life in these ways were more likely to assert that the congregation had helped them make connections between faith and their daily work, and connections between their daily work and what God is doing in the world.

There was no single PAR intervention or congregational practice that clearly stood out in the research as *the* primary variable mostly responsible for the pattern of change that was discovered in the quantitative data. Qualitative data gleaned from end line focus groups and the action research team indicated that different interventions and practices resulted in different impacts on different people. Worship practices were mentioned by some, small groups by others, and the use of social media to tell stories by still others. More significant than any particular practice was the cumulative impact of several practices to shape the congregational culture into one that recognizes and encourages connections between faith, baptismal callings, daily work, and God's work in the world. Most of the persons who participated in the research voiced their appreciation for the variety of ways connections were cultivated. Prairie Wind members' busy schedules and multiple distractions mean it is likely that any single practice introduced in a short time period will be missed by a majority of members. This makes it all the more essential to nurture a congregational *culture* in which making connections between faith, daily work, and the *missio Dei* becomes a priority in worship, faith formation activities, service events, and most congregation practices.

The one practice that showed the most promise for having a direct and significant impact on cultivating connections between faith and daily work was small group conversation. More than two-thirds of the persons (67.4%) who participated in the small group conversations that were introduced in the PAR assessed them as helpful or very helpful in making connections between faith, daily work, and God's working in the world. It was common for a person or two in each of the baseline and end line focus groups to remark at some time in the middle of the conversation how the conversation

was causing them to rethink what their faith had to do with their work. Many shared their opinion that ongoing participation in such a group would be valuable to them, even as they also questioned how they would find the time to do such a thing. This brings us back to the necessity of cultivating a whole culture in which faith and work connections are clearly a priority. Small group conversations ought to play a significant role in developing and shaping such a culture.

The results of this research are now interrogated with the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses that helped inform this study. The purpose of the interrogation is to provide further interpretation of the research findings, and to note both questions and affirmations that arise in the cross-examination. The chapter concludes with implications of this research for Prairie Wind Lutheran Church, the generalizability and limitations of this research for other congregations, and consideration of avenues for future research.

### **Patterns of Change, Transformational Leadership, and the Work of the Spirit**

The initiating and implementing of this PAR was an act of transformational leadership in the congregation. Prairie Wind members were invited to participate with their pastor in determining *together* effective ways to cultivate connections between faith, daily work, and what God is doing in the world. This was different than the usual—and expected—traditional transactional exchange of pastoral expertise for laity following. My role as a transformational leader was not simply to teach, preach, and pray that something happened, but to foster collaboration, develop competence, and build confidence in discovering what it means to live out a calling.<sup>1</sup> It was to shepherd action more than impart information. I led this process by providing information, resources,

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<sup>1</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 260.

encouragement, and direction, and by teaching, coaching, and inspiring participants along the way. This empowered Prairie Wind members for making personal and communal discoveries about Christian vocation and its relationship to the *missio Dei*, and necessarily allowed room for confusion and failure.

God demonstrated transformational leadership “in the beginning” by inviting human beings to serve as *co-workers with God* in God’s creating work (Gen 1:1). This biblical picture of shared labor was another lens for this study. The image provides a remarkable description of a partnership between the Creator and the created. It helps define the nature of work as something God had always intended those created in God’s image to do with God. The divine plan was that God and humanity would collaborate on tending what God made. The biblical description of the interaction between God and humanity in the first garden also provides insight to how God wants work carried out. God might have just given explicit instructions to the first humans about how to manage the creation, or programmed them to do God’s bidding. God empowers them, instead, to give names to what God has made, “and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name” (Gen 2:19).

The transformational nature of God’s work and leadership described in chapters one and two of Genesis was a reminder to participants in this project of how much God values human labor. God makes our first parents partners in God’s ongoing creating work. It also reinforced the move towards the practice of transformational leadership in a local, congregational context. God invites God’s creatures to share in God’s work; that leaves little room for congregational leaders to pretend that the work of the Lord is too important or too complex to be shared with unpaid servants of God.

One of the struggles that became evident early in the PAR process was that both pastor and congregation members were inexperienced in exercising the leadership steps and participation required for this process to be truly shared as intended. This was a learning process for everyone. Church members were accustomed to having church leaders give instructions about how they should think theologically and practically about their roles in the congregation and larger community, and about how to fulfill those roles. I was accustomed to sharing information and then giving such instructions. The assumed relationship was of a teacher with followers, rather than the relationship of a leader working to develop other leaders. The effort to break out of these roles, though eventually fruitful, was initially puzzling, and sometimes frustrating.

The search conference was intended to be an important step in putting transformational leadership into practice, and in demonstrating the possibilities of the priesthood of all believers working together to design and develop congregational interventions. The quantitative data indicated that this was the *least* helpful of all the PAR interventions (see table 28). Qualitative data showed that this was true, in large part, because most participants had just begun to grasp their shared, empowered roles when the conference ended. I tried to build in time for worship, teaching on justification and vocation, an introduction to the PAR process, and the design of the future PAR interventions. Too much was expected of the participants in such a short time. Efforts to reconvene the different groups so they could finish the work started at the conference were initially successful. As time passed, however, it became more difficult for the groups to gather. This left completion of the interventions to the action research team and

me. The result was a missed opportunity for a more complete implementation of transformational leadership and releasing of the priesthood of all believers.

The first pattern of change in this study was the consistent effort to include non-paid servants in both the development and implementation of the interventions that followed the search conference. There were times when it became simpler for the congregation's paid servants to take charge. The monthly meetings of the action research team served as a necessary corrective to this path of least resistance.

The cumulative result of the PAR interventions was a measurable pattern of increased recognition of connections between faith and daily work. Participants indicated increased agreement that Prairie Wind frequently helped congregation members "make connections" between faith and daily work (baseline and end line questionnaire Q39), and between daily work and what God is doing "in our community and in the world" (baseline and end line questionnaire Q40). This increase was statistically significant when end line respondents were collapsed into two groups and compared by frequency of participation in worship, faith formation activities, and congregational service. Those participating more frequently in these gatherings indicated a statistically significant increase in appreciation for the way the congregation helped them make connections between faith, their daily work, and God's work in the world. Stories collected in the focus groups affirmed appreciation for such connections. Qualitative data also affirmed that treating congregation members as valued partners in cultivating such connections was important.

The observable patterns of change exercised and revealed in this research in the congregation is ultimately attributable to the work of the Holy Spirit, who makes

Christian community possible.<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit gives congregation members—not just pastors or other paid leaders, but “all flesh” (Acts 2:17)—vision and courage to reconsider how exactly God is carrying out God’s desire to heal and transform a broken creation. The same Spirit that gathers and empowers the church leads the growth and development of the church into alignment with this larger mission of God. This happens through intentional strategies as well as in unforeseen disruptions and interruptions.<sup>3</sup> This research, carried out in the middle of the Spirit-empowered life of a local congregation, led mostly to hoped-for, strategized patterns of change. One of the unforeseen discoveries in the quantitative and qualitative data was the expression of joy, one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), in making connections between faith and daily work.

### **Vocation, Social Ecology, and the Priesthood of All Believers**

The hope at the outset of this PAR was that it would steer Prairie Wind members into greater shared *recognition of* and *response to* God’s call to participate in God’s work in the world through their daily work. The question raised by the varied understandings of call that surfaced in the data is, *was enough teaching done?* Was too much assumed at the outset of this study about Prairie Wind members’ understanding of vocation? Or would an increase in efforts to do more teaching reinforce old models of leadership and minimize the priesthood of all believers? These are ongoing tensions for leaders who desire to become missional leaders, but who have been trained to serve as the resident experts in all things church-related.

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<sup>2</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, 79.

<sup>3</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 157-159.



Participants in the search conference did receive instruction in the Lutheran understanding of the relationship of justification and vocation, via the video resource, *Down + Out: Where Grace Takes You*.<sup>4</sup> There was no other specific time over the course of the PAR that in-depth teaching about what Lutheran Christians mean by *calling* or *vocation* was offered. This may be one reason for the varied understandings of calling that surfaced during this research. More likely reasons are the church's long history of confusion about what it means to be called into ministry and live out such a calling, and the culture's use of the word to talk about everything from an occupation to a nagging feeling that a person ought to help a neighbor.

The results of the quantitative data gathered for this research affirmed that Prairie Wind members did grasp that "God has called me to my daily work" (baseline and end line questionnaire Q11). Results from the qualitative data were more mixed. These data did show the powerful effect of working out what it means to be called into daily work for God's purposes in a conversation with other *priests* in the congregation. Participants voiced their appreciation for conversations that were facilitated by a leader and shared with others that allowed room for both discovery and confusion. One example is the revelation by the participant in a focus group who came into the group believing that her calling was a job she was unable to do. Towards the end of the group's conversation she said,

This is making me reflect because I'm sure, when I first decided that I needed to switch and do something that came more natural to me, that probably was my calling at the time. Just the reflection on getting back, and realizing has me thinking again on why I love it and how it is helping others (BFG1).

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<sup>4</sup> *Down + Out: Where Grace Takes You*.

It was evident that her participation in the group did broaden her understanding of her vocation from a job in healthcare to different kind of work that suited her gifts and talents better, and helped others in completely different ways.

One of the things working against the integration of an understanding of vocation and daily work is the same excessive individualism that is attacking and damaging the broader social ecology. Robert Bellah defines social ecology as “the web of moral understandings and commitments that tie people together in community.”<sup>5</sup> A congregation that wants to bridge the gaps between faith, daily work, and recognition of what God is doing in the world will also look to healing such divisions with an eye on the impact in the larger community. The congregation that restores a connection between a sense of calling or vocation, and daily work, will better balance the gathering and scattering aspects of congregational life, and, simultaneously help heal the social ecology of the community in which it is located.

Evidence of such healing was revealed by persons in this study who identified their work as their calling, *and* by persons who insisted that their jobs were *not* their callings. Much of this difference stemmed from whether daily work was assumed to be the totality of one’s calling, or was understood as one avenue among many for living out one’s calling as an apprentice of Jesus. One example was the physical therapist who celebrated the opportunities to work with clients of multiple economic and cultural backgrounds. She affirmed their value in a strange land as she compassionately tended to their needs and the needs of their children in their homes. The businessman who blew the whistle on illegal activity in his company cited his faith as the catalyst for shining light

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<sup>5</sup> Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 335.

into this darkness, even though it cost him his job. The real estate salesperson who refused to take barely ethical shortcuts to get a leg up on the competition, and adopted a cooperative rather than adversarial approach in her industry, recognized the impact she had on others, who had an impact on others.

This is the priesthood of believers, living out vocation, not primarily through internal congregational activity, but where they live many more of their hours—in their workplaces. This research process also demonstrated what it might look like for members of a congregation to work together as members of the same “royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9), ordained in the waters of baptism. The work of this “priesthood” was encouraged and reinforced as the priests of Prairie Wind came together to learn from and with one another what it means to receive a *calling* from God. They also recognized in new ways what it means to exercise it in daily work for the healing of the social ecology as part of the *missio Dei*.

### **Small Groups, Generative Learning, and Radical Love**

It was mentioned in the last chapter that gathering people together for small group conversation was cited in both the quantitative and qualitative data as the most effective of the planned interventions. Several of the persons who participated in these conversations told me during and after the conversations, sometimes days later, how much they appreciated the opportunity to sit down with others to talk about things that mattered to them. There were too few opportunities to do this, they said. Their *church life* mostly consisted of worship participation, which was important but not conversational, and service events, which they also valued highly, but seldom afforded time to talk about what it means to live out one’s faith in the totality of one’s life.

The comments brought to mind the writing of Margaret Wheatley in her book, *Turning to One Another*.<sup>6</sup> Wheatley cites the work of Paulo Freire in helping her recognize that “all change, even very large and powerful change, begins when a few people start talking with one another about something they care about.”<sup>7</sup> This happens when people slow down enough to adopt a pace of life that allows for the kind of conversation that moves beyond hurried pleasantries, or protests of busyness and hurry. Such conversations encourage thinking, listening, learning, and speaking. This was the kind of conversations participants in the focus groups, evening table talks, and morning coffee and conversation enjoyed as part of this research project.

Wheatley points out that circles and councils are necessary ways for people to learn from one another, especially if healing divisions and widening horizons are a desired goal. They “take us to a place of deep connection with each other.”<sup>8</sup> This turned out to be a significant way that the lens of generative learning came into effect in this research. It was a challenge for me to resist my usual role as teacher of biblical stories and theological truths. The more groups I facilitated, the more I observed and experienced the learning that happened when everyone was encouraged to have an equal voice in the conversation—and the pastor/facilitator concentrated on listening. All participants had unique stories and perspectives to share on their own understanding of vocation, and how they saw themselves making *or* not making connections between

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 13. Wheatley cites two of Freire’s works in the bibliography of her book: Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 1st American ed., A Continuum Book (New York,: Seabury Press, 1973)., and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, 13.

vocation and their daily work. I was able to see and hear what sociologist Nancy Ammerman identified in her work as, “the way both the secular narratives of career and marketplace and spiritual narratives of human concern and greater good are interwoven into any given story.”<sup>9</sup>

The daily work had changed over the years for many participants in this study. This was due to changes in paid work, or changes in stages of life. The many changes made it more likely that there were significant overlaps in people’s different stories, even if their daily work was completely different.

The learning that occurred in these particular gatherings was not about depositing information in brains, but wrestling out loud with one another over significant issues of calling, discovering God in the workplace, the relationship of work and identity, and the relationship between work and rest. People may have come to gain information, since this is what many assume learning gatherings in congregations will be about. Learning that values relationships, a hallmark of generative learning, was what made these gatherings so meaningful to those who participated. Participants experienced what sociologist and psychologist Sherry Turkle calls “the talking cure,” a necessary antidote to the failing connections of the digital age.<sup>10</sup>

The risk of these kinds of small group conversations is that people are *not* valued. Their stories might be treated lightly, or with disrespect. There was concern among some of the group participants in this research about how stories of their work compared to those of others. Some of this, I believe, is related to the deep-set understanding of

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<sup>9</sup> Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*, 211.

<sup>10</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York:: Penguin Press, 2015), 5.

vocation that assigns more value to certain professions than others. Amy, a participant in a baseline focus group who works in financial services, exclaimed “what am I doing here?” after hearing stories from others who talked about their work as healers (BFG1). A similar thing happened in other groups. The response of other group members was to affirm the person who questioned the value of his or her daily work, placed alongside that of others in the group. They also pointed out that, though certain kinds of daily work can be seen as helping others more directly, there is usually a way for most kinds of work to be done in such a way that helps or cares for others.

No one identified *love* as the impetus for the work they did, their oft-related care for co-workers, or the way they encouraged the small group participants who didn’t see a lot of value in their daily work. Yet love was expressed in all these ways. It was understood that one of the most important ways apprentices of Jesus live out their faith in daily work is by loving others, even the annoying co-worker and the difficult boss. Radical love was a lens through which participants looked and assessed their work and its impact, especially relationships with clients and co-workers.

### **Congregation Culture, Faithful Presence, and the *Missio Dei***

The results of this research indicated that the *combination* of a variety of interventions had a greater impact on cultivating connections between faith and work than any particular intervention. More specifically, it was the introduction and cultivation of new practices *alongside* attention to ongoing, traditional practices that made a difference. The research also revealed that Prairie Wind’s emphasis on the core practices of radical hospitality, passionate worship, lifelong faith formation, extravagant generosity, and bold service had helped many members make connections between faith

and work before this research began. Lasting impact of this project, then, will require continued nurturing and cultivation of a whole congregational culture that values gathering for worship, learning, and service, *and* scattering into workplaces and other places for daily life. It will require the persistent integration of an enhanced understanding of the relationship between vocation, daily work, and the *missio Dei* into the many facets of congregational life.

The attention to the many things that happen when the congregation gathers as well as when it scatters, aligns well with what is required for a congregation to serve as a “faithful presence” in the community.<sup>11</sup> This was another one of the theological lenses for this study. James Davison Hunter writes that the church must first become fully present to God by gathering in worship together “to be in his presence worshipping and enjoying him forever,” before it is even possible to be faithfully present in the world.<sup>12</sup> The quantitative and qualitative data affirmed that Prairie Wind members recognize the value of worship. End line questionnaire results show a statistically significant difference between those attending worship once a week or more, and those attending less than once a week, in recognizing how the church shows up in daily work, and in the world. Persons responding to the end line questionnaire invitation to specifically identify something that helped make connections between faith and work mentioned “sermons,” prayers during worship that highlighted the work of “those for whom we might never think to pray,” and repeatedly “stressing the connection” (end line questionnaire Q47). What happens when the community of faith gathers impacts what happens when it scatters.

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<sup>11</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, 241.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

The data bear out the need for *Sabbath rest*, another of the biblical lenses for this study. We rest because God orders it in the third commandment (Ex 20:8-11). We rest because, as creatures created in the image of God, we need our rest, just as God did. The data also remind us of the relationship between keeping Sabbath and faithfully participating in the *missio Dei*. They are inextricably connected. Working all the time, even to accomplish God's purposes, lessens our capacity for making connections between our faith, our callings, our daily work, and what God is doing in the world. There is a clear word here to go with God's Word about the necessity of rest *and* setting aside regular times in our lives to sit with God, worship God, and grow in faith in God.

Prairie Wind scatters into all kinds of workplaces: hospitals, schools, courtrooms, banks, early childhood centers, home offices, dining room tables, operating rooms, retirement centers, boardrooms, sales floors, motels, construction sites, and many other locations. The challenge was to help congregation members identify these sites as locations of God's presence through those who do their daily work there. To put it another way, it was to open members' eyes to see that these are the places where God is already at work, inviting each of them to collaborate with the Holy Spirit in these spheres of influence.

There was some indication in the results of this research that at least some Prairie Wind members see themselves and their workplaces in this way. One example was the way that Ron, who works in law enforcement, observed God showing up *in jail*:

There are a lot of inmates with a lot of mental health issues. It's not at all uncommon for a fellow inmate to come to us and say, "He needs some help." They circumvent a ton of problems that way. Throughout the years there've been a lot of them that have prevented a tremendous amount of problems. Sometimes it comes from guys you wouldn't think they would care enough to call someone's attention to it. You see it frequently, but you really don't see it until you step back



and take a look at it. [God showing up in the workplace] is just so obvious when I look at it (BFG2).

Many responses in the data still tilted towards an understanding of discipleship that requires figuring out the best way to bring God into the workplace rather than joining the God who meets us there. More mutual stirrings of imaginations about who God is, what God is doing in the church and world, and how God shows up in daily work will be required for Prairie Wind to more fully and faithfully participate in the *missio Dei*.

### **Implications**

The hope is that this research will inform and inspire an ongoing effort in Prairie Wind Lutheran Church to cultivate connections between faith, baptismal callings, daily work, and the *missio Dei*. I also hope this work will also inform and inspire other congregations interested in bridging the gap between how followers of Jesus understand their callings on Sunday and Monday by cultivating the same kinds of connections. Every congregation has a different starting point in terms of its willingness to embark on this path, and its understanding of why it matters. Prairie Wind Lutheran Church members who *embraced* the opportunity to be a part of this study *still* expressed their own struggle with the change in focus that accompanied this work. That will likely be the case in most congregations.

There are at least three implications from this study which could benefit the vast majority of congregations desiring to cultivate stronger connections between the life of faith, and how that life is lived in the workplace by collaborating with the God who is already there. The first is the value of developing a congregational culture that attends to the value of the scattering of the saints into all kinds of workplaces, every time and in all the ways that it gathers. In other words, this cultivation needs to be more than part of the

adult education curriculum, a series of Sunday forums, or a seasonal emphasis in worship. This is an ongoing, long-term commitment that requires introduction of the shared development and implementation of faith practices which deepen faith and enhance worship even as they intentionally locate God's tending and mending activity in the workplace as well as in the sanctuary.

A second implication is that gathering people into small groups for conversation about faith and work connections is a vital way for them to begin to understand and practice the ways apprentices of Jesus might become *faithfully present* in the workplace. The groups may consist of persons who participate in similar kinds of work.<sup>13</sup> Prairie Wind members, when asked if they would prefer gathering for conversation with persons in the same occupation, or in a group of persons of varied occupations, expressed the unanimous opinion that they preferred people who brought insights from different kinds of work into the conversation. The value of such gatherings in simply building relationships is worth the effort it takes to get people to find time to get together. The responses of those who met in focus groups also indicated that even a single conversation altered something about how they understood the connection between faith and daily work in a positive way.

One final implication is more risky than the first two because of its contradiction to the way that most leaders of congregations have been trained to operate, and to what most congregation members expect of their leaders. A congregation that fully invests in equipping its members to live out their faith in the world, in the workplace as well as in the home and play-places, will necessarily lessen the pleas and demands for *good*

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Garber calls such groups *vocare* groups in Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2014).

*members* to participate in an ever-growing schedule of internal church activity. Darrel Guder describes what this diminishment of activity would look like in a mission community:

If a mission community saw itself primarily as the Spirit's steward of the calling and gifts of its members, its internal activities would, in one sense, diminish. It would spend much less time on providing activities that take its members out of the world. It would devote more of its times of gathering for the equipping, support, and accountability of its member-missionaries. ... Our concept of "active church member" would, of course, have to change.<sup>14</sup>

One of the things that would have to change first is how the church counts *success*, or even *faithfulness*. This is what Reggie McNeal calls "changing the scorecard for the church."<sup>15</sup> The congregation would need to start measuring church vitality and faithfulness in stories of encounters with God and neighbor outside the church walls, instead of by how many people gather and how much they put in the offering basket. It would need to do more celebrating of *faith at work* stories, and more praying for ways to live out faith in the workplace, than praying for institutional flourishing. It would continually seek out ways to stir imaginations in worship, via storytelling using social media, in small group conversations, and other creative ways about how God is accomplishing God's purposes with and beyond the church.

### **Generalizability and Limitations of the Research**

The necessary emergence of new forms of Christianity in a rapidly changing world means most prescriptions for church health and vitality in Christendom have

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<sup>14</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000), 179.

<sup>15</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

passed their expiration date.<sup>16</sup> The work here wasn't to come up with a new formula or prescription for a new day, but to help direct churches towards reclaiming what God has made them in the power of the Spirit. Congregations are collections of saints and sinners who have been assigned the identity of "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9). Most all of them gather for various kinds of worship, faith formation, and service. Fewer scatter, intentionally, to collaborate with God in bringing about the *shalom* God intends for every kind of relationship in God's creation—and not just those formed inside church buildings or wherever else *churchgoers* get together. Faithful response to God's calling requires congregations of every size, age, and denomination to come to terms with what it means to be the church in the world, especially in daily workplaces, where so many followers of Jesus spend so much of our time.

This project examined how cultivating the callings of members of one particular congregation impacted the way those members made connections between their faith, their daily work, and God's healing and saving work in the world. The intent was that much of what was tried and measured here would be helpful in many kinds of Christian congregations. Prairie Wind has many things in common with other congregations that are part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. A shared theological heritage may make generalizability easier for many Lutheran congregations. Yet, the interventions introduced in this project, such as the search conference, prayers and commissioning in worship, the use of social media, and the gathering of persons in small groups are certainly not *Lutheran only* activities. Any congregation desiring to develop and implement similar interventions will need to do so with its particular context in mind.

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<sup>16</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008).

Receptiveness to these or similar interventions will vary, depending on a congregation's previous or current practices, and the level of trust established between congregational leaders and congregation members. The search conference may require the biggest stretch in many congregations, mostly because the exercise of shared leadership and mutual learning is not that common.

The results of the interventions will likely vary greatly, depending on several things. One factor will be a congregation's understanding of and comfort level with God's call to live out faith in daily work. Another factor will likely be the occupational makeup of the congregation. A high proportion of Prairie Wind members who participated in the research work in what are typically referred to as *helping professions*. A congregation composed of persons in different kinds of daily work, or who are younger or older, will likely respond to similar interventions differently, or want to consider other kinds of interventions to address its particular context. The effectiveness of the use of social media will depend on congregation members' accessibility to such media, and willingness to use it.

### **Future Research**

One of the most significant things learned in this research project was how to go about the process of research. Future research could build on this process, and would likely be carried out more confidently and effectively. If I were to lead another search conference on a similar or different topic, I would not attempt to accomplish so many things in such a short amount of time. Confidence in the process would mean shrinking the time set aside for me to act in my traditional—and comfortable—role of teacher, and expanding the amount of time designated for participants to design and develop

interventions. The uncertainty of the outcome(s) had me leaning back towards familiar territory. I learned to better trust the outcome of shared leadership in the future.

A rookie mistake I made was to miss the opportunity to track persons filling out both the baseline and end line questionnaires. That information would have made it possible to run dependent t-tests when comparing baseline and end line participants. Such a comparison could have provided a sharper picture of the possible impact of the interventions.

A suggestion was made in the planning of the monthly prayers and commissioning for worship that we invite persons doing different kinds of work to write the prayers for those doing the same kind of daily work. A nurse would write a prayer for nurses, a teacher for teachers, and a stay-at-home mom would write a prayer to be used in worship for her and others doing the same work she does. These prayers could also be gathered together in some form for ongoing use by congregation members. We shied away from that approach because of the extra work involved in gathering up such prayers, but the process would likely have been valuable to those involved.

The introduction of a podcast to the social media intervention in this project might also bear fruit. I envision the possibility of sitting down with Prairie Wind members and others in the community to talk for thirty minutes about the connections they make between their faith, their understanding of their call, their daily work, and what they see God accomplishing in our city. It could take similar shape as the testimonies and interviews shared by Prairie Wind members and guests during Lenten worship services. They were well-received, but heard by a limited audience. A podcast could expand the reach beyond Prairie Wind members.

Since this research revealed the potential impact of small groups, any future research would include intentional formation of several groups for monthly meetings over several months. Baseline and end line research on those participating could be helpful in determining further what ways small groups help congregation members make connections between faith and daily work.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter brought the results of this research project outlined in chapter six into a conversation with the theoretical lenses defined in chapter three, and the theological and biblical lenses described in chapter four. The conversation revealed several ways the research and lenses could be woven together to inform the significance of this work. Possible implications of the research were also discussed. These included the value of developing a whole congregational culture aimed at cultivating faith and work connections; small groups as a key factor in such a culture; and a change in congregational activity that would lead to more equipping of members for *doing church* outside church building walls. The generalizability and limitations of the research were noted, along with some suggestions for building on the work reported here.

## EPILOGUE

This research project challenged me to genuinely share leadership in a way that empowered all participants in this process to have a voice in designing and implementing interventions. I would have done some things differently if my top priority was addressing my own assumptions about making better connections between Christian faith and daily work, but I wanted and needed to honor the process. The value of transformative leadership and generative learning is much more than a finished *product*; it is what happens in the process.

I learned a great deal from members about leadership practices. They taught me the value of putting team members first by checking in with them about personal matters before getting to whatever the work of the day is. I learned about the value of being open about failure, and letting team members know you are leaning on them because it is what your own work requires, and the organization is better for it.

This overall experience has revealed to me how I have undoubtedly missed opportunities to learn from parishioners about the connections they are already making between faith, their baptismal callings, and daily work. Many *do* see God at work in their workplaces, but feel unqualified to teach the teachers. Some are already experts *out in the field*, ready to teach, if we seminary trained *experts* will become ready to listen and learn where God is doing some of God's best work beyond church walls. I have just begun making an effort to meet Prairie Wind parishioners in their workplaces as a result of this project. The purpose is to get a better idea of what our members do for work, validate the



workplace as a mission field, and to hear from them what role their faith is playing in doing the work they do.

I struggled some with discerning how to serve as both pastor and researcher throughout this PAR. Some of that had to do with resisting stepping into my long-practiced role as the trained teacher in these matters. One of the goals of this entire work was to learn to resist this impulse! At other times, the difficulty was in refraining from interrupting a participant's shared struggle in a focus group so that I could offer pastoral care in the moment.

Several times in this process, I wondered what difference it would have made if a researcher who was not Prairie Wind's pastor would have led this effort. How much of the data turned out as they did because participants told the pastor what he wanted to hear? Or what a faithful Christian should say? There would be no way to know this other than having an outside consultant lead the research effort.

My expectation at the outset of this journey towards completion of Luther Seminary's Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Mission and Leadership was that I would acquire new skills for leadership in a new day. Much has changed in the church and the world since I was ordained in 1984. I have hoped this process would help me serve Prairie Wind Lutheran Church and the larger church in a way that prodded us to more boldly and faithfully engage this changed world. I have made some strides towards that goal through this research, and now hope to continue to dream, plan, and implement ways to forge connections between faith, congregation members' daily work, and God's work of tending and mending the creation.

One thing I did not anticipate in this learning process was both the necessity and the gift of learning alongside colleagues who have inspired me with their shared passion for leadership in Jesus Christ's Church. They have encouraged me and assisted me over the course of this project, when I've taken halting steps, and when I've dared plunge into practicing leadership that was unfamiliar and uncomfortable. This was generative learning fused with radical love. I could never have reached this conclusion without it.

## Appendix A

### Baseline Quantitative Questionnaire

#### PART I. Background Information

*Please fill in one box per question.*

Q 1. What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

Q 2. What is your current marital status?

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Never Married
- ☐ Living with Someone
- ☐ Other

Q 3. What is the highest grade in school that you completed?

- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ Graduated from high school or earned G.E.D.
- ☐ Some college or technical school
- ☐ Associate Degree
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Some Graduate work
- ☐ Graduate or Professional Degree
- ☐ Don't know

Q 4. What best describes the kind of daily work you do in a normal week? (Check all that apply)

- |                                     |                                       |                                    |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Student       | <input type="radio"/> Homemaker       | <input type="radio"/> Sales        |
| <input type="radio"/> Education     | <input type="radio"/> Health Care     | <input type="radio"/> Construction |
| <input type="radio"/> Business      | <input type="radio"/> Social Services | <input type="radio"/> Retired      |
| <input type="radio"/> Government    | <input type="radio"/> Volunteer       | <input type="radio"/> Clerical     |
| <input type="radio"/> Skilled labor | <input type="radio"/> Child care      | <input type="radio"/> Arts         |
| <input type="radio"/> Other _____   |                                       |                                    |

Q 5. In what year were you born? Please complete the year. 19 \_\_\_\_\_

PART II. Participation
------------------------

Q 6. How long have you been a member of your home congregation?

- ☐ Less than a year
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 4-6 years
- ☐ 7-9 years
- ☐ Ten years or longer
- ☐ I am not a member of a congregation

Q 7. How often do you usually participate in worship?

- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Two or three times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ I do not participate in worship

Q 8. How often do you usually participate in one or more faith formation activities (small groups, Sprouts teacher, confirmation guide, Sunday forum, milestone events)?

- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Two or three times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ I do not participate in any faith formation activities with Spirit of Joy

Q 9. How often do you usually participate in one or more service opportunities organized and offered by your home congregation (Food to You, food collection, Meals on Wheels, Sunday servants, gardens, ministry teams, etc.)?

- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Two or three times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ I do not participate in any service opportunities with Spirit of Joy.

Q 10. How often do you usually participate in one or more service opportunities in the community apart from congregation activities (youth coaching, serving meals with coworkers, assisting with a community charity, mentoring in the schools, etc. )

- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Two or three times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ I do not participate in any community service opportunities.

Part III. The Relationship between Faith and Daily Work
---------------------------------------------------------

*“Daily work” here means any activity that serves to satisfy human needs, either as labor done in exchange for pay, or duties and responsibilities carried out in homes and communities without pay. Please circle the number that best describes your strength of agreement to the statement.*

	Strength of Agreement						
	Very Low				Very High	Don't Know	Not Applicable
Q11. I believe that God has called me to to the daily work I am doing.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q12. How I do my daily work matters to God.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q13. Daily work is as much a basic human need as eating, drinking, rest, and friendship.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q14. Daily work is a gift from God.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q15. Daily work is punishment for humanity's sin.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q16. The primary reason I do the work I do now is to receive a good income.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q17. My daily work is a good fit with my abilities, interests and talents	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q18. The work of a mechanic or home-maker is as pleasing to God as the work of a doctor or missionary.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q19. My daily work gives meaning to my life.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q20. My sense of self is closely linked to whether I succeed or fail in my work.	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Q21. I believe I serve neighbors in my city through my daily work.	1	2	3	4	5		9
Q22. I believe God is carrying out God's work of blessing and healing the creation through my daily work.	1	2	3	4	5		9

	Strength of Agreement					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
Q23. God is transforming life in our city for the better through our congregation's ministries	1	2	3	4	5	9
Q24. God is transforming life in our city for the better through our church members' daily work.	1	2	3	4	5	9
Q25. I wish my congregation would help me make clearer connections between my faith and my daily work.	1	2	3	4	5	9
Q26. I wish my congregation would help me make clearer connections between my daily work and what God is doing in our community and the world.	1	2	3	4	5	9

Part IV. Faith Practice and Daily Work
----------------------------------------

*Please indicate how often the following practices and attitudes are true for you.*

	Almost Always	Regularly	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Don't Know
Q27. My faith impacts how I go about my daily work.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q28. I pray about my daily work.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q29. My work brings me joy.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q30. My participation in congregational worship helps prepare me for my work.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q31. I talk about my faith with coworkers	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q32. My daily work is more frustrating than rewarding.	1	2	3	4	5	8

	Almost Always	Regularly	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Don't Know
Q33. I keep a Sabbath day once a week to rest and detach from my work.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q34. I believe I would be happier if I were doing different work than what I'm doing now.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q35. I am tempted to set aside Christian values in order to succeed in my work.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q36. My participation in congregational activities helps me find meaning in my work.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q37. My faith causes me to be more just and compassionate in my work.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q38. I see glimpses of God showing up and accomplishing God's purposes in my workplace.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q39. Our congregation has helped me make connections between my faith and my daily work.	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q40. Our congregation has helped me make connections between my daily work and what God is doing in our community and in the world.	1	2	3	4	5	8

## Appendix A Supplement

### End-line Quantitative Questionnaire Added Questions

The following questions were added to the end-line questionnaire, to obtain feedback on the PAR interventions offered January-August 2015.

Part V. New Practices for Cultivating Connections between Faith and Work
--------------------------------------------------------------------------

*Please answer the following to indicate which of the following Spirit of Joy events and practices you've experienced, and your opinion about them.*

Q41. Did you receive and fill out the online faith and work survey sent out in November/December 2014?

\* Yes \* No

Q42. How helpful was the Search Conference in discerning and planning new ways for Spirit of Joy to cultivate connections between faith and daily work?

\*Not at all helpful \*Somewhat unhelpful \*Somewhat helpful  
\*Helpful \*Very helpful \*Did not experience

Q43. How helpful was the use of social media (40 Ways in 40 Days daily postings in Lent, Facebook pictures and stories of members in daily work) in cultivating connections between faith and daily work?

\*Not helpful \*Somewhat unhelpful \*Somewhat helpful  
\*Helpful \*Very helpful \*Did not experience

Q44. How helpful were the testimonies by Spirit of Joy partners and guests in Lent worship services in cultivating connections between faith and daily life?

\*Not helpful \*Somewhat unhelpful \*Somewhat helpful  
\*Helpful \*Very helpful \*Did not experience

Q45. How helpful were the monthly commissionings of persons in worship by occupation, and prayers for people in different occupations, in cultivating connections between faith and daily work?

\*Not helpful \*Somewhat unhelpful \*Somewhat helpful  
\*Helpful \*Very helpful \*Did not experience



Q46. How helpful were small group conversations (focus groups, evening table talks, morning coffee and conversations) in cultivating connections between faith and daily work?

\*Not helpful \*Somewhat unhelpful \*Somewhat helpful

\*Helpful \*Very helpful \*Did not experience

Q47. What else have you experienced in congregational life in this past year that has helped you make connections between your Christian faith and matters related to daily work?

## Appendix B

### Qualitative Baseline Focus Group Protocol

#### Introduction:

The purpose of this conversation is to learn more about the daily work of members of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church, and about how members perceive the relationship between faith and work. By “work” I’m not simply referring to a job or occupation, but rather any activity that serves to satisfy human needs. This conversation will contribute to my research project on how a congregation can effectively cultivate connections between Christian faith, daily work, and God’s work in the world. Are there any preliminary questions before we begin?

1. Please introduce yourself, tell us what you consider your daily “work” and what led you into that work.
  - a. What has been most meaningful about your work?
  - b. What have been the most significant challenges in your work?
2. The church sometimes uses the word “calling” to talk about the work a person does. Would you describe your work that way? Why or why not?
  - a. What makes your work meaningful?
3. In what ways do your particular gifts, talents, and abilities fit with your current work?
4. Give me an example of one way your Christian faith has influenced your daily work.
  - a. How does your faith affect how you deal with other people: co-workers, customers, clients, etc?
  - b. How does your faith affect how you deal with success? with failure?
  - c. What difference does it make that you are both a child of God and a (worker)?
5. Describe a time when God seemed present somehow in your workplace.
  - a. To what extent did it change the way you think about your work?
6. If God is “on the loose” out there and not just “in here” how might God be accomplishing what God wants to do in the world through your work?
  - a. What is one way neighbors in the community are served and/or blessed by what you do?
7. What are one or two ways that Prairie Wind could help you make stronger connections between your Christian faith and your daily work?
  - a. What relationship do you see between worship and daily work?

b. What other individual or communal faith practices help prepare you to do your daily work?

8. What have we not talked about that you think is important for us to know?

## Appendix C

### Qualitative End Line Focus Group Protocol

#### Introduction:

The purpose of this conversation is to learn more about the daily work of members of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church, and about how members perceive the relationship between faith and work. By “work” I’m not simply referring to a job or occupation, but rather any activity that serves to satisfy human needs. This conversation will contribute to my research project on how a congregation can effectively cultivate connections between Christian faith, daily work, and God’s work in the world. Are there any preliminary questions before we begin?

1. Please introduce yourself, and describe what you do in a typical day of your daily work?
2. The first time the focus groups met, we enjoyed some rich conversation around the subject of calling. Perhaps you’ve thought about it more since we first met. What about your daily work do you understand as a calling?
3. In what ways do your particular gifts, talents, and abilities fit with your current work?
4. What difference does it make that you are a child of God who does the work you do?
  - a. How do you make connections between these two identities in a healthy way?
5. Describe a time when God seemed present somehow in your workplace.
  - a. To what extent did it change the way you think about your work?
6. If God is “on the loose” out there and not just “in here” how might God be accomplishing what God wants to do in the world through your work?
  - a. What is one way neighbors in the community are served and/or blessed by what you do?
  - b. What is helpful in dealing with the struggle between different values? How as a congregation can we help one another?
7. Since we met in December this congregation has introduced several events and practices to help cultivate connections between faith and daily work. What, if any of these, have you experienced? What, if anything, has been helpful in your connecting God’s choosing and calling in your baptism and your daily work? What else might a congregation do to cultivate those connections?
8. What have we not talked about that you think is important for us to know?

## Appendix D

### Quantitative Questionnaire Implied Consent Form

November 25, 2014

Dear Prairie Wind Partner

You are invited to participate in a study of congregational life and Christian vocation. I hope to learn how Prairie Wind Lutheran Church can more effectively cultivate connections between members' understanding of their callings, their daily work, and the work of God in the world. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an adult member of Prairie Wind.

If you decide to participate, please complete the survey that is linked here:

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=mxIauj4A0Px9\\_2fSOYieIMOW\\_3d\\_3d](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=mxIauj4A0Px9_2fSOYieIMOW_3d_3d)

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Your completion of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to provide a picture of how congregation members understand the relationships between their Christian faith, daily work, and God's mission. It will take about ten minutes. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to develop more vibrant connections between Christian faith and daily work, and thereby strengthen Prairie Wind's ministry in our community. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey. Your cooperation in responding to the survey by December 15th is most appreciated!

The survey results will be anonymous. Your responses will not be linked to your email when you complete the survey. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Prairie Wind Lutheran Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions now or in the future, please contact me at 605-xxx-xxxx, or via email at [jeffesele@msn.com](mailto:jeffesele@msn.com). Thank you for your help!

Peace to you,  
Pastor Jeff Eisele

If you prefer not to receive future congregational surveys, please use this link:

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx?sm=mxIauj4A0Px9\\_2fSOYieIMOW\\_3d\\_3d](https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx?sm=mxIauj4A0Px9_2fSOYieIMOW_3d_3d)

## **Appendix E**

### **Qualitative Focus Group Protocol Informed Consent Form**

#### **Cultivating the Holy Callings of Ordinary Saints: The Church at Work for the Life of the World**

You are invited to be in a research study of the connection between Christian faith and daily work. You were selected as a possible participant because of your involvement in Prairie Wind Lutheran Church. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as part of my doctoral thesis project in Congregational Leadership and Mission at Luther Seminary. My advisor is Dr. Craig Van Gelder.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore ways that Prairie Wind Lutheran Church might become more effective in helping congregation members understand their Christian calling and live out those callings in their daily work.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to participate in two seventy-five-minute focus groups to discuss any connections you see between your Christian faith, God's call to discipleship and your daily work. One focus group will meet in December 2014; the same group will meet again in June 2015.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has minimal risks. Any time a group of people gather to talk about faith and personal experiences there is the possibility of bruised feelings, embarrassment or conflict. Participants may feel mild stress at times during the conversation. If the focus group conversation should generate unhealthy or unmanageable conflict I will end the conversation.

In the event that this research activity results in an injury, treatment will be available, including first aid, emergency treatment, counseling, and follow-up care as needed. However, payment for any such treatment must be provided by you or your third party payer, if any, (such as health insurance, Medicare, etc.). If discussing the connections between faith and daily work would cause you so much stress that you would need the help of a counselor, I suggest calling Riverside Psychological Services at 605-xxx-xxxx

There are no direct benefits of participation other than refreshments enjoyed during the focus group conversation. Your participation will strengthen the ministry of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church and help us cultivate ways for our members to recognize and live out God's calling in our different kinds of daily work.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in the church office. Only my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, and I will have access to the data and any video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number to be studied.

The video recordings are for use in this research project only and will not be shown publicly. The video recordings and transcripts will be erased in October 2017. Federal guidelines specify a minimum of three years for retention of data.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary or Prairie Wind Lutheran Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher(s) conducting this study is Jeffrey Eisele. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at  
Prairie Wind Lutheran Church  
Email: jeffeisele@msn.com

or

Dr. Craig Van Gelder  
Luther Seminary  
2481 Como Ave.  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
[cvangeld@luthersem.edu](mailto:cvangeld@luthersem.edu)

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to be recorded videotaped:

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Revised 11/30/14

## **Appendix F**

### Action Research Team Informed Consent Form

#### **Cultivating the Holy Callings of Ordinary Saints: The Church at Work for the Life of the World**

You are invited to be in a research study of the connection between Christian faith and daily work. You were selected as a possible participant because of your involvement in Prairie Wind Lutheran Church. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as part of my doctoral thesis project in Congregational Leadership and Mission at Luther Seminary. My advisor is Dr. Craig Van Gelder.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore ways that Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church might become more effective in helping congregation members understand their Christian calling and live out those callings in their daily work.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, will ask you to serve as part of an action team that will meet monthly between October 2014 and June 2015. The team will read Scripture together, discuss connections between faith, vocation and daily work, and help plan three congregational actions in the first half of 2015 to strengthen these connections.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has minimal risks. Any time a group of people gather to talk about faith and personal experiences there is the possibility of bruised feelings, embarrassment or conflict. Participants may feel mild stress at times during the conversation. If the action research team conversation, planning, or work together should generate unhealthy or unmanageable conflict I will end the conversation.

In the event that this research activity results in an injury, treatment will be available, including first aid, emergency treatment, counseling, and follow-up care as needed. However, payment for any such treatment must be provided by you or your third party payer, if any, (such as health insurance, Medicare, etc.). If discussing the connections between faith and daily work would cause you so much stress that you would need the help of a counselor, I suggest calling Riverside Psychological Services at 605-xxx-xxxx

There are no direct benefits of participation other than refreshments enjoyed during the focus group conversation. Your participation will strengthen the ministry of Prairie Wind Lutheran Church and help us cultivate ways for our members to recognize and live out God's calling in our different kinds of daily work.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in the church office. Only my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, and I will have access to the data and any video recording.



If the research is terminated for any reason, all data will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number to be studied.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary or Prairie Wind Lutheran Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher(s) conducting this study is Jeffrey Eisele. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact at Prairie Wind Lutheran Church.

Email: jeffeisele@msn.com

or

Dr. Craig Van Gelder  
Luther Seminary  
2481 Como Ave.  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
[cvangeld@luthersem.edu](mailto:cvangeld@luthersem.edu)

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to be videotaped:

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Created 09/21/14

## Appendix G

### Baseline *in vivo* Focused Codes

#### navigating changes in career paths

coming to current work without a plan to get here  
 traveling long and hard work to current work  
 changing directions to get to current work  
 traveling a winding road of events  
 zig-zagging all over the place to current work  
 working in an area once ruled out  
 enduring a bad experience leading to change in work path  
 responding to forced change of jobs  
 reflecting on conflict that led to career change  
 acquiring the nerve to do what I always wanted to do  
 taking the leap into something new that is a calling  
 getting the itch to do something different  
 choosing further education  
 deciding on a better fit with abilities and talents  
 conveying necessity of loving work or leaving

#### building relationships through work

recognizing blessing of meeting and treating others as equals  
 recognizing impact of work for assisting clients  
 feeling really needed  
 feeling God's direction in order to have an impact on others  
 feeling like you get to do the right thing  
 recognizing how job helps others in more indirect ways than other jobs  
 recognizing value of work for clients  
 receiving and giving support from clients  
 building relationships with people who could make a difference  
 working with all kinds of different people (clients)  
 receiving advice from mentor  
 knowing people with connections  
 receiving help for big break

#### recognizing opportunities to bless the community

recognizing job as opportunity to live out calling beyond work responsibilities  
 serving with coworkers in community service projects  
 recognizing job as calling for the sake of other opportunities provided  
 recognizing financial benefits of job as a means to generosity  
 recognizing place in blending work and volunteering in community  
 experiencing shock over lack of faith compass to guide work  
 recollecting significance of bad and good childhood experience in career choice  
 recognizing others needs  
 recognizing opportunities in work to help with what people need

working with a variety of people in need  
 enjoying idea of helping people  
 helping people at vulnerable times  
 becoming present for people in crises through work

considering the relationship between work and family

considering job as mom  
 making my kids my main focus  
 lamenting passage of time with kids  
 identifying calling as moving away from paid work towards more parenting  
 working full time at job and parenting  
 noting challenges of autistic daughter  
 identifying current calling as taking care of kids  
 recognizing parenting as calling from the soul  
 considering parents' opinions of work  
 remembering family competition for best calling  
 receiving counsel of spouse in work choice  
 expressing differences in understanding of work with husband  
 talking wife into trying new work  
 asserting values grew out of faithful upbringing  
 moving to Sioux Falls to be closer to kids and grandkids  
 noting lack of family tradition in work choice  
 following in family occupation

perceiving the value of longevity in work

working the same job many years  
 realizing calling in work after twenty years on the job  
 identifying nature of job is problem solving (not other assumptions)  
 developing long term relationships with clients  
 identifying importance of relationships

experiencing economic concerns

needing to reenter the workforce for benefits  
 experiencing comfort with **consistent** paycheck  
 receiving rewards of job well done, but not enough pay

wondering about sharing faith while working

discussing faith matters while working  
 encouraging taking risks in sharing faith  
 wondering about inviting people to Bible study or church while working  
 identifying our primary calling as telling others about Jesus  
 identifying faith sharing opportunities under the radar  
 wondering about church welcome

praying about work

praying for God's help with challenges  
 receiving help through prayer  
 praying about changing work  
 talking to God about work frustrations  
 requesting a sign from God about what work to do next  
 receiving phone call as calling/answer  
 attending national prayer breakfast  
 choosing to pray despite warnings of trouble  
 receiving thanks and affirmation for prayer

recognizing a calling

expressing appreciation for work that doesn't feel like work  
 seeing God at work in my work  
 identifying God's help in knowing how to help another  
 seeing God work in other's work  
 recognizing God at work in helping parents (clients)  
 feeling like I'm where I'm supposed to be  
 feeling blessed to receive calling  
 feeling job is way to carry out calling  
 claiming a natural affinity for (former) work in public administration  
 feeling like goals accomplished  
 loving every day on the job  
 believing current work could be preparation for future calling  
 seeing things differently than how others see  
 claiming unique abilities as God-given talents/gifts  
 believing the certainty of calling  
 making connections between personality and variety in work  
 acquiring skill set to fulfill calling  
 distinguishing between skill set and calling to help others  
 clarifying difference between importance of job and feeling called  
 discovering something I like *and* I'm good at  
 attributing skill set for success to God  
 believing God's help in work is connected to sense of calling  
 moving into skill set leading to success  
 connecting who I am in my work with God  
 understanding my **identity** as a child of God in my work  
 wondering about connection between Christian identity and work  
 affirming differences in how we understand our callings  
 getting lifted up by reminders of uniqueness of work  
 recognizing tendency to undervalue skill

perceiving the cost of making strong connections between work and faith

choosing faith over profit  
 recognizing how hard it is to do what is really is right  
 wishing empathy not so strong

getting fired for whistle blowing  
 enduring difficulty of getting fired for doing the right thing  
 avoiding temptation to take unethical advantage  
 seeing competitors through lens of faith  
 quitting job over fairness issues  
 losing sleep over struggle to do the right thing

missing a sense of calling

doubting that current job is a calling  
 envying other people's sense of call  
 denying any sense of calling to current job  
 rejecting possibility of feeling God's pleasure in work  
 recognizing lack of fit between personality and work  
 seeing disconnect between distasteful work and calling  
 working in a role that seems far from God's work  
 conveying inability to see God in work  
 struggling with what to do  
 failing to fulfill a perceived calling  
 recognizing lack of fit with job  
 noting difficulty of constant **passion** about work  
 experiencing less passion for work

perceiving God's guidance in work

recognizing God's help through dark time at work  
 reflecting on benefits of forced career change  
 setting clear, Christian based values  
 treating people right  
 changing the culture  
 making change from values that are just words to meaning them  
 living the Golden Rule  
 refusing to take advantage of vulnerable people  
 perceiving inmates and their families as people too  
 recognizing something bad turning into something good  
 learning lessons for walking in another's shoes  
 trying to sway what God wanted me to do  
 responding to forced change of jobs  
 reflecting on conflict that led to career change

appreciating church as a refuge

perceiving church gatherings for worship as a place to get away from work  
 identifying moderating influence of faith on work highs and lows  
 recognizing success and failure not just on us

seeing God show up on the job

miracles at accident sites  
 inmates helping inmates

seeing God show up in hindsight  
 feeling like God forced change because it was needed  
 getting little messages from God  
 seeing connections of circumstances and work  
 seeing God everywhere in faces and discoveries of children  
 learning to recognize God showing up  
 recognizing how God shows up in the little things

experiencing community with coworkers  
 connecting with coworker needs through prayer and assistance  
 identifying opportunity to help coworker  
 working with people of shared faith  
 experiencing devastating news with coworkers  
 sharing the burdens and joys

discerning options for strengthening faith and work connections  
 building awareness  
 creating self-awareness  
 learning to pray for people who do something different  
 forming small groups for conversation  
 inviting persons to give testimonies in worship about faith and work  
 claiming importance of servant leadership  
 filling our buckets in this conversation  
 finding conversation helpful  
 appreciating opportunity to look back and reflect on work  
 receiving encouragement for seeing skills and gifts through other's eyes

seeking balance in working and living  
 distinguishing between work that is a job and work as my life  
 separating calling from living  
 admitting unable to help or serve sometimes  
 believing life not about what I do but living each day  
 feeling balanced after long time of working out of **balance**  
 recognizing that giving prepares you for receiving  
 wondering about calling to receive from others as well as give

Total baseline *in vivo* focused codes=180

## Appendix H

### End Line *in vivo* Focused Codes

#### cultivating relationships

gaining people's confidence  
 perceiving that work is about the relationships  
 treating people right in everything  
 recognizing priority of forming relationships  
 meeting investors  
 meeting with people to listen and help them  
 starting work with management by walking around  
 checking in with people first  
 meeting members in the workplace  
 relating to a variety of people  
 interacting with diverse people  
 loving a diversity of patients  
 seeing a variety of people  
 working with people of different income levels  
 relating to all kinds of different people

#### developing teamwork

working with employees to help them get better  
 assuming others doing their best  
 trying to understand millenials  
 treating volunteers as employees  
 perceiving the challenge of helping team live right  
 sharing responsibility for getting work done  
 wondering how to make work better for employees  
 asking how to make employees' work easier and better  
 doing communication right away  
 communicating with staff  
 educating families through social media  
 asking open-ended questions sharing information with people  
 discerning the best solutions for all involved  
 dealing with ugly stuff  
 working with employees and team members with issues  
 identifying tensions in office

#### keeping priorities in order

forgetting you are a child of God first  
 prioritizing what is most important: God, family, work  
 losing sense of priorities  
 enduring a reprioritization process  
 losing sense of self because of work

experiencing life peeled back and  
 feeling the dangers of busyness  
 trying to slow things down  
 experiencing that more is not better  
 perceiving conflict between corporate and personal values  
 getting the message to do more all the time  
 being pushed to do more,  
 trying not to do more but to do good  
 seeing diminishment of relationships with increase of stuff  
 recognizing work that fed body but not spirit  
 struggling with stopping at night  
 identifying first job of the day is mom  
 wanting peace at home first  
 recognizing success accompanied by inflated ego  
 experiencing success that drives the ego  
 turning away from the main thing

#### practicing humility

asserting that no work is more important than any other  
 perceiving that Christian beliefs inform how you treat people  
 doing the right thing begins with humility  
 needing to let your employees see you fail and struggle  
 asserting importance of asking for help  
 realizing past failures  
 admitting need to make changes  
 seeing the connection between work and Christian value of humility  
 being clear about imperfections  
 seeing self as a constant work in progress  
 perceiving role of Christian faith in treating the other side with respect

#### experiencing satisfying work

fitting my personality style  
 recognizing work and life as one tapestry  
 achieving success with unique gifts  
 discerning own expertise in work  
 wearing a lot of different hats  
 wearing lots of hats  
 feeling like it's not really a job  
 experiencing accountability with freedom  
 loving my day and my job  
 experiencing rewards of a feel good job  
 perceiving life-giving connection between faith and work  
 loving variety of each day  
 getting to mix work and play  
 loving meeting people  
 feeling joy of giving back to others



considering work as calling

thinking daily work is my calling  
 feeling uncertain about my calling  
 perceiving calling as serving others  
 recognizing ability as gift from God  
 feeling more sure of calling than my Christianity  
 perceiving meshing of calling and being  
 seeing calling as my essence  
 perceiving profession as a means to work at my calling  
 identifying calling as using the gifts given by God.  
 searching for why am I here  
 discerning that a calling is something that makes you feel fulfilled  
 seeing a calling as what God puts you here to do  
 seeing unfolding life as path to calling  
 perceiving my work not my calling  
 discerning work as something I'm good at and do for a paycheck  
 identifying callings as raising my kids, and nurturing nieces and nephews  
 identifying calling as various kinds of community service  
 learning calling from mom

differentiating self from work

feeling that you always have to be "on"  
 desiring to be known for more than work  
 wanting to be known as person who helps other people  
 declaring we're much more than work  
 recognizing obstacles in work to understanding identity

needing affirmation

asserting the need for affirmation  
 asserting need to know you are good enough  
 believing I'm good enough but not hearing it enough  
 remembering banker deemed least important

serving neighbor through work

protecting people from the risks of everyday life  
 helping people reach financial dreams  
 recognizing gift of meeting in others' homes  
 remembering Jesus hung out with all kinds of people  
 creating opportunities to help kids  
 practicing Christianity through the Golden Rule  
 identifying a way for everyone to win  
 asserting that kindness and success go together  
 asserting priority of treating people fairly  
 asking to be held accountable about how people are being treated  
 asserting importance of treating people with respect  
 asserting faith is lived out in how you treat people

offering a smile to meet grumpy people  
 comforting anxious people  
 serving as a support person  
 addressing a lot of anxiety  
 meeting people where they are  
 having an empathy for people  
 helping people get better is just the baseline  
 experiencing opportunity to care for and love people through work  
 giving gift of place and presence  
 helping with personal issues  
 discerning how best to help

helping those who struggle with work

wondering how to help those who struggle with work  
 struggling with own children's jobs  
 seeing lots of people who experience disconnect between life and work  
 hanging on to get the next paycheck  
 putting up with difficult work  
 wondering about maturity of work, play hard, repeat  
 having empathy for those who can't see a calling  
 wondering how church can empathize with low-income people

effecting change in the congregation

doubting much change in people in such a brief time period  
 asserting difficulty of causing cultural change in an organization  
 trying to create change feels like swimming upstream  
 recognizing that church is a certain thing in people's minds and some prefer it that way  
 perceiving some people just want to do church as usual  
 needing to find ways to continue work in slow, incremental ways for identity change  
 expressing the need for leaders to prioritize faith in daily work as key part of our identity  
 wondering what will happen after thesis is completed  
 perceiving the need to raise awareness of faith/work connections  
 liking the search conference  
 feeling waning of enthusiasm  
 questioning outcome of the work  
 feeling frustrated that groups didn't have more time for planning events  
 experiencing enthusiasm that soon faded  
 needing to keep blowing on spark kindled in conference  
 preferring less information and more time for conversation and planning  
 liking use of social media  
 seeing same people in social media  
 appreciating multiple means of communicating faith matters  
 identifying social media as helpful

identifying difficulties of making congregation connections

affirming difficulty of making a commitment

identifying conflicts between work and commitments to church  
 struggling to manage busy lives and commit to church activities  
 needing to be encouraged  
 needing to be pulled in to participate  
 wanting to be personally asked

cultivating faith connections

participating in church activities leads to deeper faith  
 identifying varying standards of Christian practices  
 identifying difficulties of sharing faith at work  
 practicing gratitude  
 valuing radical hospitality  
 identifying connection of radical hospitality in church and in work  
 asserting regular commissioning in worship not very helpful  
 feeling like a foreigner in worship  
 asserting necessity of Sunday worship  
 appreciating worship as recharge for another week  
 asserting worship affects whole life  
 missing the refueling that happens in regular worship  
 appreciating meaningful nature of testimonials  
 preferring events inserted into rhythm of congregational life  
 wanting more teaching about vocation in sermons  
 appreciating sermon connections with current events  
 taking message back home and talking to kids about it  
 asserting fantastic congregational outreach  
 recognizing that needs in community keep growing  
 identifying service projects as best way SoJ helps me live out my faith  
 keeping helping people at the forefront of mission  
 beginning with daily devotional  
 discovering impact of daily devotion on work  
 working very hard on talking with God  
 asserting critical importance of prayer  
 praying about making a commitment

contemplating connections between faith and work

wondering if it is God first or God always  
 feeling that my work pleases God  
 trusting that God's in it all  
 discovering new appreciation for work as faith gets stronger  
 asserting connection between strong faith and peace in your work

asserting the value of small group conversations

enjoying small group conversation with others of varying viewpoints  
 appreciating viewpoints of persons at same and different places in life  
 seeing benefit of small group discussion  
 correcting compass through conversation

wanting opportunities for conversation  
wanting small group opportunities where people open up  
perceiving the need to ask people challenging questions  
taking people to next level of intimacy  
suggesting work and faith as a regular topic for Sunday forums  
perceiving difficulty in joining groups already established  
wondering about ways to start new groups  
reaching out through social activities  
preferring groups of people of varied occupations  
recognizing how competition creeps in to groups of same occupation  
appreciating opportunities to get to know people on a personal level  
recognizing the value of slowing down to experience community through church  
asserting need to be encouraged into groups  
asserting the value conversations  
asking about a group for parents  
appreciating SoJ emphasis on faith formation for adults  
asserting that the discussions will stick with me  
getting to know people is important  
identifying value of group events

Total end line in vivo focused codes=215

## Appendix I

### Forty Ways to Live Out Our Call as Jesus' Compassionate Servants in Forty Days

1. Read Romans 12:1-8
2. Give 5 Items to Goodwill.
3. Do someone else's chore.
4. Pray for guidance in the workplace.
5. Pay a few sincere compliments.
6. Write a thank you to a coworker.
7. Do something to improve your home.
8. Read Romans 12:9-13
9. Volunteer for something new.
10. Spend 5 minutes reaching out to a neighbor.
11. Share a good moment from work with your family.
12. Say a prayer for a coworker.
13. Ask a stranger "How's your day?"
14. Read 1 Peter 2:1-10
15. Invite someone to share in your favorite hobby.
16. 1 Corinthians 15:58
17. Have a family fun day.
18. Make a point to recognize those who "serve" you.
19. Introduce yourself to someone new at church.
20. Call someone you haven't talked to in awhile.
21. Pray for guidance in your home.
22. Be a mentor to someone.
23. Read Psalm 90:13-17
24. Deliver a "caring meal" to someone.
25. "Unplug" for 24 hours.
26. Take a day to truly rest for 24 hours.
27. Take a walk and pick up trash along the way.
28. Write an encouraging note to a friend.
29. Give thanks for something beautiful.
30. Invite a friend, neighbor or coworker over for a meal.
31. Collect spare change for 40 days. Donate what you've collected to someone in need.
32. Read Psalm 139.
33. Perform a random act of kindness.
34. Invite someone to church or a church event.
35. Write a letter of encouragement to yourself.

36. The next time you eat out, double your tip.
37. Write a list of the ways your work benefits those around you.
38. Bring a treat to share to work.
39. Offer to help someone in distress. (This can be as simple as helping someone pick up something they've dropped.)
40. Read Colossians 3:16-17

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